



NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND PROTECTION OF DESTITUTE CHILDREN IN KERALA: A STUDY ON JANASEVA

SISUBHAVAN ALWAYE

Dr. Priyesh C.U.
Associate Professor of Political Science
Maharaja's College, Ernakulam

ABSTRACT

Non-Governmental Organizations have been playing an important role in contemporary world. NGOs vary in their methods and activities. Some acts primarily as lobbyists while others conduct programmes and activities focusing on certain vulnerable groups in society. The NGOs have been playing a commendable job in the protection of bare minimum rights of marginalized sections in the society hence the study pertaining to NGOs has a unique place in social research.

Destitute child means a child without parents these children have to live on the street. Orphan children have been denied basic rights in the society. Destitute children are deprived of family, care, recognition and self-respect.

Kerala is a state with lowest positive population growth rate in India and the state has a density of 819 people per km. Kerala has highest Human Development Index in India according to the Human Development Report in 2011.

The state is known for achievement such as near 100% literacy rate, among the highest in the country.

The NGOs have able to channelize its programmes for the upliftment of downtrodden sections which include the destitute children in Kerala. NGOs have the managerial skill and power to take decisions on policy matters on behalf of the weaker sections in the state.

Janaseva Sisubhavan in Alwaye is a renowned non-governmental organization dedicated to providing rehabilitation for destitute children. Established with the aim of offering holistic care, the institution focuses on the emotional, physical, and educational development of its inmates. Janaseva Sisubhavan emphasizes individualized attention, helping each child to thrive and reach their potential. The center also engages in community outreach, raising awareness about child welfare and fostering a sense of social responsibility among the public. Through its compassionate approach, Janaseva Sisubhavan plays a crucial role in shaping a brighter future for destitute children in the state.

Keywords: Destitute Children, Janaseva Sisubhavan, Non-governmental Organization

INTRODUCTION

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have emerged as pivotal actors across the world, influencing social, economic and political spheres. NGOs operate at local, national and international levels. NGOs address various issues, from human rights to environmental protection. Their activities often target marginalized groups, emphasizing the importance of providing social justice to vulnerable sections such as destitute children.

The roots of NGOs can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century, coinciding with significant social movements such as the abolition of slavery and various freedom struggles across the world. These early organizations laid the groundwork for development of non-governmental organizations in future. The term "NGO" gained prominence following the establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, which recognized the critical role these organizations play in promoting global welfare.

The UN's consultative status for International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) through Article 71 of the UN Charter shows their importance in global governance and social justice efforts. By engaging with various stakeholders, NGOs contribute to dialogue and policy-making processes, ensuring that the voices of marginalized communities are heard.

One of the primary functions of NGOs is advocacy. Many organizations work as lobbyists, aiming to influence policy decisions that affect vulnerable populations. This role is vital, as it helps to hold governments accountable and encourages the implementation of fair policies. NGOs often mobilize public opinion and leverage media attention to draw focus to pressing social issues.

In addition to advocacy, NGOs frequently engage in service delivery. They provide essential services, such as education, healthcare, and economic support, particularly in areas where government efforts may be lacking. By directly addressing the needs of communities, NGOs help bridge gaps in social services, contributing to the overall well-being of society.

NGOs also play a crucial role in empowering marginalized groups. Through training and capacity-building initiatives, they equip individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to advocate for their rights and improve their socio-economic conditions. This empowerment fosters resilience and promotes sustainable development within communities.

One of the major highlights of NGO work is the commitment to social justice. NGOs strive to address inequalities and ensure that all individuals, regardless of their background, have access to resources and opportunities. This commitment often involves working with specific groups such as destitute children, who face systemic barriers to social and economic participation in their adult life. The functioning of foster care homes under the auspicious of NGOs by following standard procedures related to the development of the destitute child, would realize (equality of opportunity) in a fair society in accordance with Rawls's notion of social justice. This

development of smaller and more personalized group living services would provide justice and welfare to the children in rehabilitation centers.

Over the years, NGOs have evolved from grassroots movements to professionally managed organizations. This professionalization has enabled them to operate more effectively and efficiently, allowing for better resource management and program implementation. With trained staff and scientific approaches, NGOs can tackle complex social issues and adapt to changing social realities.

The recognition of NGOs as vital partners in development by international bodies, such as the World Bank, reflects this evolution. The 1995 World Bank document "Working with NGOs" defines NGOs as private organizations dedicated to alleviating suffering, promoting the interests of the poor, and protecting the environment" (World bank, 1995). This broad understanding underscores the diverse functions NGOs fulfill and their commitment to the public good.

“Destitute child refers to a child who has lost both parents and they have to live on the street” (Kulkarni, V.M. 1979). Destitute child also has been denied of protection in the society. These children are deprived of family, care, recognition and dignity because of their marginal status in the society.

Destitute children are those who belong to very poor or broken families, without any protection. This group includes child workers, abandoned children and delinquent youth in society. The problem of child destitution is an international phenomenon. Abandoned children can be seen in almost all societies. The number of destitute children in a country depends on various factors, such as socio-cultural makeup, political climate, and the level of economic development.

In developed countries, economic advancement enables the provision of good institutional care for destitute children. However, in developing and underdeveloped countries, including India, the conditions for these children are often pathetic. Various factors contribute to the destitution of children, such as the decline of the joint family system, the emergence of nuclear families, industrialization and urbanization.

Millions of destitute children are denied of their rights to survival, a healthy environment, food and shelter. Many destitute children live in insecure places, such as abandoned buildings and streets. Destitute children are subjected to numerous atrocities, including abuse, child labor, child trafficking and inhumane treatment. In India, many orphan children are victims of both mental as well as physical abuse. Society struggles to curb the violence against these children and fails to ensure acceptable living standards for this underprivileged section.

As a developing nation, India’s society is in transition. Even after 75 years of independence, a significant portion of the population lives in poverty. Within this context, child destitution and abandonment are prevalent.

“Destitute child cannot develop the inherent qualities of a child because of the circumstances in he or she live” (Ainsworth and Fulcher, 1981). It is crucial for destitute children to develop virtues such as love and affection in a conducive atmosphere, ideally through proper institutional care.

DESTITUTE CHILDREN IN KERALA

Kerala is a state with the lowest positive population growth rate in India, with a density of 819 people per square kilometer. The state of Kerala has the highest Human Development Index in the country, as reported in the 2011 Human Development Report. Kerala is recognized for its achievements, such as a near-100% literacy rate, the highest life expectancy, a favorable sex ratio, and the lowest infant mortality rate among Indian states.

Kerala has made significant strides in reducing child labor, primarily by making primary education compulsory and accessible to all. The state has reported fewer violations of the rights of destitute children, due to the working of a large number of non-governmental organizations focused on their protection and rehabilitation. However, this progress does not mean that child labor and other forms of exploitation have been entirely eradicated.

Compared to other states in India, the percentage of child labor in Kerala is relatively low. There is a strong relationship between poverty and child labor. In many cases, destitute children grow up without schooling, resulting in unskilled labor and social powerlessness. Poverty and the lack of social security are primary causes of child labor in Kerala.

Children from various states, including those as far away as northeastern India, are brought to Kerala in large numbers to work as housemaids, hotel suppliers, and loaders in plywood factories and quarries, as well as helpers for construction workers. These children often work long hours on the streets for very little pay, performing dull, repetitive tasks that impose excessive responsibilities and expose them to intimidation. Such work is detrimental to their health and education, robbing them of their childhood.

In Kerala, more than half of working children engage in non-agricultural activities, such as begging and prostitution. “Eighty percent of children are involved in agriculture, while 19% work as domestic helpers. Ninety percent of working children are in rural areas, and 85% of them are employed in the unorganized sector.” A growing trend is the employment of children as domestic workers in urban areas, where conditions are often unregulated. Many children are forced to work without basic amenities for very low wages, similar to slavery.

Destitute children face physical, sexual, and emotional abuse in their roles as domestic workers. Childline officials have reported that these children work long hours for minimal pay, often receiving food only twice a day, with some made to work from 5:30 AM to 8 PM. This increasing trend highlights the issues of destitute children in the state.

JANASEVA SISUBHAVAN AND PROTECTION OF DESTITUTE CHILDREN

Janaseva Sisubhavan is one of the important and popular non-governmental organization established for rehabilitating the destitute children in Kerala. “Janaseva Sisubhavan is started in the year 1999 with a noble aim to create an India without street children. That is the vision and mission of Mr. Jose Maveli, the founder and chairman of Janaseva Sisubhavan.” He believes that “the street children are our own children to save and protect them and to give them a home is our moral responsibility”.

The work of Janaseva Sisubhavan has been mainly concentrated on the upliftment of destitute children.

“Their mission is to find out destitute children abducted by beggar mafia, bring them shelter and provide love and affection.” The unscrupulous people resort to inhuman acts like dismembering them, creating burns, piercing their eyes and such acts, they think would render the children for begging. The poor kids suffer ruthless punishment even for the slight decrease in their daily collection. This institution works to eliminate beggary and their first priority is to put an end to this social problem. Janaseva Sisubhavan was started as a popular movement, with Justice V.R Krishna Iyer as its chief patron. The very existence and functioning of Janaseva Sisubhavan is made possible with the whole hearted support and the cooperation extended by the public-spirited people from every walk of life, without any distinction of caste, religion and politics.

Janaseva Sisubhavan rescued 1000 destitute children from the street and around 300 children are now residing in Janaseva Sisubhavan.” If they came to know any child is wandering around the street or engaged in begging usually, they informed the local police. With the help of the police, they present the child before the child welfare committee to get the custody of that child. With the order from child welfare committee the authority will take over the responsibility of that particular destitute child.

In Kerala, like many parts of India, children are often kidnapped by beggar mafias and forced to beg on the streets. These gangs control the children by mutilating them—pulling out their nails, mutilating their faces, or even depriving them of essential care in order to invoke sympathy from passersby. These children are sometimes grouped into small units, with each group tasked with collecting a daily quota of money, sometimes as high as Rs. 300 a day. If they fail to meet their targets, they are often subjected to cruel punishment. For these children, life is an endless cycle of torment, fear, and suffering.

Janaseva Sisubhavan stands as a beacon of hope in this grim scenario. Founded with the mission to rescue and rehabilitate such children, the organization began its work in 1999 when it rescued its first child—a young girl who had been abandoned by her mentally ill mother. Since then, the institution has expanded to care for children from all walks of life, including those born into extreme poverty, broken families, and those children who have been neglected or abused in society.

The inmates of Janaseva Sisubhavan come from diverse backgrounds, some are the children of beggars who have been rescued from the streets, while others come from families struggling with poverty, abuse, or illness. A poignant example is a blind man who had seven children, all of whom were surviving by begging. Three of his children were adopted by the Sisubhavan, giving them a chance to escape a life of suffering. Many children come from broken families, with fathers who are alcoholics or mothers who are too ill or impoverished to care for them.

The atmosphere at Janaseva Sisubhavan is one of warmth and love, where the laughter of children fills the air. The organization’s 30 dedicated “mothers” provide round-the-clock care to the children, ensuring they receive proper nutrition, hygiene, and emotional support. Children enjoy wholesome meals that include milk, ghee, and pulses, while younger ones are cared for and given regular baths. The older children are sent to kindergarten and school, and the institution has even established an English-medium lower primary school on its premises, offering basic education to the children in its care.

One of the key principles of Janaseva Sisubhavan is its commitment to secularism and inclusivity. Children from all religions are welcomed and treated equally, ensuring that the institution remains a place of unity and peace. The Sisubhavan does not engage in any form of sponsorship for the children, despite the large number of young and vulnerable children it houses. Despite being officially recognized by the Orphanage Control Board, Janaseva Sisubhavan has yet to receive any government grants, making its work even more reliant on donations and community support.

Located at Aluva, near U.C. College, Janaseva Sisubhavan has built a reputation as a secure and nurturing environment for over 300 children. The children at the Sisubhavan receive both emotional and educational support, with the goal of preparing them to face the world with confidence. After receiving basic education and counseling, children take an entrance test to assess their academic abilities and are then admitted to various convent schools, where they can continue their education at an appropriate level.

In 2007, Janaseva expanded its operations with the construction of a dedicated boys' home at Nedumbassery. This facility, spread over 61/2 acres of land and housed in a 30,000 square-foot building, is designed to accommodate approximately 300 boys. The home provides all necessary amenities to ensure that the children live in comfort and security. The building includes primary classes up to the 4th standard, ensuring that the children receive a quality education in a safe environment.

The Sisubhavan also recognizes the importance of physical and extracurricular development in shaping well-rounded individuals. In 2008, the organization established a sports academy for its children, with the goal of offering better coaching and giving the children opportunities to excel in various sports. This initiative has already yielded remarkable results, with the children from Janaseva Sisubhavan making their mark not only in academics but also in extracurricular activities such as sports, drawing, and stage performances. The institution's football team has garnered attention at the state and district levels, and many children have demonstrated outstanding potential in a variety of areas.

Janaseva Sisubhavan's commitment to excellence and its impact on the community has not gone unnoticed. In 2002, it was honored with the prestigious Mother Teresa Award for Best Social Service by the Humanist National Committee. The organization was also recognized with the Kerala Raman Kutty Achan Award for the Best Orphanage. These accolades are a testament to the unwavering dedication and hard work of everyone involved in making Janaseva Sisubhavan a place of refuge, healing, and growth for the children it serves.

CONCLUSION

Under the auspicious of the United Nations in the 20th century many important initiatives have been taken to secure the best interest of the destitute child. A major milestone in the history of the children was the adoption of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989. Which says that States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse. According to this Convention, such a reintegration of the destitute

child shall take place in an environment which ensures the health, self-respect and dignity of the destitute child.

The NGOs have able to channelize its programmes for the upliftment of downtrodden sections such as the destitute children in the state. NGOs have the skill and ability to take important decisions regarding policy matters on behalf of the destitute children in the state.

The study investigates the activities of Janaseva Sisubhavan in rehabilitating destitute children. Majority of the staff in the institution is of the opinion that they have a family like atmosphere here. 65% responded that there are conscious efforts to develop interpersonal relationships.

Regarding condition inside the care home all the children at Janaseva Sisubhavan, responded that they have a family like atmosphere. 89.9% responded that there are conscious efforts to develop interpersonal relationships. The responses indicates that, the institution has able to impart basic human values to the inmates.

The pattern of responses of both the staff and the inmates at Janaseva Sisubhavan indicates that, the organization provides a conducive family like atmosphere for the comprehensive development of the children here. There are concrete steps to ensure interpersonal relationship among the children.

The questions regarding child labour children of Janaseva Sisubhavan responded that, they have awareness about it. Majority 59.7% reported that they have to do some sort of work before coming to the institution 66.7percent of them responded that they know the bad consequences of child labour. 73.6% believe that the institution has been working to eliminate child labour. the institution has rescue mechanisms for children from the menace of child labour.

In the opinion of staff at Janaseva Sisubhavan 90% believe that the institution has been working to eliminate child labour they also said that the institution has rescue mechanisms against child labour. The institution has been organizing awareness programs against child labour.

The responses of inmates and staff of Janaseva Sisubhavan shows that this institution is keen to eliminate child labour from the state. There are efforts to create awareness regarding the bad consequences of child labour and also this institution provides rescue mechanism to deal with child labour.

The development of a comprehensive and integrated approach in the form of a well-coordinated group effort by the non-governmental organizations in the realm of rehabilitation, seeks to secure the physical, intellectual and emotional well-being of the destitute children. The non-governmental organizations have able to create a conducive environment for the proper development of their personality, by providing the protection to the inmates. There are NGOs in the state of Kerala working towards making an effort to give the children equal opportunity, they help these destitute children by giving them admission in schools, giving them books, uniform etc. this makes them feel that they have support and they can also grow up and become respected member of the society.

The NGOs in the state has the responsibility to ensure proper socialization and reintegration of destitute children into the main stream of Kerala society. The Kerala Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Rules, 2003, says that Government shall recognize only such registered NGOs which can provide services of counselling and ensure a place of proper rehabilitation to the destitute children.

REFERENCES

1. Adenwall, M. (2006): Child Protection and Juvenile Justice System for Juvenile in Conflict with Law, Mumbai: Childline India Foundation
2. Ashwin.N. Karia, C (2002): *Human Rights*, Mumbai: Jamnadas& Co. Deb, Sibnath (1997): *Modification of a Deviant Street Children's Behavior: An In-depth Case Study*, New Delhi: Indian Journal of Criminology
3. Gabardine, J. (1976): *A Preliminary Study of Some Ecological Correlates of Child Abuse: The Impact of Socio-Economic Stress on Mothers*, New Delhi: Child Development.
4. Karin Lindblom Anna, (2006): *Non governmental Organization in International Law*, Stockholm: Cambridge Studies in International and Comparative Law.
5. Kulkarni, V.M. (1979): *Residential Programmes for Destitute Children, Organization and Administration*, New Delhi: National Institute of Public Cooperation & Child Development.
6. Light, R. (1973): *Abused and Neglected Children in America: A Study of Alternative Policies*. New Delhi: Harvard Educational Review.
7. Mishra, L. (2000): *child Labour in India*, New Delhi Oxford University Press.
8. Nozick Robert, (1980): *Anarchy, state and Utopia*, U.K: Basic Blackwell Oxford University Press.
9. 9. Rawls John, (1971): *A Theory of Justice*, New Delhi: Universal Law Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd.
10. Saksena, K.P. (2003): *Human rights and the constitution-Vision and Reality*, New Delhi: Yan Publishing House.