

A Visual Social Semiotic Study of Photography Catalogue

‘Melae Vaanum, Keelae Bhoomi’ on Street Children

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Abstract: *Melae Vaanum, Keelae Bhoomi* is a photographic documentation of street children in Chennai and it is a visual narration of the dwelling condition of the street children today by the street children themselves clicking the images. The study critically reviews the images of the catalogue and portrays the effective environmental issues involved in the livelihood of street children such as water scarcity and pollution problems in the city, work environment of the children, and other environmental issues. The effectiveness of the visuals was studied in the theoretical framework of visual social semiotics and content analysis methodology has been adopted. Besides, the mentor and creator of the Photography Catalogue R.R. Srinivasan had been interviewed. The environmental issues focused by the print media in this catalogue in the form of graphic communication with image and text are a valid documentation by the street children in Chennai.

Keywords: Street Children, Pavement Dwellers, Documentation, Visual Social Semiotics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Children on the street are primarily working children. Working children due to difficult circumstances have to support themselves and contribute to their family's income. Some street children have no ties with their families. Due to reasons like poverty, mental or physical handicap and gender discrimination, these children are very much in need of care and protection. Street children are forced to live on the streets due to dysfunctional families, poverty, exploitation, domestic violence, sexual abuse, neglect, alcoholism and drug abuse (Mehta, 2008).

Graphic designs in the print media are a strong graphic communication. Development of environmental communication in the print media is very important today. In Tamil Nadu, the Government, Government-aided organizations and many NGOs deal with environmental issues. Environment is becoming a major concern for people. It has negative effect on everyone in some way or the other because of the human interventions. In today's situation, everyone needs environmental awareness. We need to know nature-surroundings, the climate and natural resources. It is important to address environment-related issues in terms of bringing awareness to people through news, programmes, events and debates.

This article analyses the environmental issues in Tamil Nadu in print media outlets through a study on a catalogue of 75 photographs of street children about their livelihood in Chennai, made by 20 street children.

Photographic Documentation by Street Children:

On 22nd September 2012, World Vision India's Chennai BalJyoti Project, which works with children living on the streets of children, opened a three-day Photography Exhibition *Melae Vaanum, Keelae Bhoomi* (sky above and earth below) in Chennai at Art House located in Kasturi Rangan Road in Alwarpet. Twenty children living on the streets of Chennai, where

the Chennai BalJyoti Project works, brought out their issues and situation which they face in their day-to-day life, captured on camera. The well-portrayed exhibition brought out the realities of life on the streets beautifully captured by the children, along with a small note in Tamil about themselves and the place they live. The children were trained on handling a camera and the nuances of photography under the able guidance of renowned professional photographer R.R. Srinivasan, Director of OHO Productions. This opportunity was an avenue for the children to capture on camera their life as it unfolds around them every day. These photographs were later made into a printed catalogue with around 75 photographs.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study on pavement dwellers makes us realize how people suffer in streets due to homelessness and difficulties faced in terms of scarce water facility, lack of toilet, alcoholism, early marriage, suicide, and being treated as untouchables. This particular documentation of the photographs by the children themselves about their own life in streets gives a picture of the society today in metropolitan cities. There is a need today to expose the crisis of the pavement dwellers to the society. The printed catalogue already created awareness among the people in Chennai, as the photographic works were exhibited to the public. This study was done further to show critically the urban realities of Chennai as the children were settled in the banks of the Coovum river with temporary shelters. The study plays a significant role in visual representation.

Ray, Davey and Nolan (2011) in the 'Still on the Streets – Still Short of Rights' article found that Government agencies and NGOs have developed a variety of non-formal education opportunities to meet the learning needs of street involved children. These include simple educational activities conducted on the street, non-formal education classes, and the facilitation of children's participation in informal education. A variety of different options are necessary to accommodate different educational backgrounds, and to allow children to become accustomed to learning again.

According to Thatte and Nirmal (2016), life on the streets, a street children survey, says that in our interactions with a cross-section of stakeholders, it appeared that there were massive challenges that they face when it comes to rehabilitation of children who have been on the street for a very long time. For the railway police officials, language becomes a barrier in dealing with runaway children. Railway stations across the country need to be more child-friendly and need to have dedicated teams to reach out to children.

Objective of the study:

To find out the effectiveness of graphic designs from the contents of the print on environmental issues published in a catalogue on street children in Chennai.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Claire (2003) in "Understanding how still images make meaning" says that semiotics denotes study of signs. For a sign to exist there must be meaning or content which is called signified and the study says that the Kress and van Leeuwen recognize that an image performs simultaneously, three kinds of meta-semiotic tasks to create meaning.

According to Iedema (2001), in "Analyzing film and television: a social semiotic account of hospital: an unhealthy business" says social semiotics gives meaning for political understandings, reading positions and practical possibilities in the society. Its purpose is to describe how texts construct realities, and to argue the socio-historical nature of their assumptions and claims. Jewitt and Oyama (2001) study found visual social semiotics can be used to read the meaning of images and it says vertical angle of an image creates a symbolic power. The US Supreme Court website photographs are an example of symbolic power.

Riley (2013) study concludes social semiotic theory can be a powerful tool for the analysis of relational art which is an art form created in the environment which relates to human actions. The relational art creates a social environment in which people come together to take part in a shared activity. The art acts as an encounter between a viewer and an object, and produces encounters between people. Through these encounters, meaning is elaborated collectively. The photographs used in this study play the role of relational art and create meaning to human actions.

Rizzini and Lusk (1995) say that most street children wander in an environment to work for basic economic necessity in a conventional workplace without safety and security. Children consistently face violence from the police who are supposed to be responsible for the safety and welfare. The labour of street children is a source of income to their families.

Abraham(2015) says that the majority of the street children are in their teens. Poverty and abuse by family members are the major reasons to become a street child. Street children are involved in collecting old papers, coolie, begging, helper, hawker, shoe polishers, seller of flowers, drug business, informer, theft, and pick pocketing. They work 5 to 12 hours a day.

Kartika and Utaridah (2016) study finds the issue of street children is problems for economy, environment, educational inequality, self-esteem and others. The pattern of communication ethnography for street children is a discussion in a long term period and keeps continuing.

Hai (2014) study finds that being typical with the mainstream children of the society the lifestyle of the street children in terms of their food habit, night shelter/sleeping place at night, sources of water, frequency of taking shower, use of toilet, clothing, means of survival, income, expenditure and savings, healthcare, diseases and treatment, educational status and skill, ownership, substance abuse and street children recreational activities, social bondage, sharing of happenings, group networks and gang culture and aspirations as revealed above is symptomatic to continuous challenges threats and struggles. Further, the study concludes that the lifestyle pattern of the street children is devoid of normal standards.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Semiotics provides us with a potentially unifying conceptual framework and a set of methods and terms for use across the full range of signifying practices, which include gesture, posture, dress, writing, speech, photography, film, television, and radio. As David Sless notes, "We consult linguists to find out about language, art historians or critics to find out about paintings, and anthropologists to find out how people in different societies signal to each other through gesture, dress or decoration. But if we want to know what all these different things have in common then we need to find someone with a semiotic point of view, a vantage point from which to survey our world" (Chandler, 2001).

Social semiotics is a branch of the field of semiotics. Lemke noted that 'social semiotics' is a synthesis of several modern approaches to the study of social meaning and social action. "One of them obviously is semiotics itself: the study of our social resources for communicating meanings... Formal semiotics is mainly interested in the systematic study of the systems of signs themselves. Social semiotics includes formal semiotics and goes on to ask how people use signs to construct the life of a community" (Lemke, 1990, p 183).

Semioticians believe all people see the world through signs. As Chandler explains, although things may exist independently of signs we know them only through the mediation of signs. We see only what our sign system allow us to see. Semioticians argue that signs are related to the signifieds by social conventions which we learn. We become so used to such conventions in our use of various media that they seem 'natural', and it can be difficult for us to realize the conventional nature of such relationships (Chandler, 2001).

The meaning of signs is created by people and does not exist separately from them and the life of their social/cultural community. Therefore, signs have different meanings in different social and cultural contexts – meanings that can range from very different too subtle and nuanced.

Visual social semiotics provides a detailed and explicit method for analyzing the meanings established by the syntactic relations among the people, places and things depicted in the images.

5. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the variables framed through the visual social semiotics were used in content analysis method qualitatively to analyse selected images in the *MelaeVa anum, KeelaeBhoomi* catalogue. Broadly defined, "content analysis is any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages" (Holsti, 1968).

The variables of the representational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction and compositional metafunction interpret the images in the following aspects. In representational metafunction, the variable 'narrative' allows viewers to create a story about the represented participants, and the variable 'conceptual' explains the idea or concept conveyed in the image. In interpersonal metafunction, the variable 'visual demand' or 'image act' creates a visual form of direct address and creates an imaginary relation to the viewer, the variable 'social distance and intimacy' interprets spatial distances between the images and explains emotion and intimacy, and the variable 'perspective' explains the angle portrayed in the

image and this refers to the position of the represented participants and the viewer. In compositional metafunction, the variable 'information value' explains the role played by the participants in the image based on the placement in the space, the variable 'modality' refers to how we feel about the visual message and explains the validity and reliability, the variable 'saliency' explains the sharpness, clarity, size and colour of the image and creates meaning. The variable 'framing' represents the arrangement of the images, whether grouped together or separated.

Besides, the mentor and creator of the Photography Catalogue R.R. Srinivasan had been interviewed.

6. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

MelaeVa anum, KeelaeBhoomi –A photography catalogue published by World Vision India in association with photographer R.R.Srinivasan involving street children is a visual treat of Chennai in-depth, comprising of children living in streets. The children were taught photography professionally by R.R.Srinivasan. Every individual child nearly made 100 snaps. Nearly 2,000 snaps were made in their surroundings and the photographs were edited finally and compiled into a catalogue and titled as *MelaeVa anum, KeelaeBhoomi*, as it reflected the livelihood of street dwelling and shared by the children themselves about their own pathetic condition of living in Chennai. This catalogue was selected for the study as it focuses on the environment in Chennai.

This catalogue consists of 75 layouts that includes wrapper to the inner page layouts. All the pages of the catalogue were numbered numerically from one to eighty four. The catalogue design was divided into seven categories with the specified title based on environmental issues as the whole content of the catalogue relates to environment of the street living in Chennai.

Each category was allotted selective visuals based on the theme from the overall contents. Among the categories in each segment, the most suitable visuals were considered for visual social semiotics. In category one, all visuals were selected for the analysis as the theme depicts from water-related issues, Category two to seven, visuals were selected for the analysis which were most suitable.

- Category one: Water related issues
- Category two: People sleeping on streets
- Category three: Polluted areas in Chennai
- Category four: Children and people at work environment
- Category five: Children in reading and playing environment
- Category six: Children and people in streets
- Category seven: Introductory pages and group photo.

Seven layouts were critically analyzed in "water related issues" in Chennai city, which is a major crisis today. The designs were furnished below

WATER-RELATED ISSUES



Fig.1-Railway pipeline

Figure 1 identifies representational metafunction that shows two girls washing clothes in the pipeline connected to railway line in the Egmore Railway Station. This visual narrates that they get water for washing from a railway pipe, meant for washing trains in the station. Conceptually, the visual portrays the demand for water which is not available to them anywhere. This visual strongly condemns water scarcity in the city which is a major environmental issue and the text incorporated in the visual says “Try and see you cannot live like us” also supports the concept of water crisis.



Fig.2- Girl carrying water



Fig.3- Boy with water can



Fig.4-Street tap

Figure 2 portrays the need of water through a street view in Egmore and it is titled “We need water”. The visual identifies representational metafunction and narrates water scarcity and conceptually portrays the struggle for water through girl carrying water to her home in the street.

Figure 3 visualizes the small boy carrying water pot in his shoulder titled “I can do it brother”. Here the visual portrays interpersonal metafunction because there is an eye contact between the boy and the viewer telling ‘I can do it’. The boy directly looks at the viewer and creates a demand visualizing that he could carry water for his needs. As far as the social distance and intimacy are concerned, the full figure of the boy carrying the water pot in his shoulder maintains a close social distance with the viewer. The angle of the boy is presented in a frontal angle. This angle creates stronger involvement on the part of the viewer and says he is one of us facing the water demand. So Figure 3 also strongly conveys the importance of water.

Figure 4 visualizes two photographs one represents ‘Vasumathi’ a girl speaking to the viewer which is an insert in the layout, another photograph which represents the demand for water with people standing in a lane to get water from a pipe, with plastic pots kept in a row. The image portrays water crisis with representational metafunction which shows the photograph insert with Vasumathy portraying interpersonal metafunction speaking to the viewer saying about water-borne diseases from a nearby water tank. The photograph insert maintains a social distance and intimacy with the head and face making a conversation with the viewer. The image of fetching water from the tap shows one point perspective with horizontal angle represents equal power to the visual. This image and design clearly states water pollution and water crisis.

Figure 5 portrays a girl carrying a water pot on her waist and it is titled ‘Hey I did it’. She carries water for her family. The image represents an interpersonal metafunction and it involves the eye contact of the girl in relation to the viewer. A demand is created by the girl with the viewer to give a strong feel and engagement portraying about carrying water. The visual maintains social distance and intimacy with head to waist by carrying a water pot. The image focuses the frontal angle creating a stronger involvement on the part of the viewer about the water issue.



Fig.5-Girl withcan



Fig.6-Water shortage



Fig.7-Bath

Figure 6 that portrays water crisis shows a woman using water from a plastic can. Water shortage was portrayed in this image with representational metafunction stating the demand for water. Conceptually, it states everyday's water needs with a text 'Shedding tears for water'. It states the struggle for present day's water needs. The image strongly condemns the water scarcity.

Figure 7 portrays a boy taking bath with water can stating that he has to take bath with only a single can. There is joy in his face enjoying the pot of water. The visual shows interpersonal metafunction making a conversation about water and bath with the viewer. It maintains social distance and intimacy with full figure taking bath in front of the viewer. The image titled as 'One pot of water for my bath' states the acute shortage of present day's water needs. The vertical angle of the image creates power to the visual. All the seven layouts on water issues were thematically designed and analyzed with Visual Social Semiotics (Cress and Van Leeuwen) theory with these visuals states the environmental effectiveness of the graphic design in the print media and focuses the issues strongly to the general public. In the catalogue *Melae Vanam, Keelae Boomi*, the seven layouts that were selected among the 75 layouts gives a clear picture on today's environmental demand on water crisis, water pollution and the importance of water for us.

In "People sleeping on streets", there are six layouts out of these two layouts were selected for the analysis. They are Figures 8 and 9. In this category, the image Figure 8 is a full spread photograph showing people sleeping in the middle of the road on the road divider, the reason being they cannot find a place to sleep. The layout locates the Egmore area and focuses all the representational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction and compositional metafunction.

PEOPLE SLEEPING ON STREETS

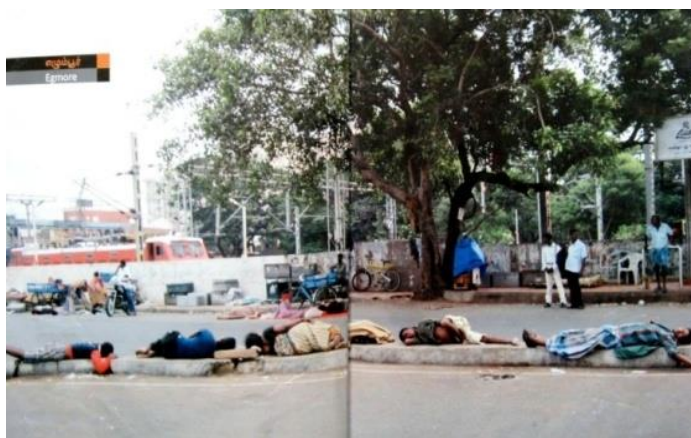


Fig.8-Egmore



Fig.9-Sleep on roads

Representational metafunction narrates that the scene of people sleeping having no place to sleep and states that this is the condition of today's street people. In interpersonal metafunction, the layout focuses on social distance and intimacy. This is shown in full figure of people sleeping on the middle of the road; with a social distance around the people with the wide

landscape. In compositional metafunction, the image shows the modality, it is stronger than other media like illustration and paintings. Figure 18 shows compositional metafunction which is a strong image exposing people sleeping on main roads is a reality. As Shapiro notes “Of all modes of representation, photography is the one most easily assimilated into the discourses of knowledge and truth for it is thought to be an unmediated simulacrum a copy of what we considered the real” (Shapiro,1988 p.124).In fact, we find photographs to be so real that Shapiro believes they pacify us to the point of unquestioning acceptance of societal norms and conventions.

In “Polluted areas in Chennai”, there are 8 layouts, and 3 layouts were considered and analyzed.

POLLUTED AREAS IN CHENNAI



Fig.10-Chintadripet, PallavanNagar

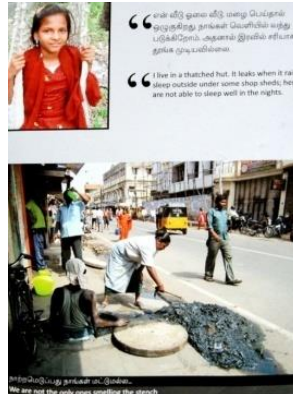


Fig.11-Cleaning Drainage



Fig.12- Boys at waste yard

Figure 10 of Pallavan Nagar Chintadripet is a wide landscape which shows the Coovum river of Chennai. Even in the Coovum riverside, small residential huts are built showing how people are residing near the drainage. The composition of the image shows the modality of realism that pictures the actual scenario of people living in drains. The image strongly fits in the compositional metafunction of visual social semiotics. The picture is a full colour one which represents high modality. It is a wide horizontal landscape from Chindaripet of Chennai. Figure 11 represents cleaning the drainage. It is titled as ‘We are not the only ones smelling the stench’. Manual labourers clearing the drain on a platform focuses on representational metafunction which narrates the scene showing the people clearing the drainage tank. The drains were stored in the roadside nearby the drainage tank which creates pollution and disturbs the passersby on the main road. Figure 12 is a visual showing two children standing in front of the solid waste dumped in the background. This design was titled as ‘Our world is a wonder’. The eye contact of the two boys focuses the viewer strongly and delivers the message that we are living in the waste dumpsite with no other go. The scene narrates the representational metafunction of visual social semiotics. All the three images of pollution issues, strongly conveys that we are living in a highly polluted city with the Coovum drainage. In “Children and people at work environment”, there are of 6 layouts out of which 5 layouts were considered for the analysis. Figure 13 titled as “My family is depending on me” which shows a boy cleaning fishes in a fish market and a photograph insert shows a girl called Sandya who delivers the message that their areas were dumped with wastages without any place for waste management. The visual image of the boy cutting fish in the market focuses on representational metafunction portraying the scene of the boy’s livelihood every day.

CHILDREN AND PEOPLE AT WORK ENVIRONMENT



Fig.13 - Cutting fish



Fig.14 - Waiting



Fig.15 - Burning goat legs



Fig.16 -Tea break



Fig.17- Bamboo

The photograph conveys that he has no other source other than this. Figure14 also focuses on representational metafunction with the same function. Here, the boy has an eye contact with the viewer and strongly conveys the concept of what they represents about their livelihood. This eye contact also shows interpersonal metafunction and creates a direct demand with the viewer. Figure 15 shows a girl burning goat legs and titled as “It’s not goats legs that are burnt, we have our share too”. This visual also conveys the status of their livelihood and fits into the representational metafunction and narrates the real situation. It narrates the work environment and the difficult of the work engaged. Figure 16 which shows a boy cleaning the fish in the market and the image was titled as “I take a break”. Here, the boy’s eye contact shows interpersonal metafunction and directly demands the viewer and creates a strong engagement with the viewer. It also maintains a social distance and intimacy by showing the full figure at an intimate distance with the viewer. Here, the boy takes a cup of tea in a break; he creates a conversation with the viewer. In Figure17, two old people work with bamboo sticks and they are making a bamboo basket. The image was titled as “A village in a metro city”. The people are busy with their work atmosphere and it shows interpersonal metafunction strongly demanding a direct engagement with the viewer. The image also maintains social distance and intimacy with full figure representation. They are sitting in front of their house and they also represent that this is their livelihood. All the five layouts represent the people involved with the work environment and their livelihood through the images. These images portray the people’s activity and their surroundings in a different atmosphere, creating a strong demand with the viewers.

In “Children in playing and reading environment”,there are 8 layouts, 3 layouts are considered for the analysis. Figure 18 shows children reading and writing in a platform. The image was titled “Education for all”, that means ‘It is for us too’. A girl’s photograph insert says that “we do not have any place to read other than the road even when it rains”. The visual shows representational metafunction narrating the scene strongly and conveys their reading activity and the atmosphere in which they are reading. The visual strongly portrays that there is no place for reading and states the actual situation of their livelihood. It creates a higher modality portraying the reality and also fits into compositional metafunction.

CHILDREN IN PLAYING AND READING ENVIRONMENT



Fig.18-Fish cart



Fig.19-A play



Fig.20- Chess square

Figure 19 portrays a small boy playing in the street with the accessory of the road. This image was titled as “Dar Dar, please make way for my autorikshaw”. Here, the boy shows a sign of stopping the passers with two hands asking a way

for his autorikshaw. The boy creates a direct demand with the viewer and shows interpersonal metafunction. The image also creates a social distance and space around it. It shows an autorikshaw in the background and states that the boy is daringly playing in the main road. Figure 20 portrays a group of children playing the chess on the street and states that they are frequently living like the coins moving while playing the game of chess. Here, the visual shows interpersonal metafunction creating a direct demand with the viewers. The two boys among the group get direct eye contact with the viewers to portray their reality strongly. They compare their life with the chess-board stating that they are temporally shifted frequently. The visual also states a front top angle to show the game played by them. The photograph insert of a boy in the layout states that he wanted to become a policeman. All the three layouts in this category strongly reveal the reality of children playing and reading on the streets. In any instance, they insist that road is their home property and frequently they have to shift their residence.

In “Children and people on streets” there are 33 layouts out of this 7 selective layout were selected for the analysis. This category portrays most of their activities, their life on the streets, how they spend and use streets for their livelihood. They show small temporary dwelling place, their play site and their reality on the street.

CHILDREN AND PEOPLE ON STREETS



Fig.21- Railway line



Fig. 22- A place for leisure



Fig.23-Bus stand



Fig.24-Morningtime



Fig.25-Temporary shelter



Fig.26- A child in dirty place



Fig. 27- Road sidehouses

Figure 21 shows an image of children drying their washed clothes in between the railway tracks. The title of the image portrays that “It’s not just our clothes that are being dried, we too are getting dried”. The images symbolically represent that they also get dried on the streets, because they live on the streets. The image is a linear perspective image of a railway track in Egmore which shows representational metafunction and narrates the reality of the street children. The concept of the image portrays the meaning of the picture narrated which says they have no other alternative for their dwelling and they depend on railway tracks and roads and they are also getting dried by the direct sun because they live directly below the sun. Figure 22, which shows a group of people with women and a boy standing and sitting near the fish cart, titled “Fish cart is our property”. The image represents interpersonal metafunction and directly demands with the viewer engaging the four people of the image with eye contact. All these four states that their livelihood is on roads with the help of fish cart and says this is their property. The people create social distance and intimacy with the entire four represented in full figure with the space surrounded by them. The picture was focused by front angle to have a nearby contact. The

photograph inserted is of a girl that says that “Due to many problems, stress and anxiety three people end their lives by jumping into the Coovumriver. People in my area should be clean, educated and should have a good life”. This textual interpretation narrates their actual life situation. Figure 23 portrays two girls sitting in a bus stand and combing the hair of the other. The picture was titled as “At last I’ve found a place to sit”. It represents that they donot find a place to sit and mend their hair and finally, find a bus stand to sit. The picture shows representational metafunction stating the narrative of the actual reality of living on the streets. The picture also shows interpersonal metafunction with a front angle focus, and one of the girls gets eye contact with the viewer and demands an engagement with the viewer. The man sitting and reading a newspaper at the background of the subject represents that it is a public place. The colour of the visual also creates high modality to the subject and confirms the meaning of the image. Figure 24 portrays a girl and a boy sitting and making a wash in the morning in front of the hut in which they live. Their front portion of the house which is a street where they have to wash as they donot have a bathroom for their wash and where they brush their teeth, and this is a compulsion for them. The two children sitting nearby facing each other with the activity narrate interpersonal metafunction. The image creates a social distance and intimacy, it maintains a social distance and its space surrounding, a bed sheet with a bicycle’s picture hanging in front shows that they occupy the road as their dwelling place.

Figure 25 represents a tarpaulin house of Mahalakshmi. The image was titled as “Looking forward to a good dawn in our lives”. The visual shows a temporary tarpaulin house. There are a number of holes on the sheet of the ceiling and the narrator Mahalakshmi says that ‘We sleep on the edges of tea shops and old iron shops’. My father does not get enough income, sometimes we go to sleep on empty stomachs. This picture focuses on representational metafunction and narrates the structure of the house and the visual pictures the same.

Figure 26 titled “A rose from the dirty clay”. The image represents dirty stagnated waste background with a beautiful girl facing the viewer. This picture is an interpersonal metafunction which engages the viewer with direct demand and states the position of the meaning in the images. The picture visualizes beauty in the dirty environment. The visual also questions the dwelling atmosphere where they have to live as street children. As the street child, the girl has no place with good and neat house to live, and this is a conditional status of such children.

Figure 27 visualizes the actual situation of the people living on the streets. The people have temporary sheds, and small huts in the road side areas, and these were pictured in this image. The photograph insert of a girl named ‘Roja’ says that “We donot have toilet and bathroom facility. So we are put into a lot of difficulty. We live in the midst of many problems and insecurity. If only we have educational development there will be a chance to uplift our area”. This visual shows representational metafunction and narrates the entire condition of their lives. Here, the image visualizes what the narrator ‘Roja’ interprets through a text in the photograph insert. All the seven layouts of this category strongly picturise the livelihood of the street children, people, their cultural identity, their risk, and difficulties in living on the streets. The text messages in the layouts clearly state the narration of the image and also convey a text material of the living condition of the people.

In “Introductory pages and group photograph”, Figure 28 has been selected for the analysis out of the 11 layouts.

INTODUCTORY PAGES AND GROUP PHOTO



Fig.28 – The street children team

The group photograph represents the entire participants of the workshop with the mentor and guide R.R.Srinivasan. All the participants cheerfully represent their happiness and joy in taking part in this wonderful and creative workshop. All

the faces are directly in eye contact with the viewer. So the group photograph creates a direct demand and creates a strong engagement with the viewer and the people share their happiness with the viewer. The colour of the image and high modality of the image focus on the compositional metafunction. So colour, modality and the group representation give interpersonal and representational metafunction too. This image has got three metafunctions and it was a strong focus of the workshop and it shows their achievement in all the faces of the participant. This group photograph was a strong image of the workshop conducted in Chennai for documentation of dwelling on the streets in Chennai.

R.R. Srinivasan shared his views about the making of the photography catalogue and his experience during the training given to the street children and the coordination given by the World Vision for the programme.

World Vision conducted a photography exhibition with the photographs in the Art House Gallery in Chennai. The exhibition got a major response from the public, the story was published in all the Tamil and English dailies and the TV channels covered the exhibition. Actor Parthiban took part in the inaugural function. The catalogue created a tremendous feedback from the viewers of the catalogue.

Srinivasan said, "I spent nearly five days with them near Mahabalipuram in teaching photography professionally for them. I shared openly with them about their livelihood on the streets of Chennai and on the premises they live in Chennai. After discussing about their day-to-day life in Chennai, I made them write an essay about it and to make them to involve in documenting it. So these preplanning made them to think about their livelihood in-depth. Through World Vision we gave still cameras to them to document their life in their surroundings. I did not interrupt in their creativity in handling their documentation. They have given about 2,000 snaps of their surroundings and I edited that photographs. Out of this edited photograph, I made this catalogue. I visited their premises in the early morning hours regularly when they shoot. The cameras were given to them for some days until they covered the maximum snaps in their locality. This is one of the important documents of Chennai streets by the children themselves in this period. I got what I expected in this project from the children. Every individual child nearly made 100 snaps, out of that I selected 4 or 5 snaps. The catalogue has come out very well with the help of the coordinator Fredrick who gave suitable captions for the selected photographs. After this project, families were evacuated from the Kannappar Thidal locality to Kannagi Nagar. This workshop created innumerable changes in the life of the children involved. After reading the story in the newspaper, a well-wisher from Madurai came to Chennai and bought a still camera for Rs. 40,000 and donated to a girl child involved in this project and went back without giving any comment. Likewise, many stories were involved in this programme due to the effects created. These pictures are an undeniable proof of what life is like for those who have *MelaeVa anum, KeelaeBhoomi* (sky above and earth below), that is all they have is the sky above and the earth below—no ceiling, no flooring! What I have learnt from this workshop is great. Only now, I know what real Chennai is. I visited the pavement dwellers' places and moved with the children and realized which life do they like? And it is amazing how the children were able to capture their real life in the pictures from the ones they have taken. It is sad that often we turn a blind eye to the realities of the plight of children on the streets. Now that these children have expressed their plight in these pictures, it is now in our hands to decide if they still have to live such measly lives. I believe that the initiative taken by World Vision by conducting the photography workshop will produce skilled artists in different artistic fields in the future. Although they have the right to have ration cards and voter IDs, they are not given these rights due to lack of address proof. They do not have even the basic rights of a citizen like water, toilet facility, and education; even those who live in war zones or in refugee camps are better off than our pavement dwellers. This is affecting the children badly—no house, no identity—they are growing up like refugees."

"World Vision requested me to conduct a workshop on photography for the street children. I agreed to do it for them. But I myself formed this concept of taking photographs of their own livelihood on their premises. This concept has worked out very well and I am very happy about the amazing output. I spent many days, and many hours working hard and I involved myself in this project to make them involve with the idea," said Srinivasan.

7. CONCLUSION

The *MelaeVa anum, KeelaeBhoomi* catalogue strongly conveys the following social picture of the people living on Chennai streets with risk and difficulties.

- The demand for water on Chennai streets where street children reside
- Water pollution in Chennai's surroundings and their effects
- The pathetic condition of the highly-polluted city with the Coovum river drainage

- The living condition of the people with their work atmosphere and nature to earn a living on Chennai streets.
- Children are playing on the streets with risk, as the streets are the only playground for them.
- Shifting of residence often in the temporary shelters as there is no permanent residence on the streets in Chennai.
- Cultural identities of people living in Chennai, the risk and difficulties of living on the streets of the city.

The researchers observe the above facts of people living on the streets in Chennai through the design catalogue and clearly state that the environmental graphic design is an essential study to understand street dwelling in Chennai. From this study it came to light after this photography project the people from KannapparThidal were evacuated to KannagiNagar, these visuals uplifted their life and made major changes in the life of the Children. It is delighted to say that this photography project made an unknown well-wisher to donate a professional camera to the girl child involved. The researchers have come to understand that the children have expressed their plight in these pictures; it is now in our hands to decide if they still have to live such a measly lives. On the whole, it is clear the living conditions in street dwelling in Chennai are well exposed in these visuals and made a greater awareness among the public.

Graphic designs of environmental issues are valid in the social perspective for human existence in the society. The study confirms that the environmental issues in the society are focused by the print media catalogue *MelaeVa anum, KeelaeBhoomi* in the form of graphic communication with image and text interpretation to the people is a valid documentation by the street children in Chennai.

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