

MEDIA IN NEO LIBERAL ORDER AND CHALLENGES TO CHILD RIGHTS: A STUDY OF REPORTING OF CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA

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Abstract

When India ushered in neoliberal economic reforms in 1990, there was a lot of optimism and promises associated with this new era of Indian economy. But after 25 years, the jobless economic growth and an accelerating and massive capital outflow towards the super-rich has changed the pattern of the coverage of human right issues. In the wake of the control of Indian media by the big shots of corporate world, the victims of the ill effects of this neo liberal regime are not the focus of the media coverage. This paper will try to analyze the challenges media is facing in the backdrop of the corporatization of media industry, which flaunts itself the fourth pillar of the state and inevitable champion of Indian democracy. Paper is a case study of coverage of child labour issues in four leading newspapers, two each English and Hindi, namely The Hindu, The Times of India, Dainik Jagran and Hindustan. Paper will analyze the coverage of child labour issues for a period of one month, after the passage of the amendment of a landmark law on child labour (Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Amendment Act 2016). In India child labour is one of the most important Human Right issue and Constitution of India enables the state to make special provisions for women and children apart from uplifting the social and legal status of children {Article 15(3)}. The content analysis method is used for conducting this study. Unit analysis of this study is any newspaper items that concerns child labour, its exploitation, magnitude, its nature and other related dimensions of this. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used to examine the coverage of child labour.

Keyword: Neo liberalism, Child Labour, Child Rights, Media

1. INTRODUCTION

The 20th century was the bloodiest one in the history of mankind that witnessed the unprecedented savagery meted out to the innocent population all over the world in general and in Europe and western world in particular. More than 100 million human life losses were the most salient feature of this modern mode of warfare that was applied during the first half of 20th century. Human rights violation was the common fashion of this era not just because of these two cataclysmic military confrontations but also due to the trend of muffling the popular aspirations by dictators in many parts of the world. In this backdrop, when India got independence in 1947, it had a mammoth challenge in front of it to make popular voices to be heard. After 70 years, India can now boast itself as a champion of democracy given the apparently independent functioning of its institutions especially the executive and legislature. But some uneasiness still persists in this perception and there are numerous issues concerning human rights which still remain unaddressed. Among these, there is the subject of child right.

2. METHODOLOGY

Content analysis method was used for the study. Unit analysis of this study comprises of two newspapers that have covered the child labour related issues. Qualitative method was used to examine the coverage and portrayal of child labour issues like incidents, laws, schemes etc. Two leading newspapers of English i.e. "The Times of India" and "The Hindu" from the period of

27th July 2016 to 26th August 2016 were selected for the study.

3.INDIA AND CHILD LABOUR

India has largest number of child labour in this world, and negligence towards the prevalent practices of child labour in a country's socio-economic structure could jeopardize its comprehensive development in the long run. Children are the future of any country and its multifaceted development depends on the fact that how the country treats its children, particularly in terms of its development process. As declared in the UN Conventions on the Child Rights, children become child labourer when they are performing work that is harmful to their physical and mental health, safety and development.¹

Like many developing countries India also is grappling with this problem, and for practical purposes, it has also joined the global bandwagon to get rid of this social evil just as its many counterparts has done. In developing countries, the perception of policy makers and government machinery about child labor is more as a social problem rather than economic or administrative one. As per O. P. Maurya, "Child labour, actually viewed more as a social problem of greater magnitude than other related problems connected with the development of human beings is abnormally high in the under developed and developing countries of the world."²

The magnitude of child labour in India was estimated by different agencies with somewhat similar statistics. The most recent statistics cited from the census of 2011, claimed that number of child labour in the country is 43.53 lakh. The minister of labour of India has given this statistics to Lok Sabha that the number of child labour cases in the country has gone down from 1.26 crores in 2001 to 43.53 lakh in Lok Sabha in 2011.³ If we analyze the incidences of child labour in india retrospectively, we

will find quite a checkered trend in terms of its growth or decline. According to the 1971 census, 10.8 million children were in labour force. Among these 36.05% engaged in cultivation and 42% were employed an agriculture labour.

After ten years, situation of child labour only deteriorated in terms of its number, though in 1981 census, definition of worker was different to that of 1971.⁴ According to the census of 1981, 13.6 million children were in the labour force in the age group pf 5 to 14. Among these, 93 % belongs to rural areas and only 7% to urban areas.⁵

Apart from the census report, other agencies have also studies on the issue of child labour. A working group on child labour set up by Planning Commission in 1979 estimated child labour as 17.36 million of which 15.57 million (89.69%) were from rural areas and 1.79 million (10.31%) were in urban areas.⁶

According to National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), in 1979, the total number of working children was 16.6 million. Here the definition of child labour was different to other agencies. The NSSO of 27th round has defined "work" as gainful activity pursued for pay, profit, or family gain or, in other words the activity which adds value to the "National Product".⁷

A Bangaluru based organization namely "Concerned for Working Children (CWC)" has also estimated the figure of child labour based upon its own definition of Child Worker". It has described the child worker as "a person who has not completed his/her 15 years of age and who is working with or without wages/income either on a part time or full time basis". With definition for child labour, the CWC estimates the figure of child labour to be a hundred million which seems to include all children below 15 years of age who are not going to school.⁸

The National Sample Survey of 1983 estimated India's child labour population as 17.63 million. According to the 43rd round of NSSO (1987-88), 2% of the total urban male workers and 5% of the total urban female worker

¹ Woolfsan, Charles, Child Labour Today-the Role of Multinationals, *International Union Rights*, Vol.6, No.3, P-3

² Maurya, O.P (April 2001), *Indian Journal of International Relations*, Vol 36, No 4, p-492

³ http://www.firstpost.com/india/number-of-child-labour-cases-declined-between-2001-and-2011-govt-2673776.html?utm_source=FP_CAT_LATEST_NEWS (accessed on 02-05-2016)

⁴ Sekar, H R (1997), *Child Labour Legislation in India: A Study in Retrospect and Prospect*, V V Giri National Labour Institute, Noida (UP), p-13

⁵ Ibid p-13

⁶ Ibid P-12

⁷ Sekar, H R (1997), *Child Labour Legislation in India: A Study in Retrospect and Prospect*, V V Giri National Labour Institute, Noida (UP), p-12

⁸ Ibid

were 5 to 14 years of age which represents a decline in the percentage of child workers from the 1983 findings (NSSO: 1990b).⁹

Table 1-MAGNITUDE OF CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA

SOURCE	YEAR	NUMBER IN MILLIONS
CENSUS OF INDIA	1971	10.74
	1981	13.60
	1991	11.29
ILO	1975	15.10
	1996	23.17
NSSO, INDIA	1987-88	17.60
	1993-94	Not Available
PLANNING COMMISSION	1983	17.36
ORG, Baroda	1983	44.00

Source- Sekar, H R (1997), *Child Labour Legislation in India: A Study in Retrospect and Prospect*, V V Giri National Labour Institute, Noida (UP), P-13

4. NEOLIBERAL POLICIES AND MEDIA

The socialistic colour of economy began to fade away after the fall of Janata Party government and the succeeding decade of 1980 witnessed the elevation of idea that market is the most powerful mechanism for the most efficient allocation of resources and fueling increased productivity, growth and wealth creation. Since this perception was prevalent among the political circles throughout the world, India also got fascinated to adopt market oriented strategies, and devised national development policies in conformity with the principles underlying them. The period of 1980s and 1990s was characterized with the acknowledgment by the government as well as the private sectors, which operates within the market, that the market is powerful tool and need for excessive advocacy of market fundamentalism should be honored. And ultimately after July 1991, India ushered in a new era of economic order with a visionary ambition of being at par with

some fastest growing South-East Asian countries and shaking off current account and foreign reserves crisis. The reception of neoliberal policies was marked by historic budget speech of Finance Minister Manmohan Singh. The compendium of speech unequivocally bid a farewell to the model of economic and social development within a socialist framework, paving the way to formally acknowledge the subservience of neo-liberal world order. This new era of economic order has not only overhauled our economic philosophy but left an indelible impact on the society and politics in India. In this world of neo liberal economy, open market was considered the inevitable reality to survive and develop. This debate prompted the privatization of government sector enterprises. In the words of Andrew Heywood, "Central pillars of neo-liberalism are market and individuals".¹⁰

This neoliberal order has benefited the multinational corporations the most. In order to maximize their profit, they are tirelessly competing each other for shifting their production processes overseas, especially in the

⁹ Ibid p-13

¹⁰ Roy, S Singha, Portrayal of Women in Indian Media in the Era of Neo-Liberal Economy, *Global Media journal*, June 2012, Vol.3, No-1, P-1

developing and labour abundant countries like India. By subcontracting portions of the production process, particularly labour-intensive manufacturing and assembly to smaller firms, multinationals try to distance themselves from the most exploitative aspect of global production. When confronted with gross violation of basic rights to the part of their subcontractor, such multinationals companies commonly claim they have no knowledge and no control over these conditions. Given immense power and influence, which these companies can wield, the claim of being ignorant about the exploitative nature of production process should not be taken seriously.¹¹

The post-independence India has been witnessing “the social responsibility theory” of media which is one of the four theories of normative theory of media. The neoliberal economy has taken a toll to this aspect of media a lot. Since the multinational has subcontracted their work to the smaller firms of India where child labour is rampant, media does not rise up to capture this social evil. One more reason behind media’s insensitivity towards human right issues is its corporatization. The corporatization tends to make media transform itself according to the of consumers’ sensual satisfaction to the level of their ultimate entertainment. The social issues like child right does not appeal the masses thus

restricts media to raise these issues due to the fear of losing the viewership and its negative impact on the supply of the advertisements they are getting from the multinationals.

5. COVERAGE OF CHILD LABOUR IN INDIAN MEDIA

Child labour is a serious threat to human development aspect the of growth journey of Indian economy. India has been tackling this problem since long and the various legal efforts were applied to abolish it. But lack of political will and poor state machinery has only complicated this problem. India has on one law that directly address the prohibition of child labour problem namely, Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986. On 26th July 2016, Indian parliament passed the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act 2016, which has initiated a widespread debate over the issue and majority of civil society groups and child rights organizations apart from academicians and film personalities, lamented on this government’s effort. To assess media’s sensitivity towards this perpetuating social evil, the one-month coverage was studied in two leading Indian dailies, The Times of India and The Hindu, from just after the next day on which this law was passed to the next one month.

newspa per	Number of child labour related news items	Number of days having no coverage at all	Nature of the items	Coverage of the protest against the Act
Times of India	13	22	No article or editorial, most of the news are on city section	1
The Hindu	21	13	Articles or editorials are there	several

¹¹Woolfsan, Charles, Child Labour Today-the Role of Multinationals, *International Union Rights*, Vol.6, No.3, P-3

Table- 2 (COVERAGE OF CHILD LABOUR ISSUES IN INDIAN DAILIES)

The findings were disheartening as during this particular one month, there were 22 and 13 days on which no coverage was given to any kind of child labour issues in The Times of India and The Hindu respectively. The insensitivity of The Times of India could be gauged with the fact that after the passage of this important bill on child labour, it published no article on this during this particular one-month period. The Times of India has though covered 13 news items concerning child related issues that was far less than expected to this largest Indian daily. The coverage by The Hindu was comparatively better. It covered 21 child labour issues and besides that it wrote some articles which highlighted the concerns of the civil society groups and the intellectuals who have been working on this issues since long. It is necessary to note that during this particular period, there were 13 days on which no child Labour related news items were covered. One more disheartening aspect of this analysis was that times of India almost wholly avoided to put on place the concerns and opposition of the said amendment of the Act. There were several protests, some of them were reported by "The Hindu" but "The Times of India" did not pay heed to that.

CONCLUSION

It was quite obvious that the introduction of new liberal policies into Indian Economy has shaped the Indian media into its new Avatar. Media distanced itself from the core Human Rights issues and marched towards entertainment of the general masses under the frame work of Free Press concept. With the advent of electronic media, it has now got involved into arousing the sensual instincts of its viewers even in the coverage of current affairs. The arrival of neoliberalism in India created the scope of advertisement industry which relies on the media. Media capitalized this opportunity to the fullest, resulting the indifference towards human right issues