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# Non-Governmental Organizations and Protection of Destitute Children in Kerala: A Study on SOS Village Always

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### 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 under privileged groups. The origin of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century. They played an important role in freedom struggles all over the world. The NGOs have been playing a commendable job in the protection of bare minimum rights of vulnerable 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 the country and the state has a density of 819 people per km. The state 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.

SOS Children's Villages of India is a non-government, voluntary organization, committed to the care of destitute children in need and protection. This organization has able to fulfil its objective to help orphaned and homeless children by giving them a family, home and also a strong foundation for an independent and meaningful life.

**Keywords:** Destitute Children, INGO, NGO

### Introduction

Non-Governmental Organizations play a significant role in contemporary world. Their areas of operation extend from local levels to international level. NGOs exist in almost all countries and they have a variety of functions in the social and economic realms. NGOs vary in their methods and activities. Some acts primarily as lobbyists while others conduct programmes and activities focusing on certain under privileged groups.

The term, 'Voluntarism' is derived from the Latin word 'Voluntas' which means "will" or "freedom". The origin of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century. They played an important role in freedom struggles and anti-slavery movements across the world. The phrase NGOs has come into popular use by the establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1945. NGOs have contributed immensely to ensure social justice in different societies. Acknowledging this the UN has given consultative status to INGOs through Article (71) of the Chapter 10 of the United Nation's Charter (M.K. Singh and Ashutosh Kumar, 2003) <sup>[1]</sup>.

The NGOs have been playing a commendable job in the protection of bare minimum rights of vulnerable sections in the society. These organizations have able to protect the legitimate interests of marginalized and alienated groups all over the world. They are able to protect the social justice of downtrodden sections like women, children and minorities in different societies.

Non-governmental organizations have become professionally managed organizations. NGOs have been able to provide distributive justice in different societies. The marginalized sections in such societies have been able to access justice delivery system due to the activities of NGOs. Hence the study pertaining to the activities of NGOs has immense importance in contemporary society. The popular initiative to create associations is to pursue a public purpose.

It is being internationally recognized that the term NGO encompasses a wide variety of organizational forms. A key World Bank operational document-1995 Working with NGOs defined NGOs as "private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services or undertake community development" (World Bank, 1995). This World

Bank view is broadly consistent with popular usage. NGOs are generally associated with charitable activities that promote the public good rather than advancing private interests.

The basis of any NGO is cherished goals and aspirations of a group of people. In case of a non-governmental organization importance is given to independence pertaining to its decision making. In order to be effective an organization should be capable enough to manage its affairs.

“Destitute child refers to a child who has lost both parents and they have to live on the street” (Kulkarni, V.M. 1979) [2]. Destitute child also has been denied of protection in the society. These children are deprived of family, care, recognition and self-respect because of their marginal status in the society.

The destitute children consist of those children belonging to very poor or broken families having no protection, child workers, abandoned children and delinquent children.

Destitution of children is a universal phenomenon. Abandoned children can be seen in almost all societies. The number of destitute children in a country depends upon various factors, such as socio-cultural makeup, political climate and the level of economic development in that particular society. In the developed countries due to their economic advancement, they are able to provide good institutional care to destitute children. But in the developing and underdeveloped countries including India the condition of destitute children is pathetic.

The various factors Responsible for Destitution of Children include the downfall of joint family system, the emergence of nuclear family, industrialization, urbanization, etc.

Millions of destitute children are deprived of their right to survival, healthy environment, nutritional food, education and safe shelter. They live in insecure places such as abandoned buildings and streets. The children who live in the street are subject to many atrocities such as abuses, child labour, child trafficking, gender discrimination, inhuman treatment. Many destitute children in India are victims of mental and physical abuses. The society is unable to curb the violence towards destitute children and fail to ensure acceptable standards of living to these under privileged children.

Being a developing nation India's society is in transition. Even after seventy years of independence a large section of the Indian population lives in poverty. In the midst of poverty, destitution and abandonment of children are common. “Destitute child cannot develop the inherent qualities of a child because of the circumstances in he or she live” (Ainsworth and Fulcher, 1981).

The virtues of a child like love, affection, etc should also be developed by the destitute child with the help of conducive atmosphere under proper institutional care.

### **Destitute Children in Kerala**

Kerala is a state with lowest positive population growth rate in the country and the state has a density of 819 people per km. The state 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. Kerala also has the highest life expectancy, highest sex ratio and lowest infant mortality rate among all Indian state.

Kerala has succeeded to reduce child labour. Making primary education compulsory and available to all was the most important precondition to achieve this objective.

The state of Kerala has reported the least violation of rights of destitute children. The state has large number of non-

governmental organization for the protection and rehabilitation of destitute children. This does not mean that child labour and other atrocities have been completely eliminated in the state.

Compare to other states in India the percentage of child labour is comparatively low in Kerala. There is a close association between poverty and child labour. Child labour is as much as a cause of poverty. In most cases the destitute children are growing without schooling results in to unskilled labour and social powerlessness. It leads to child labour. “Child labourers grow up to be the poor who are forced to have their children work. Poverty and lack of social security are the main causes of child labour in Kerala.” Children from other states, even those as far away as northeastern states of India are brought in large number to work as housemaids, hotel suppliers, loaders in plywood factories and quarries and as helpers of construction workers in Kerala.

Under child labour the children have to do work on long hours on the street for very little pay on dull repetitive task, having to take much responsibility or being subject to intimidation. The work is detrimental to the health or education of the children or just to their childhood. The highest number of working children often subjected to exploitative and hazardous conditions. When considering the types of work in which children engage in Kerala, more than half of the children are engaged in nonagricultural activities like begging, prostitution etc. “80% of children are involved in agriculture, 19% of children employed work as domestic help. 90% working children are in rural area and 85% of working children are in unorganized sector.”

A growing phenomenon is using children as domestic workers in urban areas. The condition in which children work is completely unregulated and they are often made to work without basic amenities and very low wages, similar to the situation of slavery. The destitute children have to face physical, sexual and emotional abuse while working as child domestic workers. “The child line officials said the children were engaged in long hours of labour with minimal pay. Some of them were given food only two times a day. Some of the children were made to work from 5.30 am to 8 pm.” The new trend has been seen as increasing child labour in the wake of the influx of migrant labourers into the state, in recent years this has become the menace of human trafficking.

### **SOS Village Always and Protection of Destitute Children**

SOS children's Villages of India is a nonprofit, non-governmental, voluntary organization. SOS is committed to the care and protection of destitute children in the country. Today, there are 39 SOS Children's villages all over India. The organization has been functioning to provide family-based protection to the destitute and neglected children. It is estimated that, SOS provides about 50,000 orphan children and 15,000 young adults with a permanent new family, with a '24 hours a day' new SOS mother (or, sometimes, a father or couple) to provide family-based care. Family groups once formed are kept together as a SOS children's village in India. SOS children's village at Always came under the purview of this study. SOS children village Always founded in 1990. The SOS project at Always is committed to the rehabilitation of the destitute children here. The organization is also committed to advocating for the basic rights of destitute children. The institution supports families so that they can generate an income and stay together, the village provides family-based rehabilitation and protection for the children who have lost the care and protection of their parents.

The SOS project at Alwaye is a Social Centre in the form of a family strengthening programme which offers a comprehensive package of services to enable families to stay together and take good care of their children. In addition to providing day-care, they aim to raise awareness of hygiene, rights of children and give guidance on parenting skills.

SOS provides families with food, as well as educational support, medical care, vaccination and treatment. In order to families to generate income, SOS offers them vocational training. If self-help group do not exist, the SOS facilitates their creation for sake of destitute children. Those families have been working with SOS are able to generate an income through tailoring and making jewelry, candles and bamboo products if children's can no longer stay with their families, they find a loving home with one of the 15 SOS families in SOS village where they grow up with their sisters and brothers and are cared for by and SOS mother. Behind each house there is a small garden where vegetables and flowers are grown. The children play and exercise in the playground and support field on the premises of the SOS children village. When needed the SOS kindergarten can also provide day care for young children. Older children attend the local school alongside children from neighboring families thus integrating into the community.

The SOS Village which takes care of 179 children is spread over an eight and half acre area of land and uses materials well suited to the local climate and environment. Facilities include a Village Community Centre, 15 Family Houses, Hermann Gmeiner Social Centre, Kindergarten, and Clinic, playground, provision shop, staff residences and a Village facility.

There are 15 families in this SOS Children's Village which is situated in Aluva. In each of these homes there are around 10 children with varying ages and a mother to look after them. These 15 families of this SOS Children's Village are categorized in to three as 7 Christian, 6 Hindu and 2 Muslim families in miniature form of Society.

SOS Children's Villages looks for women to become SOS mothers whose personalities and ways of dealing with life are such that the children can orient themselves to them. Through the relationship she builds up with each individual child the SOS mother passes on a part of herself to the children. She guides the children's developmental process and works together with the village director and the other co-workers in the village to promote each child in a best-possible way. SOS Mothers were also an important factor for the development of SOS Children. So, the institution follows strict rules and regulations for the selection of Mother and gives the training. The SOS mother profession is continuously developed further.

In SOS all the children are optimistic and satisfied in their life. They made decisions and do their duties independently. All-SOS children are self-confident and had leadership quality within them. There are certain reasons like divorce, orphan, natural calamity, illegitimates, etc. that lead these children to SOS. The children admitted in SOS Children's Village by the approval of Child Welfare Committee. When a new child came here, SOS conducted a "home coming ceremony".

The Village Director controls the SOS Children's Village. Human side coworker, administrative co-worker and maintenance coworker stands under the Director for the better functioning of SOS. All staff like co-worker education, mothers, aunties, nurse, teachers, director accounts, secretary,

sponsors, village master, and store in charge, drivers, campus maintainer, and gardener also does their duties.

The organization has able to ensure successful careers to its inmates. The children became government employees, doctors, engineers, teachers etc. The three Youth Facilities Arunodaya, Sopan and Gharonda at Cochin started to meet the special needs of young adults are functioning well. There are 58 young adults undergoing schooling, university education, vocational training and apprenticeships.

SOS Health center aims to provide Primary Health care to the SOS Children's Village members and the local people around the institution. SOS children's village Alwaye has undertaken family strengthening programme in response to the need of many children who are deprived of their right to a caring family environment and their basic material, emotional, health and educational needs are neglected because their care-givers lack the capacity or commitment to adequately care for their children and it aims to empower families and communities to protect and care for their children, using a step-by-step family development planning process.

The investigator visited the SOS village at Alwaye and came to know that the institution has better physical and educational facilities to the inmates. The beauty of SOS Children's Village with its full greenery gives peace and calmness within the minds of the inmates here. There 15 homes in this 8.5 acre of land with gardens, and there are separate pavements for each home with lawns. In SOS Children's Village, specially designed houses have all facilities for the development of inmates. SOS Children's Village gets 24 hours water service from Kerala Water Authority. Toilet and Sanitation facility included in all Children's Home, SOS office and Guest Houses these facilities are adequate enough to all. The SOS children's Village is equipped with Computer, OHP Projector, LED Projector, Sound System etc. A very well-equipped computer lab situates in between the Kindergarten and Library here.

SOS Children have strong emotional control over their leisure of life and SOS lead an important role in shaping the children like this with adequate mechanisms in place. The institution builds up a character as such from the early ages itself. It is from SOS that they mould their character and shaped it for their better future.

There is a well-developed system of curricular and Co-curricular Activities available in SOS Children's Village.

Presently several students are benefiting for the educational facilities offered by SOS-village here. Kindergartens are established within the SOS Children's Village facility. These are fully equipped with necessary teaching tools, staff and infrastructure and adopt a play-way teaching methodology. There are varieties of activities in SOS village offered in the form of activity clubs to all children. They have various Clubs SOS Children's Village like music club, Nature Club, IT Club, Math Club, Science Club, Art Club and Literary Club etc.

The SOS Children as the part of the community mingle with the society. The local people have positive opinion about the functioning of SOS. The human values have been inculcating by this institution. SOS Children's Village is a Loving home for every child, which give due importance to value laden education. There is no fixed time for value education, rather each activity teaches some values in the children. There is a conscious effort on behalf of the SOS to inculcate cultural values.

Some orphanages became the centers of exploitation in Kerala. The evidences show there is conscious efforts to

ensure transparency in the working of this NGO. There is mechanism to ensure each and every inmate gets his or her due share. The study shows that equal importance has been given for curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular activities in SOS Children's Village, Aluva.

The Investigator identified certain conscious efforts in this institution to eliminate negative traits such as poor concentration, anger, solitary, selfishness, changing moods and disruptive behavior among the children. In this institution every child belongs to a family every child grows with love, every child grows with respect, every child grows with security and affection.

The SOS acknowledges that child protection is the means through which all other rights of a child can be provided. According to SOS if a child has to lead a dignified life in the childhood it can be possible within a family environment. The child protection framework needs to first take steps to ensure families are able to provide the children the basic amenities. Any civilized society must address the problems faced by the destitute and orphan children. The SOS develops a framework mechanism to rehabilitate the destitute children into a caring family like environment either through adoption or foster care and to provide these children with access to food, health-care and proper education.

### 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 child especially 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 neglected child.

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. The study reveals that the NGOs should retain its power to take independent decisions, it will enable them to work freely for the dedicated cause.

SOS Children's Villages of India is a non-government, voluntary organization, committed to the care of destitute children in need and protection. This organization has able to fulfil its objective to help orphaned and homeless children by giving them a family, home and also a strong foundation for an independent and meaningful life. SOS children's Village at Aluva offer good education and training in a holistic spirit to its inmates and prepare children for his or her better future.

Regarding the questions pertaining to the functioning of SOS village inmates here responded positively. All of them agreed that the organization is able to give career guidance. The organization sighted the international recognition in the past as an indicative of its good track record. All the children agreed that the institution ensures equality of opportunity to everyone.

75% of the respondents reported that they get every possible help from the institution to avail Govt. welfare scheme.

The study shows that the destitute children in Kerala are able to access their basic rights like food, shelter and healthcare

due to the working of NGOs such as SOS in the state. The majority of the inmates of the institution is satisfied with their basic rights. This organization has able to create an awareness regarding the child rights this ensure a comprehensive personality development of the children here.

There are a few NGOs in Kerala, where all categories of destitute children are rehabilitated. The work of the existing institutions providing the services to the destitute children be streamlined and strengthened. There should be the proper supervision of governmental agencies to ensure the accountability of these institutions.

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