



## Editorial

This issue of *Artha- Journal of Social Sciences* (July-September, Vol 3, 2020) devoted to topics in Media Studies, aims to uncover issues related to media labor force, a large percentage of which remain quite invisible to the average consumer of all forms of media. Although the issue topic was announced much before the lockdown and the eventual pandemic related restrictions, the phase we are passing through now lends a sharper focus making certain discussions inevitable and imperative. In general, this pandemic has been suggested to have far reaching effects on labour (Rossi & Balsa-Barreiro, 2020). With the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic, demand for some aspects of media have increased, even as we experience increasing fragmentation of our social and professional interactions. Increased adoption of automation in industries is also another alarming trend (Bloom & Prettnner 2020). As academicians and researchers, it is our responsibility to gather data and make sense of it. We hope this *Artha* issue has achieved this via the contributions of our learned authors.

Dr. Kailash Koushik (Section Editor for this issue) shares his views on media labour in the following discussion on all article contributions featured in this issue.

### **Dr Madhavi Rangaswamy**

Editor, *Artha Journal of Social Sciences*

A focus on labour and work within media research in India has garnered interest only recently (Ramesh, 2018; Koushik, *Upcoming*). The requirement and need for research on media labour and work is, at the moment, at an all-time high. Three significant events in India's media ecosystem support the claim made in the previous statement. First, is consistent weakening of the Working Journalists Act 1955 (Koushik, *Upcoming*). It is important for social scientists, media scholars and media workers to realize that this was one of the first pieces of legislation that was aimed to ameliorate the conditions of work for newspaper journalists. There was then a chance for this legislation to be updated to include other news and

media workers too. Proposals of such an update have been put forth multiple times, but have never seen the light (“Saving Working..”, 2018). However, what saw the light was persistent blockade of the implementation of the Act by newspaper owners. From the very first wage board, which was a tripartite system to decide the wages of newspaper workers in 1957, owners were quick to move to court and stall the implementation of the same. Six such wage boards have been formulated till 2007 and every recommendation has been challenged in courts by the owners (Ramesh, 2018). How did the weakening occur though?

The answer lies in the second event which is closely related to the weakening of the Act. The owners challenged the wage board recommendations stating that they either had no capacity to pay the recommended wages, or that the recommendation to pay a certain salary violated the fundamental right of freedom of the press. Except for the second wage board recommendation, the court sided with the journalists and asked the owners to pay the wages recommended by the board. Delay in implementation, litigation in the court, circumventing the Act through introduction of contracts, were ways newspapers denied recommended salaries for journalists. Further, this was also the time when India was slowly opening up its economy, and what became popular as LPG (liberalisation, privatisation and globalization) had begun. The neoliberal ideals were first embraced by these newspapers, as most were privately owned and wanted to reduce the grip of the state on business. One of the first shifts which happened was the introduction of the contract system by *The Times of India* and which was followed by other newspapers shortly thereafter. The contract system allowed newspapers to pay outside the purview of the recommendations made by the wage board, as journalists were perceived as contract employees. The increasing popularity of the contract system in newspapers, which flowed over to other medium, along with a general weakening of labour movements which occurred globally during the 80s 90’s and through the first decade of the millennium, resulted in a media workforce which was underpaid, overworked, controlled, and devoid of power of collective bargaining. The introduction of private television channels and news outlets did not make the situation better, but amplified the need to remove any regulation aimed at the

regulation of work in the media industry. It is to be noted that unions among workers in the film industry still have power and were/are active.

Third and final event is more of a diachronic phenomenon, which has been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. The strengthening of the neoliberal ideology in all spheres of society and, flexibilization of labour, saw the glorification of individualised contracts and a simultaneous celebration of entrepreneurial/startup culture. This focus has also altered creative and media industries to adapt their production practises for profit accumulation. Outsourcing of work to freelancers [and across the globe, a phenomenon referred to as New International Division of Cultural Labour (NIDCL) by Miller et al (2005)], intensification of journalistic work, inclusion and assimilation of social media work, have become commonplace in the media ecosystem in India. Similar aspects have been observed in other parts of the media industry. At the writing of this editorial, the Government of India introduced a new set of labour codes, which effectively dissolves the Working Journalists Act, 1955.

The content we consume in a hyper-mediated world of today, therefore is being produced under conditions of work not experienced before, bringing along with it its own struggles and victories. Especially in a country like India, which has seen a boom in media consumption and media development, a study of labour, of conditions within which the deluge of content is being produced becomes necessary. This issue is a small step towards initiation of larger debates and discussions in the field of media labour research. A brief note on the articles in this current issue is provided in the following paragraphs.

Dueze et al. provide a theory for atypical work in creative and media industries, and argue that the current comprehension of discourse on work as binaries (paid/unpaid, full-time/freelance) would not be enough to understand work in the current historical present. An interesting direction that the authors point researchers of work towards is to integrate “the complex, ambivalent yet also pleasurable and transformative elements of atypical work.” (p. 11), into theory and research. One such direction is attempted in the article titled ‘Declining bargain power: Streaming, Production, and

Entertainment Labour'. At a time when OTT platforms are changing consumption patterns of media entertainment, Shantharaju attempts to conceptualize the global shift in entertainment industry, from traditional practices of production (aimed at theatrical releases and/or television audiences) to the algorithm-backed online platforms, and the possible implications on personnel involved in the production process of entertainment content. Focusing on the Indian situation, the author sheds light on a recent trend of OTT film releases and how the producers were able to circumvent the 'distributor-exhibitor' format, which proved beneficial to the consumers and producers, but for the thousands of stuntmen, drivers, light technicians, security personnel and individual employed in traditional theatres and multiplexes, got the short end of the stick. The author's focus on this labour, sometimes peripheral, and most often invisible in the film entertainment ecosystem, opens up discussions on analysing and theorizing labour in creative industries. Also, the theorization of atypical work by Dueze et al. might assist in taking this forward.

Boga's article on media in the state of Kashmir, also offers a new perspective to study media labour in conflict zones. The role of the state to control media and media messages, subsequently trickles down to journalists, and through her historical research, Boga argues that the understanding of this relationship between the state and the media will allow researchers to theorize not only media in conflict zones, but also allows for a better mapping of power negotiations, constructions of narratives and what we see (and most often celebrate) as journalistic work in conflict zones

Thomas and Venkatesh bring in a refreshing and much required method into the media labour research. Using autoethnography, Venkatesh tries to critically analyse the phenomenon of children's reality television. As a freelance floor director and coordinator for these reality shows, Venkatesh's autoethnography tries to study the bodily performances of reality television's child artists and crew's labour, by focusing on body, space and power, basing her analysis on the Foucault's theorization of biopolitics. The selection of autoethnography (methodologically) and Foucault (theoretically) certainly points to new directions which have not been seen in Indian media labour research. Thomas also uses autoethnography

to explore her own experience of more than two decades in various media platforms and organizations. Thomas is able to connect conditions of work in publishing, newspapers, television and radio, and provide an analysis of media work through the lens of gender.

This issue also contains a review of the book 'New Media Unions: Organizing Digital Journalists' by Greig de Peuter and Nicole S. Cohen. A concrete account of unionizing drives by digital journalists in North America provides a hopeful conclusion to the various dimensions of labour discussed in the issue. The rationale for selecting this theme is not just to encourage research on media work and labour, but also to facilitate conversation about labour when the media industry is undergoing tremendous change, and to build a community of researchers and journalists who are concerned about labour in creative and media industries.

## **Dr Kailash Koushik**

Section Editor

## **References**

- Bloom, D. & Prettner, K. (2020) The macroeconomic effects of automation and the role of COVID-19 in reinforcing their dynamics. Retrieved from <https://voxeu.org/article/covid-19-and-macroeconomic-effects-automation>.
- Koushik, K (*Upcoming*). *Working Conditions of Indian Journalists*. New Delhi: Left Word Books
- Miller, T., Govil, N., McMurria, J., Maxwell, R. and Wang, T. (2005), *Global Hollywood 2*, London: British Film Institute.
- Ramesh, B. P. (2018). Unpaid Workers and paid news. In Athique, A., Parthasarathi, V.,
- Rossi, E. & Balsa-Berreiro, J. (2020). The Future of Work in the Post-COVID-19 World. *Economic & Political Weekly*, **55(44)**, Retrieved from <https://www.epw.in/journal/2020/44/commentary/future-work-post-covid-19-world.html>.
- Save Working Journalists Act, Announce New Wage Board: DUJ (2018, 17 July). *NewsClickin*. Retrieved from <https://www.newsclick.in/save-working-journalists-act-announce-new-wage-board-duj>
- Srinivas, S.V. (Eds) *The Indian Media Economy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.