Child Begging: The Curse of Modern Indian Cities

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Abstract

Children begging on a city street crossing is a common sight even today. According to an estimate, nearly 300000 children are forced to beg due to serious violations of human rights of children like drugging, maiming and physical torture by criminal syndicates in our cities. There can be no place for this social menace coexisting in a country aspiring to have more than 200 smart cities and bullet trains to showcase economic advancement and technological prowess to the world. Plethora of social security measures such as Universal education, midday meal, Anpoorna Rasoi, National Food Security and MNAREGA schemes meant to give impetus to free and compulsory primary education are being provided by the government. The effective implementation of these schemes can go a long way in preventing child begging and help rehabilitating these children. Roping further in civil societies could also be useful in fighting this menace. Stringent legislations and its dedicated enforcement can tip the scale against employment of children for begging by criminal syndicates. A small but definite step in the direction of prevention and investigation is establishment of special cells in each police districts, known as Anti–Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs), for prevention and combating human trafficking including child trafficking. Thus, this paper, explores the possible solutions to deal with child begging under the existing beggary laws, the role of NGOs and the role of civil societies.

Keywords; Begging, Poverty, City, Social Exclusion

Beggary is a symptom of social disorganisation and the widespread custom of alms-giving by individuals and institutions has been the method by which the disability, helplessness or social inadequacy of the beggars has been sought to be mitigated in India. Yet this very time honoured practice of helping the homeless and the helpless has served society to wink at the grave personal and social maladjustments that cause beggary. Modern conscience demands that the root causes be analysed and understood, and that society in India launch forth a programme of prevention rather than amelioration of human inadequacy and suffering as a national concern. Obviously the most common cause of beggary in India is the loss of agricultural employment in the villages. For several decades the number of landless workers deprived of subsistence from the land has been steadily rising. All landless individuals cannot be absorbed in industrial employment. Driven from the villages

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into cities and towns, some work as earth-diggers and road menders or as domestic servants and coolies in the markets. Others prefer beggary to work that often brings less income and subsistence. For an Indian every profession or occupation, high or low, develops its inchoate social organisation, resembling some kind of a guild which gives protection to the new beggars, whether able-bodied, disabled or diseased men, women or children. Begging is the practice of entreating others to grant a favour, often a gift of money, with little or no expectation of reciprocation. Beggars are found in public places such as transport routes, urban parks and near busy markets. Besides money, they may also ask for food, drink or other small items. The simplest way of defining begging is to ask for money without any return of services. Macdonald defined begging as asking for alms or charity given out of sympathy to the poor and it is a street level resource for the poor and powerless and the solicits alms receivers to sustain livelihood are called beggars. According to the ILO's Child Labour Convention and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Children are the youth belongs to less than 18 years of age. Child begging is the begging in which boys and girls under the age of 18 beg, mostly through psychological and physical oppression. The child beggars are a distinct category of the street children who are most deprived even with the basic needs and struggle to survive in different places across the globe. These children are particularly the vulnerable group; where a child is prone to abuse, deprivation of basic needs, care and protection continuing a miserable lower class life.

The child beggars are the 'High Risk Groups of Children', children without adequate parental care. Beggary in Urban India: Reflections on Destitution and Exploitation. The term 'beggary' is also often used synonymously with 'destitute'. Though Marx had distinguished 'destitute' from the malnourished, unemployed and beggars and addressed them together as 'unoccupied', the most commonly observed occupation among the destitute is begging. Begging comes to them as a negotiated exchange somewhere between a gift proper and market transaction involving a transient relationship of obligation of giver to receiver in which the 'beggar' has power deriving from coercive subordination (Staple, 2002). Destitution is the extreme form of poor. Poverty and poor are interwoven phenomena and thus need to be understood in the wider socio-economic context of development. In India, 'poverty and pauperism' are not atypical phenomena; the act of beggary was always considered to be noble. The popular term 'bhiksha' (alms) in Hinduism, Jainism and in Buddhism are well known. Even having emerged as an unorthodox religious philosophy, Muslim also believed in 'Zakat'. However, although 'beggary' has its roots in religious mendicancy, it has socio-economic ramifications which have made it a major social problem of the twenty-first century. Children who are forced to beg are commonly beaten by those who are forcing them to work, or suffer abuse from individuals they encounter as they beg. They must work for long hours and hand over most of their income. Children who are forced to beg by third parties tend to live apart from their families, and suffer particularly poor living conditions.

Focus of the Study

The present paper looks at beggary as a growing socio-economic problem and an extreme form of destitution and poverty in urban India. The paper tries to analyse 'beggary' from a developmental perspective and as an inevitable outcome of exploitation and criminalisation of poor under the

Child Begging: The Curse of Modern Indian Cities

Dr. Anant Vijya Soni

76.2

vicious force of political economy. Poverty as well as beggary have been treated as highly vulnerable and dynamic conditions, embedded in everyday life of urban India. The present discourse further explores the possible solutions to deal with 'beggary' under the existing Beggary Laws, the role of NGO's and of Civil Society.

Child Begging, the Indian Scenario

The children of today are assets of tomorrow. Yet education, which is a fundamental right to every child in our country, is still a dream for many children in India, especially the ones who are poor, downtrodden and in dire need. Poverty and lack of education are the major factors that lead to desperate acts like child begging, which is one of the most heart-breaking and pertinent problems prevalent in our country. This act of child begging has terribly plagued the lives of thousands of children who have lost their beautiful and innocent childhood by becoming slaves.

It has often been observed that children from lower socio-economic level are more likely to be abused due to parental poverty, and hence are forced to beg so that they can supplement the total earning of the family. Apart from that, certain kinds of rackets are also at play who not only mislead or mistreat these children but even use drugs to sedate them. Handicapped children are often used for begging as this arouses sympathy of the common people. Sometimes, they are even beaten up and physically maimed for this purpose. Religion is also used as a medium for begging where children are dressed in a religious attire carrying pictures of God while begging. This is done to awaken the religious sentiments of the people.

Child begging is something which can be twisted and manipulated by larger forces at work to give it the shape of thriving business as it functions mainly on sympathy-mongering. According to a report prepared by the National Human Rights Commission of India, 40,000 children are abducted each year, which roughly means one child goes missing very eight minute in India, over 25% of whom remain untraced. According to a conservative estimate, more than 3 lakh children across India are forced to beg, using everything from addiction to drugs, to threats of violence and actual beatings. They are the cradle of a multi-million rupee industry that is run by cartels and mafias; and the sad part is that it is not properly addressed by the authorities.

Section 24 (1) of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children Act 2000) provides that whoever employs or uses any juvenile or child for the purpose of begging or causes any juvenile to beg, can be imprisoned up to three years and shall also be liable to fine. Those who abet begging are also liable to punishment. Section 363A of the Indian Penal Code provides punishment for a person who kidnaps or maims a minor for purpose of begging.

People like Kailash Satyarthi, who won the Nobel Prize for saving and helping poor children by his Bachpan Bachao Andolan, or J Rama Chandra Sarath Babu who has saved many children from begging. should be our inspiration. Then there are NGOs like Save The Children Foundation, Railway Children, Smile Foundation India, which work tirelessly to rescue as many children as they can. If we can agree that child begging is a serious problem in India, we can also sympathise with them and

Child Begging: The Curse of Modern Indian Cities

Dr. Anant Vijya Soni

start working to make a change. As there is extreme darkness in this field, one single ray of hope can make a huge difference.

Poverty: In Perspective of Developing Country

Beggary, poverty and social exclusion overlap in a complex way and can be understood better under developmental paradigm. The process of uneven development or underdevelopment has created uneven distribution of wealth and progress in India. The changing dynamics of population especially in urban areas, imbalanced regional growth, and pace of industrialisation and urbanisation are the obvious outcomes of such a developmental approach. Individualisation and atomisation, domination of one group in society over others by virtue of wealth and power, frustration of disadvantaged sections of society, staggering dimensions of social, economic and political marginality of groups are the essential components of the changing dynamics of today's development.

Poverty and its consequences and causes, such as migration and discrimination, lie at the heart of much forced child begging. Economist Dudley Seers posed a basic question about the meaning of development from the right perspective when he asserted, 'The questions to ask about a country's development are: What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to inequality? What has been happening to unemployment? If all three of these have become less severe, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development.... If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially all three have, it would be strange to call the result 'development', even if per capita income doubled' (Seers, 1969: 3).

The characterisation of development with its lofty goals is certainly very attractive but the realisation of such a process has been a complicated task. Relooking at the implementation of the development model over the last few decades we could assess the failure in the human development and offshoot of the so-called material progression of an advanced human society. The term 'development' no longer symbolises material progression. it has surfaced into widespread inequality and discrepancies between the poor and rich and has provided us with a more dehumanised world. Unplanned, erratic and unconcerned (or imposed?) pursuit of development has caused chaos and disorder in the society. Going by Frank's (1967) observation, the relation between development and underdevelopment is not just a comparative one but is related to the common historical process of exploitation and exploited. But it has given a look of neo-colonialism where the tools today come through a much liberal package of developmental processes, such as, globalisation, Marketization, privatisation and so on. Such policies have created stiff competition for developing nations. Thus the ideology 'survival for the fittest' is practiced under the pretext of human and democratic trade affairs. The consequences are obvious in sharply growing marginalised and downtrodden classes on the one hand and consumerism and erosion of values among people on the other hand.

The concept of marketization has made all aspects of life and the life of a human being a commodity. An outcome of such developmental anomie is growing poverty as well as more exploitation and criminalisation of the same. The carriers of the brunt are again the third world nations like Latin America, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, China and the like. India, despite being the largest

Child Begging: The Curse of Modern Indian Cities

Dr. Anant Vijya Soni

democracy in the world, has a sizeable proportion of its population live at an unacceptable level of poverty and deprivation. According to the Indian Economic Survey Report (2002), poverty in rural and urban areas has been constant with 40 per cent of the population remaining below the poverty line and deprived of the basic minimum of livelihood. The Human Development Index (HDI) has used several indicators to measure the well-being of the people. It is based upon a combined measure of longevity, literacy, access to basic goods and services, women's empowerment, per capita Beggary in Urban India: Reflections on Destitution and Exploitation 533 income and so on.

India is 55th in the list of developing countries ranked according to the main human poverty index. In India, 135 million people lack access to basic health services, 171 million people lack access to safe drinking water and 640 million lack basic sanitation facilities. Twenty-one per cent of the population in India is undernourished and 53 per cent of its children under the age of five are underweight. The rate of male literacy is 60 per cent and female literacy is 40 per cent. The heart numbing realities are flagrant contradictions of the dream of social development. The poor, in fact, are deprived of having a minimum desirable standard of living. Moreover, urban India also faces a unique problem of growing density of population. According to the 1991 Census, about 2000 persons per square kilometre and 5.01 per cent of the country's population live in extreme dense conditions of inhabitation with Greater Mumbai as the highest ranking in population (16,368,084) followed by Kolkata (13,216, 546) and Delhi (12,791,458). Urban India has 11.55 per cent of the total population living below the poverty line (Planning Commission Report, 2001).

Such socioeconomic and cultural trajectories are also manifested in various other forms of poverty, which include morbidity and mortality from illness, malnutrition, lack of shelter (mainly in the city); thereby increasing the number of homeless people and pavement dwellers, beggary and vagrancy, and above all social discrimination, marginalisation and exclusion of such poor sections of population from the mainstream of life and development processes. The picture is graver in the urban areas of the country especially in the cities as beggary, vagrancy or homelessness are on rise. Tulsyan (2008) reports in an online news article that 'a recent study titled Living Rough: Surviving City Streets, conducted over 2006–07 by the New Delhi-based Centre for Equity Studies, shows that though the homeless exist in our country in large numbers, the society at large tries to render them invisible, and shockingly, attempts to blame the homeless for their situation.

The study, which was supported by the Planning Commission, explored the realities of homeless life in four Indian cities: Delhi, Chennai, Patna and Madurai. Three hundred and forty respondents were interviewed for the study.' Beggary in urban India appears to be just another manifestation of a larger socioeconomic problem characterised by low incomes, high unemployment rates, rising cost of living, rates of population growth, inappropriate public policies and continued rural-urban migration and displacement. Thus the cardinal reason for most of the different categories of beggars to earn a meagre living on the streets, near religious places and other collective quarters of the cities is poverty precipitated by different factors and events. The beggars as an impoverished underclass presently find themselves in multifaceted and extreme destitution which can generally be characterised by chronic food shortage/insecurity, illiteracy, homelessness or poor housing

Child Begging: The Curse of Modern Indian Cities

Dr. Anant Vijya Soni

76.5

unsuitable land, disease, unsanitary living conditions, death, and above all marginalisation and exclusion from social and political rights.

Beggary: A Form of Social Exclusion

Poverty or 'daridrata' means 'roving' and implies the breakdown of community or social disorganisation. Whereas, beggars are the extreme form of poverty who are reduced to personal disorganisation and are victimised under the process of moral, political and social exclusion. It may also lead to unpunished violence to person, and the extreme seizure of assets or the complete destruction of 'soul and self'. The denial from employment and social exclusion (in terms of acceptance and tolerance) of this section of population appeared to be justifiable and legitimised by the majority who practice it. However, it must not be overlooked that for these marginalised poor sections, expulsion from moral and political society, and exclusion from work or from social protection by the state (governance) leads to deprivation from the fundamental right to work or from the preconditions for day-to-day economic reproduction of their labour as citizens of any democratic nation-state. These are also some of the many conditions necessary for accumulation of wealth (Russel and Malhotra, 2001). This is how poverty, and beggary as an extreme form of poverty, enters into the political economy. It implies a process of exclusion and exploitation and is legitimised by culture; a culture of marketization and consumerism and institutionalisation of beggary as an 'offence'.

City and The Child Begging: The Indian Scenario

It is unfortunate that although the Ministry of Social Welfare has given due thought to the problem of beggary, there is no current data on what the actual beggar population in the country is except what is provided by the Census data of 1971. It recorded, 10,11, 679 beggars and vagrants of which 5,91,501 were males, 4,20,178 females. The population might have increased manifold in 2004 due to population explosion and huge influx of migrants into urban India. A series of secondary data on urban population, density, and slums may give a probable approximation of the beggar population in urban India. In India about 300 million people live in the cities and population explosion growth is an average of 2.4 per cent every year due to rural-urban migration (Census Report, 2004). In India there were 218 cities with a population of more than 100,000 in 1981 and in 1991 there are 816 cities with the same population. Major cities like Mumbai (12.5 million), Kolkata (10.836 million), Delhi (8.38 million), Chennai (5.3 million), Hyderabad (4.27), and Bangalore (5.27 million) contain more people than all the population living in the state of Kerala and two-thirds of the people living in Tamil Nadu (Census Report, 2000).

The behavioural manifestations of certain clusters of beggars, the nature and pattern of begging is largely influenced by the social milieu, religion and community criteria they are attached to and come from, and in large part, are an outcast of the same. For example, a section of the destitute that clusters in the main commercial pockets of the city would follow certain strategies to beg which would vary from the section that clusters near religious places before devotees or at the time of a pilgrimage. Within their own clusters they also maintain a sense of bonding and a 'we feeling' and

Child Begging: The Curse of Modern Indian Cities

Dr. Anant Vijya Soni

would not like to mingle with other groups of beggars. These are largely observed in metropolitan cities in the form of 'organised begging'. Ethnic traits are predominantly observed in groups of beggars coming from particular areas of certain states or regions. Social interaction, lacking depth both in the past and the present, are reflected in terms of lack of support, competition and conflict.

Child Beggars Bane of Modern India

There are over 300,000 child beggars in India with a total population size of 1.2 billion, as the gap between rich and poor is wide, according to the Indian National Human Rights Commission. India's beggary laws are a throwback to the century old European vagrancy laws that overlook the crucial difference between official text and practical reality. In other words, instead of addressing the socio-economic angle of beggary, it tries to criminalise it. Bombay Beggary Prevention Act, 1959 makes begging in public places a crime and the Act describes a beggar as '...having no visible means of subsistence and wandering about or remaining in any public place in such condition or manner (as) makes it likely that the person doing so exists by soliciting or receiving alms'. If one takes the definition forward, one can state that it is not a simple condition of deprivation, expulsion and exclusion. It is also a denial of citizenship, right to live and work. Under certain conditions (e.g., state development projects often induce displacement of large sections of people, and further, such displacement often backed by state and corporate bigwigs fail to compensate or rehabilitate evicted poor people) the law and the institutions of development may actively cause extreme situations of destitution and as a result the practice of beggary. "These children find their way to the streets owing to diverse reasons, but mainly because of poverty and an unstable home. Forced child begging exists in the wider context of child begging, something that may in it be regarded as an indictment that society fails to protect and nurture its children. Evidence from India and Albania revealed that all children who beg work long hours and are intimidated and punished by police and others rather than helped. Forced child begging constitutes a gross violation of children's rights. Children forced to beg by third parties experience particularly severe abuse, but the problem of parents forcing their children to beg should not be ignored. Consequently, Anti-Slavery International argues that governments and others with a duty to protect children's rights should adopt the following recommendations as a matter of priority:

1. Governments must ensure that adequate legislation is in place to protect children who are forced to beg, and that these laws are enforced.

2. Children, who are suffering from extreme violence or exploitation through begging, must be removed immediately from harm and placed in a safe and caring environment with appropriate educational and rehabilitative support.

3. Governments should prioritise investing in quality, affordable and accessible education for all. This would go a long way towards preventing forced child begging and other forms of exploitation, rehabilitating those already involved, as well as helping all children in poverty to improve their lives and future prospects.

Child Begging: The Curse of Modern Indian Cities

Dr. Anant Vijya Soni

76.7

4. Prevention work among families and local communities should form a central plank of all interventions. Families will need practical support to help remove poverty as a major factor in decisions to send their children away or out to beg. Such interventions must include awareness raising about the immediate and long-term risks to children who are forced to beg, and the rights of children to a childhood and to an education.

5. Far too often, all child beggars are treated as a problem by authorities. At worst, they are beaten and mistreated by the very authorities who should be there to protect them. A range of training programmes particularly for police and social workers are needed to help them to respond sensitively to the particular needs of these children.

6. Raise awareness among the general public that the money they give may be handed over to others who are exploiting these boys and girls. The public should be offered alternative ways to help those in need if strategies are in place to protect children and their families from the effects of losing this income.

7. Many shared experiences and causes mean that a number of strategies to address forced child begging should be approached within the wider context of child begging. Efforts to improve the lives of children begging, including support with healthcare and education, can also offer ways to help identify and remove from harm children who are forced to beg by violent or other coercive means. Despite the particular challenges this involves.

Task of A Community

Given the fact of steadily increasing number of beggars in the cities and other urban areas of India, the role of community becomes important. The responsibility, the citizens could consider as a political and social obligation to have and create a better living environment for themselves and for these thousands of floating destitute beggars all over the cities. People have their own prejudices and stigma attached to the words 'beggars' and 'beggary'. A concept of self-help groups emerged as a popular term in many advanced communities of the western world decades ago and has gradually penetrated India as well. A self-help group of neighbourhood community based organisation, action group (short term and long term), and Voluntary Committees with a clear agenda of preventing, curing and rehabilitating destitute beggars can be formed. In Mumbai, the 'Mohalla Committee' has already shown much success to recreate a better hygienic, social and safe environment. Similar practices can be exercised in other urban areas. Few recommendations can also be considered such as: Forming a medical team for the prevention of infectious diseases through beggars, free medication to them can be regularised in each respective neighbourhood of cities and in other suburb townships. A self-help group can be formed to reach out to the roaming population of beggars in the respective locality and help them by providing work or bring them in touch with public or voluntary organisations for vocational training and other rehabilitation measures.

Beggary in Urban India:

Reflections on Destitution and Exploitation 541 Community based organisations can keep a sharp

Child Begging: The Curse of Modern Indian Cities

Dr. Anant Vijya Soni

76.8

vigil on organised beggary (through maiming and physical force) in their own neighbourhood and inform the law and order agency.

The stigma that persists in people's minds has to be rationalised through awareness programmes. Bit it is also important to check on their criminal record and other unlawful acts of the person before they are brought back into the mainstream of life and work. Able-bodied women with child/children can be absorbed as domestic servants with a proper registration of work permit and an official identity.The concept of charity and benevolence is an age-old concept of philanthropy in India. A 'City Fund' can be formed by the city people to regularise the charitable trust for food, medication and shelter for sick, aged and disabled beggars who are dependent on mainly religious mendicancy for their livelihood.

Few efforts that can be made by NGOs are as follows

- Mobilising the civic bodies to prevent forced beggary/organised beggary.
- Creating more rehabilitation centres, even in joint collaboration with public rehabilitation centres.
- Improving the quality of vocational training programmes.
- Able-bodied male beggars can be provided with industrial training so that they can directly enter the labour force.
- Awareness campaigns, mobile medication facilities and a legal approach could be adopted by these NGOs for the ethical, moral, social, economic and political rights of the beggars in urban India.

Conclusion

Child begging offers an important focus for the struggle for children's rights in that it represents one of the most extreme, yet troublingly commonplace, forms of exploitation of children in the world today. It is also an indicator of a general failure of states to protect their children.

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Child Begging: The Curse of Modern Indian Cities

Dr. Anant Vijya Soni

76.9

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Child Begging: The Curse of Modern Indian Cities

Dr. Anant Vijya Soni