CHAPTER 4
ROLE OF MEDIA IN ENSURING CHILD RIGHTS

4.1. MEDIA REPORTING ON CHILD RIGHTS:

Although India is home to 17 percent of the world’s children, and has the world’s largest child population. Despite this, India’s children are often neglected and their rights ignored. Of the 430 million children in India, an estimated 55 percent – a staggering 236.5 million – currently experience rights violations (Internews Europe, 2014 report).

As a natural result of the country’s geographical size, huge population and numerous languages, media landscape of India is one of the oldest and largest in the world. It is vast, fragmented, complex and highly diverse. And with over 3 million non-governmental organisations (NGOs), India also has one of the world’s largest NGO sectors. The majority of these, child rights advocates among them, 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. Yet, child rights advocates express strong concerns on what they see as India’s media consistently failing to play its part in this effort. Therefore media is repeatedly criticised for its lack of adequate, balanced coverage on child-related issues, and the absence of children’s voices in news reporting.

I. THE INDIAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Table 1 presents an overview of Indian media platforms and consumers. However, this landscape is undergoing changes and a closer, more in-depth analysis provides some interesting insights.
Table 1: The Indian media and access to consumers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Media platform</th>
<th>Consumers in India (million)</th>
<th>% compound annual growth rate (CAGR)</th>
<th>Media credibility ranking²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobile (subscriber)</td>
<td>900³</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television (viewers)</td>
<td>730⁴</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print (readers)</td>
<td>353⁵</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio (listeners)</td>
<td>159⁶</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet (users)</td>
<td>124⁷</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Indian Readership Survey (IRS) Q4, 2012.
7. Com Score, July 2012. The total number of Internet users across surveys and reports varied significantly from 44.5 million to 176 million. However, com score was unanimously cited by social media experts as the most reliable source, and as an internationally accepted one.

Source: InternewsEurope_ChildRightsMedia_Report_2014

Among traditional media, television is the largest and most popular, with approximately two in three households in the country owning a TV. Print media, opposing the global trend, continues to grow in India, coming second to TV but with only about half the number of consumers. Conventional wisdom suggests that radio, given its wider accessibility and lower costs, would be one of the more dominant media in the country. However, policy and regulatory issues and the strong foothold of the visual medium in India has resulted in radio having only a relatively low user base, with a strong likelihood of being relegated to the least popular media platform in the coming
years. Moreover, in India, only All India Radio (AIR), the state-owned radio, is allowed to broadcast news bulletins, though guidelines cleared by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry in 2011 now permit private radio channels and community radio to broadcast news bulletins from AIR in an unedited format.

Within TV, general entertainment is the most watched genre, whereas news forms a mere fraction of overall viewership. Additionally, news viewership has faced a decline over the past year, with English language channels declining most. Within print, Hindi and vernacular newspapers together dominate circulation and readership, while English-language dailies continue to dominate advertising revenues.

**4.2. THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF MEDIA**

The notion of the social responsibility of the media has been derived from the social responsibility theory of the press. It has aroused as a result of the ability of the media to influence the belief, ideas and behaviour of the people on the important issues. It has resulted from the fact that since the press (newspaper) was influential, it had social responsibilities as well. Hence, every media is expected to deliver accurate and unbiased news to meet the divergent needs of the heterogeneous public.

The impact of the media in society is tremendous (Herdís, 2003; Marsh and Melville cited in Wolferman, 2010)). The social responsibility of the media is promoted when the media get engaged in what is referred to as “committed journalism”, in which priority is placed on values such as “democracy, free choice, openness, morality, and serving the common good”, thereby informing the public about political, social, economic, and cultural affairs. “Committed journalism” would best manifest when the media undertake to be the public watch dog (Lusgarten and Debrìx, 2005). The role of media is also to search and uncover the truth, through investigative journalism in harmony with the public interest. The role of media is instrumental in the promotion of child rights.
4.3. IMPACT OF MEDIA

Media’s impact is altogether different for different section of people. A politician will have political impact on his mind; a psychologist will feel psychologically and so on. ‘Perhaps the only safe conclusion on effects of the media is that arrived by Bernard Berelson several years ago: Some kinds of communication on some kind of issues brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions have some kinds of effects.’

In a democratic country, participation of every citizen is important and it is only possible through communication. Gradually, the media is becoming a part of daily life as it directly influences people’s ability to interrelate in social, cultural and political field. In the swift transforming Indian society, print media holds a big contribution in educating the mass people on child rights and thereby ensuring child rights protection.

The Agenda-setting theory describes the media as instruments which are used to influence public opinion by setting up agendas. The theory states that when issues are covered by the media as often as possible, the public would take them to be important (Wanta 1997, cited in Wallinger, 2010).

The theory was derived from the work of Walter Lippman in 1922, who argued that “the public responds not to actual events in the environment but to the pictures in our heads” (LittleJohn and Foss, 2008), that the “news media construct our view of the world” (Coleman et al, 2009). The term agenda setting was coined by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972. An agenda is a selection of items arranged to give some items more importance than others. Agenda theory says that the news media present the public net with a picture of the world as it is but an agenda of their own-selection of reports about what is happening in the world. Agenda theorists try to describe and explain

a. How stories are selected, packaged and presented-a process known as gatekeeping
b. The resulting agenda and
c. How this agenda affects what people think about the relative importance of the issues presented.

Public opinion is “shaped and influenced” as the media choose and shift certain elements of news, which makes the audience of the media think along a certain pattern. Hence the media’s choice of topics and how the topics are presented are elements of the theory (Fourie, 2001). The news gatekeepers such as reporters, writers and editors (Sanchez, 2002) are responsible for determining what counts as news (Dainton and Zelly, 2011). The importance of news items in a newspaper could be known by the particular position they occupy, where the important ones are used as headlines, written in bold characters and placed on the front page of the paper. For the broadcast media, important stories are reported first, and in detail before others, thus “stories judged [by editors or news directors] to be of some what lesser importance or newsworthiness occupy the back pages, or the last part of the broadcast” (DeFleur, 2010). As a theory of mass communication, agenda setting has passed the test of time, and proved to be “deep and wide” (Coleman et al, 2009). Its validity has been confirmed by various studies (Shehata, 2010; Uscinki, 2009).

Since media has influence on the public, it can create mass awareness on the significant issues pertaining to child rights such as compulsory registration of birth, providing health care, reducing malnutrition and exploitation and abuse of children. These changes can be carried out through the use of following mass media:

• Publishing articles, special features, interviews, case studies in print media.

• Airing radio jingles, songs, series of programmes on issues related to children.

• Telecasting spots, special features, serials to project child rights.

• Producing films, documentaries, feature films on children’s issues.

• Curbing misuse of children in advertisements on TV and films.

• Creating public opinion to prevent violence against children and value the girl child.
4.4. VIEWPOINTS OF THE CHILDREN

Children are not considered a key audience segment in either news broadcasting or print. News targeted at children is confined to periodical children’s supplements or pull-outs carried by some newspapers. But these children’s supplements are targeted at, and accessed by, more privileged sections of society, with only limited access in rural areas. They also tend to have an entertainment or higher education focus rather than a focus on child issues or child rights. In line with this, Indian Readership Survey data highlights the fact that newspaper reading is least frequent among 12-15-year olds, with 59% of literate children not reading newspapers. Since reading habits are formed in the early years, the FICCI-KPMG 2013 report points out that failing to engage the child and youth population could be a potential threat to the print industry, as there exists a very real possibility of this section of the Indian reader base shifting to new and social media for their news and views. Thus, it seems that if the print industry is to survive in the long term, it would become essential for print publications to target news content at the literate child and youth section, possibly through an increase in child-produced and child-oriented news content in their publications.

4.5. MEDIA COVERAGE ON CHILD RIGHTS ISSUES:

Issues related to children have become very important now a day. Therefore spaces are dedicated in both print & electronic media for children. Apart from creating awareness, coverage has ensured debate, action and accountability –Eg. News about the midday meal (MDM) deaths in Chappra District, Bihar. Govt (both at State & Center level), had to reviewed the MDM program around the country, layed down guidelines to monitor quality and quantity of MDM) (Dixit.D, media and child rights). Similarly, media has been reporting the incidences of plight of abuse & sexual abuse of minors, highlighting the frequent incidence of the abuse, pointed out the lack of adequate legislation & procedure. This has contributed to the passage of the POCSO Act in Nov 2012. Many cases that National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has taken up, is because of Press coverage.
Some of the incidences mentioned by Dixit.D, a former member of NCPCR, (in her article on media and child rights), those were taken up by media were as follows:

- **Sexual Abuse of Girl Children in Kanker, Chhatisgarh:** Print Media Coverage bought this matter to the forefront. It was discovered that the girls were subjected to abuse for 2 years-no one took any action. It was only after the press covered it, that these children were rescued—the District & State Administration has taken steps to post women guards and staff at ashramshalas for girls, come up with an action plan for the state to monitor the same.

- **Corporal punishment in Kolkata:** Press coverage highlighted the issue of rampant corporal punishment in the urban school, due to which a 13 year old boy had to commit suicide. Adequate pressure from the press ensured criminal proceedings against the Principal and 2 Teachers of this school. Press coverage of Corporal Punishment in schools ensured that it has been banned under the RTE Act (Sec. 17).

- Similarly in Assam, the 9th July incident, where a teenage girl was molested by a mob, G.S.Road, Guwahati was massively reported by the local media. After this the S.S.P. of the Kamrup metro was transferred to Dibrugarh District. All the culprits were arrested and selling of alcohol below 21 years was banned.

- After the telecast of incidences of child sexual abuse in the Amir Khan’s program “Satyamev Jayate”, the protection of children from sexual offences Bill, 2011 was passed by Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha.

Further Dixit, D, former member of NCPCR, said in her report on Media and Child rights, guidelines for reporting on children is very important due to the following reasons.

- Coverage relating to children may have long term consequences on their overall development (physical, mental, psychological, emotional, moral, social, economic, etc.), life and dignity;
- Lack of care may entail real risk of children facing harm, stigma, disqualification, retribution, etc.
The privacy, dignity, physical and emotional development of children needs to be preserved and protected while reporting/broadcasting/publication of news/programs/documentaries etc. on and for children

4.6. GUIDELINES FOR MEDIA REPORTING ON CHILDREN:

- Meaning of terms used: “Child” or “Children” shall mean a person(s) who has/have not completed 18 years of age. “Media” shall include, but not be limited to any newspaper, magazine, news-sheet or electronic media.
- Involvement of children in news/programs/documentaries etc. must evidently be editorially justified from a child rights perspective.
- Media shall ensure that child victims of rape, other sexual offences, trafficking, drug/substance abuse, elopement, organized crimes, children used in armed conflicts, children in conflict with law and child witnesses, etc. are automatically guaranteed anonymity.
- Ensure child’s right to privacy and prevent the child from being exposed to anxiety, distress, trauma, social stigma, risk to life & safety when reporting/broadcasting/publication of news/programs/documentaries etc. on and for children.
- Ensure that a child’s identity is not revealed in any manner, including but not limited to disclosure of personal information, photograph, school/institution/locality and information of the family including their residential/official address.
- No sensationalization of issues or stories, especially those relating to children.

Source: Guidelines for media reporting on children by Hon’ble High Court of Delhi on 08/08/2012 in writ petition (civil) No 787 of 2012.

4.7. Role of the Newspapers reporting on Child Rights:

This section deals with the viewpoints of the respondents on the basis of the role played by the newspapers regarding child rights.
Study shows that 79.82 percent of the respondents believed that newspapers encourage children towards science and technology, while two percent disagree with it. Whereas, 76.07 percent of the readers strongly agreed that newspapers provide clean environment for children and 86.96 percent of them agreed that newspapers educate people about the dangers of child work and child abuse. This is similar to the findings of Goddard and Saunders, 2001. 83 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that newspapers urge for non-discrimination against class. Regarding the role of newspapers on its urge to provide facilities to children, the responses were found to be 66.07 percent. It was interesting to note that none of the respondents had strongly disagreed with any of the role played by the newspapers.
Table 4.2. Frequency distribution of respondents based on their viewpoints regarding the coverage of children news/views

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Viewpoints of the respondents</th>
<th>Highly Satisfactory</th>
<th>Moderately Satisfactory</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Total space given to children news/views</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Frequency of coverage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>News report</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Articles</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Features</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Letter to the editor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Language approach</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Sensitivity maintained</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Depth of the news</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Photos published</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Captions used</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: field survey

N= number of respondents, f=frequency, %=percentage

Table 4.2. shows the frequency distribution of respondents based on their viewpoints regarding the coverage of children news/views. The viewpoints of the respondents on the total space provided by the newspapers to children news/views were found that half
of the respondents (52%) were unsatisfied followed by 25 percent with moderate satisfaction. 21 percent of the respondents were highly satisfied.

Majority of the respondents (75%) were not at all satisfied on the amount of coverage on children news through news report. 13.8 percent and 11.2 percent were moderately and highly satisfied respectively. Similarly, majority was not satisfied with the amount of coverage through articles (61%), features (53.4%), editorial (77%) and letter to the editor (78%) as well.

Whereas, regarding language approach 54 percent of the respondents were highly satisfied followed by 34 percent and 10.8 percent with moderately satisfied and unsatisfied respectively.

More than the fifty percent of the respondents (54%) were moderately satisfied with the maintenance of sensitivity. 22 percent of the respondents said that they are highly satisfied but 22.8 percent were found to be unsatisfied.

Regarding the role of the newspapers in going into the depth of the news, majority of the respondents (65.2%) was not satisfied whereas, 22.3 percent were moderately and 10.3 percent of the respondents were highly satisfied.

Response towards the publication of photos on children was found to be mixed. 66.2 percent were moderately satisfied and 24.8 percent were unsatisfied. Only 9 percent of the respondents were found to be highly satisfied.

Similar response was found for captions as well. 47.8 percent of the respondents were highly satisfied followed by 39 percent with moderate satisfaction and 13.2 percent were unsatisfied.

The table below is based on the frequency distribution of respondents on the basis of their viewpoints regarding the role of newspapers played in educating the mass people on various issues related to child rights.
Table 4.3. Frequency distribution of respondents on the basis of their viewpoints regarding the educational role of newspapers in various areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.no.</th>
<th>Educational role of the newspapers</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Children in conflict zone</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Juvenile justice</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Organisational activities</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Child rights protection</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Violation of child rights</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: field survey

N=650

It was found that the respondents agreed with the educational role of the newspapers played in various aspects. Regarding the role played by the newspapers in educating the readers about the educational rights of children, 78.9 percent of the respondents agreed to it. Similarly, in terms of health, children in conflict zone, juvenile justice, organisational activities, child rights protection and violation of child rights, they responded positively with 73 percent, 83.2 percent, 62.1 percent, 88.7 percent, 76.5 and 76 percent respectively.

On the contrary, 37.9 percent, 27 percent, 24 percent 23.5 percent and 21.1 percent of the respondents denied the educational role of newspapers in terms of juvenile justice, health, violation of child rights, child rights protection and education respectively.
4.8. Viewpoints of the Experts:

In support to my study I further attempted to interview experts from each newspaper group. Questions were asked regarding the coverage of news/views on Child Rights. While interviewing Ms Asmina Ali, sub-editor of *The Sentinel*, it was found that the total space allotted to new/views on child rights depends on the importance of the news. Placement is made according to its location e.g. if the incident is of Guwahati city then the news appears on the city page. They place a news related to children on the first page only if it is needed to be highlighted and it is topic of discussion during that period. Regarding the frequency of news/views on child rights, she said that they are occasional and less frequent.
Although catchy caption or tag lines are used to attract attention of the readers but still she said that they maintain the sensitivity of the news and use respectful language. Similarly they maintain the privacy of the victims as far as possible. They investigate the depth of the news only if the news is important.

With similar viewpoints, Manoranjan Kalita, sub-editor, *Amar Asom* said that placement of news/views on child rights depend on the availability of the space and importance of the news. Regarding the frequency of the news on child rights, he said that, while news reports are regular but the articles/editorial or letter to the editor are quite occasional and mostly based on the topic of the discussion of the period and its weightage.

Sensitivity is maintained in approaching child related news/views and conducts follow up wherever necessary. Since they devote regular weekly page for children, most of the news/views of children are covered by the page.

Mridumoloy Lukhurakhon, chief sub-editor of *The Assam Tribune*, said that the total space given to issues on children depends on the content of the news. Usually, on first page children’s news are published as a news capsule while news in detail is provided in the inside pages. Depending on the weightage of the of the news placement is made.

He said that they publish only positive photos and carries out the follow up to go deep into the news. Regarding the various issues related to child rights, he said that they are covered by the additional supplement for children.

On the contrary, Manashi Bayan, Senior Assistant Editor of *Asamiya Pratidin* told the investigator that the newspaper always prefer child rights issues particularly issues on violation of child rights is prioritised. A weekly page is devoted to children.

After interviewing the experts, it was found that the frequency of news/views on child rights was very less. Placement or coverage of news merely depends on its importance, relevance, and apposite. The pressures to boost up circulation might be the major reason for most of the media houses to concentrate on those issues that generated some debate and hold the interest of the readers. The new/views on children had failed to generate the same interest among its readers. Due to which the media with objectives to make
profit found the news/views on children as not favourite and considered them as least important. Further, the children’s issues did not make any worthy news and since their rights rarely “make news”, they occupied the inside pages. Regarding language approach they were sensitive towards child rights issues and always used respectful language. They maintained the privacy of the children.

This finding is similar to the findings of Mushidi (1993) and Bwire and Wenje (2000)
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