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## Problems of Conflict Victimized Orphans and Community Concerns in Kashmir

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### Abstract

*Orphaned children are one of the most disadvantaged groups living in the community with an assortment of problems. The problems of orphans are universal in nature and the magnitude of problem varies from one geographical location to another. The common problems faced by orphans worldwide are at higher risk of harsh malnutrition, high mortality rates, subordinate levels of school attendance, and increased likelihood of child labour. These children are also more likely to be subjected to abuse, neglect, exploitation and are not mentioned the grief of losing their parents. There are lakhs of children living as orphans due to conflict, poverty, war and other causes. The orphans in Kashmir have developed a great challenge in Kashmir and there were a little number of orphans prior two decades. The two decade long conflict has made a paradigm shift in relation to care, protection and rehabilitation of such orphans. The number of orphans increased at an alarming rate as a result of loss of life due to armed conflict in Kashmir. There*

*are different Non Governmental Organizations working for orphans in local, national and international level. While taking care of these orphan children, they face various challenges and difficulties due to increased poverty and increased number of orphans. The concept of helping out the orphaned children is gradually changing from agencies or Non Governmental Organizations to different communities due to extensive community awareness. Nowadays the role of community in alleviation of orphan problem is significantly observed in different communities.<sup>1</sup>*

**Keywords:** orphans, problems, conflict, community, concern

### Introduction:-

Orphan is a child who has lost one or either parents or whose parents have abandoned him permanently (UNICEF). Orphans have been the most abandoned population. Orphans lack the regulation and compassion which is necessary

for the emotional development to take place. Death of parent accustom with a major change in the life of orphans. Death of a parent is always hurtful and harrowing for an orphan.<sup>2</sup>

The future of child wholly and solely depends upon parents, their mentality, their behavior and their belongings. A family with sound economical background can make their children sound in all spheres of life. But unfortunate thing for an orphan is that he or she lacks this valuable guardian i.e parents. The orphaned children miss their parental support while as thousands of families lost their bread earners. It becomes impossible for an orphan to survive smoothly in this expensive and cunning world. As far as orphans of Jammu and Kashmir are concerned they are in constant strain, stress, anxiety due to the situation of armed conflict from the last two decades and Kashmir region in particular has been most affected. The conflict has led to the loss of human resources and caused infrastructural damage at a very large scale. In the valley of Kashmir, the number of orphans is far beyond than normal than other states of India.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Objectives:-**

1. To figure out the major problems of conflict victimized orphans

2. To elucidate the community concerns towards the problems of orphans

3. To come across some possible suggestions to trickle from these problems

#### **Impacts of Kashmir Conflict:-**

Since 1989 when armed conflict started in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, property worth hundreds of thousands was raised to the ground or else destroyed. It led to social disorder, social disorganization, educational backwardness, mental and physical health deterioration, mass psychological depression, mass humiliation, extreme helplessness and the degenerated cultural aggression. The conflict in the state had resulted in loss of a significant number of people. The death of a family member has created a challenge to the family as a whole socially as well as economically. Most distressing aspect of the conflict is that prominent victims of violence during the last two decades were the youth. They at once become the targets, perpetrators as well as survivors of conflict. While their childhood was lost in the incidents of armed conflict, they could not be socialized in appropriate cultural and religious ethos of Kashmir.

During the last two decades the societies of Kashmir have scattered, leaving children either orphaned or as household heads. The loss

of a parent generated a number of problems which has to be reflected practically in a number of ways in day to day life of the rest family members. More commonly the widows has to be psychology under constant worry and economically dependent on the labour of their children.

Conflict destroys the safe environment provided by a family, leads to inadequate nutrition, education and Unemployment. The civic services became hard to find. Education, civic amenities and health care remained there in name. A number of schools have been destroyed since 1989 in Kashmir during the course of military confrontation. Strikes, security threats, bomb blasts, arrest of teachers have left the educational performance and Health care facilities in the Valley paralyzed. In these conflict ridden societies, some dreaded disease could not be stopped to emerge with dangerous implications. Every family on an average with conflict has rendered family members as patients of cardiological, neurological, oncological, cancer related and other dreaded diseases. However, the most common disorder developed among people as a consequence of the conflict is of psychological nature.

The armed conflict in the Kashmir valley has resulted in the hardship of the Kashmir

societies through the channels of reduction of the capital income and employment, physical destruction of agricultural resources, reduced investment and mass displacement of human resources. In addition to falling within grey zone, death, conscription, injury, disappearance, curfew and other mobility restrictions have added fuel to the fire.

The impoverished families have a direct impact on their children in a number of ways such as compelling young kids to work at the expense of their schooling, under-nourishment and malnutrition. Thus result in the overall backwardness of the Kashmir and particularly of those families who are the victims of the two decade long conflict in Kashmir. Yet another impact of the conflict in Kashmir is the human rights violations. The excessive presence of security forces on the one side and militants on the other side has resulted in human rights violations in whole Kashmir. Movement of both of these is characterized by the damage of life under constant vigilance, restrictions of movement, frequent harassment and intimidations leading to direct violation of civil and political rights. Meanwhile the check points, surveillance operations, interrogations, search of homes and work places, restrictions on the press and other activities all have affected normal interactions and community life in Kashmir.<sup>4</sup>

### **Problems of Victimized Orphans:-**

With the increase in number of orphans in Kashmir, which had a direct impact on the inadequate resources allocated to them resulted in multiple challenges and problems and these problems are increasing day to day. The major problem that people are suffering from is armed conflict which later on leads to following problems given below.

#### **❖ Accommodation Problem**

First and foremost the most important problem of orphans that we have figured out is related to their shelter. After the death of their parents, the children are not taken carefully neither by their patri-kins nor by matri-kins. Though their near and distant relatives and some family friends help them for some months or years but later on with the passage of time, they stop helping them slowly. In that situation, orphans are compelled to come out of their first relative's house and search for their own accommodation.

#### **❖ Economic Problem**

Second, economically orphans become debased after the death of their parents, especially in the younger cases. Relative's financial help continue for some time, but afterwards they had to come out of their homes for some economic activity for earning livelihood. The only means available for them

to earn their earnings are domestic work, handicrafts and child labour where they get immensely exploited and harassed. They are not even paid equal wages, if paid that too after a long period of time.

#### **❖ Educational Problem:-**

The most dangerous problem that orphans are confronted with is that they remain devoid from the field of education. The death of their parents especially their bread earner led to the complete halt of regular income to the worried families. So, their children could not pay even the meager amount of fee in the educational institutions. This directly impacts their results.

#### **❖ Social Disorganization:-**

Orphans also suffer in society the matters of family, marriage and kinship. It has been observed that their unit of family gets fully disorganized. In this social environment, neither the patriarchal authority could be established nor could the traditional norms and values be legitimized and maintained. As a result, there is significant degree of erosion in the valuation ethos and social control mechanisms within and outside their families.

#### **❖ Feeling of Insecurity:-**

Another crucial problem faced by majority of orphans is their feeling of mental and physical insecurity. In fact, the situation

created by the absence of head or father of these household is primarily responsible for this menace.

❖ **Health Deterioration:-**

One of the dangerous problems which orphans face at the present time is related to their health. It has been generally observed that like other vulnerable sections of society, these orphans also have developed abnormal health scenario in which they could not get minimum health needs fulfilled on the one hand and on the other hand they could not protect themselves from most dangerous diseases like neurological, cardiological, psychological and oncological diseases.

❖ **Total Dependence:-**

The most undesirable aspect of the life of orphans in Kashmir is their total dependence on others who include relatives, friends and neighbors. This dependence is of material and psychological nature.

❖ **Deviance and Delinquency:-**

Lack of proper authority, socialization and social control in the family has created some degree of deviance and delinquency among some orphans. It follows that in a situation in which the growth and development of the personalities of orphans took place, the rise of such undesirable trends is unavoidable.

❖ **Social Disruption:-**

Family is the basic social unit for the care, socialization and emotional support of children. The death or injury to family member has created a great challenge to the family as a unit, through displacement, dispersal and intense economic and social pressures. The loss of family member turns into a problem with chain reaction that significantly affects people in all spheres of life.<sup>5</sup>

❖ **Loss of Service Access:-**

The conflict has a direct impact on the accessibility of various services like civic amenities, education and health. Strikes, bomb blasts, security threats, arrest of teachers and absenteeism have also taken a heavy toll on educational performance. Further, the mobilization of health care professionals remained restricted and disturbed adding more to inaccessibility of health services.

❖ **Impoverishment:-**

There has not been more data produced on the impoverishment of Kashmiri society due to two decades long conflict. However, the reduction of the capital, income and employment are directly associated with range of factors, including substantial destruction of agricultural resources, reduced investment and mass displacement resulted in direct impoverishment of the Kashmiri society. The

impoverishment of victimized families impacts upon children in a number of ways.<sup>6</sup>

❖ **Civil and Political Violations:-**

The excessive presence of security forces has led to human rights violations in Kashmir. The militarization of society, which is characterized by the strain of life under constant vigilance, frequent harassment, restrictions of movement and intimidations leading to direct violation of civil and political rights. Meanwhile, the check points, interrogations, surveillance operations, search of homes and at places of work, restrictions on the press and other activities all have affected normal interactions and community life in Kashmir.

❖ **Transformation in Roles and Responsibilities:-**

Kashmir has witnessed transformation of families and communities for survival. The effects of conflict first lead the transformation in recruitments, like children were employed. The second was that the employment of people on exploitative basis and children in hazardous occupations. It had resulted because families undergo times of deprivation and material loss, and required to turn to their children as an economic resource. These restrictions have also imposed threat on recreation & play.

❖ **Vulnerability to Children:-**

The threat to children during conflict in Kashmir was marked, according to gender, age, religious, social or ethnic status and position within the family. The impact of conflict has created a new group of widows and orphans in huge number, while as their number prior to 1989 was meager.

❖ **Future at Stake:-**

Last but not least, orphans face the acute feeling that their future will not be bright. In a situation in which these orphans live and the societal response they have received has compelled them to think on these lines. In actuality, they seem more concerned about their future career, business, occupation, employment which does not look encouraging in the present circumstances.<sup>7</sup>

**Community Concerns towards Orphans:-**

An estimate by a United Kingdom (UK) based charity Save the Children; Kashmir has 215,000 orphans out of which more than 37% have lost one or both parents to the prevailing conflict. More than 15% of these orphan children live in orphanages. Before 1990 most orphan children were rehabilitated within extended families and adopted by relatives without any financial help from the State. Due to the ongoing conflict, the number of orphans increased exponentially and the families struggled to take care. Some orphans had no



extended families, some families were too poor to look after their relative's children and others worried about their safety at home. The traditional role of society towards orphans started changing and various Non-Governmental Organizations took over the role of extended families and homes got substituted by orphanages. Most of these orphanages are run by charities, Non-Governmental Organizations and some by the State. Reportedly most of these orphanages are not registered. Though let us not forget, 85% of these orphans are living within community without any help from the State.

In these orphanages, usual focus is on providing physical rehabilitation like food, clothing, care and safe shelter but hardly any emphasis on the psychological wellbeing and over all personality development. There is no evidence that orphanages are helpful in the long run and are believed to have negative influence. These institutionalized children have poor psychosocial development due to insufficient emotional stimulation. These children become institutionalized and are not able to blend in or perform in the society to their potential. They are always reminded of being orphans and dependent. They are deprived of the normal childhood as they are expected to be mindful of the local rules twenty four seven. They are mostly devoid of any personal preference and

have to do what is being told. This gives these orphans a sense of rejection, worthlessness, low self-esteem leading to various emotional problems.

In another side, it is fair to say that if these orphanages had not come to rescue, these children may have become victims of hunger, violence, exploitation and what not. Most of these charities are working in excellent faith and have done a commendable job. These poor orphan children have been neglected by society and condemned by the state.

The Jammu and Kashmir Rehabilitation Council was created in 1996 with one of the objectives to look after any orphans who are product of the conflict. Although it claims to provide psychological, physical and economic rehabilitation but no one has heard of it on ground.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights had recommended to the Jammu and Kashmir government to draft a Child Policy and set up State Commission for Protection of Child Rights back in 2010. It had made several other recommendations to ensure the orphans rights including that "The orphanages should function instead as boarding schools, the state government should do away with the nomenclature of 'orphanages' or 'orphans' which

could be stigmatizing as well as incorrect in many cases”.

The State Government had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2013 for implementation of Integrated Child Protection Scheme in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. But no proposal was submitted for the release of grants. There are no policies in the state for rehabilitation or safeguarding of these orphans and neither did the state government bother to act on any recommendations.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Suggestions:-**

Most extended families who had to give up these children because of meager amount of income would be happy to have them back if due financial assistance is provided by the state government. Also the State can give an option of adoption for families who want to come forward after a due process. It is a big blow to the humanity, if these orphans are left at the mercy of orphanages forever. Social welfare department needs to wake up and utilize all resources from central schemes and Non Governmental Organizations. A special department or even a cell can be started in the social welfare department to collaborate with various Non Governmental Organizations, orphanages and civil society to come up with a joint working plan. That would entail educating

masses, advertising benefits of fostering and implementation. It should be made easy for people so that they can come forward minimizing the red tape. The money currently spent to run these orphanages can be pooled from both State and Non Governmental Organizations and used to support the families who are willing to raise these children. The State needs to come up with the laws and checks to prevent any kind of abuse of these children either in orphanages or in community. If the State continues to fail, the civil societies would have to take charge of this serious matter. Civil societies play very important role in rehabilitating these children and utilizing resources for integrating them in the community than promoting orphanage culture. Civil society can take on various stake holders including the State, Non Governmental Organizations, charities and international bodies to start the noble process.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Conclusion:-**

Children are the backbone of the society and citizens of tomorrow. It fits to the every child in the society whether he is living with his/her parents or without parents. But it is very deplorable that some of the children like orphans become disadvantaged and victimized due to the absence of parents and support of guidance in the society. The society should



respect and treat equally all children .It is only possible to do so if a lot of awareness on children from different sources is organized. It is also necessary for the people of all walks of life to help and support orphans in their society directly or indirectly .If it is done, definitely that particular society will experience children without any sort of discrimination in their community and it will become exemplary to the whole society. The state government also needs to support fully these orphans and work with other stakeholders to rehabilitate them in community. These orphans deserve to live in society with dignity and not to be neglected, used or institutionalized.

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