

Illness for Children: A struggle of performativity in crisis

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Urban spaces, with a promise of development and better quality of infrastructure, largely inform the medical practice in India. Inequality seeps in as a regularity in such neoliberal setups, hence leading to differential treatment of ailing patients. Priority is given to those who can anyway afford to get treated owing to their social and economic capital, which is ironic when the State insures (if not ensures) healthcare in India. The vulnerable sub-populations find it even more harrowing to locate their somatic identity in a matrix of biopolitical forces. Children often find themselves at this edge, especially when they are faced with a life-threatening and/or terminal illness: the politico-legal dependence on 'significant others' to chart the course of their detection and treatment often creates gaps in the narrativization of their pain biographies and limits the etiological understanding of their illness itself. It is assumed that their bodies react to the pathological/physiological pressures the same way, as the adults, which in turn leads to their exclusion from the medical discourse(s). This sociological inquiry investigates alternative reclamation to illness narratives by reading some accounts, of children jostling through and figuring out the 'unknown' and complex world of healthcare, and juxtaposes them with the visual pleas of crowd-funding for child-care produced by platforms like MILAAP, ImpactGuru, and Ketto, which have gained a lot of traction in the last two years, owing to the parallel, emergent pressures of COVID-19. A sense of dichotomy is finally explored between emotion (universally assumed for children) and economy -- reassuring the sustenance of scientific (medical) knowledge being produced and dominated by those who are not, in fact, afflicted. What is simultaneously explored is whether the benevolence sustains itself in the post-COVID world when a looming/overarching illness (felt by the World) doesn't hit so close to home.

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