



Begging in India: Reasons and implications

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Abstract

It is characterized as "begging," "panhandling," or "soliciting alms" to ask total strangers for money or other forms of help. It is estimated that there are around 400 thousand beggars in India, making it a huge issue for the country. In India, there are several underlying causes for begging, including economic hardship, a dearth of educational and employment opportunities, rural-to-urban migration, and the persistence of the caste system, which perpetuates social inequality. Many handicapped and mentally ill persons are forced to beg because they have nowhere else to turn for assistance. In India, there are severe consequences for beggars, including the exploitation of children and women by organized begging rings. In addition to burdening social organizations that are already busy, begging may raise the possibility of criminal conduct and public disturbance. As with the general populace, beggars are subject to antagonism, abuse, and discrimination. The Indian government has implemented many anti-begging measures, including the creation of rehabilitation Centers and the passage of anti-begging laws. However, these projects have been criticized for not going far enough to address the core causes of poverty and inequality. To address the root causes of begging in India, more education, professional opportunities, and assistance for those with impairments or mental health issues are required.

Keywords: begging, consequences, India, laws, social, poverty, factor

Introduction

Begging is a severe social stigma that has existed for centuries. Recently, the outlook has become increasingly worrying. Even if 'poverty and pauperism' have existed for a very long time, begging has always been seen as a noble deed. The term "bhiksha" (alms) is used often in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. Despite its unusual roots, "Zakat" is a fundamental principle of the Islamic religion. A significant social concern of the 20th century, "pauperty" or "beggary" has its origins in religious mendicancy but also has socioeconomic consequences. Untidiness is indicative of a person's failure to adjust to their environment. As the homeless person comes to mind quickly, it is a symbol of social dysfunction. This kind of individualism is attributable to the poorly constructed Indian society since the individual cannot find a comfortable position within it. Begging is an issue in any society, regardless of income or resources, but it is especially detrimental to a developing country like India. There are around 500,000 regular beggars in India, and this number is likely to rise to several million if we include those who beg just sometimes (Sarkar & Mehta, 2019) [3].

Beggars contribute nothing useful to society, and their sheer existence is parasitic. They contribute to the country being impoverished. However, beggary is a social and moral problem that cannot be resolved by concentrating just on economics. In actuality, panhandlers are a breeding ground for the spread of disease and other abhorrent ills. Beggars represent a decomposing and putrid element of society. Beggars are a societal illness that must be removed immediately and completely, or they will spread to the rest of society.

Images of Indian beggars fighting like dogs over little amounts of money, swarming like bees over restaurant leftovers, sleeping naked on the floor, and sucking their thumbs have been extensively distributed in worldwide

media, bringing dishonor to India. These photographs depict India in vivid colors. This research tries to address topics such as what causes individuals to beg, what types of people participate in such behavior, why current policies are ineffective in this area, and what can be done to eradicate the problem (Allahbadia & Shah, 1992) [2].

Literature review

India's begging cartel

Begging has become a significant industry in India. In actuality, cities including Delhi, Noida, Gurgaon, Mumbai, and Kolkata are home to begging gangs. Each of these organizations is directed by a gang leader. The revenues of the day are distributed among the beggars, and each leader allocates his group to a certain zone. Because looks may be misleading, it might be difficult to distinguish between real and fake beggars. Even the youngest children with dirty cheeks and pleading looks have been instructed in the proper method of begging. When we see a young woman begging on the street with her baby kid, we often experience an outpouring of sympathy. Typically, infants are found when sleeping. Everything is a fraud. Multiple undercover operations have shown the widespread use of rented babies to legitimize begging. Babies are often poisoned during the day so that they seem unwell and may be easily transported by young women beggars (Saeed, 2022) [4, 6].

India's laws governing begging

There is no state-wide legislation that specifically criminalizes panhandling in India. But 22 states and some few Union Territories have their anti-begging legislation. The Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, of 1959 is the model legislation for all national anti-begging statutes. If convicted of begging for the first time under the Act, an individual faces a minimum of 3 years in prison and, if convicted again, up to 10 years in prison (Vishwajeet, 2021) [5].

Lawfulness of Begging

Based on the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act of 1959, which criminalizes begging, the legislation criminalizes begging in several other metropolitan areas, including Delhi. In a precedent-setting ruling from a year ago, the High Court of Delhi declared that the Act is unconstitutional in Delhi because it violates Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution, which protect the rights of individuals who have no other means of livelihood but to beg. The court has acknowledged that the implementation of the anti-beggary act has been primarily arbitrary, which has resulted in the detention of the poor who may not have participated in begging but may have "fallen through the communally-created net" — for instance, they may be homeless people, people with disabilities, transgender individuals, migrant or sex workers (Saeed, 2022) ^[4, 6].

During their hearing, Acting Chief Justice Gita Mittal and Justice C. Harishankar said that it is the role of the state to guarantee that its citizens may enjoy decent lives.

Approximately 4 lakh beggars in India may have breathed a sigh of relief after the Delhi High Court's ruling that asking for alms is not criminal conduct. However, the court also criticized the government for disregarding society's most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens. Hundreds of panhandlers who were detained and imprisoned for months as a result of the unusual ruling to invalidate as many as 25 provisions of a cruel and severe anti-begging statute will be released immediately. (Malik, 2012) ^[7].

Characteristics of begging

The problem of beggary takes on many different manifestations in India, which have been variably categorized and referred to as different varieties or categories of beggary (McCabe, 2018) ^[8]. Homeless people may be divided into the following categories:

The child beggars

For many in our society, begging is just a way of life. This is particularly true for abandoned, mistreated, or otherwise unfortunate children. In urban areas, it is typical to see children working alone or in small groups to generate finances and supplies for privately maintained orphanages or homes. Nonetheless, many children must fend for themselves alone or in ad hoc groups of two or three. These children may be spotted soliciting contributions at bus stations, malls, churches, and even picnic sites. These children often originate from households in which both parents work several jobs and earn too little to appropriately provide for their children. Lastly, some begging children might behave like their parents. Such youths often fall victim to beggary sin and eventually join beggar gangs. Many people recognize how difficult it must be for a child to beg. This is why the Children's Act considers a kid who is begging differently from one who has been abused. (Kaushik & Gupta, 2022) ^[9].

The physically handicapped beggars

The majority of homeless or begging individuals have a physical deformity or handicap, that could have been evident at birth or developed later in life. Due to physical disabilities such as blindness, hearing, dumbness, limb or body malformations, and other types of physical dysfunction, some persons are impossible to participate in mainstream culture. These disabilities might prohibit

individuals from communicating, listening, or comprehending their surroundings. This demographic often requires aid from charity organizations or employment in other sectors to make ends meet. The bulk of people who rely on begging for a living is blind. They might be whether male or female and be of any age. Individuals who can donate funds to charities are much more inclined to feel empathy or compassion whenever they meet a physically disabled person. As a consequence, there is a huge need for organized beggary geared toward physically disabled or disfigured individuals. This group also includes beggars that have been subjected to the most atrocious acts of inhumanity or violence by other homeless individuals. These beggars are the focus of other homeless people.

The mentally challenged or insane beggars

Mentally impaired individuals encounter the same employment obstacles as their physically disabled counterparts. Insanity and other severe forms of mental instability render a person incapable of doing even the most mundane activities, such as housekeeping. Due to their mental incapacity, these individuals must depend on the charity of others to live. People with mental disabilities frequently depend on public charity because they lack enough personal assistance from family members. Several homeless individuals suffer from mental deficiency, mental disorders, or epilepsy. (Swardhana, 2020) ^[10].

The religious mendicant's beggars

Numerous religions in India condone the formation of mendicant organizations and recommend a life of poverty for their followers. Bairagis. Examples of recognized vagrant and mendicant lifestyles include the fakir or darveshes way of life in Islam, the Kabir-panties way of life in Hinduism, and the nank-shahis and gianis way of life in Sikhism. Close to Mazars, mosques, and shrines, these religious organizations grow. Gurudwara or other religious organizations, however, members of these religious groups often take alms in private and public settings. Since the ideal of renunciation and self-negation is connected with religious dishonesty in our society, yet our culture accords respect to those who adhere to specific practices, a considerable number of individuals feel that it is simple to survive via fake religious dishonesty.

Friendly beggars

The vast majority of beggars are unemployed or underemployed individuals who only resort to begging as a last resort when their financial situation is dire. Typically, this category consists of unskilled rural laborers who are unable to obtain full-time work in urban regions and must settle for temporary or part-time work instead. Therefore, if they are no longer able to work or their part-time employment no longer generates adequate income, they find it difficult to maintain themselves, which leads them to rely only on the support of charity organizations to exist. However, some beggars only participate in the activity momentarily until they can get temporary or part-time work.

Professional / hereditary beggars

In certain civilizations, begging is a usual or accepted practice, and individuals of these societies often participate in the behavior. Members of certain castes or ethnic groups that live a nomadic lifestyle and support themselves by

entertaining others via singing, dancing, or performing acrobatic feats are more prone than other persons to participate in this kind of beggary. These societies do not see depending on charity to make ends meet and leading a dangerous lifestyle as immoral or disrespectful. Professional beggars are those who refuse to conduct any work other than begging, maybe because they are physically unable or mentally disinclined to perform any other kind of work. Due to prevalent cultural practices in some regions, many consider begging to be their ancestral profession. Examples of this kind of performer include Nats, Bajigars, Sains, Jugglers, Bhats, and Kanjars. They have no negative associations with their chosen profession and begin their jobs at a young age. Many of them see their children as a benefit, someone who may earn more money, support their parents, and inspire more compassion in the hearts of others.

Reasons for begging in India

Like any other societal issue, homelessness has more than one facet. Its origins may be traced back to the complex webs of relationships that make up its social fabric (Saeed, 2022)^[4, 6]. The many reasons for poverty that have been identified may be classified under the following headings:

Economic Aspects

Economic considerations often lead to individuals begging. Poverty, unemployment, underemployment, as well as income loss are all significant causes.

Natural Tragedies

Our physical surroundings may be very frustrating at times due to famines, earthquakes, droughts, tornadoes, or floods. Each of these natural disasters may inflict major damage to property or farmland, forcing people to flee their homes or resort to begging to alleviate hunger pains.

Psychological Issues

Beggary may sometimes be caused by a person's poor psychology. Those reasons include frustration, reluctance to labor, and a proclivity toward solitude.

Social Issues

Among the socioeconomic conditions that contribute to begging to include ancestral profession, family disintegration, and widowhood.

Physical Issues

There are no suitable provisions in India for the treatment or social rehabilitation of the blind, deaf, dumb, or physically disabled. In the lack of any other option, such people are forced to beg.

Implications of begging in India

The Bombay Prevention of Begging Act of 1959 makes it illegal in India to seek money or charity from passers-by. Begging and vagrancy are penalized by fines, imprisonment, and placement in a government-run homeless rehabilitation center. In practice, however, the law is seldom regularly implemented, and several panhandlers are not prosecuted. The law has been criticized for being too punitive and for failing to address the underlying causes of poverty and homelessness, even though its claimed purpose is to address the problem of begging. Those who beg may face discrimination and social exclusion, particularly if they have

an evident physical or mental handicap. They may not have access to basic medical care or other necessities, and they may be vulnerable to abuse and exploitation at the hands of organized begging gangs.

To effectively resolve the issue of begging in India, it is vital to address the root cause of poverty. Instead of penalizing the poor, the government should give them the means to improve themselves, such as improved health care, education, and employment opportunities. By implementing programs that provide financial help, job training, and different types of social support, it may be possible to eliminate panhandling and relieve poverty (Arvel, 2022)^[14]. Disability and mental disease are also important contributors to begging. Numerous homeless individuals are unable to work due to mental or physical limitations. Providing these individuals with access to healthcare and other services may reduce their reliance on charity and increase their likelihood of obtaining productive work.

Begging in India may result in fines, imprisonment, or rehabilitation in a government-run center for the needy. However, increasing the accountability of the poor has little effect on the fundamental causes of poverty. To effectively reduce the number of beggars in India, a more extensive, all-encompassing plan is necessary. This policy must tackle poverty, disabilities, and mental health issues.

Conclusion

Overall, begging in India is a complex issue having origins in poverty, disabilities, and mental health issues. The Bombay Prevention of Begging Act of 1959 criminalizes begging and homelessness with fines, imprisonment, and rehabilitation in government-run beggar facilities. Unfortunately, this law has been criticized for neglecting to address the core causes of poverty and homelessness and for inhumanely treating beggars.

Poverty is a major real cause of begging in India; hence, addressing this primary cause is essential for effectively reducing the number of beggars. Education, healthcare, and employment initiatives may help elevate individuals and families out of poverty and reduce the need for begging. In addition, offering appropriate healthcare or social services to those with impairments, including mental health issues, might improve their quality of life and reduce their need to beg.

Additionally, begging may result in discrimination, social marginalization, mistreatment, and exploitation.

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