CHAPTER 5

Discussion And Evaluation

“There are some people, who live in a dream world, and there are some who face reality;
and then there are those who turn one into the other.”

- Douglas Everett

The ability to dream comes naturally to us. It is always beautiful to remain in dreams. We always try to create a fantasy world for ourselves.

Cinema and television are dreams, which comes packed in cans and cases. It is a medium that can create dreams and make people laugh and cry and vent their hidden feelings. People watch it sometimes to get away from their real life, and sometimes to relate themselves to the actors and see themselves in place of them. It is not that only adults like to dream as they can get away from the problems of everyday life. Even young children like to imagine, fantasize, and create a beautiful world of their own. But, when someone becomes a part of a dream which is not their own, but of someone else, the world may not be as pleasing as fantasised.

As the American playwright, Pulitzer winning dramatist Marsha Norman says

“Dreams are illustrations... from the book your soul is writing about you.”

So, Dreams stem from reality, just like the situation that exists in the realistic side of the dream world (Cinema and television). The stories that are created are hugely connected to the lives that we lead. The ideas they use are inspired from the day-to-day incidents we face. But the only difference is that these stories cut the unpleasant and unlikeable aspects of reality, making it more attractive and dream-like. Unfortunately reality does not allow us this freedom.
But before speaking of reality, it is important to know what the reality today actually consists of. It is important to know the details of the lives we intend to speak about. This research was undertaken in order to clearly understand the condition such children who are used in films and television to act.

These children spend as much time and energy shooting for films or television programs as many of their adult colleagues would. So, evidently for these child actors, a lot of time that other children spend in going to school and playing, is spent in toiling hard under the arc lights in the dusty studios, with an adult environment for days together. This means these children spend a lot of their valuable time in creating a dream for someone else which they may have otherwise used to create dreams for themselves.

But all may not be as grim as it seems. There is also another version to this line of reasoning which says that the children who act in films and television are actually very talented kids, whose aptitude is being given due recognition by giving them an opportunity to showcase their skills to millions of viewers. Along with this, during the process of shooting, they also get to learn a lot of new things which aid in their over personality development. They improve their memory, verbal skills, body language, confidence building, oratory skills and various other aptitudes which may not be accessible to the other children.

This research is placed in between these two lines of argument, trying to find out what the actual condition of the child actors is, and how much of each of the claims and opinions are true and valid. But situations in different societies and ethnic backgrounds are different and vary from one country to another; one state to another in the same country. It changes due to the practices and mindsets in those societies, and also due to the legal systems prevailing in those specific places. It was therefore decided to zero in to the researcher’s local setting which may
also aid in easy access to the concerned people for the research. Therefore, this research examines the conditions of the Child actors in the Kannada film and television industry.

Two chief areas which would matter to the child in its life and which had a possibility of being influenced by the film and television industry were chosen. It was decided to explore and examine how the (a) Social life and (b) the Psychology of the child were affected, the correlation between the two areas and how one influenced the other knowingly or unknowingly.

The research process began by trying to define the population in order to determine the sample size. But it was a major revelation for the researcher, right at the onset of the research process, that there is no record of how many child actors are there, in the Kannada film and television industry. From the organisations working for children’s films to the production managers & casting directors who deal with child actors on a daily basis – nobody had a measure of how many child actors were there at that given point of time. The approximate numbers that were given by them varied from 50 to 250 to 400! So, in order to arrive at a conclusive set for the research, a list of the most popular child actors was made – numbering upto 25. Out of them, 10 were chosen for the interviews and study, based on their willingness and availability to be a part of the research. It was not just the child, but the parent / guardian of the child also had to be willing to be a part of the research process, which would mean being agreeable to spend time with the child and separately, give information which is honest and unbiased, with complete trust in the researcher and the process.

Thus the research began on a note with no idea of the exact number of child actors in the Kannada film and television industry. But each interview was as edifying as the other. A lot of information was collected from children as well as their parents, on the promise that they would not be leaked on to anyone in the industry. But inspite of it, some of them preferred not to name
the producer/director about whom they were sharing information. The name was kept anonymous on their request, and only the incident was recorded for the research.

This was a thought that set the researcher to wonder about the actual situation in the industry. If the parents were so hesitant to speak about the problems and unpleasant incidents they (and the child actor) faced to a researcher who was neither a part of the industry nor the media, would they really be able to speak up in front of an authority or complain if the situation arises? The reason that was stated for not naming the people was that they did not want to ‘spoil their reputation’ in the industry, which may in turn affect the career of the child. If people in the industry start thinking that they go around complaining and telling people about the production, they (the child) may not be cast for any role in future. This was a fear lingering in everyone, but a few did honestly open up after they were given enough assurance that the information they give will be used only for research purposes and nothing else.

This was the beginning of the research process. The experience that the researcher had when speaking to the employers was also an interesting one. Some of them were completely on the defensive, assuming that this interview would pick up faults and publish it. There were reactions like “u won’t get anything u are looking for from me” (Nanjunde Gowda, president of Children’s India, Producer and director of children’s films). After explaining (again) that this was for a research and does not intend to ‘look for’ anything specific, the responses were better. But he seemed quite upset, and most of the questions regarding the concern for the child actor elicited a negative response. A few of the other producers/directors were also surprised by the fact that no one has actually thought about this aspect so far!
During the interaction with Mr. Nanjunde Gowda, who is a Producer and director of children’s films and the President of Children’s India - a 7 year old, non-profit organisation for promoting children’s films, there were more surprising revelations.

The organisation which works for promoting films for children, speaks about protection of child rights, education and entertainment for them, has no plans for child actors. Mr. Gowda says, “Children in general, are very important. We only look at the larger population, that is, the bigger section of kids – as audience. The number of professional child artists is very less and their career span is not more than 3-5 years. So their welfare could be the responsibility of the school, their parents, or may be the production team. Protection for child actors as an organisation is not necessary. They are infact, the most privileged of the lot. So giving them extra facilities is unnecessary. We would rather look at kids below poverty line, who need facilities”. When Mr. Gowda referred to the number of child actors as less, the researcher was keen on finding out if there is a list or database on which the statement was based. But there was nothing available to that effect as the statement was made out of his personal knowledge in the field.

Even the Children’s Film Society of India looks only at films for children but not children in films. The aim of CFSI is as follows –

“CFSI is a nodal Government of India organisation dedicated to providing wholesome entertainment for children through film and television, with the objective of broadening their horizon and justifying Right to Entertainment.”
5.1 Invoking laws for aid

After most of the interviews were done, just when it almost seemed like the research has reached a dead-end with no support for child actors either socially or legally, the researcher did find that there are enough laws which could be used to defend the child actors, in case of a situational necessity. Here are some parts of the laws which may be relevant, if used.

Most of the issues dealt with in the sections below are similar to the issues that the child actor deals with; more so with the italicized points. Problems like duration of work, cleanliness, safety precautions in case of fire or other accidents etc are referred to by the actors themselves during their interviews. Even the employers, during their interviews have stated that a first aid kit is the maximum safety precaution that anyone has, and some of them do not even have that. This is the case on normal shooting days, and no extra changes / precautions are taken if a child is shooting.

1) The Constitution of India:

Article 39 (f):
Children shall be given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth shall be protected against moral and material abandonment

Article 47:
The State shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties and, in particular, the State shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption except for medicinal purposes of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health.
II) The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)

It has been set up in March 2007 as a statutory body under the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005 (4 of 2006) to protect, promote and defend child rights in the country. A child has been defined as a human being below the age of eighteen years. Child rights as per section 2 (b) of the Act includes the rights provided under the CRC. The major standards for children prescribed are as follows:

1] The child is protected against all forms of discrimination, based upon race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

2] In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

3] The child shall have the right to identity, name & nationality

4] Every child has the inherent right to life, survival and development, including the right to the highest attainable standard of health & to facilities for the treatment of illness, the right to education, which shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; and the right to benefit from social security.

5] right of the child to rest & leisure,& to engage in play and recreational activities

6] right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
7] No child is subjected to illicit transfer and non-return of children abroad and prevent the abduction of, the sale of or traffic in children for any purpose or in any form.

8] Views of the child are given due weightage

9] The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; & access to information, ideas and material; freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

10] A child shall not be separated from parents against their will, except when such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child.

11] A child deprived of family environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State

12] Institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform to the standards established

13] A mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full & decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance & facilitate active participation in the community. Children are protected from economic exploitation

14] Children are not subjected to illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances

15] protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse,

16] Every child is protected from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

17] No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment or be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily

18] Take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture
19] The rules of international humanitarian law applicable to children in armed conflicts are respected right of every child alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law to be treated in a manner consistent with the promotion of the child's sense of dignity and worth

20] No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his/her privacy, family, home or to unlawful attacks on his/ her honour and reputation.

**Mandate of the Commission**

The functions of the Commission as laid down in the Act are as follows:

- To examine and review the safeguards provided by or under any law for the protection of child rights and recommend measures for their effective implementation and to present to the central government, reports upon the working of those safeguards;

- To examine all factors that inhibit the enjoyment of rights of children affected by terrorism, communal violence, riots, natural disaster, domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, trafficking, maltreatment, torture and exploitation, pornography and prostitution and recommend appropriate remedial measures;

- To look into the matters relating to children in distress, marginalized and disadvantaged children without family and children of prisoners and recommend appropriate remedial measures;

- To spread child rights literacy among various sections of society and promote awareness of the safeguards available for protection of these rights;
➢ To inspect or cause to be inspected any juvenile custodial home, or any other place of residence or institution meant for children, under the control of the central government or any State Government or any other authority, including any institution run by a social organization; where children are detained or lodged for the purpose of treatment, reformation or protection

➢ To inquire into the violation of child rights and recommend initiation of proceedings in such cases; and to take suo motu notice of matters relating to: deprivation and violation of child rights;

   1. non-implementation of laws providing for protection and development of children;

   2. non-compliance of policy decisions, guidelines or instructions aimed at mitigating hardships to and ensuring welfare of the children and to provide relief to such children;

   3. or take up the issues arising out of such matters with appropriate authorities;

➢ To study treaties and other international instruments and undertake periodical review of existing policies, programmes and other activities on child rights and make recommendations for their effective implementation in the best interest of children;

➢ To analyse existing law, policy and practice to assess compliance with Convention on the rights of the Child, undertake inquiries and produce reports on any aspect of policy or practice affecting children and comment on proposed new legislation from a child rights perspective

➢ To promote respect and serious consideration of the views of children in its work and in that of Government departments and organizations dealing with child
➢ To produce and disseminate information about child rights;
➢ To compile and analyse data on children; and
➢ To promote the incorporation on child rights into the school curriculum, teachers training and training of personnel dealing with children

The above laws, though exist from many years, are not referred to in case of child actors as they refer to all children in general. So, it may not be possible to use these laws in order to make blanket rules / norms for all child actors, as the situations in case of child actors may be very different. Also, each state has its own laws, pertaining to its local conditions.

So, laws to protect children in Karnataka were found under the **Department of women and child welfare, Karnataka**

Declaration adopted by the UN General Assembly at the 27th Special Session on 10th May 2002 -

- First preference to children
- Eradicate poverty: invest in children
- Leave no child behind
- Care for every child
- Educate every child
- Protect children from harm and exploitation
- Protect children from war
- Combat HIV/AIDS
- Listen to children and ensure their participation
- Protect the earth for children
Though these laws are not as specific and detailed as the ones under the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), a reference could be drawn in case of a necessary situation, if not wholly depend on them for justice.

But the above laws refer to all the children. But here, we are referring to children who are working and earning money for the work (time and effort spent) they do. But they are not categorised as ‘child labour’ as per the Child Labour (Prevention and Regulation) act as the entertainment industry does not figure in its list of Industries. (Please refer to Appendix - B for the list of occupations and processes as stated by the Act)

However, there are a lot of similarities in terms of instances and situations that the Act protects the working children from. Below are a few selected sections where there are comparable circumstances under which the child actors work and the child labour referred to in the Act. Some of them are italicised for easy reading.

Section 2. DEFINITIONS. - In this Act, unless the context otherwise requires, - (i) "appropriate Government" means, in relation to an establishment under the control of the Central Government or a railway administration or a major port or a mine or oilfield, the Central Government, and in all other cases, the State Government;

(ii) "Child" means a person who has not completed his fourteenth year of age;

(iii) "Day" means a period of twenty-four hours beginning at midnight;

(iv) "Establishment" includes a shop, commercial establishment, workshop, farm, residential hotel, restaurant, eating-house, theatre or other place of public amusement or entertainment;

(v) "Family", in relation to an occupier, means the individual, the wife or husband, as the case may be, of such individual, and their children, brother or sister of such individual;
(vi) "Occupier", in relation to an establishment or a workshop, means the person who has the ultimate control over the affairs of the establishment or workshop;

(vii) "Port authority" means any authority administering a port;

(viii) "Prescribed" means prescribed by rules made under Sec. 18;

(ix) "Week" means a period of seven days beginning at midnight on Saturday night or such other night as may be approved in writing for a particular area by the Inspector;

(x) "Workshop" means any premises (including the precincts thereof) wherein any industrial process is carried on, but does not include any premises to which the provisions of Sec. 67 of the Factories Act, 1948 (63 of 1948), for the time being, apply.

Section 7. HOURS AND PERIOD OF WORK. - (1) No child shall be required or permitted to work in any establishment in excess of such number of hours, as may be prescribed for such establishment or class of establishments.

(2) *The period of work on each day shall be so fixed that no period shall exceed three hours and that no child shall work for more than three hours before he has had an interval for rest for at least one hour.*

(3) *The period of work of a child shall be so arranged that inclusive of his interval for rest, under sub-section (2), it shall not be spread over more than six hours, including the time spent in waiting for work on any day.*

(4) *No child shall be permitted or required to work between 7 p.m. and 8 a.m.*

(5) No child shall be required or permitted to work overtime.

(6) No child shall be required or permitted to work in, any establishment on any day on which he has already been working in another establishment.
Section 13. HEALTH AND SAFETY. - (1) The appropriate Government may, by notification in the official Gazette, make rules for the health and safety of the children employed or permitted to work in any establishment or class of establishments.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing provisions, the said rules may provide for all or any of the following matters, namely:

(a) Cleanliness in the place of work and its freedom from nuisance;

(b) Disposal of wastes and effluents;

(c) Ventilation and temperature;

(d) Dust and fume;

(e) Artificial humidification;

(f) Lighting;

(g) Drinking water;

(h) Latrine and urinals;

(i) Spittoons;

(j) Fencing of machinery;

(k) Work at or near machinery in motion;

(l) Employment of children on dangerous machines;

(m) Instructions, training and supervision in relation to employment of children on dangerous machines;

(n) Device for cutting off power;

(o) Self-acting machines;

(p) Easing of new machinery;

(q) Floor, stairs and means of access;

(r) Pits, sumps, openings in floors, etc.;
(s) Excessive weights;
(t) Protection of eyes;
(u) Explosive or inflammable dust, gas, etc.;
(v) Precautions in case of fire;
(w) Maintenance of buildings; and
(x) Safety of buildings and machinery.

One cannot help but speculate at this situation where the laws have considered the possible arduous circumstances that a working child may be exposed to, but just because the film and television industry is not mentioned in the Act, the entire set of population in the entertainment industry have it easy, with no authority to question.

5.2 Being realistic with Reality TV

**Reality television** is a genre of television programming that presents purportedly unscripted dramatic or humorous situations, documents actual events, and usually features ordinary people instead of professional actors, sometimes in a contest or other situation where a prize is awarded. The genre has existed in some form or another since the early years of television, which began in earnest as a television formula in the 1990s, and exploded as a global phenomenon around 1999-2000. Programs in the reality television genre are commonly called "reality shows" and often are produced in series. Documentaries and nonfictional programming such as news and sports shows are usually not classified as reality shows.
Reality television frequently portrays a modified and highly influenced form of reality, utilizing sensationalism to attract viewers and so to generate advertising profits. Participants are often placed in exotic locations or abnormal situations, and are sometimes coached to act in specific scripted ways by off-screen "story editors" or "segment producers," with the portrayal of events and speech manipulated and contrived to create an illusion of reality through editing and other post-production techniques.

This genre, off late has been in the news for various reasons. It has opinions in both extremes. It has been positively welcomed due to its innovative settings or situations and ability to gain immediate connection with the audience due to its non-fictitious nature. But it has also received its share of criticism which accuses it of its high influence of the profit motive, misleading the audience with tricks in editing, restaging, premeditated scripts and acting.

**Instant Celebrities**

The participants, who include both adults as well as children, usually are not the professionally trained actors / singers for Television. They are ordinary people from all walks of life. But the reality television has the ability to turn them (in the present situation – the children) into instant celebrities. They gain huge popularity across the nation / state, overnight. But this celebrity status is mostly short lived. It is lost as quickly as it is gained. This process of gaining enormous popularity in one instance, which include having to facing the media, interviews, being invited as guests to events, promoting products etc.; and losing all of it in the next instance, which means having to deal with the same media and people forgetting and ignoring, is a major emotional upheaval. When it can be a very complex situation for adults, the effect of all this on children could be unpredictably gruelling. Their parents too have to go through equally strenuous times.
These children could be compared with the child actors on the ground that they gain the celebrity status and have to learn to live up to the hype that the media and the society around them would offer. But the major differentiating factor would be the fact that the child actors gain popularity over a period of time and also lose it over many years after they have stopped acting or as they grow up into adults. As Master Manjunath says, he took 2 years to gradually get back to the normal social life with friends and family after he disconnected himself from films, though this was his own decision. But the celebrities of reality TV seldom have this choice. Popularity is thrust on them suddenly and also seized away, as suddenly.

The child’s talent of singing / dancing / acting are definitely brought to the forefront, so that the child could get enough scope to pursue its interests, through these programs. But the price that they pay for it through the emotional turmoil that they go through has various effects and the instances we see in the media like –

a) Shinjini – had to be admitted to the hospital and given psychological counselling after she went into severe depression. The cause for this was stated as the reaction of the judges and the comments they gave about her performance on the show.

b) 11 yr old Neha Sawant attempted suicide because her parents PREVENTED her from attending another reality show after she was a runner up in the first one. The parents stated that the shows were taking away most of her time and she had to concentrate on studies and school.

The authorities are also gradually waking up to this new phenomenon and its effects and taking measures which may help in future. Some of the actions taken are:
a) NCPCR (National Commission for Protection of Child rights) has said that no children below 7 yrs are to be allowed to participate in reality shows of any kind, across the country. (Ref. Ch3, Pg 40-41)

b) Andhra Pradesh State Human Rights Commission has banned all reality shows involving children after they found that they were being shown in an objectionable manner. But eventually, how many children suffer and how many are actually benefitted by these shows and more importantly how the television channels respond to these complaints and issues is to be seen. (Ref. Ch3, Pg 56)

5.3 Exploitation or Encouragement?

Like the above instance of reality shows, the film and television industry too has arguments which speak about the advantages it offers along with the disadvantages and drawbacks of being a part of the industry. The contention gets more emphasis in case of children. This is because, in case of adults, they are themselves responsible for all their actions. But it is not so in case of children. Someone else has to take decisions for them, and the responsibility of the child is not just in the hands of the parents, but everyone in its immediate social environment which include school, friends, neighbours, hobby classes, siblings, relatives and whoever the child is in frequent interaction with. This is easier said than done. Though everyone may agree to this premise in the ideal sense, the problem begins when things are not all right; the main issue being who will take the blame. As the researcher began discussing this with various people across the sections of the society, to get an idea of what the majority opinion would be, it was quite a revelation to find out that most of them think that parents are responsible.
The Onus is on the parents

This is because they are the first access for any child and most of the decisions are taken / expected to be taken (even legally) by them on behalf of the child. It is the parent or the guardian who signs on the child’s behalf for any legal, financial or personal documents. The parents almost act as the face of the child for any administrative or legal documentation purposes. So, does it mean that they have to take the entire responsibility of everything that happens to the child? Do they have access to, or can they control everything in their child’s life?

Master Manjunath, famous for Malgudi Days, was one of the most popular child actors in Kannada entertainment industry. He seems to agree on the fact that parents are obligated towards their child. He says that most of the problems arise if the parents / guardians are not careful right from the beginning. “The major who signs on the child’s behalf is always responsible for any problem. People can be easily manipulated with these issues either because they are ignorant or they want to be that way”. When he was questioned as to which parent would ‘want’ to push their child into trouble, he says, “sometimes, parents too are over-eager to make sure their child makes a good name for himself and becomes a successful actor. In a few cases, parents are insecure and hesitate to question any discrepancies, or demand the rights, that they feel is required for their child. Instead, it would be a lot easier if they handle it professionally, instead of suffering later.”

This may be true, as the weaker side is always prone for exploitation, and once the parents show themselves to be insecure or over-anxious, they may be overpowered easily.

Continuing, he says – “The contract for an English film I did was 350 pages long, with everything included. Whereas here, the contract could be 2-3 pages with everything that the production
house wants to make sure of, like dates of shoot etc., and nothing about the actor’s demands or requirements are included. But in most cases, there is no written contract and it is just an oral understanding, which could be easily manipulated. If this is the case, how can the employers be held responsible? We adhere to rules everywhere, except here. We have to put rules and adhere to it. It is all upto the individual”.

His thoughts are reflected in the statements of Ms. Priyabharati Jagadeesh, who is an independent feature film director. A Kannagida, residing in the United States of America is passionate about Kannada and the huge film industry it has. The concern for the industry and its people is reflected in her knowledge of the industry inspite of having lived in USA all her life. She too agrees that it is completely the duty of the parents of the child to make sure he / she is comfortable not just during shooting, but also in its social and educational life. She is of the opinion that, everyone in the world is selfish to a certain extent, as everyone wants his / her welfare to be the first priority. Though the producers are aware of the child and its basic necessities, they may prioritize the smooth running of their film schedules to prevent losses. It is during such situations that the parent has to come to the picture to make sure the child’s needs are met. But if the parent begins to feel insecure or vulnerable, then there can be no one to support. She also tries to focus on the fundamentals of any project. “The basic agreement and understanding has to be very clear before taking up any project. It is even better if all of it is in writing from the child’s side too.”

But, she was told of the reality of the situation, where too many conditions and demands from the child (or the parent) may result in replacing the child with someone else who may offer to do it with much less demands, thus rendering the child without an opportunity to showcase his/her
talent in that project. This is what makes most of the parents feel apprehensive before objecting to anything.

But the director feels that true talent and professionalism will never lose its sheen. They may lose out on a few projects here and there, (which may be for good, instead of suffering under unprofessional circumstances) but eventually perseverance and talent will always endure.

She also quotes examples of her film where she had to go against the producer’s wishes to accommodate the child’s school and scheduled the child’s shooting only on weekends. This had to be done as she was very particular about that specific child for a role in the film, due to the child’s talent in emoting well, even with lengthy dialogues.

It does seem fair when it is told that true talent never fades away and the parents have to have faith in the child’s talent and not feel insecure. Any parent would definitely not be willing to compromise their child’s comfort. So why are the issues cropping up? Where is the discrepancy?

From the interviews, there were a few examples which are found to be relevant to this issue. During the interview, when the researcher met child actor Gautham’s mother, apart from answering the questions asked, she was eager to narrate an incident that she and gautham had to go through –

During one of their outdoor shoots (outskirts of a small town in North Karnataka), where she accompanies him to all the locations, she was requested to stay back at the lodge for some time till another car arrived, as there was no room in the vehicle which took the actors to the location. But the second car never arrived and she had to sit in the lodge till lunch time. She was horrified to see her son walking in crying, with rashes all over his body. She was even more shocked to hear the story of what happened. He had to fall from a height of 80 feet, with no safety measures
except a few cardboard boxes. They had 13 takes of this shot! To avoid objection from the mother, they tried to keep her away from location. He developed rashes due to the ropes that were tied to him and none had bothered to take them away after the scene. Nothing about this scene was told earlier. After all this, they were given a meagre payment in front of everyone which was very embarrassing. When she objected, she was spoken to very rudely and arrogantly. This is a story of a helpless parent who could not do anything to protect her son, inspite of making efforts to travel with him wherever he is required, in order to be with him. After much persuasion, she revealed the name of the producer – Omprakash from hubli.

The parent of another child – Chiranjeevi, had a long list of issues she had with the working of the industry, but did not know where to go for help. Below is a list of concerns she has –

- The payment of 2-3 serials; 1 film - totally unpaid
- Children don’t have an association - to complain. It will make at least some difference
- ID Card should be given to keep a record of children in the industry
- Kids must be given first priority for security, pick up drop, doctor facility etc.
- Good food and clean water should be compulsory for kids
- Make up needs to be taken care due to sensitive skin of kids
- Must consider school and parents while scheduling shoots
- Stars are given a secretary and asst which is unnecessary
- Producers/directors are good, but Production managers eat up all money and don’t give us anything. Production managers need to be taken to task
- Costumes are all used, smelly and dirty. This can lead to infections
We were once dropped in the outskirts at 12 midnight - not near a bus stand as the driver had to drop another actress for which he had to travel in another direction. No payment was also given.

I cried not knowing what to do. Who should I speak to about all this?

She is scared to quote names due to lack of support. She did not give names as the film is yet to be released.

Child actor Manoj, who was also a winner in one of the reality shows on Zee kannada, has his father support him in his interests. But the father too has issues with the industry he narrates –

- Payment withheld as he is a kid- from well known people like T.S. Nagabharana (project - O Manase) one week of pilot episodes were shot and after that there was no response. When we went to enquire, he was replaced and no money was paid.
- Kunigal Nagabhushan - not capable of handling a production. 2.5 thousand unpaid.
- Good experience with final cut productions. No issues whatsoever.
- Otherwise, we have fought in all other productions for issues like timings, unscheduled shooting dates, payment, facilities sometimes lesser than the heroine's assistant.

He is of the opinion that the law and systems here are good, the problem is with people. As long as there are corrupt people, no improvements in terms of legalities or unions will be of any help.

Shreya’s mother feels that many dues are not paid. She calls them ‘rakshasas’ (demons). Director - Sadhu Kokila said that I should have asked for the money before they began work.

Now after work, nothing can be done. I just remain silent and don’t quarrel much. I am not
very bold and out-going. I can’t fight. But if someone else does it I will definitely support them.

Amulya, a popular actor also has had her share of problems, not very different from the others. Her mother too, speaks of areas which could be improved - Food is not of good quality, pickup and drop facilities are careless, payment not prompt. Her mother specifically mentioned that she is very careful in the way her daughter is spoken to or held by people. Precaution is taken with the kind of costumes given to her and even in the roles she plays, because, it can be quite unsafe for girls.

Ironically, a few months after the interview, there was a major scandal involving her and a director – Ratnaja. Photographs of Amulya and the director kissing were leaked and it was all over the television, newspapers and magazines. After a lot of denials and tears that were shed, it was proved that the picture was graphically altered and the girl in the picture was not Amulya, but her look-alike.

Scandals like this put a lot of stress on not only the actors themselves, but also their families. These can lead to a lot of embarrassment and humiliation for them, more so if it is a girl. A lot of parents think that it is safe for them, especially girls when they are young, and encourage them to act, but want them to quit and get into regular mainstream after they grow up, due to the fear of such rumours and scandals. But these days, when scandals seem to have gone beyond the age bar, this logic may not hold good.
5.4 Master Kishan – Paradise Lost

The biggest example of a child enduring a lot of publicity and limelight in the Kannada Film Industry is Master Kishan. Though he started as a child actor, he is now a story writer, singer, music composer, and most importantly, a Film director. Here is a short report on Master Kishan:

Kishan Shrikanth (born January 6, 1996), known as Kishan SS or Master Kishan, is an actor and director. He is the “Youngest Director of a professionally made feature length film” as acknowledged by the Guinness Book of World Records. As of January 2006, he has acted in 24 films and in many popular Indian soap opera (more than 500 episodes). The film C/o Footpath (Care of Footpath) is adapted from a short story he wrote himself, and the cast includes prominent Indian actors Jackie Shroff, Saurabh Shukla, B.Jayashree, Sudeep and Tara. Kishan himself plays the lead. The film has been dubbed into the 5 major Indian Languages and it has also been released in English Language. It was first shot in Kannada and the Kannada version was released on 26 November 2006. The Tamil version of the film called Sathanai was released in January 2007. The English version of the film titled Care of Footpath premiered at SAIFF South Asian International Film Festival, New York on November 1st. Shroff said of Kishan: “He is such a genius that I had to work in his film. He is constantly thinking about his next shot, constantly innovating to make it better. He is sure about what he wants from his actors”

The above information is sure to make any Kannadiga proud of Kishan and his achievements. In one of the interviews, Kishan says he managed his schedule so that he did not miss much of school. He also says that there is no difference in his friends' reaction after all these achievements.

The Kannada industry that lauded his efforts also has these things to say. Below are a few excerpts of what some the actors, directors and producers of the industry have to say-
Jayanth – former child actor, presently Producer/Director - Zee Kannada, Suvarna channel etc.

“He mother searches on net... Any record that is not broken, she makes him do it”.
“I definitely doubt achievements. They definitely sound unnatural. It is intended and planned. It is impossible for him to think of such a story and direct it.”

Keerthi – former child actor, presently cinematographer and entrepreneur

“At a very young age he has achieved a lot but i hope this status still makes him to be simple and down to earth cos most of the times this fame makes people think high about them.”

Anand - former child actor, presently director of a TV series

“He seems very mature; he has good back up from family too. He also has the ability to pick things up quickly. Guinness record is truly commendable - they are not fools to give him the credit if he does not deserve it”.

He speaks with maturity, which seems unnatural and taught.
Success should be step by step. Only then one will know the value. Now probably his satisfaction level is higher. No more Indian awards will make him happy.
There seems to be no “what next” for him. Success and money shouldn’t go to the head. There is nothing great in parents producing a film for their son.

Manjunath - former child actor, Presently the Chief of PR, NICE

He is sold on himself. He doesn’t look like a kid. We appreciate his achievement. But hyping this is so fake. I am actually impressed with his groomer!!
**Sindhu - former child actor, presently acting for Television**

He is great. I’m proud that he is a Kannadiga. He has brought credit to Kannada.

But, I doubt if he has done it himself completely.

‘avanige ashtu mariyade illa’ (he seemed disgraceful)- In the state award function, as he was requesting Sri Kumaraswamy to get him a site as he got the award. That should not have been his behaviour, if he genuinely had done it.

**Vijay Raghavendra - former child actor, presently lead actor in Kannada films**

Kishan is overrated. He is beyond his age. It is embarrassing to see him like this because I too have been in his place once. Parents should set limits. Kishan’s parents don’t seem to have done that.

**Jeetendra – production executive of Manipal Entertainment**

(Laughs.) I don’t know him personally. He may be intelligent, but it isn’t his work. He is bold, and mature. He does not look like a kid and speaks like an adult.

**MK Mutt - Director and actor, State award winner**

He has lost his childhood completely. He is surrounded by people everywhere. People address him in plural. It gives him a false and unnecessary illusion about himself. It may cut off the real actor / talent in him.

This is one example visible in the media. But there are various others going thru the same in this industry. Why can’t he repeat the same again? He is now expected to do bigger things now.
was very good in acting. But in his direction, no one can get that kind of maturity in that age. He has been taught and fed. Why didn’t sons of other directors try to do the same? Is there no talent? Kishan’s parents pushed him into this, for their credibility. The things that he says in his interview like - "I will burn all the Kannada prints of my film if I don’t get a specific theatre" It is definitely not his statement and he probably wouldn’t know the value of it or the repercussions of it at that age. His dad immediately continued and supported him. Guinness book people are not fools. But they too have limitations. They cannot get into the bedrooms of Kishan’s house. Kannada media too, wanted to publicise this so that Kannada film industry gets into international news. But this greed of industry and media is at the boy’s cost. His future is gone. He can never survive like a normal kid. His entire life has become cinematic.

_SihiKahi Chandru – Producer and Director, Final Cut Productions_

He is no more a ‘master’. He has lost his childhood and it is forced. When he acted for our project before he made the film, he was curious and inquisitive like any child of his age. If that is called genius and is expected to go beyond his age, it is unnatural. He can’t relate to his younger sister. He doesn’t know the basic pleasures of childhood. His biggest challenge now is - what next? He seems brainwashed. There is no innocence.
5.5 Discussion:

In the story so far, one notices two extreme positions parents could take. In the case of child actors like Amulya, Gautham and Shreya, we see helplessness and vulnerability on the part of the parent. They seem to want to encourage their child’s talent on one side, but are confronted by logistic issues and ego related problems which make them seem very frustrated. The same film industry also boasts of Master Kishan, who has reached the zenith of achievement, which many adults can only dream of. Most of the credit for this, apart from Kishan’s own talent, goes to his parents, who, baring all odds have managed to push their child’s talent to greatest heights which has also brought a lot of envy and jealousy along with the pride and honour that the industry flaunts.

So, the question arises that, is there a possibility of an inference that the parents are more responsible to what happens to the child? Since the parents seem to spend the maximum amount of time with the children, they also tend to have a very high influence on the child’s mind too. Sometimes to the extent that parents or one of the parent becomes a role model for the child for the rest of its life. So, like Professor Paul Therly says, “The parents and their reactions also play a major role in how the child reacts. Negative experiences for the parent or unpleasant reactions by the parent could be very de motivating for the child.” The child directly may not conclude or deduce anything from a situation on its own. The opinion about a situation or a person depends upon what view the parent holds about the same person or situation. So a parent may have to be doubly careful before reacting to any situation or person either in an angry, rebellious nature or in quite the opposite way, by being submissive or passive about the same. The child may, over time, pick up these qualities from the parent to begin forming opinions and attitudes of its own.
5.6 Mothers – dominant or vulnerable

An important aspect that the researcher noticed during the interaction process was that in most cases, it is the mother of the child who takes the initiative. Be it taking the decision to make the child act; or trying to spread the word with photographs of the child in order to get offers; or accompanying the child to the shooting location everytime, making sure of the child’s welfare. The obvious reason could be that the father is busy with the job and his career being the breadwinner of the family, while the mother takes up the responsibility of the child’s interests. But there is also a possibility of the mother being the dominant of the two, and manages the show herself. This can also possibly be connected to the existing situation of the parents being sidelined and lack of facilities for the child and also for the parent. The possible outcome of the mother being on the shooting set, which is predominantly male with one or two female artistes, is that she could be easily overpowered and cannot hold an argument in front of them. (The situation of Gautham’s mother could be invoked at this instance.) This is not something that is very apparent and can be spoken of evidently. But the undercurrents in an all-men environment with just one ot two women, especially in a male-dominated Indian society, could make her extremely vulnerable.

So this makes the situation for the parent even trickier. At one side, the child and its welfare has to be taken care of, and at the other, the parent has to be a role model to the child who may be constantly observing and picking up characteristics.

But does all this mean the employers can completely wash their hands off from the responsibility towards the children they employ? Films and television are themselves highly influential mediums for all children; whether they are actors are not. But for children who live inside them,
the influence could be unimaginably higher. Like Jayanth, who says “I had grown more than my age. That is very dangerous. Films are exaggerated, but a child tends to think it is real. I had a crush on a girl when I was in 7th standard. I imagined her in a saree, but I was in shorts. My behavior with her was all film influenced. The influence is more to me that those who just saw films”.

The expectation of a certain kind of behaviour from the peers may also increase. So the general conduct of the child in terms of dressing-up, talking etc. could see major changes. The chief source of information and inspiration for these aspects could come from the shooting environment, for which the employers are accountable. Simple or innocent imitation in walking styles or dressing could be considered as a part of growing up, which any child would go through, by imitating their favourite heroes in sports of films. But the problem begins when these imitations turn dangerous like smoking or drinking. These could be as easily picked up by children as the ways of dressing-up. Child actors, who spend most of their time amidst adults who may unknowingly do this in public on the shooting sets are liable to encourage the child, though unintentionally, into picking up these habits. Sometimes, when matters get worse, it could be intentional too, like the example stated by Master Anand – “sometimes parents leave kids on set and go away. Production boys try to ask kids to try smoking and stuff. I too have faced this and I know Master Manjunath also faced it. They used to tease me a lot. I used tell my father and not react much. Manju (Master Manjunath) was forced to smoke on the sets and the same people publicised that he smoked as a kid”.

Many such incidents may happen when the parents are not around. The child may also not speak about such issues openly out of fear or shame. Most of the producers and directors to whom this issue was posed, accepted that there is a possibility and that they would try and take as much
care as possible to prevent them. They also said that should there be such a situation, they are ready to take the people responsible to task. Whether they would actually do it may be another line of reasoning, but they agreed at least in principle. But there were exceptions, like Nanjunde Gowda who said “Kids are more prone to these things outside than films. It is more disciplined here. We try to maintain it here. I blame regular environment more. Infact film environment is safer.” And Dinesh Babu who said “They mingle with other co artistes and technicians. Foul language and habits are a risk one has to take; it is there everywhere. But don’t mind punishing them”.

First aid and other safety measures on set is another issue which seems to be neglected, as there are minimal precautions, as accepted by most of the producers and directors. Children are completely exposed to the electric wires, plug sockets and other heavy technical equipment, for which there are no special precautions taken, though there is a law preventing children being exposed to any of this during work.

5.7 Communication Gap?

While the parents blame the producers / production managers for causing inconveniences such as bad facilities, transport and pay, most of the employers who were interviewed complain about the parents who are more difficult to handle than kids. They speak about tantrums and demands related to facilities, food and pay. So here, we notice that the main problem areas are the same on both sides – facilities like transport, food and pay. So there is a possibility that, there is a communication gap between the two. What the parents call ‘insisting on basic necessities’ is possibly being labeled as ‘tantrums and creating a fuss for unnecessary demands’. But who is to draw a line to say if a particular issue is a ‘necessity’ or an ‘unreasonable demand’?
5.8 The child – nowhere in the picture?

With all the discussions about the onus to be on parents or the employers and the argument as to who is more dominant of the two, one begins to wonder as to where does this leave the child. While the whole issue, now seems to be between the adults, the child, as the interviews portray, seems to be in its own sweet world, enjoying the new experiences as they come, learning new lessons on the way and being completely non judgemental about anything or anybody they encounter. As Ms. Geetha Sundararaman says “There is no specific impact on children below 10 years. They find excitement in little things like new clothes to wear and new places to visit. They may also feel excited about all the attention and praise that they attract wherever they go”. So, does it mean that they have to be left as they are, without being bothered about the laws, norms, psychological impact etc.? Since there is no apparent trouble that is seen in the child at this point, should it be believed that there is no trouble at all?

The child actors of yesteryears, who have now grown up have possible answers. They are children who grew up with no regulations or support whatsoever. Looking back, they seem to see a lot of issues which did not seem troublesome then, actually being subjects of concern.

- I looked for other jobs in the same industry after I was an adult and was not accepted / successful as lead actors. This was because I didn’t know anything else other than films as it came to me from childhood (Master Anand and Jayanth)

- Grandmother refused to buy me a cycle and did not let me do skipping fearing I would grow tall and no one would offer roles. I was asked to trim my eyebrows when I was in 7th standard. She would pinch me to go and wish “good morning” to all the producers on the set. (Sindhu)
• I wanted to become normal. I was abnormal - I did not have a regular social life. In the next 2 years I learnt to live a normal social life - understanding family life. I didn’t know what to talk with friends. I had to find the real world away from films. All my education had to be through correspondence. I could not sit in class. (Master Manjunath)

• Humiliation in school –

- The headmistress used to scold me in front of everyone if I missed school, but praised me only if I recommended the school for shooting as they got publicity.

I was not selected for dances or plays in school - "kai kodtaale". (may leave half-way and not be prompt) because I acted in films. (Sindhu)

- Teachers purposely asked me difficult questions in class. Kids who won prizes in small competitions were called on stage and praised, but when I won filmfare and state awards no one appreciated me. This continued in high school too. I was discouraged from doing good plays in high school. Some teachers discouraged me from attending classes and gave me less marks. If I made a small mistake, like any other kid, I would be told "hogo neenu doddanna jote chaddi hakond dialogue helokke sari". (Go! You are fit only to wear shorts and say your dialogues with doddanna)

These instances are evidence enough to say that all is not well even with children. They may not realise this at their age or take it too seriously during childhood. Some may also avoid talking about these issues out of shame and embarrassment. They may try and side-line these issues temporarily with all the accolades and praise they are getting due to the acting assignments. But we cannot afford to ignore them as adults.