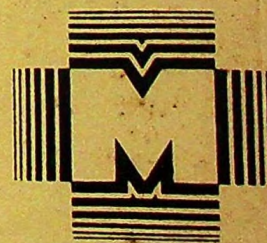




MEDIA AND THE GIRL CHILD
Strategies to Effect Change
A REPORT



MADHYAM

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INTRODUCTION

The situation of the female child in India has been matter of acute concern in recent times. While the majority of our children are condemned to a miserable existence because of poverty and attendant ills, girls face certain special problems and dangers because of the general devaluation of the female gender by society.

UNICEF and other national and international organisations concerned about women and children have been drawing attention to the tragedy of the girl child for a long time. The governments of South Asian countries officially acknowledged the seriousness of the problem last year when they declared 1990 as the SAARC Year of the Girl Child. In this context, the Indian government has been exploring ways of highlighting and tackling this important issue.

Everyone agrees that only a change in social attitudes will lead to an amelioration of the situation of girls. It is also accepted that the media have the potential to be powerful agents of social change by effectively creating public opinion in favour of progress.

It is crucial, therefore, for the personnel attached to the government media - particularly radio and television, which have the greatest reach across the length and breadth of the country - to fully comprehend the gravity of the problem as well as to be totally familiar with its various aspects.

It is hoped that with a more thorough understanding of the situation of the girl child they will be able to use their technical know-how to create programmes which will be more valuable tools in the work towards social change and a better deal for female children.

In this context, the Department of Women & Children's Welfare, Government of Karnataka, supported by UNICEF, put forward the idea of holding a workshop for media-persons on issues concerning the girl child. This workshop was held in Bangalore in December 1990.

OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP

- * To sensitise government and other media personnel to the situation of the girl child by making available an information base.
- * To encourage inter- and intra-media critiques of current media content with reference to the girl child.
- * To generate ideas for radio and television programmes, press and other media features which can address the problems in an informative as well as creative and, therefore, effective way.

STRUCTURE OF THE WORKSHOP

The workshop was structured to allow maximum interaction between resource persons and participants in the morning session, to facilitate a thorough analysis of the various issues concerning the girl child. The afternoon session was devoted to presenting samples of All India Radio as well as Doordarshan programmes on the subject, which were followed by discussion. The deliberations of this workshop form the body of this report.

MADHYAM

Workshop on Media and the Girl Child : Strategies to Effect Change

December 20, 1990

9.15 a.m to 5.15 p.m.

Programme

Morning session

Welcome : Ms Sucharita S Eashwar, Executive Director, Madhyam

Inauguration : Mrs Meera Saksena, Director, Dept of Women & Children's Welfare, Karnataka

The Girl Child - Survival and Health - Dr Shirdi Prasad Tekur
Community Health Cell

The Girl Child and Education - Dr Malathi Somiah
Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore

The Girl Child and Work - Ms Nomita Chandy
Ashraya

Discussion

Coffee

"Media as agent of social change - Potential and Limitations"

- Ms Sakuntala Narasimhan
Journalist

Discussion

Moderator : Mrs Meera Saksena, Director, Dept of Women & Children's Welfare, Karnataka

Post-Lunch session

Presentation on AIR's programmes on the Girl Child : Mr Chandramouli
AIR, Bangalore

Discussion

Presentation on DD's programmes on the Girl Child :

- Ms Jai Chandiram, Director,
Central Production Centre
- Ms Nalini Ramanna, Producer,
Bangalore Doordarshan Kendra.

Discussion

Viewer Reponse and Adaptation of Alternative Media Forms into
Mainstream Media

- Prof M S Nagaraj, Media Critic

Discussion on action strategies

Summing up - Ms Deenaz Damania

Moderator - Ms Deenaz Damania, Child Counsellor and Activist.

Inauguration

In her inaugural address, Ms Meera Saksena, Director, Department of Women & Children's Welfare, Govt of Karnataka, pointed out the pathetic situation of the girl child saying that nutrition, sanitation, safe drinking water and education, some of the basic necessities of life have not reached her. There is a felt need among the rural as well as urban poor for such basic inputs, which they feel will go a long way in improving living conditions.

Ms Saksena also traced the low status of the girl child to negative, derogatory images of women in the media, especially Indian cinema, which reflect the negative attitudes towards girls right from birth.

According to her, several government programmes are specially designed to benefit the girl child. Some of the projects to be undertaken during the Eighth Five Year Plan period are the provision of better creche facilities, schools and polytechnics exclusively for girls; and broadening of ICDS scheme so as to include adolescent children, who are now recognised to be a very vulnerable segment of the population. However, she said, not enough investment or thought has been given to programmes, especially in the rural areas. Quoting the instance of the efforts of the Department of Health in Periyar District, Tamil Nadu, to motivate people to improve sanitation facilities, Ms Saksena noted that motivation of the population is necessary for effective programme delivery.

The media can play a vital role in creating public awareness about the situation of the girl child, she said, Media interaction with socially conscious groups as well as professionals like academicians, doctors, writers and so on would help generate useful resource material on the girl child, she added.

In conclusion, Ms Saksena pointed out that there was no cause to despair about the situation of the girl child; rather, there is greater hope of a better future for her now that there is official recognition of her plight, as seen in the declaration of 1990 as the Year of the Girl Child, and genuine efforts are being made to ensure a better future for the girl child.

PAPERS PRESENTED

The Girl Child - Survival and Health : Dr Shirdi Prasad Tekur
Community Health Cell
Bangalore

Education and the Girl Child : Dr Malathi Somiah
Faculty Member
Indian Institute of
Management,
Bangalore

Work and the Girl Child : Ms Nomita Chandy
Ashraya
Bangalore

These papers are appended to this report.

POINTS RAISED IN DISCUSSION

- Legislation can be successfully implemented only when there is cooperation from the target population, and this can be achieved by creating awareness about these laws among the population.
- It is equally important to follow up legislation and other programmes regularly.
- The situation of destitute children, numbering almost 38 million, is alarming; of these children, 14 million of them are totally destitute, being orphans without any shelter or institutional care. Nearly 50 per cent of such children are girls. However, this problem has not been tackled so far and needs to be looked into.
- Sex-determination and pre-selection are increasingly being practised because the girl child is unwanted even before birth. There have been moves ^{to} ban these practices in Karnataka (following the example of Maharashtra); but it is more relevant to ensure self-discipline on the part of doctors.
- Another problem which undermines the status of the girl child is the question of dowry, for which she and her family pay a heavy price. It would be useful to ensure that the dowry remains with the girl and is not appropriated by her husband's family.
- One way to overcome these problems would be to create attitudinal changes in the family and in the woman so as to enable them to accept a girl child as no less than a boy.
- Other alternatives to enhance the girl child's status would be to ensure skill formation and upgradation and training in remunerative employment, which would give them greater chances for employment.

MEDIA AS AGENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE - POTENTIAL & LIMITATIONS

Ms Sakuntala Narasimhan

Ms Sakuntala Narasimhan spoke about her experiences as a member of the panel screening programmes submitted to Doordarshan, especially for the afternoon transmission, which targets a female audience. She gave several examples which revealed the difficulties of attempting to analyse such programmes from the women's perspective when so many of them are based on outdated stereotypes about women. She particularly pointed out the culpability of producers of so-called humour programmes, whose stock-in-trade seems to be the assumed stupidity, incredulity and frailty of women. She also referred to the effective way in which 'Tamasha' a new magazine for children manages to subtly convey positive images of girls and women's role in society.

PRESENTATION ON AIR'S PROGRAMMES ON THE GIRL CHILD

Mr Chandramouli played back some of the programmes produced by Akashvani on the girl child and described the audience response to these.

PRESENTATION ON DOORDARSHAN PROGRAMMES ON THE GIRL CHILD

This session comprised a lively interaction among participants. Ms Jai Chandiram presented a video recording of television advertisements and features which show women and girls as weak, dominated by men, dependant and always ready to please males by looking glamorous and keeping a perfect house for them. Men, on the other hand, are portrayed as dominant, clever, aggressive, adventurous and, above all, the providers.

According to Ms Chandiram, the media create a reality which is male-oriented and moralising. Viewers unconsciously absorb these images and aspire to live up to them. However, since this is not possible in most instances, a sense of frustration and hopelessness develop among women.

The images of girl children and women, already poor, are further reinforced by these negative images which constantly appear in the media, said Ms Chandiram.

It emerged from the discussions that the way out of this situation is to look for ways to encourage the girl child in all fields. Doordarshan programmes should reflect girls as active participants in all spheres of activity.

According to participants, Doordarshan programmes would be more effective if they were made keeping in mind the regional diversity in the country - for example, in language, customs and traditions.

Ms Nalini Ramanna presented some clippings of programmes made by Bangalore Doordarshan. She began on a positive note, stating that television is a powerful medium of communication, and could play a very constructive role in social development by motivating people to avail of the benefits of development, as well as by encouraging self-help rather than dependences on outside agencies (like the government) for progress.

One clip on the problems faced by a girl throughout her life was judged by participants to be rather negative and defeatist. They felt it could have a disturbing impact on girls who might be in a similar situation because it didn't show any way out. It was felt that such television dramas would be much more powerful if they reflected a positive approach. One concrete suggestion was that information on where women in distress could seek help could be provided at the end of such programmes.

ADAPTATION OF ALTERNATIVE MEDIA FORMS INTO MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Prof M S Nagaraj

Prof M S Nagaraj began by observing that often the objective of a programme did not always get reflected in the programme itself.

Bringing up the issue of popular epics like the Ramayan and Mahabharat, he noted that they had been adapted into various media forms. They had several women characters, who were generally portrayed as subservient to men, never as women in their own right.

He suggested that Doordarshan features should go beyond merely projecting literary works - they should convey something more positive and convincing. It would be useful, for example, to produce programmes re-interpreting old ideas and stories. The crude and simplistic way in which women and girls have been portrayed in Doordarshan programmes till now have to be substituted with a more realistic approach.

Theatre, too, is a powerful medium, said Prof Nagaraj, and its traditional forms are very popular with the masses, particularly in the rural areas. However, one can only expect a gradual change in people's thinking about and attitudes towards the girl child. Changes in her status can only be brought about through/sustained effort by the media, repeatedly exposing people to new ideas and taking up this issue as a campaign to improve the status of the girl child.

RECOMMENDATIONS MADE AT THE WORKSHOP

Following the day's discussions, the participants outlined a plan of action, which was summed up by Ms Deenaz Damania as follows : The strategies suggested are relevant to various media forms in portraying issues related to the girl child and particularly to radio and TV programmes.

- * Increase in the time allocated for children when programmes concerning the girl child could be included.
- * Participation of conscious and knowledgeable women nominated by women's groups in the panel for selection of scripts and programmes.
- * Some of the spots and programmes telecast on the national network have far-reaching messages. To enable them have a better impact, local and regional culture specific adaptations could be made of such material.
- * Greater use of traditional forms of communication, such as folk music, dance and street plays, could be adapted for Doordarshan programmes.
- * Programmes on children should also focus on the situation of the adolescent girl, especially since there is growing consensus that this is a particularly crucial stage in the girl child's physical and mental growth.
- * Messages conveyed by Doordarshan programmes should not be over-simplistic, idealistic and moralising, but should be practical and oriented to reality. It should serve as an eye-opener, making viewers question and analyse the messages.
- * Programmes should be strongly oriented towards bringing about change in attitudes. Superstitious attitudes and irrational beliefs and practices should be exposed, as these are at the root of the plight of girl children today.
- * Audiences research data should be made public, so that programmes can be planned accordingly.

The potential and power of the media have not been adequately tapped so far. Much more can be achieved, especially through Doordarshan and Akashvani, which have tremendous reach even to audiences in remote areas.

With a view to portraying the girl child in a proper perspective by Doordarshan it has been suggested that :

- * positive images of girls must be portrayed in films for children
- * song and dance sequences found objectionable because they stereotype girls/women as doormats or sex objects, should be eliminated
- * the presentation of success stories/role models should be carefully done highlighting collective action so that it becomes clear that it is not a one-in-a million case, but an achievable target for ordinary girls
- * short plays/serials on emotive issues like dowry problems, etc, must be accompanied by information on where help is available to victims.
- * The 'sick' sense of humour which often denigrates women needs to be eliminated
- * advertisements and programmes which/certain roles that idealize women are expected to perform , resulting in inappropriate aspirations, must be suitably altered
- * work of the girl child needs to be publicized, so that her contribution to the family income and the national economy is made visible, and her value in society enhanced
- * Mainline cinema, advertisements, etc. present stereotyped role models of women and children as subservient, helpless and 'dumb', these images need to be changed.

GIRL CHILD - SURVIVAL AND HEALTH

Dr Shirdi Prasad Tekur

Introduction:

There are a number of factors not commonly thought of as contributing to health or illness which affect our survival. It is increasingly being recognised that our health is affected by the circumstances of our lives; environmental and living conditions, resources and life-styles as well as political and socio-economic realities. Customs, attitudes and cultural traditions all affect health, and in the case of women and girl children, the effect is often negative.

Women live longer than men and outnumber them at all ages, given equal care and environmental conditions. This is because nature endows females with endogenous factors which make them more resilient and resistant to health hazards compared to males. In hostile physical and social environs there is a narrowing or reversal of this female to male differential. The adverse gender ratio of 933 females to 1000 males (1981 census) in India speaks for itself. Increased risks of morbidity and mortality are reflected in the lower life expectancy and age-specific-death-rates (especially in the reproductive age group) in females.

Facts and figures: Children constitute 40% of the population. Almost half of them are girls.

- a) At birth: Gender differentiated data on children are inadequate, but with few exceptions, the disadvantages suffered by girls suggest that they are unwelcome at birth. With recent advances in determining the sex of a foetus, this bias even precedes birth!

A study in Bombay on Amniocentesis tests revealed that in 7999 out of 8000 cases, the foetus aborted after such tests were those of female children. Female infanticide in Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu is a well reported phenomenon.

- b) Infancy: There is no significant difference between boys and girls at birth. One third of all children in our country have a low-birth-weight (less than 2500 gms) which affects their chances of survival. Later, girls have inferior nutrition and health care compared to their brothers.

In normal healthy children, the physical growth curve of females lags behind that of males, except between 10 to 12 years when their growth is faster due to the adolescent spurt. In India however, these normal differences are considerably exaggerated, pointing to a higher level of malnutrition among females.

Safdarjung Hospital, New Delhi recorded more male children in the out-patient department, though among them case of malnutrition show a female child preponderance (46% males as against 54% females malnourished).

- c) the first 5 years: Half the total number of deaths in the country occur in children below five years of age.

The under 5 mortality rate (U5MR) is the best available single indicator of social development overall, as most of the factors which it distills are as indicative of meeting essential needs of all human beings as they are of the particular well being of children. Only 84.8% of Indian children survive to the age of five years. The major killers are Diarrhoea, Respiratory infections, Measles and neo-natal tetanus. Vaccines are now available for six major diseases in children, while oral rehydration is a simple technique to prevent deaths due to diarrhoea. A great majority of these deaths can now be prevented at low cost.

Data from the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau show that in children, calorie and protein inadequacy was mostly in the younger age group. In 1982, of the ten states monitored, Kerala showed the highest percentage of normal nutrition - that was 31.8% !

The manifestation of serious deficiencies in various micro-nutrients like vitamin A, Iron, Iodine and possibly others are recognised as so widespread, as to limit efficacy of health and nutrition interventions in other directions. Each year, about 40,000 children go blind due to vitamin 'A' deficiency. National Institute of Nutrition (N.I.N) studies show that 65% of India's children below 3 years and 45% between 3 to 5 years, suffer from anaemia. The seriousness of Iodine deficiency disorders is unfolding only recently.

- d) the absent childhood: From early childhood, girl children assume increasing responsibilities for the household in the areas of water and fuel collection, sibling care, cooking and cleaning and they are expected to help their mothers in agricultural or informal sector activities. This is at the expense of their education.

India has an estimated 100 million child workers - the official figure is only 20 million - of whom 80% are on farms. The work is often hazardous; tuberculosis, burns, work-related injuries, skin ailments and even beatings by employers are common. Says Swami Agnivesh: "Child labour flourishes even though there is a high level of adult unemployment, because it is the cheapest labour available." The Child-in-need Institute (CINI) has been generating awareness on the Girl Child in 24 Paraganas, West Bengal. In their study, they found 78% girls working as against 45% boys, and work involving carrying of heavy loads like collecting firewood or fetching water was done by girls! Their study brings home the fact that the life of a girl in India is built around the home and marriage. Even education is advocated only for 'better' grooms. Her life is divided into two parts - before marriage and after marriage. Till she is married, she is trained for marriage, looking after her younger siblings, fetching water, gathering firewood, helping her mother with household chores and managing the household single-handed if mother is not around. None of the findings presented say anything 'new' - it serves to emphasize the fact that the girl child has an absent childhood.

c) Adolescence: At adolescence, girl children face early marriage and are locked into lives of hard work and risky child-bearing. Children born to women under 18 are twice as likely to die in infancy as children born to women in their twenties. The risks to the health of both mother and infant increase steeply after the third child.

Factors for survival:

The SAARC conference on children recognised that one of the first requirements for ensuring child survival, growth and development was the availability of adequate quantities of safe drinking water and a clean environment. Other life support needs identified were food, fuel and shelter with all interrelations with and implications for the environment.

Another crucial factor for child survival and development is - a well informed mother. The low infant mortality in Kerala is attributed to the high literacy rate of women in the 15 to 45 years age group. Maternal awareness level has got a statistically significant inverse relationship to the infant mortality rate.

As for women's access to health services, the very nature and structure of health services systems militates against reaching women. Women have neither the time, mobility, resources or child care facilities to travel long distances to seek medical aid. And, she cannot travel alone! The mother's access to health services has a direct implication for child health and survival.

The need :

An improvement in the mother-child life cycle should begin with the girl child. A focus for enriching this is the pre-adolescent girl. She should be enabled to avail of learning opportunities, specially for the development of a self-image. Her burden of child care and domestic work should be reduced by providing supportive services and facilities. It is important that special education programs are directed to the girl child to include not only health and nutrition education but also vocational training. This can prove to be of immense help in equipping them for the future and will also improve their economic status and decision-making role in the family.

Jawaharlal Nehru said "We talk of revolution political and economic and yet the greatest revolution in a country is one that affects the status and living conditions of its women".

This revolution can take place if we

- i) ensure that programme interventions include not only infants, but young children under age five, girls, adolescents and women of all ages, regardless of maternal status;

- ii) enable approaches at the grass-root levels which help women define their problems and become directly involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of processes directed towards them, and
- iii) see that, in the longer term there is no need to treat women as a separate target group in the development process.

To quote Ravindranath Tagore in the end,

"EVERY TIME A CHILD IS BORN,
IT BRINGS WITH IT THE HOPE
THAT GOD IS NOT YET
DISAPPOINTED WITH MAN"

I feel sure that he was refering to the girl child.

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Education of the Girl Child

Dr Malathi Somaiah

The year 1990 has been declared as the Year of the Girl Child by SAARC. This clearly indicates that the status and condition of the girl child requires a lot more attention than what has been provided. Henceforth, the utmost priority has to be given by the various individuals and organisations who are working for the welfare of the girl child.

There are several areas which need improvement in order to provide a meaningful, pleasant and comfortable life for a girl child and help her to evolve into a more complete human being. Some of the improvements required are in the areas of health, education, employment; change in the attitude of the society and an improvement in socio-economic framework in which a girl child takes birth, lives and grows into a woman. This paper looks at only one such component required for the development of the girl child and that is the education of the girl child.

Whenever any indicators of development are examined, some of the following areas where a girl child does not get an equal share are clearly brought out. Those indicators include high infant mortality, low literacy rate, high drop-out rate, low level of schooling, etc. In order for a girl child to actively participate in the process of development and to reap the fruits of it for her own growth and development, it is important that she gains certain cognitive skills and attitudinal changes to be able to live in a society which does not give her an equal share of its resources. This clearly brings out a case as to why one has to be concerned about the education of the girl child. Such education has envisaged to bring about changes in several areas, given the fact that education is one of the greatest forces for change in women's lives. It is also one of the areas in which, universally, women have made the greatest recent gains, and even in the poorest countries, governments have made impressive investments in education over the last several decades.

Education influences a woman's chances of paid employment, her earning power, as well as her control over child bearing. It enables her in exercising of legal and political rights. Her ability to care for herself and her children also improves with education.

If a girl child has to be assertive and demand for her rights, she requires self-confidence and self-esteem to deal with an extremely harsh environment. One of the most important strengths would be the level and quality of education that she gets. Let us look at some of the facts of girls' education as it exists today, which show that :

- * boys outnumber girls in school;
- * rate of dropouts among girls is much higher than boys;
- * rate of dropouts of girls before completing grade 4 is the highest both among boys and girls and among girls at different levels of schooling;
- * inequality of educational opportunities is highest among girls;
- * Access to school is lowest to girls in India;
- * literacy rate is lower among women than men,

Given such a scenario of girls' education, several factors which come in the way of the education of a girl child can be identified. Most of them are mainly rural-based, living in poverty and with no access to schools. Added to these are family hurdles to attend school, as the responsibility of caring for siblings usually devolves around girls. Often, attainment of puberty restricts chances of continued schooling, especially where there are no schools meant exclusively for girls. Investment on education, especially for the girl child, is perceived as non-productive; the girl child has the least bargaining power for limited resources in a family for education.

Further there is a lack of role models for girls, which could be either by way of women, and these further reduces chances of a girl child attending school.

If the Year of the Girl Child has to result in substantial changes in the life of a girl child, a large number of important decisions have to be made both by government and non-government organisations, individuals, families, mothers of the girl child and of course, by the girl herself. In the area of education, some of these decisions include raising investment on the education of the girl child, providing greater access to schooling, removing hurdles which come in the way of her schooling, providing quality education which alone helps her to both remain in the education system and to compete with others for limited education and employment opportunities, laying greater emphasis on the importance of women's literacy so that a woman would not withdraw her daughter from the school at an undesirable stage of her education. Even if a modest beginning is made in these areas, I think that would be the greatest gift one can think of, to a girl child in a developing country like India, as part of the SAARC Year of the Girl Child.

* school teachers or literate mothers

What speaks most eloquently of the state of the working children in this country, are the statistics. They are so widely varying as to be totally UNBELIEVABLE. They range from the Government figures, based on the 1981 census of 13.6 million, to the National Sample Survey (1983) figures of 17.36 million; Non-governmental estimates of the Operations Research Group, Baroda are given as 44 million; to a whopping 111 million projected by the Balai Data Bank. One can only comment that the figures are not really known, or that they vary because of the different parameters used by the data collecting agencies, and what is most telling of all is that possibly no one cares enough to make these projections seriously. Two things seem to remain fluid; what constitutes the age of a "child" and what exactly constitutes "work". If this statistical confusion evolves around the working child, one can imagine how much more confused the data is regarding the GIRL CHILD, more specifically.

A Times of India report in 1988, stated that "Girls perform tasks which do not lead to skill formation. As much as 84% of working females are found to be illiterate and with no skill, education or avenues for training. The girl child's opportunities on the labour market are limited, so that she is tied to the low-paying, back-breaking, and exploitive jobs" - and what is most significant, "The EXPLOITED GIRL later becomes The EXPLOITED WOMAN". The girls also are the just to be retrenched whenever technology is improved in order to increase production.

Much of the work done by the girl remains unseen and is hardly constituted or recognised as work by the society or her family members. From a very young age she is involved fully in household chores, child minding, agricultural work, looking after livestock and gathering fuel-woods. She has in effect no childhood at all. In urban areas, girls are engaged in domestic labour and contract daily work. A UNICEF report estimates that by the time a girl grows up she has contributed approximately Rs.40,000 to her family through the benefits accruing from her work. Yet she is seen as a "burden" to her family and her contribution remains invisible and unappreciated, so to speak. The idea of parents is to get as much out of a daughter as possible, before she is married.

While for the most part the girl child's work remains invisible, in certain industries like the match industry, for instance, one can see her up-front. It is said that of the 45,000 children working in the match industry in Sivakasi, 90% are girls below the age of 14. The Beedi industry employs about 300,000 children and most of them are girls. The Jaipur gem polishing industry employs about 6000 girls. Thousands of girls are employed in the Carpet industry, in making brassware and locks; in chikan embroidery, zari work, chair, agarbati and garment industries. A great part of this work remains "unseen" as it is done at home. However, it is accepted that the bulk of the female child labour is to be found in the rural areas.

Girls tend to join the workforce earlier than boys and because of their age, sex and poverty, they remain the most exploited section of the Indian labour force. Most of the work she does involves long hours, low pay and conditions of work that are most hazardous to her health. Jobs in the carpet industry for instance, in which she has to adapt herself to a squatting posture over long working hours, ends up in stunting her growth and in difficult pregnancies in her later years. In the beedi industry, T.B. asthma and bronchitis, are common diseases affecting children, especially girl child, who has limited access to health services. Her health problems are compounded by the harmful material she works with, in bad working conditions and her low nutritional intake. Detailed work like chicken embroidery and zari work adversely affects eye-sight. Female working children like rag-pickers and domestic servants also face sexual abuse and violence.

The exploitation of the working girl child continues unabated for various reasons. Part of the problems is that while her work is not recognised by her family; law and Government policy inadvertently, also do not recognise her "work", as efforts to control or regulate the situation have, for various reasons, concentrated only on the organised sector. Between 1970 and 1990 work participation of girls seems to have increased and that of boys decreased. It is stated that "If the definition of child labour includes children engaged in unremunerative work, the estimated figure for child labourers would be approximately 45 million. More than half of these are girls". Very little has been done to check this exploitation, because though we are looking at a system which has excellent built in legal controls, the implementation of the law is practically non-existent.

As far back as 1987 a survey of child labour was proposed by the then Union Minister of State for Labour, Mr. Sangama. He had asked the States to conduct these surveys and had promised that 75 percent of the cost would be borne by the Centre. One wonders what has happened to those surveys? In an even more telling statement, the Labour Minister of West Bengal requested the Centre to remove the "anomaly" in the rule barring the employment of children below 14 years in the plantation industry, provided a certificate of fitness was obtained! This seems to be a strange request, considering the high rate of adult unemployment in this country. What in deed, are children employed at all one might ask? It is well known that most of the wages earned by children, especially the girl child, are used for the benefit and indulgence of the male adults in the family and the benefits of her hard labour do not filter down to the girl at all. There also seems to be an unholy alliance between official agencies and the employers who prefer to employ children because of the low wages they can pay them (well below the statutory minimum wage) and because children are more pliable and easy to manipulate. In the carpet industry in Kashmir, Government itself exploits child labour in the so called training-cum-production centres which are geared to foreign exports and huge profits.

What can the media do to help remedy this situation? I would think that one of the most essential things to do is to make the female child's work "visible", by Government, by society and by her own family. It is a truism that 'what we don't see we don't care about'. Media pressure can also ensure that data about

working children especially the girl child, is properly tabulated and that some common parameters are drawn up. It is only when we are aware of the magnitude and the diversity of the problem, that strategies can evolve to find viable solutions to help the girl child.

Perhaps, with the use of powerful media like television, once the family and society can "see" the vital contribution made by the girl to the family economy and the national economy, her "value" and image will slowly improve and she will have a better status in her community and better access to its resources.

The media can also act as the "conscience" of the nation to ensure that laws which protect the girl child are strictly enforced, and widely publicized. With a concerted effort to conscientise and educate the public with regard to the gross exploitation of the girl child by vested interests, vis a vis her rights, much can be done to remedy the situation. Most important of all, the press can certainly "hustle" Government into action to protect the girl child. In the more organised sectors, we find there are concentrated pockets of child labour, revolving around specific industries. With stepped up bureaucratic controls involving senior, committed and honest officials in these areas, a strong effort can be made to control unauthorised child labour. If the press can keep alive issues such as 'Bofors', they can certainly do a great deal to improve the status of the working girl-child through an unrelenting, long-term effort to effect change.

A new census is about to be conducted in 1991. It is essential that this census collects adequate and varied data on the girl child, so that once and for all the statistical confusion is sorted out; and that the definition of "work" is widened appropriately to include all categories of work, organised and unorganised, including household work.

I wonder if the situation would change if Government paid a scholarship or stipend of Rs.100/- per month to the family of each girl child admitted into school. Perhaps the burden on the exchequer would be huge to start off with, but now that it is widely accepted that women's education is a vital tool in the process of development and social change, perhaps the long term social benefits would be immeasurable. While families have a vested financial interest in putting the girl child to work, let them instead have a vested interest in letting her attend school. Moreover, by removing millions of children from the labour force, more adults could find gainful employment and the percentage of unemployment would come down and working conditions would improve. All this needs political will and a social conscience. I see the media as the most appropriate mediator in creating this climate of change.

What kind of country are we, we might ask ourselves, that part of our economic growth is built on the backs of our children, and at their expense? Something needs to be done urgently to bring thousands of children out of the "dark middle ages" into the 20th century.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE RESOURCE PERSONS

Dr Shirdi Prasad Tekur is with the Community Health Cell, Bangalore. He is a practising paediatrician, with various interests ranging from allopathic medicine, in which he had his training, to alternative forms of medicine and community health.

Dr Malsthi Somiah, Associate Professor, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, is a specialist in education management, working in the area of teaching, training and research, focussing basically on the application of management techniques to education, evaluation of social projects and effective communication and training of trainers.

Ms Nomita Chandy is with Ashraya, a child welfare agency in Bangalore. Her work and interests centre around underprivileged children and their welfare. Ms Chandy is presently an Executive Committee member of the Karnataka Council for Child Welfare. Her main focus is to find alternatives for children placed in institutional care.

Mr Chandramouli is Producer, English Programmes, All India Radio, Bangalore.

Ms Jai Chandiram is Director, Central Production Centre, Doordarshan, New Delhi, and has worked extensively in the area of educational audio-visual media.

Ms Nalini Ramanna is Producer, English Programmes, at Doordarshan, Bangalore and takes a keen interest in women's and children's issues.

Ms Sakuntala Narasimhan, a journalist, writes a column on women's issues for the Deccan Herald. She is also the author of four books, the latest one on Sati having just been published. Ms Sakuntala also teaches post-graduate students of journalism and has recently returned from a Fulbright assignment in the U.S.

Prof M S Nagaraj, former Head of the English Department at Renukacharya College, is a media critic and also actively involved in dramatics.

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BACKGROUND MATERIAL GIVEN AT THE WORKSHOP

1. The State of the Worlds Children 1991
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2. The Girl Child in India - UNICER Media Kit
3. The Girl Child in Karnateka - Madhyam
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4. State-wise Classification Based on Birth
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