



---

# An Analysis Of Photo Journalistic Ethics On Koodankulam Issue In Tamil Nadu

**K.Manikkam** Temporary Assistant Professor (T), Part Time (Internal) Research Scholar, Department of Communication, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli.

**Dr. G.Balasubramania Raja** Professor & Head, Department of Communication, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli.

---

## Abstract:

The responsibility of media is, as a substitute of presenting erosion of our social status, to devote itself in emphasize upon developmental issues. News related to innovation, discovery, improvement of every sector will encourage the people. In last year more than one million images were posted in various online magazines. In this statistics most of the pictures are social consequences. This research topic focused on the media responsibility towards the coverage of Koodankulam atomic plant protest. Koodankulam is located in southern Indian state Tamilnadu. Koodankulam issue is a very sensational one and its reaches worldwide coverage through various media. The project has its roots in 1979, when the Soviet Union entered into a nuclear power deal with the Indian government. In this atomic plant issue Koodankulam and surrounding village peoples are protest over the twenty years. Some of the people were killed police attacks. The main objective of the protest is impact of atomic power energy danger and its effects on the people living and future generations also.

So, many photojournalists covered the peoples protest in various themes with different perspectives. Some of the magazines and newspapers covered the detailed view and scientific view of the issues of Koodankulam atomic plant. Photojournalism has opened up a new field that became extremely influential in conveying social issues to the general public. Photojournalist Amirtharaj Stephen has covered the issue for the four years by spending considerable time interacting and being one among the people and working ethically without exploiting the people's privacy. So this research focuses on photojournalistic ethics of Amirtharaj Stephen's photographs taken during the protest. In this research content analysis method is adopted for analyzing his published photos in various media.

**Keywords:** Koodankulam atomic plant, Photojournalism, Ethics, Journalistic Responsibility

## Introduction:

Every day mass media outlets provide audience members with information about current events involving government and elected officials. The words, photographs and graphics used by media present the information editors think is important to informed citizens. Photojournalism captures moments within an event or space in time that are used to tell a larger story. Photographs are powerful tools for communication because these moments not only represent facts; they also have an ability to speak to viewers on a relatable and emotional level. The preamble of the National Press Photographers (NPPA) Code of Ethics states:

“Photographic and video images can reveal great truths, expose wrongdoing and neglect, inspire hope and understanding and connect people around the globe through the language of visual understanding. Photographs can also cause great harm if they are callously intrusive or are manipulated. (NPPA, 2012, Preamble)”

“Photojournalism has as its underpinning a desire to portray accurately a visual scene which people around the world can relate to, respond to, and believe. Believability is the backbone of news imagery” (Harris, 2001,)

In this research topic focused on how photojournalism plays the important role to the Koodankulam anti nuclear protest. Koodankulam, a remote coastal village in Tirunelveli district of southern Tamil Nadu has become the epicenter of political strife ever since the construction of a nuclear plant started there in 2002. As the Centre goes ahead with the project despite the long standing protests, the idea of democracy itself has become a suspect. It is one of India’s biggest nuclear plants. The Russian-designed, 2,000-megawatt Koodankulam Nuclear Power Project is part of an aggressive nuclear expansion as India struggles to solve severe power shortages. Koodankulam issue is a very sensational one and its reaches worldwide coverage through various media. The project has its roots in 1979, when the Soviet Union entered into a nuclear power deal with the Indian government. In this atomic plant issue Koodankulam and surrounding village peoples are protest over the twenty years. The government officials and nuclear scientists say the Koodankulam power plant is very safe and also they produced more documentary films and awareness programmes. Responding to the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board's clearance to commence nuclear fuel loading in the Koodankulam plant, the People's Movement against Nuclear Energy announced that protestors would lay siege to the plant on 9 September. Police force was deployed in huge numbers in the area. On that day, between 8000 and 10000 people, including children and women from Idinthakarai and neighboring villages started from the Lourde Matha church in Idinthakarai. Activists from across the country are making a beeline to Koodankulam and Idinthakarai to empathize with the sentiments of the native community, to whom protests, strikes and fasts have become a way of life. In this protest over the twenty years continuously happened and different levels of protest and people movement form the

different stages like pasting, The villagers stood in waist to neck deep water prompting the force to boost up the surveillance, Fishermen proceeding towards the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant, Children from Idinthakarai with the post cards they have written to the Russian Ambassador requesting Russia to stop providing technical support to the project, Thousands of villagers protesting against the commissioning of the plant sleep on the seashore with their kids near Koodankulam plant, in various forms. The main objective of the protest is impact of atomic power energy danger and its effects on the people living and future generations also. Because people are aware to the Hiroshima accident so this incident people are continually protest to stop this project. In various media focuses the Koodankulam protest in different beat. Few of the national media are portrayed the real situation of the village and protestors point of view and opinion. But some of the local regional media are support to the government and publish news against the protesters, and publish the photographs file photo of Koodankulam, less crowd of the people movement. So, many photojournalists covered the peoples protest in various themes with different perspectives. Some of the magazines and newspapers covered the detailed view and scientific view of the issues of Koodankulam atomic plant.

This research focuses on photojournalistic ethics of Amirtharaj Stephen's photographs taken during the protest. Photojournalist Amirtharaj Stephen has covered the issue for the four years by spending considerable time interacting and being one among the people and working ethically without exploiting the people's privacy.

### **Koodankulam: A Nuclear Plant in My Backyard**

Amirtharaj Stephen, a freelance Tamil photographer based in Bangalore, gives a hitherto unseen angle to the sorry state of the helpless villagers of the coastal area. Stephens's photographs are mostly based on the environmental and society based. He was working several magazines including international news agency. His work was differently perspective from others, lets his photos do the talking. For four years, he was the eyes of the outside world at Koodankulam, where protests took place against a nuclear power plant that was built there. Amirtharaj wanted to "systematically document" the people's protests at Koodankulam. "For the first six months, I couldn't get any photographs," he remembers. But he hung on, a silent spectator to the happenings at the pandal that housed the volunteers of the People's c Movement against Nuclear Energy and the everyday lives of the village of Idinthakarai. Many of the national and international magazines and online agencies were published in his photos worldwide. Stephen's narrative essay captures, from an intimate vantage point, a story unlikely to be covered by the mainstream media: Koodankulam: A Nuclear Plant In My Backyard, documents the uprising of a local community against the Indian and Russian Government on the commissioning of the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP), as well as the violence by government forces attempting to clamp down on the protesters.

Stephen's images are bathed in shadows, the monochromatic photos giving a glimpse into the life of villagers in the Tirunelveli district of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Protesters flock in front of churches and beaches, rallying against the construction of a nuclear power plant they deemed unsafe for their village. Ultimately, the plant was built, but as Stephen's project illustrates, officials from Russia and India who commissioned the structure did little to successfully assuage the very real, post-Cold War fears of the fisherman-heavy community.

His 'viewpoints' were honored with the Media Foundation Award for best photo story for 2013. And his master of work is Koodankulam. He was also honored by annual activist award for emerging photographer in the work Koodankulam.

In this protest period government also negotiate to the protesters and also take police action. Tamilnadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa's declaration of support to the plant, police cordons blocked the access of essential supplies and services for protestors in Idinthakarai. Keys to the Panchayat water tank were seized. Fortunately, the protestors had a fair share of fisher folk among them. At tremendous expense of time and diesel, the protestors managed to bring in drinking water, provisions and milk for their children using their fishing boats through the sea route. "The government also suspended bus services in the area, causing untold hardships to the aged, ailing, and pregnant women needing urgent medical attention," so the village peoples are affected to their daily lives.

Photojournalist Amirtharaj Stephen has covered the issue for the four years by spending considerable time interacting and being one among the people and working ethically without exploiting the people's privacy. So this research focuses on photojournalistic ethics of Amirtharaj Stephen's photographs taken during the protest.

### **Review of Literature:**

Photographs are powerful tools for communication because the captured moments not only represent facts; they also have an innate ability to speak to the viewer on a relatable and emotional level. With this power comes ethical responsibility and natural tension points for journalistic practices. This literature review examines scholarship on photography, photojournalism, and ethics. It begins with an overview of the theories behind the power of photographs to communicate and the various levels on which we read them. Photographic theorists describe the inherent tension of photography's communicative power in terms of connotative and denotative, informative and affective. This thesis will use that theoretical foundation to argue that similar tension exists in photojournalistic communication between the seemingly opposing forces of authenticity and sensitivity. By considering the theoretical underpinnings of journalism next, we will begin to see where ethical concerns for responsible use of photographs as journalistic communication might emerge.

Photojournalist Mark Hancock, now with ZUMA Press, wrote: A journalist tells stories. A photographer takes pictures of nouns (people, places and things). A photojournalist takes the best of both and locks it into the most powerful medium available\* frozen images. Photojournalists capture “verbs.” (para. 10\_11)

A simple definition of photojournalism, which University of Missouri Dean Frank Luther Mott is said to have coined in the 1920s, is “reporting visual information via various media” (Newton, 2001, p. 5).

In telling its own story, the great picture agency Magnum Photos (2008a) reports that Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, George Rodger and David “Chim” Seymour “created Magnum in 1947 to reflect their independent natures as both people and photographers the idiosyncratic mix of reporter and artist that continues to define Magnum, emphasizing not only what is seen but also the way one sees it” (para. 1). The issue, then, becomes one of who is doing the seeing, how and why they see, and how and why they publish.

A few scholars take a less positive view of the value of Civil Rights Movement photographs, however, and consider the way in which the mainstream press used a few iconic images to consistently frame the movement, reducing complex social issues to a simple narrative of white-on-black violence and, therefore, undermining true reform. Martin Berger (2010) says,

“The appeal of civil rights photographs to whites rested largely on their success in focusing white attention on acts of violence and away from historically rooted inequities in public accommodation, voting rights, housing policies and labor practices” (para. 23). This line of reasoning brings into question photography’s authenticity in representing a complete truth. In Berger’s exploration of “shame” (the emotional level on which whites related to the photographs), he reinforces the idea that context is key to the reading of texts. “Emotional texts are not better or worse than rational texts in general; each must be judged in context” (2011, p.73).

Domke and colleagues (2002), for example, suggest the notion that images drive public opinion is overly simplistic. Results of their experiment examining the power of visual messages show that images interact with individuals’ predisposition, experiences and values to shape information processing judgments.

Nicholas Mirzoeff says his book of visual culture why do pictures look real? How does the notion of the real change? There are three constitutive modes of representing reality in modern western visual culture – the picture, the photograph and virtual reality.

The interpersonal function of images is also a crucial component in visual journalism seeking authentic communication. Choices made by the photographer are one factor in determining this interpersonal narrative. Interaction and power relations are created through lens choice, perspective and camera angle. For example a low-angle perspective, looking up at the subject, gives the subject power over the viewer. Conversely, looking down on a subject diminishes them. Close-ups allow an imaginary

intimate relationship between subject and viewer; medium shots (3/4 body or waist up) enact a social relationship; and long angle (full body) depictions are seen as impersonal.

Research on photojournalism and ethics tends to focus four primary areas, which include digital alteration of photographs, concern for the subject's privacy, the publication of graphic images, and how ethics codes address images (Keith, 2006, p. 247; Harris, 2002).

### **Methodology;**

This paper consist Amirtharaj Stephen's photographs published from various magazines and online agencies during the protest time taken photos are considering to analyze content analysis method are adopted to this study. Since photographer was present to cover the Koodankulam protest, the event produced numerous photos, many of them in nature, as the news was unfolding and different perspective of vantage point of his photos. Specific picture are analyzed by different analyze based on ethical concern of manipulation, privacy, and graphic nature, which are the broad categories in which many ethical challenges in visual journalism fall.

### **Photographic Theory**

News photographs do more than just illustrate events. It is the widely accepted practice of scholars to distinguish between a photograph's literal (denotative) meaning and its more volatile connotative constructions. Connoted messages include ideology and belong in the realm of moral discourse. Foundational scholars on this topic include Roland Barthes and Stuart Hall. Barthes (1983, p. 198) positions news photographs as paradoxical in nature. Their "objectivity" is derived from the idea that their denoted meaning is simply an "analogon" of the scene or literal reality as simply a record of things seen. (Zelizer, 2010).

### **Analysis and Interpretation:**

In this study focus on selected photographs of Amirtharaj Stephen taken during the protest and these following images are published in various magazines like Tehalka, India Today, and various online media blogs.

All the images are taken monochrome color tone, because black and white images are never distort to their viewer, in color images there are several colors like cloths, background area, foreground area, and other elements are disturb to the viewer. So the photographer work the series of black and white photographs are very powerful and gives more attraction.



**Fig.1 Napoleon, a resident of Idinthakarai, runs after being attacked by the police September 10, 2012**

In this photograph shows the violent against the village community people, the police force attack the protesters in seashore to move towards the Koodankulam Power plant. Emotional and sensational photograph, the photographer approaches in this photograph very clear and his primary objective is the protesters are struggling to survive against police force.

In connotative meaning of this photograph represents in Tamilnadu government also support to the Koodankulam Power plant. Because during the protest time government cancels to their water supply, transportations, electricity. Some of the major media only cover to this message and highlighted. But Stephen photograph shows the real ideology of the protest. All the protesters are struggling to government; the major issue of this photograph the individual person is attack and file FIR.

In India every protest has strong reason, it's based on the issue, but all the protesters are resistance by the government or particular Political party support. In this photograph the photographer does not over expose the protest. He just clicks what is happening there, and expose their pain.





**Fig 2** Idinthakarai villagers and their children sleep on the seashore near Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant, protesting the commissioning of the plant. September 9, 2012

Particularly in this photograph mentioned by the photographer, in this image was taken by September 9, 2012 night, in morning time the protesters were attacked by police. In Tirunelveli district all the media are disposed from that place in evening time, the major incident of the protest is nearly 1000 village peoples and their children's are sleep in seashore near the plant. No media coverage this issue because all the media came up in morning and he want just what is happening to there, collecting the news and leave from the village. Sometime the media collect news from the press release source. They did not analyze the people protest. Stephen only taken this photograph and published in various media, he spending more time and getting closer to the protesters. Otherwise the people do not allow taking the photograph in sleeping time.

Because in south India culture is strictly followed by the people, so the photographer expose to their personal problems during the protest time. In this photograph framing is also convey the meaning in depth of area focus. So the photographer personally involved and taking series of photographs in over the three year.





**Fig3.** Xavier Amma, a resident of Idinthakarai, cries out for help after being chased into the sea with no place to run. She is later both helped and arrested by security forces, and is subsequently charged with 16 offenses including the serious charges of sedition and waging war against the nation. September 10, 2012

A photojournalist's first instinct is to shoot because once a moment is gone it cannot be recaptured. It is informative, clearly depicting the scene described by the seconds following the lathi charge. Photography's potential for powerful storytelling is realized in this emotionally charged moment, but does it do enough to authentically communicate of the scene.

In this photo Xavier amma fall down during the police charge, no one help because the police force attacked everyone, there is no women police in this photograph. After some time the police arrested Xavier amma and subsequently charged with 16 offenses including the serious charges of sedition and waging war against the nation.



Fig 4: women plead with Dr. S.P Udaya kumar, leader of peoples moment against nuclear energy to reconsider his decision to surrender to the police. Within few minutes he was lifted from the dais by a group of youngsters and carried in a boat to a safe hideout. September 11, 2012

A reading can be made along the lines of gender hierarchies (the woman who is crying and hugging SP Udaya kumar resists any black and white reading) and yet for me what I am drawn to and see is this woman on the left, as she steps into the frame, the energy of that stepping into, blurring her, her face in pain, her hands trying to make space amongst the men, an understanding that surrender in this country most often equals death and death by torture. This is the beginning of a frame of a moment that will see SP Udaya kumar being carried away to safety by the people as they continue to struggle and resist.



Photojournalists will tell you good storytelling is about intimacy. Their aim is to create photographs that explain a situation and evoke emotion by authentically representing the story or scene– not photographing the outliers, but people and situations that fairly depict the story. When covering situations depicting grief, photojournalists are called upon to practice ethical decision making, often on the fly, as they decide when to photograph and what best tells the story while respecting the integrity of the moment.

The people of Koodankulam have now been in non-violent protest for more than 1300 days. Throughout they have been repeatedly subjected to violence by government forces.

### **Conclusion:**

Photographs are powerful tools for journalistic communication because they represent visual proof while enacting a personal connection between subject and reader that fosters understanding and perhaps motivation to act. We realize there is subjectivity in choices made by the photographer – what to include, angle, composition, etc. – but accept this qualified reality. In this research the photographer does not overrule the ethics; every frame should have strong evidence of peoples protest and government pulling police to resistance to the protesters. In regional newspapers and magazines are view the issues is news related sometimes they publish government issued press releases. But Stephen cover the issue in closely to the village community people view as well as the photojournalistic perspective. Then only he taken his photograph clearly in this point anything went to wrong the photographer biased. But he did not do that. In his images

are black and white monochrome color tone, composition mainly focused by the peoples struggle, how they treated by the police, how they are affected by their basic needs. In this photo series have strong document to this protest and published various national and international magazines newspapers and online news agencies. This photo series also exhibited in various nations protest against nuclear plant and other environmental issues based in his photographs are the main objective for the reaching different approach. Stephen covers the non-violent protests, human rights violations, and issues related to the livelihood of the local community, and he continuously visit the village and go along with the people whenever there is an agitation or a campaign.

Stephen has been documenting the protests since November 2011, and many of the photographs in this essay come from the period around September 2012, when tensions escalated in the region following brutal police crackdowns on peaceful protests. On September 10, more than 8000 protestors under PMANE (The People's Movement Against Nuclear Energy) who had assembled on the seashore behind the plant were battled by police forces, who charged at them with lathis and deployed tear gas to break up the protest. In his photographs are witnessed and documentation of peoples protest against the nuclear energy.

#### References:

- Associated Press. (2013). AP news values and principles. Retrieved from
- Barthes, R. (1983). The photographic message. In S. Susan (Ed.), *A Barthes Reader*. New York, N.Y.: Hill and Wang.
- <http://www.ap.org/company/news-values>
- <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/powerful-images-help-revisit-kudankulam-protests/article5237825.ece>
- <https://munikempanna.wordpress.com/tag/koodankulam/>
- <http://www.inforefuge.com/emergence-of-photojournalism>
- <http://www.thehoot.org/research/special-reports/kudankulam-s-nuclear-holy-cow-6497>
- Julianne H. Newton (2009) Photojournalism, *Journalism Practice*, 3:2, 233-243,
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- McLuhan, Marshall and Powers, Bruce R. (1989) *The Global Village: transformations in world life and media in the 21st century*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) (2008) "Code of Ethics", <http://www.nppa.org/professional-development/business-practices/ethics.html>
- Shields, Minla Linn, "Ethics in Photojournalism: Authenticity and Sensitivity in Coverage of Tragic Events." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2014.
- Riviera, D. (2010). *Picture this: A review of Doing visual ethnography: Images, media and representation in research* by Sarah Pink. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(4), 988- 991. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-4/pink.pdf>.
- Rosenblum, Naomi. *A World History of Photography*. Abbeville Press Publishers. 1997.