



BEGGING: A GROWING MENACE IN INDIA

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Abstract : *In India the problem of beggary has assumed a stupendous proportion. Beggars of today have adopted beggary as a profession, it has changed its form in the modern period and the problem has become a colossal one. Beggars do nothing, except begging and leading a life of horrible moral corruption. Moreover due to less productivity and all-round backwardness beggary is growing at alarming rate. Both in Hinduism and Islam, for example, charity to beggars is required for all people of faith. However, besides the fact that "beggary" has its root in religious mendicancy, it has its socio-economic ramifications and that has made "beggary" a major social problem of the 20st century. The beggary is a curse for any society under any condition and circumstances; but for a poor country like India it is not only curse but a great financial burden, too. At present there are more than half a million beggars in India and if we include among these those persons who occasionally beg, the number will swell into a few millions. Probably this blot on our society should be attended to. It is high time we draw a blue print to eradicate this social menace. The sole intention of this article is to draw attention to the legal, sociological, economic and social condition of the poor in India; how they are deprived of their right to live a decent life.*

Keywords: *Beggars, Destitute, Law, Menace, Social Problem.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Allah keh naam par 10 rupay dey dey beta. (Please give me Rs10 in God’s name, son.)

***Roti khila dey, tujhey ek naik aur khubsurat biwi miley. (Give me bread to eat and you will
find a beautiful, decent wife).***

***Aye deedi, bhaya, Allaha kay naam pay daa daa. I am a poor person. My children are
hungry and...”***

When you hear this, you should know that, you are being attacked by a beggar”

Beggary is an age-old social evil. It has of late assumed alarming proposition.¹ In India, though ‘poverty and pauperism’ are age old phenomena, the concept of beggary was always considered to be a noble act. The popular term “bhiksha” (alms) in Hinduism, Jainism and in Buddhism are well known. Even having emerged as unorthodox religious philosophy, Muslim also believed in “Zakat”. However, besides the fact that “beggary” has its root in religious mendicancy, it has its socio-economic ramifications and that has made “beggary” or pauperism” a major social problem of the 20st century.² It is a form of personal disorganization as it indicates the failure of the individual to adjust himself with his social milieu. It is a symptom of social disorganization as the beggar in the street at once reminds us of the ill-organized society which is not able to adjust him properly. The beggary is a curse for any society under any condition and circumstances; but for a poor country like India it is not only curse but a great financial burden, too. At present there are more than half a million beggars in India and if we include among these those persons who occasionally beg, the number will swell into a few millions. The beggars perform no useful social function: their existence is parasitical. They contribute to the impoverishment of the country. But the problem of beggary is not only economic; it has social and moral aspects also. In fact, the beggars are the fruitful source of disease spreading and it also spread reprehensible ills. The beggars represent a section of society which was rotted and is putrefying. This requires drastic and immediate tackling: otherwise the beggars would contaminate the whole of society. The foreign press and television have put India to shame by graphically showing pictures of beggars fighting like dogs for few coins, swarming like bees for food left over in hotels and restaurants, naked women sleeping on floor and

¹ Asuina Kartika. “Statical Survey”, *Social Defence*, vol- xxxv, Oct, 1994, No 118, 44.

² Sumit sarkar, “beggary in urban India: conflict and challenges of human development”, *Social Action*, January-March, vol. 57, 54.



children sucking. These scenes show India in very lurid colours.³ In this paper an attempt has been made to know the reason of begging as well as types of beggars and also why the laws made in this connection is not working properly and what should be the necessary steps to be taken to eradicate this menace.

In India the problem of beggary has assumed a stupendous proportion.⁴ The plight and menace of beggary is growing at an alarming rate. Begging is the conduct whereby a person appeals to others for the material help by words or gestures. Beggars adopt several modes for appealing for alms. While some sing to attract attention, some others exhibit wounds—real or faked—yet some focus on their disabilities. The beggars of today have adopted beggary as a profession, it has changed its form in the modern period and the problem has become a colossal one. In most of the cases the beggars are found to be professionals who otherwise could have earned a decent living.⁵ They do nothing except begging and leading a life of horrible moral corruption. Moreover due to less productivity and all-round backwardness beggary is growing at alarming rate. Even many superstitious and orthodox Indians consider it a moral duty to give charity, but any intelligent man can easily appreciate the fact that giving of charity amounts to perpetuation of social and moral cancer in the society. If we seriously consider the social and moral aspects of beggary, we cannot help in concluding that beggary must be uprooted from a society which wants to progress.⁶ In some cultures, beggars actually play an important role. In both Hinduism and Islam, for example, charity to beggars is required for all people of faith. By donating to beggars, the faithful can fulfill a major tenant of their religion, increasing the chances that they will be admitted into paradise or reincarnated in a good body, depending on the faith.⁷

2. FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR BEGGARY

The practice of asking for alms has become a great socio economic problem, a social disease threatening to upset the social equilibrium. Begging is a complex psycho-socio economic problem. It is difficult to give particular cause or set of causes to the institution of beggary

³ Rajendar Kumar Sharma, Urban Beggary, “Urban Sociology“, Atlantic Publishers & Distributers, New Delhi, 2004, 246.

⁴ S.K.Battacharyya, “Beggars And The Law”, 19, JILI,1977, 498.

⁵ Delhi’s anti-beggary drive faces practical problem, <http://www.wikipedia.org.com>, visited on 7-6-12

⁶ Rajendar Kumar Sharma, Urban Beggary, “Urban Sociology“, Atlantic Publishers & Distributers, New Delhi, 2004, 248.

⁷ www.http.org/indiankanon.com.



as is the case with a criminal. Therefore, the various factors responsible for begging are discussed as below:

2.1 Economic Causes

The most important causal head for explaining beggary is the economic condition. Beggary is related to economic condition in two ways. First, beggary might be the consequence of adverse economic condition or distress. Second, under certain situations beggary might be motivated by economic gain considerations, this is particularly relevant in case of organized or exploitative beggary. Causal factor such as unemployment or under-employment, landlessness, poverty, calamity or famines and various other conditions of destitution are all variants of economic causes in the first sense. In the pre-independence era a large section of the Indian population remained perpetually under economic stress mainly on account of unjust land relations and oppressive wage structure.

One of the main factors which forces people to take begging is destitution. Having no sufficient means to support themselves or their families many persons resort to begging. Lack of employment opportunities in villages either, because of tiny holding or non-availability of other work forces thousands resort to begging when they cannot find employment in the cities.⁸ However, the number of people that were sucked into new urban centres was far more than those who could be gainfully employed. The jobless and unemployed were left with very limited choice. Going back to the villages which he had left in hope of better prospects in the towns was not feasible on account of limited employment avenues and increased pressure on land back home. Settled employment in the urban industries could be secured by a relatively small percentage. The only alternative (for the larger numbers) was to hang around in the urban centre's and wait for a chance, which invariably meant leading the life of a vagrant and surviving through beggary. The post war 1940's was, therefore, very significant from the point of view of beggary management policy and legislation's.

Poverty alone cannot be held responsible because all those who live on poverty line do not take to beggary. Thus, Economic cause has yet another very significant dimension. The factors like unemployment or underemployment are in a sense secondary cause, the

⁸ Gurumukh Ram Das, "Indian Social Problems – social disorganization and reconstruction", Allied Publishers Ltd, 1976, 229.



primary cause being the basic economic relations. A man begs not only when he is poor but also when he is unemployed or underemployed.⁹ Seen in this way even some social and biological causes become secondary to the economic condition. Owing to easy gains and sufficient income from begging many people make it a profession instead of doing honest labour, it was seen that many labourers beg to supplement their income. Not only that, many make it a business and exploit others by investing some amount in this business. There are groups operating in big cities which force many children to this profession. Sir S. Bahadur observes, "A study made by the sub-committee disclosed a most disturbing state of affairs. It appeared that gangs of professional kidnapers existed practically in all states of India. They kidnap or entice away children from the possession of their parents and then commit inhuman cruelties on them to make them into objects of pity so that they could be exploited for the purpose of beggary in public places. Many specific cases were mentioned by the sub-committee in its report and a typical case was a kidnapper, Karamat Ali, who with his associates lifted a 3 year old girl from Katihar Railway Station in Bihar, broke both her legs and arms and blinded her by poking fingers into eyes, thus converting her into an object of pity so that they could exploit the peoples sentiments and collect charities."¹⁰

2.2 Religious Cause

In India, the phenomenon of beggary is related to religion and culture. Religious mendicancy is not only tolerated by a large section of Hindus, Muslims and Christian population, but even supported on religious grounds. That is why religious mendicants are often exempted from the operation of general laws prohibiting beggary. A sort of religious sanctity is attached to alms. However, the religious form of beggary is often misunderstood in the modern times and attempt is made to support professional beggary on religious grounds. Mendacity is treated as a device by fake sanyasi and god men, who find it easy to extort good sums of money from god-fearing and superstitious masses. Religious festivals and congregations prove God-sent opportunities for such operations.

Most of the beggars are encouraged to remain in this profession because of good prospects of income which they cannot earn by honest means. There are many social customs which force us to give something or other to the beggars, orphans and religious mendicants.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.. 20.



Among the Hindus during Shradh observance, birth and marriage ceremonies and at certain other religious days and among Muslims in the month of Ramzan it is obligatory to offer alms. Charities are also given by various temples, mosques, dharamshalas, gurudwaras, shrines and by many public philanthropists. This charity, religious or otherwise, encourages beggary to a great extent.

2.3 Loss of agricultural occupation

Another 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 into cities and towns, some work as earth-diggers and road-menders or as domestic servants and coolies in the market. 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 organization, resembling some kind of a guild which gives protection to the new beggars, whether able-bodied, disabled or diseased men, women or children. It is the gang or guild life of the beggars in the big cities and towns of India that makes easy the transition from independent, though precarious, livelihood to pauperism in this country. For the gang or the guild trains persons how and where to beg, acts as a foster-parent to children that are deliberately maimed in order to evoke sympathy of passers-by in the streets, and, generally speaking, looks after their welfare. India has had for centuries this shadowy organization which has its capitalists and a large number of intermediaries, the ramifications of whose business extend to distant villages and hamlets. They arrange for beggars' accommodation in some slum or tenement and advance them food, cash or dirty clothes from day to day, their wage-earners bringing home every evening the hard day's collection of alms from the different muhallas of the city, so that they all have a share in the gains of this organized beggary.

2.4 Social Cause

Another cause of beggary is social disorders like the break-down of joint family, anomie, cultural conflict, community disorganization, faulty socialization etc. generally sociological studies and researches have centered round such causal enquiries and often suggested



measures for managing the problem of beggary within the existing socio-economic structure.¹¹

Joint family has been a very vital social institution for the management and control of beggary in India. The individual secures substantial support from the family in the event of economic or other forms of social hardship. Members, who failed to fend for themselves for any reason, could fall back upon the joint family lap. However, the break-down of joint family institution on account of large scale migration, weakening of the traditional family structure and the emergence of individualistic considerations seems to have changed the situation considerably. The absence of joint family and other social institution to share and provide support forces quite a few persons in crises situations to a life of beggary.

The anxieties, insecurities and the anonymous mode of urban existence engender a condition of anomie for the rural migrant, who rarely suffer from any inhibitions and succumbs to the temptations of beggary easily. Furthermore in some instances beggary and allied pattern of existence might be a reflection of cultural conflict. The beggars might be acting in consonance with their cultural pattern or they might have considered deviant activity like begging as the best way out under the situation. Often the feudal cultural ways of life come in clash with the urban commoditized way of existence, where even pavement space for shelter has to be purchased for a price. The logic of 'strange environment' impairs the rural migrant's sense of difference between obtaining the money through hard-work or through beggary.

Social disorganization is yet another cause of beggars; social change and industrialization have been responsible for considerable disorganization in the social institutions and structures. The institutions relating to orphans, infirm and aged, lepers, lunatics, widows, divorces¹² and other socially handicapped categories are in a state of disarray on account of lack of resources and uncertainty of the policy. This also leads to an increase in the number of beggars. As a common knowledge, Indian society is high by orthodox and traditionalist. The widows are not allowed to remarry and are often maltreated by their in-laws; hence in

¹¹ B.B.Pande, "Vagrants, Beggars And Status Offenders", Law And Poverty, Critical essays, Ubinder baxi, N.M Ttpathi Private Ltd, Bombay, 1988, 261.

¹² In Smt. Sulochna sahu v. Baman Ch. Sahu, April 1986, In this case, the court held that, in order to save the petitioner from destitution and beggary, interim maintenance under sec.125 should be allowed. <http://www.indianlanoon.org>.



order to escape mental torture they move out of family. If unlucky, they possess no skills or education and then they are left with little else except prostitution or beggary.¹³

Those who are either physically unable or mentally disinclined to do any work and will only beg are called professional beggars. Because of social customs in certain communities they consider begging as their hereditary profession. Among these may be included: Nats, Bajigars, Sains, Jugglers, Bhats and Kanjars. They do not attach any social stigma to this profession and take to it from their very childhood. To some of them their children are an asset who can excite more pity in human heart and can earn more and support their parents.

2.5 Biological Cause:

Sickness or disease, physical disability or deformity, mental infirmity and old age can be described as biological causes of beggary. The discussion relating to different types of beggars amply shows that a large majority of beggars suffer from some kind of biological disability that makes them less than normal. Though biological disability may itself be seen as a cause, but actually only those biologically afflicted persons resort to begging who are not in a position to fight out their disability economically. With the limited medical facilities, available either free of cost, large percentage of our population is hardly in a position to reach the medical centers'. Often they have to carry on with their sickness for a long time, starving and begging till the end.¹⁴In India there is no adequate provision for the treatment and social rehabilitation of blind, deaf, dumb or handicapped. In the absence of any reasonable alternative such persons feel compelled to beg. The idiots, morons and psychotics unless cared for by society or relatives, have no option but to beg. When a person suffers from chronic and pernicious disease, people feel a sort of contempt for him. Even his family members sometimes abandon him. It becomes difficult for him to stay in the locality, let alone in the family. He finds himself in utter helplessness and leaves for an unknown destination¹⁵.

¹³ N.Jayapalan, "Problem Of Beggary", "Urban Sociology ", Atlantic Publishers & Distributers, New Delhi,268.

¹⁴ On October 7, 1983. The Supreme Court issued notice to the Delhi Administration and the Superintendent of the lok Nayak Jayprakash Narayan Hospital pursuant to a petition alleging inhumane conditions in and around the hospital, where the poor patients called the "lawaris mareez" receive shocking maltreatment. The petition is a strong testimony to the state of the medical services that are available to the vulnerable sections of our society in general.

¹⁵ S.K.Battacharyya, "Beggars And The Law", 19, JILI,1977, 499.



2.6 Natural Calamities:

The natural calamities such as earthquakes, flood, tsunami, hurricane and drought compel people to leave homes, leaving everything behind them and under circumstances of immediate needs, the persons who are unable to find work feel compelled to beg to save themselves from starvation and death.¹⁶ Years of drought or earthquakes swell the number of those who starve and beg for food first, it may be, in the villages or near-by towns and then in the distant cities. Calcutta and Bombay are full of migrant beggars. For the beggar often has a free journey by train or steamer or earns as he proceeds by stages. India's traditional method of charity which is enjoined by religion keeps him both alive and mobile.¹⁷ Further people, who suffer due to act of God, mostly have no choice but to beg. Places, homes, agricultural lands damaged by floods. Tsunami and hurricane, left people in a situation, were they are forced to beg for the survival of their life. We often see people begging and showing written papers were it is written that they are the victims of natural calamities such as earthquakes, flood, tsunami, and hurricane.

3. TYPES OF BEGGING

In, India the phenomenon of beggary assumes variety of forms that have been variously described as types or kinds of beggary. The beggars can be classified under the following prominent types:

3.1 The Child Beggars:

Beggary is an accepted way of life for a large section of orphan, destitute and neglected children in our society. In urban areas we often come across children operating alone or in groups, soliciting money or food for privately run orphanages or homes. Apart from these a large number of children fend for their survival alone or in informal groups of two or three. These children can be seen making appeals for private charity in various ways in the railway stations, religious centre's and picnic spots. Such children are usually drawn from families where the parents are either too poor to care for their children or too busy to provide the required support or guidance. Finally, some child beggars may adopt the way of life of their parents. Such children often become part of organized gangs of beggars and are often the victims of the beggary evil. The especially vulnerable position of the child beggar has been

¹⁶ Dr. S.R.Myneni, "Law And Poverty", Allahabad Law Agency, Third Edition, 2009, 271.

¹⁷ R.K.Mukherjee, "Causes Of Beggary" Our Beggary Problem : How To Tackle It. Dr.J.M.Kumarappa, ed., Fadma Publications, Bombay, First edition, 1945, 27-28.



appreciated by the society. That is why a child beggar is handled differently as a neglected child in terms of the children Act.¹⁸

The children in misery arouse great piety. They cry, whine, and wail so pathetically that they are given alms simply in order to be free their painful presence. Many clever beggars pretend blindness, hunch-backness or old age and use for beggary.¹⁹ Thus, due to some type of disorganization in the family or because of the death of parents, or loss of mother or father, maltreatment by parents, neglect by parents, thus, forcing the child leaves home and resorts to begging. Even many beggars kidnap children and mutilate them in order to use them as their pawns in beggary.

3.2 The Physically Handicapped Beggars

The large percentage of the vagrant beggar population suffers from physical deformity or handicaps that might be congenital or acquired later on in life. Physical disabilities like, blindness, deafness or dumbness, limb or bodily deformities and other kinds of physical disorganization excludes a large section of the population from normal work and employment such a disabled population is often compelled to struggle for its survival through private charity or other forms of vocations. A large percentage of beggars suffer from blindness. They may be males or females and young or old. The class of physically handicapped are most in successful in arousing sympathy and compassion in the heart of the alms givers. That is why physically handicapped and bodily deformed are in great demand for organized beggary.²⁰ However, in this category are also beggars who have been subject to most inhuman and cruel treatment by other beggars.

3.3 The Mentally Handicapped or Insane Beggars

Like the physically handicapped the mentally handicapped ones suffer from disqualification in most of the areas of employment. Mental handicaps like insanity or serious forms of mental disorder renders these persons unfit even as a domestic help. Life for such a kind of mentally handicapped person means living on other's resources. In the event of limited family resources the mentally handicapped are compelled to fall back on private charity,

¹⁸ Dr. S.R.Myneni, "Law And Poverty", Allahabad Law Agency, Third Edition, 2009 , 268.

¹⁹ N.Jayapalan, "Problem Of Beggary", "Urban Sociology ", Atlantic Publishers & Distributers, New Delhi, 267.

²⁰ B.B.Pande, "Vagrants, Beggars And Status Offenders", Law And Poverty, Critical essays, Ubinder baxi, N.M Ttpathi Private Ltd, Bombay, 1988, 256.



often in public places. The persons suffering from mental deficiency, mental defects and epilepsy are the most common trait of a majority of beggars.²¹

3.4 The Diseased Beggars

A large section of our population suffers from chronic illness such as tuberculosis, leprosy, venereal diseases, skin diseases, heart condition etc. such chronic from illness, in the case of undernourished population, means serious impairment of physical capacity and the resolve to work. Such diseased and sick need prolonged medical treatment and proper nourishment that is why they are often compelled to resort to private charity. These are the persons who cannot earn their livelihood because they are too ill to work. They spread such diseases not only among themselves, but are a great danger to the society at large and infect the innocent passers-by by their contact.²² In poor families, due to under nourishment people suffer from chronic illness, they are not able to work and also they cannot afford prolonged medical treatment and proper nourishment and are compelled to live in alms to survive.

3.5 The Religious Mendicant's Beggars

There are quite a few religions in India that sanction founding of mendicant orders and ordain mendicant way of life for its members. Bairagis. Kabir-panthis among Hindus, fakir and darveshes among Muslims and nank-shahis and gianis among Sikhs are known vagrant and mendicant way of life. Such religious orders grow around shrines, mosques, mazars. Gurudwars and other religious centre's, but the members belonging to such religious order often resort to private charity and receive alms in private as well as public places. Since our society associates religious mendacity with the value of renunciation and self negation and accords respect to the followers of such practices, quite a few find it convenient to survive through bogus religious mendacity also.

3.6 Casual Beggars

A large section of the beggar population comes from amongst the unemployed or under employed class who resort to begging only under situations of extreme economic distress. Such a population is generally drawn from amongst the unskilled rural labour who are able to secure only casual or part-time work in the urban labour market. Thus, once they are out of employment or their part time work ceases to bring adequate earning they find it difficult

²¹ Ibid.

²² Gurumukh Ram Das, "Indian Social Problems – social disorganization and reconstruction", Allied Publishers Ltd, 1976, 234.



to maintain themselves, which compels them to fall back upon the only way of surviving that is through charity. However, this type of beggars resort to begging only as a stop gap arrangement till they are able to secure some casual employment or part time work again.

A survey of the beggars in Delhi conducted by the Delhi school of social work revealed that there are two kinds of part-time or casual beggars i.e. the non-religious part time beggars and the religious part-time beggars. About the first type the survey observes “one type consists of those who are normally self-employed in various small scale manual trades and the returns from these are neither regular nor stable. The work is often of casual nature subject to many seasonal and other variations. Whenever the work fails to bring in a day’s earning they go out to beg. Whether the frequent repetition of this practice becomes a process that ultimately makes a professional beggar out of the part time beggar is difficult to say in the absence of any detailed study on this point. It has however been observed that quite a few casual workers do not hesitate to join a ‘langar’ where free food is distributed outside a place of worship or on the lawns by a philanthropist.²³ Generally, the beggars found around Gurudwars and the temples on appointed days belong to this class for whom beggary is a temporary and casual means for survival. These types of beggars are those who are engaged in some petty works and beg in spare time.

3.7 Professional / Hereditary Beggars

Certain communities consider begging as their profession and indulge in begging as a traditional or customary activity. This type of beggary is prevalent amongst the members of certain caste or tribal groups who lead a nomadic way of existence and earn their living by entertaining people through singing, dancing or performing acrobatic feats. These groups consider nothing wrong or disrespectful in living on charity and lead a precarious existence. Those who are either physically unable or mentally disinclined to do any work and will only beg are called professional beggars. Because of social customs in certain communities they consider begging as their hereditary profession. Among these may be included: Nats, Bajigars, Sains, Jugglers, Bhats and Kanjars. They do not attach any social stigma to this profession and take to it from their very childhood. To some of them their children are an

²³ The Beggar Problem In Metropolitan Delhi, Delhi School Of Social Work (1959) 31.



asset who can excite more pity in human heart and can earn more and support their parents.²⁴

3.8 Exploiter Beggars

There are some beggars who practice organized beggary. They take begging as any other business and trade activity and perform the begging operations within a set organizational structure. The leader who masterminds the operations often stays in the background and leaves the job of actual begging, collecting the daily proceeds and the supervision of the other members to his trusted men. Such organized beggars kidnap and deploy children for doing the actual begging work and merely provide them with some food and shelter in return. These groups are also known to be responsible maiming and disfiguring the children to assure their permanent membership for the organization. This kind of beggary raises serious social concern for the interest of the victimized beggars, who are mainly the children. In view of the seriousness of this type of beggary the law has designed special provisions which subject the exploiter beggars to serious penal consequences.²⁵

3.9 The Employed Beggars

This may seem a contradiction in terms, but in India there are a larger number of men and women who work night shifts in mills and factories and go out begging during the day. Very often they earn more by begging during the day than by their labour in the factories and mills at night, and therefore become irregular in their attendance at work. The unsteady nature of the job and extremely poor wages often serve as an inducement to begging. Thus we have the curious phenomenon of the night labourer becoming a beggar by day. They pretend to be crippled or deformed or besmear their bodies with ashes and put on the religious mendicant's robe and go about begging as though they belonged to the class of professional beggars. Sometimes they are so skilled in the art of deceiving the public that they outdo the professional beggar and earn more than he does.

3.10 The Temporarily Unemployed but Employable

Many woes of the working classes spring from irregularity of employment and from their failure in taking the necessary steps in time to undo its bad effects. This causes their energy

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Section 363A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 provides upto 10 years imprisonment for kidnapping a minor for begging and up to life imprisonment for maiming a minor for begging. Similarly the various beggary laws contemplate stringent action against exploiter beggars.



to become intermittent; their off-days become habitual, and in the wake of indolence, intemperance springs up. Further, with uncertainty of employment comes recklessness about their future. Irregularity of employment, in its turn, is caused by fluctuations in trade, or by the periodic nature of certain occupations, or by illness, misfortune, or some exceptional incapacity. Intemperance and indolence are also the causes of much that goes by the name of want of work. These causes bring about distress among the working people; and when they do not get work in proper time, gradually they lapse into habitual indigence which forces them ultimately to have recourse to beggary. This type is amenable to social adjustment, and if sent to the native place and set to work on cottage industries at the time of temporary unemployment, may be rescued from lapsing into indigence and beggary. They may also be employed on agricultural projects, road construction and the like as they would only too gladly accept any employment.

3.11 The Temporarily Unemployed who are Unemployable

Unlike the last mentioned type, this type has degenerated to the point of becoming unemployable after a temporary period of unemployment. The low wages, the unskilled nature of the work and its growing irregularity unsettle habits of industry and at last make the men unwilling to accept steady employment. The conditions under which they live and work in industrial towns and cities contribute their share towards the breakdown self-respect and personal pride. The overcrowding, lack of privacy and absence of nearly all facilities for decent living cannot help exercising a demoralizing influence. Their work is hard, the hours are long and the bosses order them about like so many dumb driven cattle. They then naturally are not concerned about the quality of work done and drift off the job. Gradually there is a decay of honest hard labour and the labourer deteriorates into the regular professional beggar and becomes unemployable.

3.12 The Somewhat Permanently Unemployed who are Employable

This class of unemployed is those who by reason of a change in their trade or in the market, or for some other economic reason find themselves threatened by unemployment, and yet are able and willing to work. If adjustment is not made to some other trade or job many belonging to this class generally become demoralised and degenerate into beggars. If provision for those finding themselves threatened with permanent unemployment can be made promptly and well, before habits of idleness and the recklessness of discouragement



have set in, the danger of breeding confirmed indolence, hopeless apathy and progressive degeneracy will often be safely averted.

3.13 The Permanently Unemployed and Unemployable

This class of the unemployed is permanently out of work because, for one reason or another, they are too inefficient to do any type of work. In other words, to this class belong vagrants who are constantly on the lookout for opportunities of obtaining food and lodging without giving work in return. Feeble-mindedness, mental diseases and various personality disorders breed this type of permanently unemployed and unemployable beggars. These include degenerates with eccentricities, epileptics, hysterical types, neurasthenics, persecuted and mystical types, those who regard themselves as apostles and prophets, and those suffering from schizophrenia, or drifting into senility. In a general way these men might be termed weaklings who having no great strength of character, lose their grip on life under the stress of some temporary misfortune. Then having found how easy it is to live without regular work, they lose what little ambition they may have had and merge into the ranks of the unemployed and unemployable.

3.14 The Permanently Unemployed who are viciously and Incurably Unwilling to Work

To this type belong the idle and disorderly persons, rogues and vagabonds. They comprise the semi-criminal, vicious and confirmed idlers who habitually depend on doles and charity, and finally become a danger to the whole community. Hence, the necessity of applying genuinely drastic measures is to keep them under control. They have reached the lowest rung of the ladder of pauperism as the moral fibre of their personalities has become rotten to the core.

No social and economic improvements, no establishment of labour colonies will be of any avail in dealing with this type. The only probable solution would be for the Government to establish Penal Labour Colonies. This does not, by any manner of means, imply that they should be treated like criminals. On the contrary, they need the most sympathetic care and handling. The Penal Colonies should be like psychiatric sanatoria where the treatment programme should include a balanced plan of work and healthy recreation, and provide for reasonable opportunities for the satisfaction of the most fundamental physical and psychological human needs; for, it is important never to lose sight of the fact that these paupers, however hardened they may appear, are essentially weaklings. Most of them have



dwindled into their present plight because they have not had the courage to face and fight the hard battles of life. They have either fled from certain crises in their lives, or because of some misfortune, become hostile to society in general and adopted anti-social ways.

3.15 Small Trade Beggars

This may sound even more paradoxical than the last type, for it is hard to believe that anyone engaged in trade, however petty it may be, should find it necessary to beg. Yet it is strangely enough a fact that a number of beggars have made enough money to open up small panbidi, vegetable, flower, grams and puffed-rice shops as side business along with their usual profession of begging. While some members attend to the sales at the shops, others go out begging and each responsible member takes his turn at the shop and at begging by rotation. Perhaps there is no other country in the world where begging has proved so profitable as in India. This type of intelligent beggar makes use of his profits in carrying on small trade as a side line and making greater profits. But most of the professional beggars beg only for begging's sake, and through a peculiar psychological perversity hardly ever spend a penny on themselves. They have never known what it is to buy food or clothing. Both are procured through begging and every pie is accumulated until their death. Thus, they lead a hand-to-mouth, wretched, sordid existence in naked poverty and starvation, and finally die leaving behind them thousands of rupees to become Government property. With them begging is an end in itself. It is not a means of bettering their condition or standard of living as in the case of the employed.

3.16 The Tribal Beggars

Far different from either the genuine or bogus religious mendicant is the tribal beggar. These tribes move about from place to place singing and reciting poems, and begging; and they are quite welcome in certain parts of India. This type with its traditional songs and poems is unusually free from the viciousness of the city beggar. They correspond more or less to the minstrel and are vastly different from the various criminal tribes and gypsies who travel from one town to another in caravans and who are notorious for begging, thieving and dacoity. Very few places in India have criminal tribes settlements; and these beggars wander from province to province establishing colonies and camps wherever they happen to halt or settle temporarily. When they come to the large cities they and their children live



by begging and petty thefts. Some of the men folk try and obtain casual work whenever they can.

Among this class of tribal beggars may also be included the seasonal vagrant and the permanent vagrant. The seasonal vagrants comprise those migratory casual labourers who work on the fields or on some trade or craft in their native village during the season and in the off season migrate to larger cities where they live on foot-paths or open maidens, and maintain themselves by begging or stealing. They seldom find work and even if they do, they are incapable of sticking to one job and before they get settled in one job, they migrate to another place. The permanent vagrants are the migratory non-workers. They are purposeless wanderers who beat their way from place to place, begging for food, getting along in any way they can and carefully avoiding rendering any useful service to the world. They travel in tribal caravans and lead a carefree existence sleeping wherever they can and eating whatever they get. Some of them wander continuously, others only at particular times or seasons and still others at irregular intervals, and whatever be the difference in their modes of migration, they are all of a class in that they are confirmed non-workers. In any scheme of social reconstruction this type would be the most difficult to tackle not only because of lack of fixed place of abode but also because of the utter depravity to which this class has sunk.

3.17 The Able- Bodied

Much less nauseating but far more exasperating is the able-bodied beggar. This type considers begging its birth-right and bullies, harasses and troubles the public into giving him alms. If a person happens to turn a deaf ear or to remonstrate with him for not working even though physically fit, he will turn round and use such abusive language that the person retires within his shell and makes up his mind never to address a beggar again. If offered a job he will flatly explain that he is ancestrally a beggar and as he has never worked in his life, his bones are stiffened and his constitution will not allow him to work.

If caught by the police and sent to a home or work colony, he will abscond the very next day saying he has never lived within walls and must roam freely in the open. He thinks it is his ancestral birth-right to pester the public and no one has any authority to interfere with that right. No amount of change in sociologic and economic viewpoint and system will affect him as he simply refuses to work, however attractive the wages and terms offered may be. Nor



are enactments adorning the statute book any good. What is needed is thorough and efficient machinery for the enforcement of the legislation prohibiting begging and the following up of a constructive programme after the arrests have been made.

3.18 Migrant Beggars

A third view of begging as a livelihood strategy pursued by a large number of people in various parts of the world. For poor households, it may be a precursor to another, more permanent way of making a living, or it may be an enduring phenomenon. Scholars of migration have paid little attention to this way of making a living. In India, people migrate from villages to beg, are because of the four crucial reasons and they were:

- 1.18.1 To meet daily household expenses and educational costs;
- 1.18.2 To make more substantial purchases, for instance, of land for economic improvement;
- 1.18.3 To recover losses from crop damage from natural calamities; and
- 1.18.4 Migration by young people to visit new places and earn cash.

The extremely poor did not migrate owing to their lack of means. Travel expenses and worries of leaving the family at home were other deterrents dampening migration. While women migrated from a few households, the majority of the migrants are men. A few women migrated due to poverty resulting from separation from husbands or due to widowhood. Others migrated due to the unequal spread of irrigation, as well as the high density of population and landlessness, small size of landholdings, the devastation caused by the millennium flood. The agricultural and non-agricultural work migration is common; each of the migration trips had specific destinations, durations and seasons. Seasons influenced migration for agricultural work, especially paddy. Migration for summer rice, transplantation occurred in mid-January and for the harvest in mid-April; the duration for both was up to a month and during this period poor people migrated for the purpose of earning money through begging. Thus begging is a key source of livelihood for several migrants, often continuing throughout the year, but during festivals and fasting periods, they often went further into the state. They, however, realised that begging was essential to make a living. In some households, poverty was not the only driving factor behind begging. Ageing and a decrease in physical fitness for agricultural work often compelled men in the age group of 50 to 60 to start begging. Additionally, the long suffering from various diseases



often associated with hard labour and lack of enough food persuaded men to engage in the comparatively less arduous work of begging to fill their stomach. The amount of cash they earned varied, depending primarily on the duration of stay. The staying arrangements and living conditions at the destination, is fairly easy to find a place. Clubhouses, school buildings, privately owned accommodation with a family or outside a house were used to spend a week or more. However, often the destinations did not have many facilities. They migrated in groups of three to four along with similar groups of men. Usually before migrating, they planned their journey considering the destination to be visited, their need for cash, food or clothes as well as the possibility of an upcoming festival or social event. At the destination, they would split and go from house to house in groups of two or three. They carried their own bags, a pair of clothes and some money, if it was available.

4. MODUS OPERANDI / TECHNIQUES EMPLOYED IN BEGGING

It will be interesting to note that the beggars employ various types of techniques to exploit the religious sentiments, spiritual beliefs and human nature of their patrons. These techniques may be discussed under following five heads, viz:

4.1 Ordinary Technique

The beggar employs his techniques in such a manner so as to appeal to human sentiments and arouse sympathy on the one hand and adjusts himself to the varying situations and circumstances on the other. The desire to make oneself comfortable in this life and the life beyond characterizes most of the human beings. The blessing that the beggar showers on the giver of alms has a direct reference to the fulfillment of this desire. Women are more easily lured by such stimulated pleadings, such as predicting good health and longevity of their husbands and children, while old men and women are fit subject for the glorification of their future life and the means necessary for securing it.²⁶

When he is unable to elicit any response in this way he starts relating tales of misery and ill luck that have befallen him. If he is diseased or if he is harbouring some sore or untreated wound he exposes it to attract their sympathy. In addition to display of handicaps imposed upon him by nature, he employs various other means such as evidence of his incompetency

²⁶ Gurumukh Ram Das, "Indian Social Problems – social disorganization and reconstruction", Allied Publishers Ltd, 1976, 234-235.



in printed letters and giving some false pathetic stories. Sometimes they give melodious songs or show certain tricks to attract the attention of the passers-by.

Sen Gupta points out that the beggar in his begging appeals banks upon the sentiments inherent in human nature and attempts to touch the personality at all its vulnerable points. "He appeals to your religious sentiments, to your sense of dependence on divine grace when he shouts, 'may god give you happiness' (Tumko parmatma sukhi rakkhay, baba) ; he appeals to you as a parent when he blesses your children (tumeharay bal bachcha sukhi rahey) ; he appeals to your sense of greed when unfold wealth and even a kingdom is promised to you or a nice husband or a job in exchange for a price, and seeks your protection for himself and his starving family; and finally he tells you of his illness, hard luck, bereavement and utter destitution."²⁷

Dr. Sen Gupta has also mentioned about the psycho-physical techniques which the beggar employs in order to make his appeal effective. In order that his appeal may be effective it must have three ingredients. It should (i) Attract attention. (ii) Appeal to emotions. (iii) Impress the need of the beggar upon the mind of his patron.

4.2 Techniques Employed by Religious Mendicants

Sadus and faqirs generally employ one of the following techniques for collecting alms both in kind or cash, i.e.

- 4.2.1** Organizing some religious feast, bhandara or the like;
- 4.2.2** Removing any natural calamity or disease, e.g. epidemics, small pox, cholera or to bring rains;
- 4.2.3** Making pilgrims to all the religious centre's;
- 4.2.4** Giving blessings to people and an assurance of a happy life beyond; or
- 4.2.5** Constructing a temple or a mosque.

They are aware of the fact that they cannot get alms in abundance, if they appeal to the public directly.

4.3 Use of Coercive Method

Some of us might believe that modes of begging means the employment of humble ways of collecting alms, and that a beggar always appeals apologetically to the public sentiments, but there are other ways by which a beggar makes his way through and forces the people to

²⁷ N.N.Sen Gupta, "Mental Traits of Beggars", In Our Beggary Problems (1945), 28.



give something or the other. A beggar may force a man by turning himself as a nuisance to him by holding or tugging the feet, by coming nearer the people, by showing such wounds or actions of abnormality physical or mental so that one may like to avoid his or her sight. One can avoid such person only by giving some money to him. Some particular types of beggars, known as murchias would bleed before one who does not pay. Similarly, some sadhus, e.g nagas, would threaten a hunger strike if they are not properly provided for.

4.4 Use of Tricks

Apart from the various techniques used by the beggars, they employ various tricks and trickeries in order to make their appeal more effective. Some beggars excite the people by exhibiting some strange natural phenomenon- a cow with four tongues or birth of a queer boy. Indian jugglers and snake charmers may show new feats. Some become palmists and show strange charts to attract the passers-by.

4.5 Deforming of Body

The most sinister of the tricks is that when the child is deformed at the time of birth or in early childhood to be used as instrument for beggary. The crippled children are used as means to an end. Many beggars are given training in their noses, lips and ears closed by various devices. They have got a strange and indirect organized method of begging and are governed by elaborate codes of behavior, discipline and ceremonial drinking parties. A beggar leader may have under his control several beggar children and others whom he provides with the necessary food, clothes and shelter. All the earnings earned by these beggars go to his pocket. The greater the contribution of an individual beggar the greater the amenities provided by the gang leader.²⁸ In Madras city where a survey of beggars was carried out in November 1953 it was found that the method used for begging, were ordinary, exhibiting wounds, exhibiting new-born babies, singing religious songs, exhibiting pregnancy or exhibiting dead bodies.²⁹

5. EFFECTS OF BEGGARY

Beggary affects every individual in the society; beggars are everywhere, in any place. They are an inconvenience to the smooth flow of traffic. You pull up your car at a traffic signal and they are bound to appear. They march in restaurants, parks, cinema houses, bus stops,

²⁸ Gurumukh Ram Das, "Indian Social Problems – social disorganization and reconstruction", Allied Publishers Ltd, 1976, 2334-237.

²⁹ Social Legislation, Its Role In Social Welfare (1955), 247.



railway stations, local transports, mosques, hospitals, shops, and markets, in the universities and institutions and on the roadways. Some of them have a loud, high-pitched voice that can be heard across the road. If you try to get rid of one by giving him some money, you end up in attracting a dozen beggars irrespective of age or gender. Rollup the car window and they pester you by a constant knock. Shabby women carrying underfed children, old, sick, forsaken men and children (mostly under the age of 10) are commonly seen begging. They bother you even when you are within the premises of your house. There is the doorbell ringing. You leave your work and walk all the way to the gate only to discover a beggar. What disturbance! And what guts! When out of the house, beggars torment you with an ever-increasing intensity. Every individual are becoming sick of these beggars. They are disturbing you everywhere.

Nowadays, begging is another name for cheating. I have seen beggars who implore people to buy them medicines because their son/husband is ill. They usually succeed and when the buyer is out of sight, they go back to the medical store to return medicines and claim cash. To beg by harassing is perchance the worst form of begging. Begging is also a successful disguise, for burglars clad themselves as beggars and are on the lookout for a locked house or a lonely child. Once kidnapped, the child is maimed and forced to beg. Compelled by poverty, innocent women turn to immorality and camouflage it under beggary, and also a bug outgrowth of begging, particularly among young women, is to turn to prostitution.

Begging is a tricky art that requires tact, skill, and intelligence. Desperate, starved, envious looks are a product of careful cultivation a good beggar is not only a good actor but also a good judge of character. These people are hypocrites who want people to be moral and generous so that they can be exploited on these grounds. With this, we need to re-consider our stance; if pity can exploit us, then it is something to be avoided, something to be beware of. Beggary is one of the factors that affect social psychology. It is not a global issue but pertains to the third world scenario. The biggest effect of beggary is that the future of a child ruined by this profession, a child whose age is 7 or 8 and his father is also a beggar then the child also lives his whole life being a beggar. And now days, as is it increasing every day (especially in the third world countries), thousands and thousands of children's life and their future is eaten up by this curse begging. The mafia is behind all these professional beggars, and some of these are international mafias, which are the biggest fear for any



country, because these mafias are also forces these beggars to do some crimes in the country. These professional beggars also become an inspiration for all the poor in the society, to just become a poor and earn easy money without any hard working. For this reason also more and more people are becoming beggar. The poor people so inspired by these professional beggars that they think beggary is the only work, which poor people do (most of the third world countries especially Pakistan, Bangladesh, Srilanka and India).

Begging has a really bad effect on society. If law enforcement agencies will leave the evil forces like this whole young generation can become victim of such evils. We should promote habit of hardworking in the individuals of our society and do not let them to adopt this as a profession. We should develop more job opportunities for individuals and should start programs through which skills of individuals could be improved.

6. BEGGARY LAWS AND ITS EFFECT

Associated with the problems of poverty and unemployment is the problem of beggary which is a social problem of great magnitude and grave concern in developing countries. Begging is a problem for society in as much as a large number of beggars means non utilization of available human resources and drag upon the existing resources of the society. It is common to find beggars at rubbish dumps, road sides, and traffic lights and under flyovers. There is no proper enumeration of beggars in the country. Moreover the number of women and children is ever increasing. The biggest problem lies in the changing attitude towards beggars. According to Mr Upendra Baxi former vice-chancellor traditionally begging has been an accepted way of life in India. Giving alms to the needy was built into the social fabric. That changed with the colonial rule, to the Victorians beggary embodied laziness and moral degeneration. Colonial laws held a beggar punishable for his condition. The newly independent nation imbibed this attitude towards poverty. In the new millennium the Government doesn't want them laying around middle class regards them as a nuisance.³⁰

India's beggary laws are a throwback to the centuries old European vagrancy laws which instead of addressing the socio-economic issues make the poor criminally responsible for their position. The definition of beggar in law states as anyone who appears poor. The anti-beggar legislation is aimed at removing the poor from the face of the city. The beggars who have spent years on the street find it very difficult to live in confined space. There are

³⁰ <http://www.azadiindia.org>, visited on 5-6-2012.



provisions for vocational training in the government run beggar homes. But these are worse than the third rate jails where convicts can spend up to 10 years. India as a nation needs to think for its begging population. With the nation aspiring to achieve world standards in every field socio-economic measures are needed to curb the begging problem in India. Despite, the number of legislations passed by the different state legislatures the menace of begging is uncontrollable. The Indian Penal Code (Section 363A) deals with the kidnapping and maiming of a minor for purposes of begging. However, there is hardly any evidence on the part of law enforcement agency to arrest people who maim or coerce children, who were living off their earnings, for purposes of begging. The beggars of today are either too ill to do any work or too ideal for that, they, therefore prefer to beg to fill their bellies than doing work. They have adopted beggary as a profession.³¹

These laws are not able to eradicate begging altogether. Still we find beggars in abundance at streets, market places, traffic signals, railway stations, religious places, begging and the concerned governments are doing nothing, to curb this socio-legal disorganization called begging. The solution calls for a comprehensive programme and reorientation of the existing programmers. Philanthropic approach to beggar problem should be replaced by therapeutic and rehabilitative work.

7. SUGGESTIONS TO ERADICATE BEGGARY

- 7.1 Laws dealing with beggary should be strictly enforced;
- 7.2 Effective planning should be done by the government to solve unemployment and poverty;
- 7.3 Beggars should not be allowed to stay in public places like railway stations, bus stops, market places, etc.
- 7.4 The state should provide for free treatment of mental ailments in psychiatric centre's;
- 7.5 Proper development should be brought in agricultural and industrial sector which provide them employment opportunity to stand on their own legs;
- 7.6 Underground beggar organizations should be checked by public and police and should be given capital punishment;
- 7.7 The Government should open special clinics to take care of those who are unable to pay for treatment of diseases like leprosy etc.

³¹ Dr. S.R.Myneni, "Sociology for law students", Allahabad Law Agency, second edition, 2007, 535.



7.8 General and technical education should be given to orphans.

7.9 In the contrary, all the orphans and handicapped should be taken care of by opening more and more rehabilitation centre's;

7.10 To eradicate beggary it is necessary that we must provide everyone a constitutional right to work and also raise the minimum wages.

7.11 Work homes should be established for lazy people.

7.12 The people should be enlightened about the realities of beggary and its effects on the society as a whole and make them stop giving alms to the beggars.

8. CONCLUSION

India is a home of beggars. In no other country you will find so many beggars. The reason is that begging is a profession in India. Many of the beggars are beggars by birth. They do not like to change their profession. They make their living with ease. All Indian beggars are an object of pity. They were rags. Some are seen in loincloth only. They go about place to place on their daily rounds. They have begging bowls or bags in their hands. They are very persistent. They are dead to all sense of shame. Beggary is an infamous organized business in our part of the world. A lot is said about it, yet it still persists on. The root problem such as injustice and lack of equality must be combated if beggary is to be eradicated for good. Its poverty, that forces poor people to opt for beggary as a mode for earning their livelihood. One can't sort out this problem through law only. The beggars are idlers. They cause a great loss of labour and industry to the nation. Their manual labour could have been better utilized in factories or mills. They would have produced useful work. The healthy beggars should not give any alms. They should be discouraged in every ways so that they may become the useful members of the society.

The people in India are religious minded. The Hindus believe in the rebirth of soul after death. They think that if they would do good actions, God would be pleased with them and he would send them to this world again as men. The Muslims too believe that if they would do well to their fellow-beings, they would be sent to Jannat (paradise) on the day of judgement. So, all people are charitable by nature. Hence they distribute food among the beggars. The charitable disposition of the people encourages beggary. People can get bread, flour, clothes and money without any effort of hard work on their part. So they like to be beggars. Beside this, the absence of workhouse or poor houses compels the blind, the lame



and disabled people to take to begging. They have to means of supporting themselves. When they get no help from the Government, they become beggars. Begging for alms has now become a business proposition of huge magnitude at least that is what now we understand through columns in news papers and what we see in our day to day life. Beggars are everywhere, in your neighbourhood, in trains, in busses, in government offices, colleges, universities, on roads and they are as ubiquitous as god himself. It is reliably learnt that beggars are there even in communist countries who swear by egalitarianism and in capitalist economies as well. Begging is perceived to be part of Indian culture and tradition along with sadhus, snake charmers etc. It has become a means of living without any investment except that one has to forget about self respect and dignity. Probably this blot on our society should be attended to. Our Governments did not care about eradicating this. The chatter of coins in a begging bowl always remind me that I have been part of a system which created an equal distribution of wealth that some of my brothers and sisters have taken to begging in order to survive. It is high time we draw a blue print to eradicate this social menace.