

Coverage of Child Rights issues in Indian Print Media

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Abstract: *Child rights protection has gained momentum during this century especially in a developing country like India. Childhood is a vital stage of human development psychologists. Childhood is diminishing due to various factors like social, educational, economic, political, psychological, cultural and environmental, having wrong influences and forces that have disturbed childhood and unfortunately fast forwarded their adulthood. There are several stakeholders who are responsible for the protection of kid rights in modern society, like parents, society, teachers, schools, governments and NGOs. After UN convention of child rights, various child protection and development measures are devised and implemented in to emancipate youngsters from malnourishment, abuse, child labour, child exploitation, health, and other violations of their rights. Specific legislation, development schemes, media laws, and initiatives are launched in India to safeguard the interest of children and enable them to grow during a healthy atmosphere. Communications media including print and electronic have a social responsibility in protecting the kid's rights and facilitating integrated child development in the Indian Republic. Practically all developing countries including India have accepted communication as an integral part of national development planning. The role of newspapers in child rights protection has been examined in this study.*

Key Words: *Child rights, Media, Child Labour, Child Laws, Child Rights Protection, Newspaper.*

The UN Convention of child rights (1989) (CRC) defines a child as any human who has not reached the age of eighteen years. Every person till the age of 18, according to Indian law is a child. To recognise children as Indian citizens, children have to grow, experience their teenage, complete 18 years, the very next day they become eligible to vote and lo behold they are Indian citizens. They are regarded as wonderful buds getting ready to bloom into a delightful flower with a wonderful fragrance. They don't know what's going on behind them in this big scary world. Every child needs physical, psychological and emotional support from their families and the society as well. The majority of the Indian population consists of children. This world's future depends on these little angels. Moreover, theirs and our future too relies on their development. As soon as teachers, seniors, elders or speakers say today's children "those who are listening to them, say with one voice tomorrow s citizens", so are children not today's citizens? Who are children then? In general you may get the following answer; children do not know anything, are naïve and innocent, to be under the protection of parents, playing happily, and eyes filled with curiosity. They do not sit at one place with full of enthusiasm, like flowers, having soft emotions very small and delicate.

How are tomorrow's future/tomorrow citizen looked after? If we observe it can be understood whether they have been allowed to be like "children" or their "adulthood" fast forwarded. According to our culture children are like God. Children up to ages of 5 years are considered God, without any vices. But are they been given the importance and respect that is given to god? Have they been allowed to grow in a good environment? Have they been given favourable condition or their happiness, joy and curious nature? Have they been given an opportunity to bloom?

Another set of discussions say children are the indicators of development, what does it mean? A country maybe very rich, another country maybe very poor that does not mean the rich country has developed and the poor country has not developed. And as such it has to be examined from different angles to say that whether a country has developed socially, economically and environmentally. And interestingly a new yardstick for measurement has been introduced lately; happiness of the citizens and this includes the vast majority of children as well. The state of affairs of the children will become the main point for a countries developmental yardstick. By not getting pure water, nutritive diet, preventive medicines, lakhs of children are dying. Here death of girls is more. Children are made to leave schools to fend for their families due to lack of financial support. Child labour and children trafficking is on increase. Child Rights are the basic human rights of kids with attention to protection and care for minors. Children's rights includes physical protection, food, basic education, health care, and laws applicable for the age and all round development of the child, equal protection of the child's civil rights, freedom from discrimination of race, gender, origin, religion, disability, color or ethnicity.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children - that was ratified by India in 1992 - all children are born with fundamental rights.

- Right to Survival - to life, health, nutrition, name, nationality

- Right to Development - to education, care, leisure, recreation, cultural activities
- Right to Protection - from exploitation, abuse, neglect
- Right to Participation - to expression, information, thought, religion

And a basic right to fulfill these rights. India's children account for more than one-third of its population, the largest in the world, their interests have not been given their due. Sadly their rights have been violated very often.

India has the world's largest child population and is home to 17% of the world's children and. In spite being the major part of the population, children in India are always overlooked and their rights are disregarded. Of India's 430 million children, an estimated 55% — a whopping 236.5 million — currently experience violations of rights.

UN convention for children motivated India to pass a number of legislations and formed many policies to improve the conditions for children. 'CPCR' Commission for protection of child rights act passed in 2005 and 'NCPR' the National commission for protection of child rights was set up in March 2007 to ensure that all policies, schemes, programs and laws are in line with child rights perspective as mandate of UNCRC and also as cherished in the constitution of India. Some important ones were;

POSCO – the right to protection against sexual offences in 2012.

RTE – the right of children to free education in 2009 and child marriage prohibition act in 2006.

ICPS - Integrated child protection scheme which was proposed in 2006 and implemented in 2009, aimed at building a protective environment for children in difficult circumstances, as well as other vulnerable children, with Society and Government partnership.

SSA - Sarva shiksha abhiyan by providing free and compulsory primary education for children between 6 – 14 years of age. This was started in 2000 and aimed to educate all children between the ages 6 to 14 by 2010. The time limit has been extended as we unfortunately have not been able to accomplish it. The *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya* or KGBV is a residential girls' secondary school run by the Government of India for the weaker sections in India.

Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme aims to provide day care facilities to children (age group of 6 months to 6 years) of working mothers. The children would be provided nutritional supplements. Timely immunization would be done. Preschool education would be given to 3-6 years children.

Mid-day meal scheme was started in 1995 to improve nutrition for school age children to enhance proper growth. Free lunches are provided on working days, currently serving over 120,000,000 children in over 1,265,000 schools. This was also an attempt to lure parents in sending children to school.

This has brought a good number of children to schools. Though progress has been done still there are areas of concern. 38.4% of children are still mal nourished. More number of girls' are attending schools. Rate of literacy has increased from 64% to 88%. Child marriage has declined from 47.4% to 26.8%. Infant mortality rate has reduced from 79% to 41%.

Violence against children still remains a huge challenge with increase in crime against children with 1,29,032 cases in 2017 as compared to 1,06,958 cases in 2016. More than 25% cases reported under POSCO including child rape. The legislation, policies and programs for protecting child rights in India are several. However, none are followed properly when it comes to implementation level. This is due to government's low budgetary allocation of the overall national budget to the child welfare sector and monitoring of implementation of programs and schemes. Other problems include insufficient personnel and material services, laxity in instruction and supervision, poor documentation, etc. The situation of children in India continues to be grim, with targets not achieved in the areas of child nutrition and child care. Poverty, indifference and disingenuous governance pose major challenges. Our legal framework needs to be flexible and efficient in order to make worthwhile our own attempts and those of international child rights agencies such as UNICEF and ILO. Sincere attempts should be made to boost the economic status of many rural families.

The Indian Constitution recognizes the rights of children as a basic lawful right. The dignity and rights of every child has to be respected in any given circumstance. While either reporting or interviewing children, special attention must be given, to ensure child's right to privacy and confidentiality. To have their opinions heard, and to make them participate in policy making, that affect them and to be protected from harm and retribution is the need of the hour. When trying to determine the best interests of a child, their views has to be taken into account and given due importance in accordance with their age and maturity. Those closest to the child's situation and best able to assess it are to be consulted about the political, social and cultural ramifications of any reportage. Do not publish a story or an image which might put the child, family or peers at risk even when identities are changed, obscured or not used. Presently child-related policy discussions in India concentrate on the Juvenile Justice Act. Juvenile's age and the proposed amendments to the current Child Labour Act (Prohibition and Regulation) – the debate on expanding the legal concept of what defines child labour in India. The principal duty of the government is to guarantee the rights of all children.

This situation has to change first, all children should be able to spend their childhood in a protected atmosphere, to live, to develop their body and mind to the fullest possible ability, be able to attend discussion and voice out their opinion pertaining to their welfare. As such instead of calling children as tomorrow's citizens, they should be renamed today's citizens. As the children are the assets of a country they have to be properly taken care of. Education, health and

protected environment, has to be of utmost priority. In future they must be able to work for the development of the nation. One of the oldest and largest, in the world is India's media landscape, which is vast, fragmented, multifaceted and highly diverse. This is so as a natural result of the country's geographical size, humongous population and vernacular media. The system is unfortunately infested by poverty, unemployment, overpopulation and corruption.

The power of press is yet to be reckoned. Newspapers play a vital role. Morning never starts for many without a cup of coffee with the days' newspaper. A newspaper is the most the popular, easiest and cheapest means of knowledge and information. It's an encyclopedia of current affairs. It has become a very essential part of our life. Over progressing daily newspapers are being published in Hindi, English and the regional languages. More than 20,000 periodicals are brought out; weeklies, bi-weeklies, fortnight-lies, monthlies, etc. Issues of national importance are covered in editorials, lead articles or expert interviews. These newspapers help public to reflect and form opinions. The readers can publish their grievances'.

India has more than 3 million NGOs, making it the world's largest. Most of the activists for children's rights find the media very necessary and effective to achieve the civil societal aims of ensuring children's rights and of pushing the government to take their responsibilities on board. Nevertheless media is consistently failing to play its part. When an issue gets violated only then media focuses on the issue, but then there are no follow up stories of the remedy for the issue. It is more of sensationalising rather than sensitizing the people about it. The majority of child rights advocates view media as extremely important and powerful in achieving the civil society goals of ensuring child rights and exerting pressure to hold government accountable for them. The activists of child rights express serious concerns because India's media consistently does not contribute to this effort. The media got blamed on a various occasions for its inaccurate and unbalanced reporting on child issues and the lack of voices in news. When a problem arises, the media focus on the issue, but then the remedy is not followed up. It has to be more about awareness rather than sensitisation.

Many studies have shown that newspapers have increased public knowledge about children's rights, survival and development. It has been able to inspire the public to promote the rights of children and other issues related to the welfare and growth of children. The researches have shown that the media have helped in raising awareness about the dangers of child abuse. The application of the knowledge and, the way children are handled has also been progressing. Media technologies if used appropriately will contribute to human development by closing knowledge gaps, improving the delivery of services, promoting healthy and educational outcomes and at the same time generating new business opportunities. With the help of Media more so Social Media has bridged cross borders and time zones, to join the once disparate, and to foster social connectedness, has included the children to contribute in a global society which was earlier not so easy. In many cases Media has been able to inspire the public to support child rights and other related issues. What remains is the transformation of this awareness into favourable ways and manners of handling and treating children. Media programs should explore avenues of uniting patrons in child welfare and child abuse eradication crusade as well as the various tiers of global governments to address critical issues of poverty, unemployment, gender based abuses, among others, in the locality which tend to aggravate the condition. Government should introduce empowerment and skill acquisition programs that would be backed by Media in order to ensure a sense of belonging.

Media needs to ensure that the voice of children is heard in decision making to promote their active participation and at the same time improve system's accountability. They should be empowered to form groups to represent themselves in various forums related to them. The crusader of climate change Greta Thunberg is great example for what children can do to raise awareness among even adults and together strive for a better world. The priority to bring into force the mandate of UNRC should be through making strong and effective implementation of legislations and schemes. There should be regular monitoring to check timely implementation and survey schemes to improve it. Data must be collected and analysed, and evaluated if things are done properly. On a regular basis newspapers should bring about articles related to education, health and especially child rights/legal matters, from subject matter experts. Columns answering questions pertaining to psychological health, adolescent health, mensuration hygiene and health etc. be published. Stories educating about good touch/bad touch and importance of education or about cleanliness etc. must be published to empower children. Media organisations together with educational institutions should conduct quizzes, essay competitions or other interesting means/methods designed, to impart information about children's rights.

“Collaborative efforts from key actors include Media, State, Society, Parents, Schools, Children, Government, NGOs/INGOs and private sectors together, nourish our children to fulfill the vision of UNCRC and together we flourish”.

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