



**Nisha Nair V**  
**State Assistant Program Manager**  
**- Social Development**

# TACKLING THE HYDRA CALLED PENURY

## HOW MULTIFACETS OF POVERTY ARE DEALT WITH IN ASHRAYA

---

### ABSTRACT

One of the distinctive features of the destitute is that they are invisible. The society ignores them and they themselves are incapable of reaping the benefits of Government's poverty alleviation programs. Unlike the poor who struggle to keep both ends meet, the destitute are always in a state of chronic want.

When a policy maker is unable to distinguish between the poor and the ultra poor, the program fails to reach out to the ultra poor. So delineating between poor and ultra poor should be a matter of grave concern for a policy maker empathetic about those living in abject poverty (Devereux 2003).

To specifically address the ultra poor, Government of Kerala, in 2003, introduced Ashraya tailored to tackle the problems faced by the destitute. Unlike many Governmental programs which focus on one aspect of poverty Ashraya attempted to confront various aspects of poverty.

This paper attempts to look into the behemoth program and analyze its strengths and weaknesses and how the hurdles it faced should be addressed when it is refurbished as Destitute Free Kerala (DFK).

---

### PENURY - A TEAR IN THE SOCIAL FABRIC

Poverty is a gremlin that in turn acts as a well spring for many other issues faced by the society. Like a many headed hydra, the Greek monster, poverty is also multifaceted. Though many a times poverty is measured solely on income as in per capita GDP or defined as "earning less than one dollar a day", many economists view it as multidimensional, as measured by Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI) or UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI).

In India poverty is assessed based on poverty line. In

1962, the Working Group of Planning Commission quantified the minimum (food and non food) requirement of the individuals for a healthy living. The money value of this minimum requirement came to be called as poverty line which is based on per capita consumption expenditure (Sharma 2002). In 1979 the Task Force on Projection of Minimum Needs and Effective Consumption Demand chaired by Y K Alagh constructed a well defined Poverty Index and developed a method of determining the consumption demand of the poor and the non poor. The Task Force calculated the poverty line by working out the average calorie requirement of the population by their place of residence and consumption expenditure necessary to meet the calorie requirement. The poverty line conform

to a consumption basket that satisfies the calorie norms (2400 kcal in rural areas and 2100 kcal in urban areas) and meets a minimum non – food requirement. Those below the poverty line are deemed to be poor.

Though money metric measurements of poverty like poverty line may adequately capture other dimensions of deprivation, it may lead to headcount poverty. In the early eighties Amartya Sen had cautioned against the use of headcount poverty as it could distort allocation of resources towards the moderately poor ignoring the ultra poor (Devereux 2003). “In the head-count measure, the starving wreck counts no more than the barely poor . . . With the use of the head-count measure of poverty, the best rewards to poverty-removal policies are almost always obtained by concentrating on the people who are just below the poverty line rather than on those suffering from deep poverty” (Sen 1981).

One of the major short sights of policy making using headcount poverty is that the policy maker fails to distinguish between the poor and the ultra poor or destitute and the poverty alleviation program will be deemed successful when it benefits the moderately poor ignoring the ultra poor. In poverty literature both are distinguished as working poor and non-working poor (destitute). While the working poor suffers from chronic poverty (low productivity) or transitory poverty (vulnerability) the non-working poor suffers from dependency on transfers. One way in which destitution is fundamentally distinct from income or consumption based measures of poverty is in its focus on assets and assetlessness (Devereux 2003). Though very poor lack entirely in productive assets, they do have their labor power. This is evident from the fact that in India, destitute households are more likely to resort to child labor than others (Mohanty 1996). However destitution is also associated with single person households who lack even their own labor power. This resonates with Dasgupta’s definition of destitution as the inability to participate in the labor market (Dasgupta 1993). In addition to the inability of the destitute to access to markets they are also socially excluded and many a times depend on welfare transfers. If a poor tries to make two ends meet, a destitute is always in a chronic state of want.

As evident from various studies and analyses, though poverty can be measured on monetary terms and can be attempted to be solved through income generation and employment generation programs, destitution needs special focus so as to raise a destitute above the poverty line.

### ASHRAYA – AN ATTEMPT TO BRIDLE DESTITUTION

Foremost objective of development planning in India is the reduction and ultimate abolition of poverty and social backwardness. For this, the adopted strategy was twofold – (i) to promote economic growth and (ii) to use state intervention to spread the fruits of growth towards human development (Sudarshan 2002). Since independence, both the Central and State governments have been focusing on poverty eradication through the trickling down effect of the general growth process and direct income generation programs. All income generation programs were either asset generation programs or employment generation programs. Though these helped in uplifting many from the clutches of poverty, they failed at reaching out to the poorest of the poor. Thus the economic growth of the country, many a times, did not help the destitute to escape the penury to which they have been thrown into.

The Government of Kerala in 2003, realizing that the benefits of such programs do not reach the downtrodden and destitute at the bottom of social ladder through trickledown effect, decided to implement a program specially designed for them called Destitute Identification, Rehabilitation and Monitoring (DIRM) or more popularly known as ‘Ashraya’. Ashraya which was designed to cater to the destitute in the society was devised to tackle the many facets of poverty through convergence of existing Government programs. The project was implemented by the local self government institutes (LSGIs) with the help of Kudumbashree.

Destitute Identification, Rehabilitation and Monitoring (DIRM) Project was implemented in 83 Gram Panchayats in 2003 (LSGD March 2003). A special Central assistance of Rs. 680.15 lakhs was released for the project to the Panchayats for the project. Gradually the project was expanded to 814 Gram Panchayats (Table 1).

Ashraya phases	No of LSGIs which implemented Ashraya	No of beneficiary families
Ashraya 1st phase	814	130843
Ashraya 2nd phase	466	75427

Table 1: No of beneficiaries in Ashraya first and second phase

In 2010, the first phase Ashraya beneficiaries were revisited and assessed whether they need further assistance. Those who needed further assistance were included in the Ashraya Revisit project. In 2012, the second phase of Ashraya was kick started and new families were identified for the project. Along with this, the beneficiaries of first phase who need further services were included in the Continuous Phase to ensure that continuous benefits are received by them.

### BENEFICIARY IDENTIFICATION

In 1992, while a Community Development Society (CDS) system was introduced in Alappuzha with the support of UNICEF, a 9 - point criteria was introduced to identify the poor and study the nature and causes of poverty. In that study a family was considered as a risk family if it satisfies at least four out of the nine point criteria (Board 2015). When the Government of Kerala introduced Ashraya in 2003, the same criteria were applied to identify the beneficiaries except in this case a family had to satisfy 7 out of 9 the criteria and 1 additional criterion. The beneficiary families were identified by the Community Development Societies (CDS), the apex body of the three - tier community organization of Kudumbashree, and later ratified by Grama sabhas (Dept 2004).

The 9 - point criteria is given below:

- (i) Kutcha house
- (ii) No access to safe drinking water
- (iii) No access to sanitary latrine
- (iv) Illiterate adult in the family

- (v) Family having not more than one earning member
- (vi) Family getting barely two meals a day or less
- (vii) Presence of children below the age of five in the family
- (viii) Alcoholic or drug addict in the family
- (ix) Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe family

Those short-listed families with one of the additional criteria given below were selected as beneficiaries of Ashraya.

- (i) Having no landed property to create their dwelling place (living in poramboke land, forest land, side bunds of canal and paddy fields etc.)
- (ii) Spending the nighttime in public places, streets or in the verandas of shops for sleeping.
- (iii) Unwed mothers, single parent or those separated women living in distress
- (iv) Young widows who are economically poor or women who have passed the age of marriage and remain unmarried.
- (v) Subject to severe, chronic and incurable diseases or physically and mentally challenged.
- (vi) No healthy member to win bread for the family below the age of sixty
- (vii) Beggars who resort beggary as a vocation.
- (viii) Women subjected to atrocities.

In 2004, however, discerning that penury in urban areas was unlike that in rural areas, the Government of Kerala amended the criteria for identifying the Ashraya beneficiaries as per the recommendation of the Executive Director of Kudumbashree (Table 2 and Table 3) (Dept, GO(MS)No.46/2004/Plg. 2004).



HOUSE CONSTRUCTION UNDER ASHRAYA

<b>9 - Point criteria for Urban Local Governments</b>	<b>Additional criteria for Urban Local Governments</b>
No. Land/Less than 5 cents of Land	Spending the night-time in Public places, streets or in Verandas of shops for sleeping
No house/Dilapidated house	Beggars who resort beggary as vocation
No sanitary latrine	Young widows who are economically poor or women who have passed the age of marriage and remain unmarried
No access to safe drinking water within 150 meters	No healthy member to win bread for the family below the age of sixty
Woman headed household/ presence of a widow, divorcee/ abandoned lady/ unwed mother	Women subjected to atrocities.
No regularly employed person in the family	Families having street children/ children in Juvenile Home or Poor Home
Socially disadvantaged groups (SC/ST)	Families having children below the age of 14 who work to earn money for the family
Presence of Mentally or Physically challenged person / Chronically ill member in the family	Family living in slums
Families without color TV	Families having women members who live in Abala Mandiram
	Families having Commercial Sex Workers
Table 2: 9 - Point criteria and additional criteria for urban areas	
9 – point criteria for Village Panchayats	Additional criteria for Village Panchayats
Kutch house	Having no landed property to create their dwelling place (living in poramboke land, forest land, side bunds of canal and paddy fields etc.)
No access to safe drinking water	Spending the night-time in public places, streets or in the verandas of shops for sleeping.
No access to sanitary latrine	Unwed mothers, single parent or those separated women living in distress
Illiterate adult in the family	Young widows who are economically poor or women who have passed the age of marriage and remain unmarried.
Family having not more than one earning member	Subject to severe, chronic and incurable diseases or physically and mentally challenged.
Family getting barely two meals a day or less	No healthy member to win bread for the family below the age of sixty
Presence of children below the age of five in the family	Beggars who resort beggary as vocation.
Alcoholic or drug addict in the family	Women subjected to atrocities
Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe family	

Table 3: 9 – Point criteria and additional criteria for rural areas

**In 2012, criteria for Ashraya 2nd phase were modified as relevant at the time (LSGD 2013). The 9 – point criteria were modified as follows:**

1. Landless family or family with less than 10 cents (rural) and 5 cents (urban)
2. Houseless or family living in dilapidated house
3. Family with no potable water facility within 300 m (rural) and 150 m (urban)
4. Family with no sanitary toilet
5. Family without any member having job or less than 10-day work a month
6. Women headed family
7. SC/ ST family
8. Family with illiterate adults (rural) and family with no color television (urban).

The additional criteria are mentioned in Table 4.

Additional criteria for rural areas	Additional criteria for urban areas
Landless (family living on forest lands, waste lands, bunds of canals/fields etc.)	Family sleeping on public places/ streets at night
Family sleeping on public places/ streets at night	Financially unsound widows/ unmarried old women
Family with unwed mothers/ mother & children only/ deserted women	Family engaged in begging
Financially unsound widows/ unmarried old women	Family with no members below 60 years of age capable of providing food for the family
Family with members having chronic illness/ physical or mental disabilities	Family with woman who faced atrocities
Family with no members below 60 years of age capable of providing food for the family	Family with children in Juvenile Homes/ Poor Homes/ street dwellers
Family engaged in begging	Family looked after by children below 14 years of age
Family with woman who faced atrocities	Family with commercial sex workers
	Family with women living in destitute homes
	Family living in slums

Table 4: Additional criteria for identifying beneficiaries of Ashraya 2nd phase

The CDS and the LSGI together prepared a project for the beneficiary families by identifying the services needed by each family and allocating funds for the same. Once the project was approved by the State Government it is implemented by the CDS and the LSGI together.

### TACKLING MULTI FACETS OF DESTITUTION

Asraya Project is different from other poverty eradication projects in the sense that instead of focusing on a particular aspect of poverty, it endeavors to look into various dimensions of poverty (Table 5). While many of the basic, developmental and psychological needs of an Asraya beneficiary family are taken care under the aegis of Kudumbashree, the other needs are satisfied by LSGIs and Government Departments like Health Department, Public Distribution System, Civil Supplies Department, Social Justice Department, Revenue Department, etc.



Table 5: The various facets of poverty covered under Asraya Project by focusing on different needs of the destitute

## FUNDING IN ASHRAYA

Resources required for funding different components of the project are mobilized from existing schemes and programs. The funding of the project is by Kudumbashree, LSGIs and philanthropic individuals and institutions. Kudumbashree allocates fund for basic needs called the Challenge Fund (40% of the total project cost subject to a maximum of ₹25 lakhs for general projects and ₹40 lakhs for ST projects). So far a total of Rs. 106.33 crores has been allotted to LSGIs s Challenge Fund (Table 6)

Ashraya phases	Total Fund allocated (Rs)	Total Challenge Fund allocated (Rs)	Total Expenditure (Rs)
Ashraya 1st phase	375.5 crore	90.86 crores	55.26 crores
Ashraya 2nd phase	365 crores	15.47 crores	8.78 crores

## HURDLES FACED IN ASHRAYA

Unlike poverty alleviation programs, Ashraya faced many hurdles while implementation as it was a destitute rehabilitation program. Destitution cannot be overcome solely by a government program unless aided by civil society. In Ashraya also, each process starting from the beneficiary identification till implementation and monitoring would have been successful only with the co-operation of CDS and LSGI. Wherever both worked in harmony the program implementation happened smoothly. Also proper monitoring by the civil society in the implementation of the program was germane to the success of the program. One of the major hurdles faced by Ashraya was the lack of interest of civil society. This affected the proper implementation of the program. Awareness creation is very essential to ensure the involvement of civil society in the form of neighborhood groups. As many of the beneficiaries were either senile or physically or mentally disabled or chronically sick, finding a livelihood was not an option many a times. This sometimes rendered Ashraya a mere welfare program.

## FROM ASHRAYA TO DESTITUTE FREE KERALA

The success of Ashraya, despite being a behemoth program, lies in the fact that it was a convergent program. The stakeholders of the program, apart from beneficiaries, were various Government departments steered by the LSGIs under the guidance of Kudumbashree. There is no better example of how community involvement (via Kudumbashree Community Organizations) helps in uplifting the poor, than Ashraya. Its success also lies in the fact that it has a decentralized approach to poverty eradication.

Though an outstanding project by itself, Ashraya was still unable to help many of its beneficiaries shatter the fetters of penury that bind them. At present, the Ashraya project which had seen many phases is being restructured into a more comprehensive one time program called Destitute Free Kerala/ Agathirahitha Keralam (DFK) (LSGD 2017). The major differences between Ashraya and DFK are given in Table 7



HOUSE WARMING CEREMONY - HOUSE CONSTRUCTED FOR ASHRAYA BENEFICIARY

Ashraya		DESTITUTE FREE KERALA
A three year project with continued service by revisiting the project.	⇒	One time project
Fishermen community not included	⇒	Preferences for Fisherman community
No facility to inclusion of a new families during the project once implemented	⇒	Provision for any time inclusion
For the land registration and land document preparation cost not waved	⇒	All the registration fees, stamp duty and documentation charge are waved for land registration
MLA fund, MP fund, other department fund utilization not permitted	⇒	The permission is granted for utilization of all such fund
Reserve fund is only 1% of total project cost	⇒	Reserve fund increased 5% of the total project cost.
Fund for many services was insufficient	⇒	Fund for many services is increased
It is not possible to hand over the cost for building construction as advance	⇒	The cost of construction of building may be given as advance as installments.
Less attention for mentally and physically challenged beneficiaries	⇒	A special attention given for the mentally and physically challenged.

Table 7: Changes in DFK compared to Ashraya

DFK is equipped with better technology in beneficiary identification (via mobile app) and project preparation rendering the project more cost effective and timely. It also has an anytime inclusion provision. Thus Ashraya which has donned new attire in the form of DFK is expected to tackle the many facets of destitution in a better way.

**CASE STUDY: Blessing in Distress**

James felt that his family had fallen into a bottomless pit when his wife was diagnosed with mental illness. With his two kids in school, he couldn't leave his wife alone at home. And there was no one to help. To care of his wife, he had no choice but to stop going for work. They had never felt the pangs of hunger before. At around the same time, CDS started making the list of potential beneficiaries for Ashraya. When they came to know his family's plight, they included him in the program. "The monthly food kits were real blessings" said James. Apart from the food kits, he got a house, well and sanitary toilet under the aegis of the program. Now as his two kids have grown up and his son became the breadwinner, James' family voluntarily withdrew from Ashraya program. "Ashraya helped us pick up our lives. I don't know what I would have done without the program", said James.

**CASE STUDY: From Shed to Security**

R. Jayakumar lives with his family which includes his wife and two children. He owns a shop and also gets a pension for the disabled. During the past two years he had undergone two major surgeries in the head. He used to go for rubber tapping 6 years ago and now he is completely incapable of moving without help but runs a shop and earns whatever he could. He has two children who are both now settled. The younger son is an IT student and the elder daughter is married and works as a primary teacher. This family was included in the Ashraya beneficiaries list four years ago. The services they received were a house and monthly food kits. They lived in a shed before the house was built under Ashraya. His wife is now a part of an NHG and the family actively participates in Gramasabha as well. Now they possess land, house, shop, and other physical assets.

## Bibliography

- Board, State Planning. "Report of the task force on the poverty elimination, Kerala." 2015.
- Dasgupta, P. "An Inquiry into Well-Being and Destitution." Clarendon Press, 1993.
- Dept, Planning and Economic Affairs. "GO(MS)No.40/2004/Plg." Government of Kerala, 2004.
- . "GO(MS)No.46/2004/Plg." Government of Kerala, 2004.
- Devereux, Stephen. Conceptualising destitution. IDS Working Paper 216, Sussex: Institute of Development Studies, 2003.
- LSGD. "GO (RT) No. 872/2003/LSGD dated 07/03/2003." March 2003.
- . "GO(MS)No. 362/2013/LSGD." LSGD, 2013.
- . "GO(MS)No.252/2017/LSGD." Government of Kerala, 2017.
- Mohanty, B. "Agricultural modernisation in rural Orissa: prosperity and destitution." Man in India, 1996.
- Sen, Amartya. "Poverty and Famines." Clarendon Press, 1981.
- Sharma, KL Datta and Savitha. "Facets of Indian Poverty." Concept Publishing Co., 2002.
- Sudarshan, RJ Chelliah and R. "Income Poverty and Beyond." Anthem Press, 2002.
-