CHILD ABUSE: THE GRIM REALITY ABOUT REALITY SHOWS

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Abstract- There is no business like show business. Everything about it is appealing. Children are also mesmerised by its charm. Earlier, preteens would participate only in quiz competitions. Now they want to appear on TV or celluloid and aspire to get "too much, too soon". Perhaps they have been conditioned in this manner by their parents. Kids are ruling the TV industry. We have been an audience to lot of kids reality shows like Boogie Woogie, Li'l champs, Sabse Bada Kalakar, Indian Idol Junior, DID little masters, Voice of India, India' s Best Dramebaaz, soap operas like Balika Vadhu and the controversial one that went off the air viz Pehredaar Piya ki. Undoubtedly these tiny bundles of talent amaze us and their perfect performances give us goose bumps. There is an increasing demand for shows and serials having kids and the broadcasters too have obliged. But there are unpleasant realities about this reality shows and soap operas which we cannot afford to overlook. The glamour world has turned the children to workaholics or slaves where they need to rehearse for longer hours out of fear of rejection or out of pressure to perform better and better. It robs them of normal childhood. Their body language and mannerisms change and they have an air of superiority. Eventually when they are deprived of stardom it impacts their tender minds and they may even get into drugs to cope up with the situation. Who can forget Jugal Hansraj of 'Masoom' fame who won the hearts of millions but didn't make it big in Bollywood? Children have to push their limits as parents keep on harping that the sky is the limit for them. The unpleasant truth is that the industry is aware of the issue of child artists being exploited. What remains to be seen is how seriously the provisions under 'The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016' are executed and how seriously punishments on defaulters are implemented.

Keywords- Kids, Reality shows, Child labour

I. INTRODUCTION

"If reality shows are creating problems in education, impacting health and freedom, and if there is an economic consideration involved—then that makes a young child a child labourer."
- Kailash Satyarthi, Child Rights Activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate

'Reality TV star Neha Sawant, a class VI student commits suicide as parents pull her out of dance academy and tell her to focus on studies'.

Such horrifying news expose the truth of the glamour world. These days children want to showcase their talent through soap operas and reality shows in the garb of extracurricular activities. Children strain their vocal chords to qualify for the shows or dance through racy numbers. The rehearsals and shoots have a toll on their mental and physical health and their studies go for a toss. At times, they are made to propose the female judge by uttering lines which they themselves fail to comprehend. Children who fail to qualify for the next round in a reality show weep oceans of tears, so do their parents. Imagine the cutie pies being rejected and facing failure at such a tender age. Imagine the humiliation of the child on National Television. The camera never fails to catch their emotions to increase the TRP. At times the judges even go to the extent of criticising or body shaming the preteens. Can such reality shows be termed as healthy competition? Even soap operas dish out stupidity and bizarre thoughts in the name of creative content. A ten year old is shown stalking a grown up girl and eventually getting married to her. What impact it will have on young minds?

II. WHO IS TO BE BLAMED?

(i) Media

"Teens with dreams of participating in a reality show abduct a 13 year old boy in Faridabad for ransom and murder him." Such news headline clearly indicate that children are aspirin to enter the maddening world of glitterati without understanding the risks involved therein. Be it reality shows, soap operas or movies the job is not a cakewalk. The glamour world robs the children of their innocence. The wellbeing of the child is grossly neglected. These shows and serials compel the children to grow up even before they should. A Balika Vadhu becomes famous overnight. As these children grow up into adults they realise they are no more popular, their stardom was just a mirage. It becomes difficult for them to come to terms with reality.

(ii) Parents

Parents want their children to reach the pinnacle of success. They want to give their children all the amenities that they themselves craved for in their childhood. They feel that times have changed and their children should have some talent to make it big in life. These children are enrolled into dance classes, singing classes, martial arts, gymnastics, aerobic and what not. Parents want their children to be a complete package - singer, dancer, actor, anchor and even stand up comedian. Poor chaps are torn between their academics. and parents' expectations. Ultimately, they have to compromise on their academics. They have to shunt between schooling and shooting, their future is jeopardised as academics becomes secondary to winning celebrity status.

A sense of becoming a 'superstar' at such a tender age brings with it lot of 'arrogance' and lot of responsibilities. Then the parents say, "Nowadays kids are under too much pressure." But the big question is: Who is exerting the pressure?

III. SERIOUS CONCERNS

1) Even infants are shown participating in shows like 'Pati Patni aur Woh' where the participating couple is taught lessons in child care.
2) Sometimes the clauses of the contract are too harsh and they do not contain exit clause.
3) Issues like separation from parents for the purpose of shooting are not dealt with adequately in the contracts.
4) In some cases, the participants' provocative dances and dresses in the TV show are quite demeaning in nature.
5) Children are made to work for longer hours and if they are famous they have to make repeated appearances in different shows on different channels.
6) Children are made to crack marital jokes which they do not even understand.

IV. CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS

1) Section 17 of the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights (CPCR) Act, 2005 provides for the constitution of a State Commission for Protection of Child Right (SCPCR) in each State: Violation of child's right to health, psyche, safety, education, recreation, leisure, etc.
2) Cable Television Networks Rules, 1994- Rule 6 (1) (a) and Rule 6 (1) (l): Rule 6 (1) (a) Programme Code — Programme that offends taste or decency; and Rule 6 (1) (l): Programme Code — Programme that adversely impacts children and is in derogation to their rights to dignity.
Protection from all forms of physical, physiological or mental trauma, anxiety, violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment, or exploitation, including sexual abuse while in the care of parents, legal guardians, or any other person who have the care of them, (as required under Article 19 (1) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 which has been acceded to by India on 11December, 1992) and the Juvenile Justice Acts.
3) The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, attacking child labour.
4) Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 the Commission reiterated that child labour should include all forms of labour. It further provides regulations for the abolition of, and penalties for employing, child labour, as well as provisions for rehabilitation of former child labourers.

V. NEW GUIDELINES TO REGULATE GLAMOUR INDUSTRY

According to Shantha Sinha, chairperson, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), children will still be able to participate in talent-hunt or reality shows, but only as long as they are not paid for it. "Participation in reality shows and talent-hunt shows is a matter of violation of child rights and not child labour." NCPCR has brought out guidelines for participation in such shows, which ensure that the child is not exploited. The government has introduced the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2017 ("Rules"). It is significant to note that the Rules make special provisions for the inclusion of child actors in any type of audio-visual entertainment, be it films, short films, T.V Serials, Reality Shows, etc. In 2010-11 the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) released detailed guidelines discussing the problems and challenges faced by child actors in reality shows, T.V. Serials etc. It stated that "Participating in an adult-oriented industry, children are often exposed to unsuitable, anxiety inducing, and at times, dangerous operational hazards and situations. Many of these problems may be generic to the industry, but children cannot handle the emotional and physical trauma. It needs to be remembered that children do not join the industry of their own will. There is always an adult involved – a parent, or caretaker – who takes the decision for them. In the absence of any monitoring mechanism, there is every likelihood of child actors being exploited when it comes to the number of hours worked per day, and short-changed in terms of educational and safety provisions."
Guidelines for defining age-related norms for the participation of children in tv/reality shows; ensuring the physical conditions and safety of children; setting up of regulatory and monitoring mechanisms; and ensuring education of child participants were recommended by NCPCR.
The important compliances to be adhered to by producers before employing child artists in audio-visual entertainment programs, from the amended Act of 2016 and the Rules:

1. Conditions for children working for media entertainment: Section 3 also exempts children working as artists in an audio-visual entertainment industry, including advertisement, films, television serials or any such other entertainment or sports activities except the circus from the purview of the prohibition if the prescribed safety measures, have been complied with.
2. The producer shall:
i. Obtain permission from the District Magistrate and shall furnish an undertaking in Form C of the Rules to the District Magistrate before beginning any activities in the district;
ii. Provide the list of child participants, consent of parents or guardian, name of the individual from the production or event who shall be responsible for the safety and security of the child;
ii. Ensure that all screening of his films and television

programs shall be made with a disclaimer specifying that if any child has been engaged in the shooting, then, all the measures were taken to ensure that there has been no abuse, no neglect or exploitation of such child during the entire process of the shooting;
iv. Arrange appropriate facilities for education of the child
v. Not allow children to work consecutively for more than twenty-seven days; and
vi. Appoint one responsible person for maximum of five children for the production or event
vii. No child shall be made to participate in any audio visual and sports activity including informal entertainment activity against his will.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the day- children are children. You cannot look for money making machines in them. True that the broadcasters provide a platform to children to showcase their talents but parents should not barter their children's future for fame. Avoid counting the chickens before they are hatched Further the payment to children should be through fixed deposits so that their future is secure. Also broadcasters should be sensitive towards child rights, especially any form of child abuse-be it even mental trauma due to rejection or long hours of work -all of which has to be corrected at every cost. Let's save children from all sorts of abuse and let's go on with the show.....

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