

DEFENDERS OF DIGNITY: THE ROLE OF NGOS IN SUPPORTING DISABLED CHILDREN IN INDIA

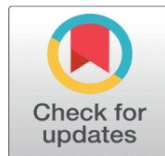
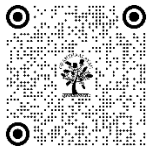
Subin Thomas ¹ , Sheen Thankalayam ² , Dr. Parashurama Kamath ³ , Neenu Anna Ninan ⁴ 

¹ Research Scholar, Alliance School of Law, Alliance University, Bangalore, India

² Research Scholar, Department of Media Studies, CHRIST University, Bangalore, India

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, CHRIST University, Bangalore

⁴ Assistant Professor, The Oxford College of Law, Bangalore, India



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Corresponding Author

Subin Thomas,
subinpolackal@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Children are considered precious gifts and hold the key to the future of any nation. They represent hope, potential and the promise of a better tomorrow. Access to education, healthcare, nutrition and opportunities for social and emotional progress are essential for the holistic development of children. However, children with disabilities struggle to access these rights and explore their inner potential. Using the term 'differently abled children' instead of 'disabled children' is a more inclusive and respectful way to refer to children with disabilities or special needs. Despite their challenges, these children have unique abilities and strengths and focus on their capabilities rather than their limitations. Governments and NGOs are continually working to address the challenges encountered by differently abled children in India and to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for their development and growth. In India, NGOs are crucial in assisting the government and other institutions in their efforts to protect and support children with disabilities. Their effort and dedication considerably improve the lives of differently abled children and advance an inclusive and equitable society. The research paper provides an overview of the current issues confronting disabled children in India, such as societal stigma, limited access to resources and other barriers. It emphasizes the crucial role of NGOs as 'defenders of dignity' in addressing the challenges faced by disabled children in India.

Keywords: Non-Governmental Organizations, Disabled, Differently Abled Children, Child Rights

1. INTRODUCTION

Children represent potential and aspirations for the future of every country, and they are the face of hope. Armed with their intrinsic talents and distinctive characteristics, they stand for the hope of a brighter tomorrow. The fostering of these developing potentials depends on the holistic development of children, which includes their education, health, nutrition, and emotional development. The rights and welfare of differently abled children serve as a sign of society's dedication to its weaker members in a world that strives for inclusivity and equity. The journey toward guaranteeing a

dignified and empowered life for differently abled children has been both tough and exciting in India, a nation known for its rich cultural tapestry and diverse population. Differently abled children have extraordinary qualities that merit respect despite the obstacles that make them unique. It is essential to pay more attention to their potential than their limits. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), through their unwavering dedication and innovative approaches, not only contribute to the improvement of the welfare of children with disabilities but also promote the advancement of a more inclusive and egalitarian society.

This paper aims to provide insight into the prevailing challenges faced by impaired children in India, encompassing societal biases, limited availability of resources, and several difficult obstacles. The central focus of the study, however, revolves around the pivotal role that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) perform as 'defenders of dignity'. This article highlights the significant influence of these organizations in addressing the issues encountered by impaired children in India through a comprehensive exploration of their diverse contributions. The paper will also discuss the evolving challenges faced by NGOs in their mission to uplift disabled children.

1.1. DISABLED TO DIFFERENTLY-ABLED

The transition from 'disabled' to 'differently abled' requires reevaluating and reconceiving our understanding and discourse regarding people with disabilities. Traditionally, the term 'disabled' emphasizes the limitations or difficulties that people with impairments may face, emphasizing their perceived inability to perform specific duties or activities. This language has the potential to reinforce negative stereotypes and feelings of fragility or helplessness. In contrast, the term 'differently abled' aims to highlight the unique abilities, knowledge, and skills that individuals with disabilities possess while recognizing that they may view the world through a different lens.

The main objective of using the phrase 'differently abled' is to bring attention to the abilities of people with disabilities. It shifts the focus from their limits to their abilities and potential. It promotes the idea that everyone has their own set of abilities and challenges. The utilization of this concept has the potential to mitigate negative societal perceptions and discriminatory treatment of those with disabilities, thereby fostering an environment with a more positive and inclusive outlook. It gives disabled people more power by valuing their individuality and highlighting their accomplishments.

2. RIGHTS OF DIFFERENTLY-ABLED CHILDREN

The rights of children with disabilities are an integral part of both human rights and social justice, as they strive to promote the fair treatment, empowerment, and integration of children with disability. The following are some of the rights most usually underlined while discussing the rights of differently abled children (Baxipatra, 2013).

2.1. RIGHT TO NON-DISCRIMINATION

Every kid, no matter what their aptitudes are, should have the same opportunities in school and in life. This necessitates the removal of material, structural, and perceptual barriers that prevent children with disabilities from fully participating in society (Baxipatra, 2013).

2.2. RIGHT TO LIFE

In order to thrive, children with impairments need not only physical but also mental and nutritional support. This involves working to eliminate harmful practices or biases that devalue their lives and speaking out against them.

2.3. RIGHT TO HEALTH AND REHABILITATION

They need to have access to therapeutic and interventional medical practices that are tailored to their unique conditions. All aspects of a person's development are addressed during rehabilitation, from physical to occupational to verbal to emotional.

2.4. RIGHT TO EDUCATION

The unique requirements of children with special needs need schools to be equipped with trained staff, adequate materials, and supportive environments. Because of this privilege, students are able to attend regular schools and learn alongside their age group.

2.5. RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION

There have to be places where these kids may voice their opinions, have a say in matters that affect them, and become involved in their communities. This highlights the significance of listening to and respecting their stories and aspirations (Baxipatra, 2013).

2.6. RIGHT TO PROTECTION

Given their potential vulnerabilities, separate safeguards should be in place to protect them from abuse, neglect, and harm. This highlights the importance of providing both a safe and emotionally satisfying environment.

2.7. RIGHT TO ACCESSIBILITY

Buildings and websites intended for public use should be designed with accessibility in mind. This makes it so the kids can confidently explore their environments on their own.

2.8. PARTICIPATION IN LEISURE ACTIVITIES AND RIGHT TO RECREATION

Playgrounds, cultural centres, and other fun places should be easily accessible to them. Cultural programming and events should also provide them with a platform to share their perspectives and experiences. They have a right to grow up in families that love them and provide for their unique needs. Surrogate care solutions, used when traditional family care is not an option, should model themselves after the warmth and order of a conventional family (Baxipatra, 2013).

2.9. RIGHT TO A FAMILY LIFE

Disability allowances and other forms of community assistance, such as assistive technology, should be made available by local and state governments. This highlights the significance of establishing conditions in which children with disabilities may thrive, free from unnecessary hardships and social supervision.

2.10. RIGHT TO SOCIAL PROTECTION

By recognizing the importance of these rights and working to put them into practice, we can build communities in which children with disabilities are celebrated for their talents, ambitions, and the unique perspectives they bring to the world.

3. DIFFICULTIES FACED BY THE DIFFERENTLY ABLED

India is a diverse and democratic country, yet its disabled citizens still confront many obstacles. Despite the existence of laws protecting them, many children from low-income households still lack access to even the most fundamental protections and opportunities. Physical and mental hardships often combine to condemn children to a life of dependence and misery. Even though the Indian Constitution protects the rights of all citizens, including those with disabilities, many people with mental disabilities continue to experience harsh and brutal mistreatment and that includes of being chained or wrongfully imprisoned. It is underlined that such treatment is against the law, and that the Supreme Court of India has affirmed the constitutionality of reservation laws protecting the rights of people with disabilities.

The disabled population in India continues to struggle with a number of issues, including those listed below.

3.1. DISCRIMINATION AND INEQUALITY

Despite having their rights protected by the Indian constitution, people with disabilities often experience bias and exclusion while dealing with government agencies, the workplace, and public benefit programmes. Because of prejudice, they are denied basic protections, which makes living difficult. They may have better lives if given the same chances as everyone else. However, they frequently experience marginalization in India as a result of pervasive prejudice and inequality (Vispute, 2021).

3.2. ILLITERACY

Persons with disabilities in India, especially those from disadvantaged socioeconomic origins, have a disproportionately high rate of illiteracy. Due to financial constraints and physical limitations, they are unable to attend school and hence stay functionally illiterate. Due to their lack of education, they are unable to apply for occupations that would accommodate their impairment, making it difficult for them to support themselves. As a result, they have less options in terms of employment and financial security. A staggering 45 per cent of India's crippled population is illiterate, compared to 26 per cent of the general population, according to the country's 2011 Census (Vispute, 2021).

3.3. LOSS OF SOCIAL STATUS

People are hardwired to care about how others see them, and this concern is closely tied to their level of education, employment, and financial security. People who are disabled in India's complex social, religious, and cultural environment sometimes face exclusion and humiliation. Many people have a hard time getting the education, career, and financial independence that are necessary for gaining social standing. Although there are plans in place to bolster their capabilities, these plans have been rendered ineffectual due to poor execution (Vispute, 2021). As a result, many disabled people in India face discrimination and a lower social status since their impairments are seen as an obstacle to success.

3.4. INHUMAN TREATMENT

Disabled people experience prejudice and harsh treatment from many sectors of society. They face apathy instead of the help they need despite the severity of their physical impairments. Government institutions such as Tehsil, Social Welfare Departments, banks, and post offices often fail to provide enough guidance to the public, resulting in many repeat visits. They have trouble in getting medical certificates, and they are abused for financial gain during this time. Due to being treated so poorly, they lose hope and self-esteem. Although the government has made accommodations for people with disabilities, many qualified handicapped people still have trouble finding employment (Vispute, 2021). The constant abuse from society and government bodies might drive them to a point of desperation where they would consider extreme measures like suicide. Recognizing their rights and treating them with respect and dignity is critical for society as a whole.

3.5. LOSS OF IDENTITY

Identity is a common struggle for those who are disabled. Disabled persons sometimes feel that their disabilities overwhelm their personal identities, despite the fact that everyone is recognized and accepted based on who they are. Their efforts are made more difficult in this day of globalization and advanced technology (Vispute, 2021). Whether their disability is the result of birth or an accident, individuals confront challenges that most people cannot even begin to understand. Some of them have college degrees, yet they still have a hard time finding work that pays well. Unfortunately, many people are misinformed about the government aid that is available to them. As a result, it is of critical importance that disabled people do not lose their sense of self in modern society.

3.6. UNEMPLOYMENT

Even for those who are college-educated, finding work as a disabled person in India is quite difficult. The PWD Act of 1995 requires a 3% reservation of employment openings for people with disabilities, although these positions are often empty or filled by people who are not impaired. The Supreme Court and the High Court have issued mandates for the filling of certain positions, although qualified people with disabilities continue to confront barriers to employment (Vispute, 2021). They have a disproportionately high unemployment rate while having a right to work that may enhance their economic and social standing. Although the government offers financing programmes for the disabled in an effort to promote entrepreneurship, many disabled people are unable to take advantage of these programmes owing to misunderstandings, unfair treatment, or red tape. Basically, disabled individuals in India continue to confront institutional hurdles to work and economic advancement, despite legislative measures to the contrary.

The challenges that disabled people face have always been significant causes for worry and significant obstacles on their path to a successful job, a fulfilling life, and a happy existence.

4. THE CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS FOR THE DIFFERENTLY ABLED

Although the Constitution of India does not specifically include the rights of people with disabilities, it does give certain protections for disabled people, including children, via its different sections. Articles 14 and 15(1) emphasize nondiscrimination and equality, guaranteeing that people of all backgrounds, including those with impairments, be treated fairly (India, 1950). Article 21 strengthens the right to life, including the right to live with dignity, and Article 21A requires all children between the ages of 6 and 14 to receive a free and obligatory education. Articles 23 and 24 serve as protections against forced labour and child labour, preventing the exploitation of marginalized people such as handicapped children. Meanwhile, Articles 39 (f) and 41 highlight the state's obligation towards citizens in circumstances of disability and the need to provide children with safe and nurturing surroundings where they are protected from abuse and neglect (India, 1950).

Disabled children in India are guaranteed protection and rights under different provisions of the Indian Constitution. This includes the state's responsibility to care for their welfare and development in the absence of direct guardianship, as well as their right to a decent existence, education, and protection against exploitation.

5. LEGAL FRAMEWORK RELATED TO DIFFERENTLY-ABLED CHILDREN IN INDIA

Awareness of the need to protect the rights of people with disabilities has grown dramatically over the last 15 years, both domestically and internationally. Following the United Nations "Decade for Disabled Persons" (1993 - 2002), a worldwide movement has promoted the inclusion of people with disabilities. The outlook of government officials, experts, and NGOs has shifted as a result of this shift. By the mid-1990s, disability problems had moved from the realm of welfare to that of basic human rights. This change highlighted the need for laws aimed at empowering people (Aneraye et al., 2023).

A community that welcomes people of various abilities is implicitly supported by the Indian Constitution, which guarantees rights like equality, freedom, and dignity for everyone. Article 41 of the Directive Principles requires the State to guarantee citizens the right to labour, education, and public assistance under certain conditions, such as disability. The Constitution's Articles 243G and 243W provide local urban and rural organizations authority for plan implementation, while the Seventh Schedule gives states responsibility for handicapped aid. These municipal authorities' responsibilities towards protecting the rights of the disabled and the mentally retarded are laid out in detail in Schedules 11 and 12 (India, 1950).

Article 253 of the Indian Constitution mandated the creation of the Persons with Disabilities Act of 1995, a landmark piece of legislation that aims to provide people with disabilities more say in their own lives and guarantee them equitable access to resources. The Act is all-inclusive and treats rehabilitation as a fundamental human right. This is in keeping with the declaration for equal rights and participation made by the Asia-Pacific area. It broadens the definition of "disability" to include conditions including deafness, blindness, and mental illness. Education, employment, vocational training, and social security are just a few of the many areas that are covered by the Act. At least 3% of all job openings in private sector organizations must be reserved for individuals with disabilities, with the quota allocated differently for various impairments. This limitation extends to government-run initiatives to alleviate poverty as well as government-

funded academic institutions. In addition, the Act mandates that businesses have a goal of employing at least 5% of individuals with disabilities. Health care coverage, financial aid, and protection from discrimination in a range of public settings are other features. A Chief Commissioner would be selected centrally, and state commissioners would be appointed to oversee the Act's execution. However, even with these safeguards in place, there are still problems, most notably with respect to the 3% of government and public sector employment that is set aside as a reserve (India, 1995). The Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Act of 1995 recognized seven disabilities, later expanded to twenty-one under the Rights of PWD Act, 2016. Despite legal provisions, implementation across government administrations remains inconsistent, with PWD defined as those having at least 40% disability certified by a medical authority (Vispute, 2021).

In 1999, the Parliament introduced an Act establishing the National Trust to support individuals with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation, and Multiple Disability. This Act establishes the structure and accountability of the Trust, including the formation of its Board and Local Committees. The legislation emphasizes legal guardianship and promotes an environment for maximum independent living for these individuals. The Trust's goals are to enhance support systems, especially for those without families, ensuring their well-being and protection. Furthermore, the Trust champions equal rights and opportunities, manages guardianship duties and establishes essential facilities and services like residential care, foster care, and counselling (India, 1999).

The Rehabilitation Council of India Act (1992) aims to provide a single registration for rehabilitation professionals, standardize rehabilitation training, and recognize associated institutions. The Act defines those with disabilities as having one or more of the following impairments: mobility impairments, hearing impairments, cognitive impairments, or both. The Council is primarily responsible for establishing standards for handicapped service providers, enforcing those standards, and launching disability rehabilitation training programmes (India, 1992).

The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, which prioritizes handicapped people's access to opportunity, protection of their rights, and full participation in society, was established in 2006 (India, 2006). This program aims to increase people's independence in all areas of life, especially in economics, education, and health. As part of this effort, a group headed by Dr. Sudha Kaul introduced a bill in 2012 protecting the rights of people with disabilities. With this proposed legislation, the Persons with Disabilities Act of 1995 would have been replaced with a more inclusive rights-based approach in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). It categorized different types of impairments, pushed for a more restricted form of guardianship, and pushed for disabled people to be included in the workforce and in schools. Some people felt that the new law promoted private mental health institutions and made compulsory admissions to such facilities easier, which might violate the rights of those who are mentally impaired. There have been requests for a reconsideration of the Act due to its problematic parts.

6. THE ROLE OF NGOS IN UPHOLDING THE RIGHTS OF DIFFERENTLY-ABLED CHILDREN

The work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) advocating for children's rights and welfare has been crucial. Their policy has evolved over time from one focused mostly on welfare to one that also prioritizes growth, autonomy, and the protection of children's rights. They record and study extensively to understand the real difficulties kids encounter and use that knowledge to fine-tune their solutions. Some of the preventative steps they've taken include advocating for legislation reforms, producing alternative reporting on children's rights, and developing partnerships. In addition, they put an emphasis on educating the public, responding quickly to rights abuses, and even resorting to direct action if required. They organize into lobbying organizations and work with government officials to sway influential policymakers. Their efforts go down to local levels, involving kids and communities in meaningful ways that have far-reaching effects. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) aggressively pursue, from many different angles, a future in which children's rights are respected and fiercely protected. When it comes to the safety and security of children with disabilities, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in society. Being the guardians of hope, NGOs bridge service gaps, fight for marginalized people's rights, and provide them a place to be heard. Here is how they look out for the well-being of children with special needs in their care:

6.1. PROMOTING INCLUSIVITY

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) promote inclusion by working to make society more welcoming to children with special needs. Campaigns are launched to educate the public, lessen prejudice, and encourage tolerance. In

doing so, they provide a welcoming environment in which children with disabilities may feel accepted, valued, and loved despite the challenges they face.

6.2. EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

Educational Programs and Policies: Learning Should Be A Right, Not A Privilege. Physical impediments, ineffective teaching methods, and negative social attitudes may all make it difficult for impaired children to get a good education. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) often fund the creation of specialized educational institutions, vocational training programmes, and inclusive education programmes for kids with special needs.

6.3. HEALTH AND REHABILITATION

Disabled children have access to a wide range of health and rehabilitation services because to the efforts of several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). They provide more than just medical care; they also offer therapy and counselling to help kids reach their full potential.

6.4. POLICY ADVOCACY

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) advocate with governments and other decision-making authorities to protect the rights of children with disabilities. One way to do this is to advocate for policies and programmes that are more accessible to children with special needs.

6.5. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Scientific Investigation Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) conduct scientific investigations on the difficulties experienced by children with disabilities. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) may better address these issues by first thoroughly analyzing them.

6.6. SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND LIVELIHOOD PROGRAMS

Because of the inevitable adulthood of people with disabilities, numerous NGOs provide training and employment opportunities for the impaired youth of today. The training they get via these programmes allows them to support themselves economically and socially.

6.7. EMERGENCY SERVICES

Help for Disabled Children in Times of Crisis Emergency services are essential in the event of a natural catastrophe or armed conflict. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are crucial to rescue efforts, providing secure housing and delivering timely medical and mental health care to individuals in need.

6.8. NETWORKING AND COLLABORATIONS

NGOs often team together with other groups, including government agencies and international organizations. Their collective effect is multiplied when members of these networks pool their expertise, resources, and best practices.

6.9. AWARENESS AND TRAINING

Workshops and training sessions are provided by NGOs to parents, educators, and community members so that they are aware of the needs of children with disabilities and have the skills and knowledge to aid these children successfully.

6.10. LEGAL AID

Some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide free legal representation to low-income families with disabled children who are victims of abuse, neglect, or prejudice.

Thus, the NGOs serve as a ray of light and a safety net for families with challenged children. They fill up the holes that the government has left, use novel methods, and fight for equal opportunities for children with disabilities. They are helping to create a more accepting and compassionate society by doing this for these kids.

7. CONCLUSION

The phrase 'differently abled children' accurately captures the innate abilities and qualities that are unique to these people. A more thorough awareness and appreciation of the diverse qualities each person possesses may be developed in society by placing more emphasis on evaluating an individual's possibilities than their limitations. The shift in perspective makes it easier to create an environment that supports these people's overall development and maturation. The efforts of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been a source of encouragement and a driving force in the progress made in resolving the problems these kids face. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have evolved into crucial partners in the promotion of diversity, equity, and empowerment as a result of their unwavering dedication, enthusiastic backing, and creative solutions. They have not only supported legal changes and public awareness, but they have also established specialized programs that address the unique needs of differently abled children. Education, healthcare, skill development, and social integration are examples of interventions that aim to eliminate barriers and break the cycle of exclusion. The importance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will continue to be crucial in the future. These people play a significant role in bridging the gap between people's hopes and their realization, enabling good changes in the lives of children with disabilities. Additionally, their efforts help create a society that is marked by inclusivity and equity. It is important to recognize that the process is ongoing while we celebrate their accomplishments. We can work together to create a future in which every child has the opportunity to realize their full potential and emerge as a catalyst for positive change within their families, communities, and the entire country by supporting non-governmental organizations (NGOs), engaging in cross-sector collaboration, and persistently advocating for the rights of children with disabilities.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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