CHAPTER – 6
Conclusion and Future Directions

6.1 Summary and Implications

Children constitute an important and inevitable component of any entertainment industry workforce. Whether it is production of fire crackers, manufacturing of toys, or making of cinema and TV serials, children are utilized in various capacities and in a variety of roles. In some contexts, children just serve as manual workers, but in theatre and motion picture (including TV) industries they play the roles of actors, besides being used in other capacities. Because of their meek physical conditions, mental make-up still in the making, oscillating moods, and parental mediated contacts with the industrial management, they encounter special problems and undergo different work experiences than their adult counterparts. The physical and psychological demands of the work situation may result adversely on their physical health and psychological well being. The inability to cope up with the expectations of the work environment may cause frustration, loss of confidence, lower self-esteem, and in general, overall growth of personality and future professional development and performance.

The situations of child actors are unique and require careful consideration. The core issues involving child actors may be listed:

1. The children in acting situations are removed from their natural life situation involving childhood activities and social relationships. Since they enjoy a special status among their peers, they are bound to be looked upon as “different”, and are expected to behave differently. The child actors may respond naturally to these expectations and may begin to behave differently keeping in tune with their newly acquired special status. This may result in loss of peer contacts, play activities, household chores and all other beautiful
things in a child’s life. The consequence of these deprivations is a kind of fantasy life which may adversely affect the development of “true self.”

2. The schooling of child actors will naturally get disturbed and the academic achievement may suffer due to irregular school attendance, withdrawal of attention from school curriculum, and disturbed academic schedule. Special arrangements have to be made to compensate for the losses in school, and these arrangements may not be adequate substitute.

3. Since child actors are made to enact a variety of roles, they are bound to experience simulated horror, violence, crime and other kinds of disturbing situations. True, they are simulated situations; nonetheless, the impact of them on the growing minds can’t be just undermined. (Ref. Ch4, Pg 124). The children need to be properly debriefed and counselled about these situations and their own involvement in these situations. Even after taking adequate remedial measures, there is no guarantee that children are free from some permanent damages. The cases of child actors taking to drugs, indulging in criminal activities, and experiencing depression and despair are abound. (Similar to the case of Jodie Sweetin mentioned in Ch 4, Pg 164-166)

4. Financial exploitation of child performers by their own parents and parental squandering of child actor’s earnings is somewhat common. A good example is the life of Jackie Coogan. (Ref. Ch4, Pg 148)
5. Child performers seem to have difficulty in adjusting to life as adults. Stan Ziegler, a psychologist who has researched child performers is of the opinion that “instead of natural childhood of acne and budding breasts, they are pampered, protected and cared. Suddenly that world ends and they are forced to make adjustment to the real world. Most can’t.”

6. Child labour laws do not adequately protect child actors. (Ref. Appendix B)

The factors listed out above make it abundantly clear that child actors encounter unique situations and have to confront innumerable social and psychological hurdles. The study has been more exploratory in nature and has identified some of these possible stumbling blocks and impediments that beset child actors in their professional and personal growth.

Below are some of the highlights that stood out in the research -

- The children are innocent and usually accept everything that is given to them especially by their own parents without being judgmental with regard to its implications or effects on their lives. So, a child may say – ‘I am very excited to go for shooting and it is ok if I miss school, since I can make it up later with the help of friends.’ This cannot be taken on the face of it to conclude that there is no issue and the child is happy. The child may be happy to skip (the boring) school to do exciting things like meet film stars, wear costumes and act with them. (Example of Vijay Raghavendra may be invoked – Ref. Ch4, Pg 114,118). But it has to be looked at in a broader perspective and analysed with regard to both the advantages and disadvantages in the long term.
• Though simple psychological effects are noticeable at the young age, like restlessness, dressing up glamorously that is unnatural among peers of the same age, aversion for a specific food item, displaying moody behaviour, change in the kind of language used etc., they could be mistaken for normal ‘growing-up’ issues that even non-acting children face. But their actual consequence would become evident only after they grow up. But it is the duty of the society around it beginning from parents/teachers and the employers to recognise this at an early stage and support the child overcome it.

Awareness – all of the children interviewed knew the concept of ‘child labour’ (though some did not know the term ‘child labour’). They say that they feel bad for them and blame the parents. But when asked as to why they are in the industry, they are not too sure, but the only reason they give is usually the parent and their initiative.

• The overall approach of the film and television industry according to the present research is that – children are for granted or not taken too seriously. The chief cause being the fact that kids are meek and soft and would not fight or complain against them, unlike the adult actors, especially the ‘big stars’. This is proved by the fact that almost all of the actors interviewed have at least 2-3 projects where their dues are unpaid, among various other complaints. (Ref. Ch 4, Pg111,122; Ch5,Pg 211-213)

• Working conditions in the industry though are not the safest or the most comfortable for children, they are not necessarily toxic or harmful in the direct sense. But the information got by the researcher indicates that a good support system (which is completely absent) for children will go a long way in improving the environment of work for children,
thereby upgrading the overall state of affairs between child-parent, parent-employer and child-employer. This in turn is bound to have long-term effects for the children till their adult lives.

- According to an article (Ref. Ch 3 page 42) NCPCR (National Commission for Protection of Child Rights) has fixed the minimum age for child actors at 12 years in the year 2008. But no one in the film and television industry has a clue about something like this existing. Most of the employers were not familiar with the presence of such a commission in our country. The probable reason would be that child actors are not associated with labour or child rights.

But going by the announcement by the NCPCR, it may not be practical to have children aged above 12 years for a roles meant for a five year old. However the enforcement form the NCPCR also seems to have lost momentum and hence no effect is seen so far.

- Drugs, cigarettes and alcohol – child actors are probably more prone to this, since they have the finances and also probably easy access since they spend a lot of time with adults. But psychologist Ms. Sundararaman says, if the child is inclined towards such things, their background or finances do not matter. We see children of rich parents or for that matter even some street children trying some of these. The only way to curb them would be through responsible upbringing and proper monitoring. Noted psychologist and former Bangalore University vice-chancellor Prof M S Thimmappa says, “These are major evils of a society. They have to be avoided or nipped in the bud. Otherwise they can have long-term effects. De-addiction centres give symptomatic treatment. They’ll
stop taking drugs, but the problem is a more deep-rooted one. Such problems will have a history of 10 to 15 years”. Some experts recommend correctional observation, while some suggest effective counselling. Dr M J Thomas, consultant psychiatrist at Sagar Hospital, says, “A child could take to any of these for three reasons: psychiatric problems including depression, out of curiosity, the third being those with anti-social personality disorders. In such cases, the de-addiction centre will only detoxify them and don’t do much to correct the disorder. They need a prolonged period of counselling.”

- **Swini Khara – An example of the irony and paradox of being a child actor**

  A very well known face in the field of hindi film and television, Swini Khara, was recently in the news for a very ironical reason. She was not allowed into the theatre which was screening her own film, because it had a U/A certification from the Censor board, which means children under 18 have to watch it under adult supervision! (Ref. Ch3,Pg58)

  This is the case with most of the child actors in Kannada too, as Mr. Vasudev Sharma mentions “Ravichandran used kids in the most adult situations and scenes. They are also seen mouthing double-meaning and other adult dialogues or songs. (Ref. Ch4,Pg 172)

  It is encouraging to know that we have a strong governing body – ‘The Central Board of Film Certification’ to censor and control the films and its content for the audience to watch, even if they have the right to watch what they want with their money. This is a responsible move to enable people to choose the right kind of entertainment for them. But what is extremely disappointing is that, there is no governing body to check what
happens during the production of the entertainment content and whether it is suitable for
the people involved in creating it.

So, very ironically, like the above example where even if the children are not allowed to
view some sections like extreme violence, horror, or other adult material, it would be
acceptable to have them present in such situations and perform such actions!

- Legally, there are some existing laws can be adapted for the time being but for long term
usage, a separate set of laws is needed since the case is unique. They can neither be
clubbed with the child labour group completely (though they do have a lot of similarities)
nor can they be treated like a normal school going child (as they have a responsible job,
earn money and face the media)

1. Laws with regard to their support during shooting, in case of emergencies, special
considerations like time / days of work ; kind of work etc
2. A set of Rights as well as Responsibilities for the parents of child actors. They
should know to what extent they can demand comforts for them and their child, at
the same time have complete knowledge of their accountability for their child’s
live and their duties as parents.
3. Making sure the child’s education and recreation does not suffer, as they are the
most important building blocks of growing up. It should be the duty of both the
production and the parent to make sure the child’s mental balance is kept through
the right amount of play and studies in between shooting schedules.
4. A list of punishable acts and situations that have to be compulsorily avoided with
children.
5. A separate governing body for the welfare of child actors
6.2 Conclusion

Mike Davidow, in his book ‘People’s theatre – from Box office to the Stage’ speaks about theatre for children in Russia [5]. The artistic director of the theatre Mr.Korogodsky says, the main aim of his theatre is to ‘Develop the talent of the Audiences. To make the people of Russia, culturally and spiritually richer is the very essence of our theatre. This must not only start with childhood, but also done systematically. We want to open up the world to our children with all its complexities. We want to teach them to take joy in beauty. We want to make them better human beings. If the aim of the school is to educate minds of the children, ours is to educate their hearts’

This statement sums up all that has to be expected out of child actors in films and television. The objective of making children better human beings is a universal purpose for all adults alike. But the responsibility of making it for each child lies with everyone who is even remotely accessible to the child. A child’s mind is so sharp and inquisitive that it cannot be taken for granted. It cannot be generalised as to who or what will be a bigger influence on its mind or from where it can pick up and learn things.

Any activity that the child is involved in, should eventually help in making him/her a better human being. The trick is not in choosing the right activity, but making any activity right. The people around the child during the activity can make it right or wrong for the child. So it is everyone’s responsibility equally to make sure that the child is the focus and not their own selfish interests or egos. Rules, regulations, laws and norms can only go a certain distance. The rest of the distance has to be covered by the conviction in people’s minds in order to reach the final goal of having an audience with awareness and which is sensitive to the world around.
6.3 Limitations of the research

- The research being a humanities research - one that deals with people, their minds, reactions and situations, all the results cannot be certified as true at all times. Though the overall situation in general may remain same with a few minor changes, various factors in the individual’s life may undergo changes over a period of time which can be unexpected and unforeseen.

- This is a research with internal validity – which means that the research and its findings hold good only within the sample. The information from one interviewee cannot be applied to another person, as individual opinions differ.

- The psychological analysis could be done in various levels. This study does not go very deep into the specific psychological traits of the children, but instead looks at how children react and think in various situations due to the impact of media.

- Children are the main subject of the study. Though the researcher has tried to get the information from them in the most truthful and authentic manner, there is a small chance that the child’s mind may change very quickly or the child may not have been in a playful mood when answering.

- Since there has been very less information about research or studies which were previously done dealing with child actors in the Kannada film and television industry, the researcher could not use the information from this study to compare and evaluate with other information.
6.4 Scope for further study

- This was a research conducted within the limits of the vernacular Kannada Language Film and Television industry. But the fact that children are used for the films and TV in the same plane as any adult is used in the entertainment industries of other vernacular languages in the country also. A study of how the other counterparts are working and dealing with this issue would lead to newer perspectives.

- Legally, though all everyone would come under the Indian Constitution, how the state laws have shaped up to deal with this matter and how the organisations are working would also add towards broadening the perspectives.

- This was a research conducted with a select sample of specific people, from the concerned sections of the population directly involved in the subject matter, namely – the child actors, their parents, the employers and the authorities / experts. The research would be much more extensive if other groups, though indirectly involved, are also included. New ideas and interesting thoughts could be brought in by including more groups for the research sampling.

- Stretching the time-scale would also bring interesting outputs for the research. By examining how a specific change brought about in the present, would affect the overall situation in the future – when the child actor grows up. A longitudinal study of this nature would be a very valuable addition to the research on child actors.
• Going in depth by studying specific psychological traits individually as an impact of the media like anxiety, depression, stress or excitement would throw more light on what kinds of effect it could have on the mind. Specific psychometric tests meant for studying these traits could be used to derive data which would yield accurate results.

• Along with the comparison with the film and television industries of other languages, a parallel could be drawn with other entertainment areas like Theatre (children’s theatre), advertising, fashion etc. which extensively use children in their regular course of work. It is also true that many children, who are actors in film or television, also do modelling for advertisements. So it would be of great help to this research if a study on those areas is also done.

• Reality shows are a major rage in the television industry, which is picking up momentum by the day. Though they do not get included in being called a ‘profession’ or ‘employment’ since it is a voluntary participation for a game or a competition, it is true that it is affecting the lives of a lot of children. It involves both physical as well as psychological effort on the participant’s side. They are usually based on the performing arts like dancing, singing or acting. A detailed study on how this new phenomenon is taking shape may open up newer horizons for the present research.

• Finally, apart from the children in the industry, there are various instances where the adult actors too face exploitation. A study could be based on the injustice that the adult actors face in the industry and the support systems or the facilities they have to sustain themselves. This study could be compared with the condition of children in order to get an in-depth perspective of the industry.