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**MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT**  
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Member of Standing Committee on Finance  
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Co-Chairman, District Development Coordination & Monitoring Committee, Bengaluru Urban District

*Dear Ran Shambhaji*

December 18, 2018

Sub: Government must crackdown on Digital Child Abuse on the internet

I draw your attention to the vital issue of safety of our children and the threats posed by the growing digital sexual abuse of children online – a threat that merits a urgent scrutiny and intervention by your Ministry and the Government.

As you are aware, I am a vocal advocate of the benefits of digital India and the increasing use of technology in governance and democracy. However, we should be aware there are ugly and negative uses of the internet that government and regulators should be proactive about.

I enclose here with this letter a media report (Annexure enclosed) which points out that there is an exponential growth in a few short video mobile apps due to their simple-to-navigate interface, and free availability on Google Play or App Store. Apps such as *Kwai*, *Clip*, *TikTok*, *NewsDog*, *LiveMe* and *Helo*, which threatens the safety of children are easily accessible.

These apps are becoming a new breeding ground for 'grooming' underage children for child pornography. In January 2018, through a Parliamentary Question, I had drawn the focus of the Ministry of Women & Child Development towards this new phenomenon of 'online child grooming' where paedophiles target children, befriend them and establish an emotional connect in order to lower the child's inhibition towards nudity and sexual activity. Pedophiles use these apps as a hunting ground to push Children into the porn and trafficking industry.

Further, the research also suggests that people who seek children online could eventually go on to harm a child in real life, therein making the transition from a 'content offence' to a 'contact offence'. In light of these facts, it is crucial that the Government take cognizance of this problem and put an end to this horrific threat that India's 400 million children are faced with.



सत्यमेव जयते

Such Apps have a high demand from vernacular entertainment consumers in different states in India. The abusers try to contact children using these vernacular languages. With easy availability of internet and smart phones, there has been a surge in cases of child sexual abuse, harassment, bullying and blackmail where the perpetrator finds his victim on one of the available social video apps. Inappropriate videos of Children, suggestive sexual content are rampant across most of these apps. The apps do not just have inappropriate videos, it also has enough evidences of users trying to '*groom*' a child online. They operate out of different countries and when law enforcers reach out to them for content take-down, no data is shared.

This is a highly disconcerting realization, in light of the fact that every single such image or video involved the commission of an actual physical offence against a child. According to INTERPOL, around 2.4 million instances of online child sexual abuse were reported from India in 2017. US-based National Center for Missing and Exploited Children also reported that over 24.46 lakh children were abused in 2017 in India. These are just the reported cases, there could be many that go unreported.

Therefore, the need to regulate and shut down such apps is incontrovertible and urgent. For this, I suggest the following steps that you could take. You are free to add and modify as deemed necessary: -

- a) Create a permanent institutional framework to monitor and regulate online content that falls under the category of Digital Exploitation of Children. A suggested institutional framework could be a permanent inter-ministerial group consisting of representatives from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Women and Child Development and Law and IT to arrive at a technology-based solution to the problems of Digital Child Abuse.
- b) To immediately initiate extensive consultations, awareness programmes. with all stakeholders and draft well-crafted roles for each group — including ISPs, the police, parents, schools etc.
- c) Review and amend the IT Act, 2000 to provide strict penalties to intermediaries who facilitate such content and strengthen legal framework including Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act.
- d) Ban such mobile applications which do not curate the inappropriate content involving children.





- e) Direct intermediaries such as *Google* and *Apple* to take strict measures for removing/banning such apps from *GooglePlay* and *AppStore* which allow exchange of child pornographic images/videos and enable paedophiles to "groom" the children.
- f) Formulate a dedicated legal framework where specific guidelines regulate mobile applications which makes viewing and sharing of sexually explicit images/videos of children a punishable offence.
- g) Review and amend POCSO Act ,2012 to make Digital Child Abuse and *Online Child Grooming* a punishable offence.

Children constitute 44.4% of India's current population and are the future of our nation. It is our responsibility to ensure that they get a safe and happy childhood that they deserve. This issue requires serious attention. Regrettably, your ministry has done very little so far on this issue. I hope you and your ministry will take strict action to prevent Digital Child Abuse in India. I am copying the Hon'ble minister of Women and Child Development and Ministry of Human Resource Development for taking action on this serious issue.

The internet, if not regulated and monitored can make it a biggest threat to parents who are deeply concerned about the safety of their Children. The Government must involve with parents and schools in mission mode to ensure that Digital India is also an India free of sexual exploitation.

Yours Sincerely,

RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR

Encl:

1. Annexure- News Report on subject matter

Copy to:

1. Smt. Maneka Gandhi, Hon'ble Minister of Women and Child Development.
2. Shri. Prakash Javadekar, Hon'ble Minister of Human Resource Development.



# New hunting ground for paedophiles: Chinese apps

Shadma Shaikh

A 12-year-old girl stands in a field, dressed in a pink lehenga and velvet blouse, her chest heaving as she dances to a popular Haryanvi song that goes 'Mert jatti jwani maange paani paani'. It's a 15-second clip on popular social video app Kwai. There's another video of the girl in the same setting and clothes dancing with a boy about the same age, thrusting their bodies at each other.

The videos — and there are at least 560 more of them — were posted on the account, *Gaon Ki Bachchiya* (Village Girls), which has nearly 98,000 followers. Some of the videos are of girls as young as two or three, lip-synching and dancing in an age-inappropriate manner, or doing chores like cooking and drawing water from a well. The comments are mostly from men, complimenting the girls on their bodies or asking to see more skin.

Social video apps, where users post 15-second clips of themselves, have become an easy hunting ground for paedophiles. "Short video apps are the new ground to

groom underage girls for child pornography," said Nitish Chaudhan, project manager at Cyber Peace Foundation, a non-profit in New Delhi that deals with child porn cases. In the past year, the organisation has found an uptick in cases of child sexual abuse, harassment, bullying and blackmail where the perpetrator found the victims on social video apps.

With data access getting cheaper, short video social media apps like Kwai and TikTok have gained millions of followers over the past year. Apps like Kwai, TikTok and Clip, aimed at lower- or lower-middle-class users in India, have found strong growth with demand from vernacular entertainment consumers. Kwai counts India as its primary market after China, and claims to have 10 million to 15 million users here. TikTok, built by Chinese giant ByteDance, also cites India as its priority market and had 15 million users here as of February 2018. India-based Clip, with China's Shunwei Capital as an investor, had three million downloads as of December 2017.

A lot of the content on these

comments about her "hot body", full lips, and requests to remove her top. In six days, the views crossed 1.20,000, and followers 18,000.

Jajith Thottol, an activist from Thiruvananthapuram who has busted child porn rackets on social media, says these videos are part of the grooming process to make children comfortable around perpetrators. "The perpetrator eases a child into suggestive nudity, then asks for other favours," he says.

China-based companies have had problems in the past with moderation of user-generated content, largely due to language and cultural differences. Forrest Chen, founder of NewsDog, an India-focused content aggregator app, said the company was aware of its "content problem" referring to inappropriate and suggestive sexual content. Chen said NewsDog hadn't been able to moderate inappropriate content due to its limited understanding of Indian languages, but would prioritise language-based moderation going forward.

Social video apps are designed to get users hooked with a simple-to-navigate interface. Since they

depend on user-generated content, they run contests and campaigns to encourage local content. Popular content on Kwai is generated through campaigns like 'Act like Amlitabh Bachchan'. 'Create a dance video using #BalleBalle', or 'Mime your favourite Bollywood dialogue'. The prize money ranges from Rs 30,000 to Rs 1 lakh.

Gania Murali, head of Kwai India, says the platform uses both automatic and manual review systems to monitor content. On the China version, Kwai recently released a parental control function. The company holds training sessions to teach users to create videos. Accounts that create popular videos get monetary rewards. Some top India users earn up to \$400 (about Rs 28,000) a month, Murali says.

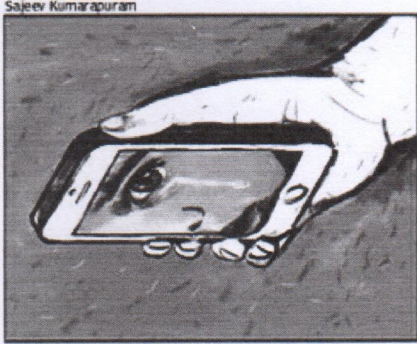
He says that much of the content featuring children comes from fake accounts. By fake accounts, he means accounts that are aggregators of such content or managed by parents or relatives of the children. "There is a continuous audit to monitor content on our platform. If there is adult or inappropriate content featuring kids, it

will be taken down," he says.

But, the content moderation team is based in Beijing. It's unlikely that this team will be able to detect inappropriate content from an Indian child. Chandan says child porn is a deep-rooted problem in India and the content on Kwai is just the tip of the iceberg. "There are stats to show that Asian kids are the most in demand for child pornography," he says. His foundation has received 148 cases of child harassment originating from social apps. There could be thousands of cases that go unreported, he says.

Chandan says paedophiles exploit a child's addiction to gaming apps or challenges on social media. There's a trend of paedophiles sending videos to kids, asking them to imitate an adult and send their video back. There have been cases of young girls masturbating and sending videos to a friend they met on a social app. "Most of them don't know what they are doing. They think they are completing a challenge and are going to win a contest," Chandan says.

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Sajeer Kumarapuram