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Beggary in India

B.F.H.R. Bijli

Environmental Engineer, water Environmental Engineer

Abstract
In this paper we will consider how we Indians consider beggary. We will consider sociological, political, religious, administrative aspects of beggary briefly in the world and a little more elaborately in India. Beggary has been practiced in India since time memorial The historical and philosophical analysis of the practice of begging explores a number of findings. In India the practice of beggary has been explicitly discussed in the religious scriptures, sociological discourses, and day to day life. A brief analysis has been in the topic of beggary is presented in this paper which gives an insight into various aspects related to beggary, the beggars and the people who promote it inadvertently and consciously.

Keywords: Beggary, sociological, political, religious, administrative, elaborately, explicitly, connotations, handicapped, imbalanced, abnormalities, hooligans, territories, cognizable, identifiable, panhandler, Arthashastra, Bhiksha, Bhikkus, Zakath

Abstract
In this paper we will consider how we Indians consider beggary in India. We will consider sociological, political, religious, administrative aspects of beggary briefly in the world and a little more elaborately in India. In India the practice of beggary has been explicitly discussed in the religious scriptures, sociological discourses, and day to day life.

Introduction

As a concept, beggary is understood as a process in which the person in need asks for monetary and/or material help including essential or basic amenities. From the sociological perspective, beggary is perceived as a form which includes, but not restricted only to seek material benefit by requesting for money and beyond money asking for food, drink, cigarettes or other small items. The seeker has no commitment or intention to return the cash or to provide any kind of physical or mental service. In other words, begging is the practice of pleading to others to grant them a favour without expectation of reciprocation.

Beggars possibly can be found in community spaces such as transport routes, city parks, and near busy markets. In fact, begging is a social nuisance, which has many negative connotations, not only for socio-economic and physical surroundings of the cities, but also for beggars themselves. Therefore, it is also called most sinister evil among all social evils. The status of a place can be best categorised by the number of beggars present there. The reasons for this are many. To name a few, physical deterioration, mental incompetency, avertable ailment, malnourishment, infliction of lives by forcing them into felony, mental abnormalities, family maladjustments and social irregularities etc. The dilemma of begging is a worldwide phenomenon; it is not weird to any fraction of the country. This problem is easily noticeable in urban areas of several countries. However, depending on the social environment the crisis of begging

is considerably higher in one part than in the other. There are many specific areas where beggars are found, such as petrol filling stations, restaurants, banks, super markets, mosques, churches, temples etc. Beggars are the poorest of the poor and the most unfavourable segment of the society. They are ill fed, ill cared for, ill dressed, generally suffering from some disease or other, physically handicapped, mentally imbalanced etc. In such deprived conditions and circumstances where they exist, they are incapable to accomplish their basic needs of life (food, shelter, health and protection). Their situation is really heart rending.

There are numerous factors which stimulate or encourage the practice of begging. Major factors are poverty, religion, physical disability, culture, national disaster, civil war, bad habits (drug, alcohol, and gambling), and family heritage, uncontrolled rural to urban migration, eviction from their land by government and other major industrial projects sites and psychiatric disorders and disabilities.

But the present era, begging has become a profession. Actually, this profession is based on the sympathetic behaviour of the public towards the destitute people. No doubt, beggars are the disadvantaged persons. But segment of beggars have adopted ingenious tactics to accumulate more alms to save themselves from physical works. Cunning muscle men develop beggar gangs and set up their business of beggary collection. These steel children and maim them and train them to be beggars.

There are differences in begging systems between India and western countries. There are beggars in England and USA and other western countries. The distinction between the begging system of the western countries and our country is in the methods of begging. In developed countries, beggars gather money by performing their arts and skills, but in India they are getting money only on the basis of sympathy or on the clemency of society. It is rare to find beggars who sing very well and seek alms.

Let us have statistics beggar prevalence in our Nation. According to Census of India 2011, there were 4, 13,670 beggars and vagrants in India which was 6, 27,688 in 2001. Despite 20 States and 2 Union Territories (Chandigarh and Delhi) of India have either enacted their own Anti-Beggary Legislation or adopted legislations enacted by other States; the practice of begging still exists in every nook and corner of the country. Legally begging is treated as a cognizable and non-bailable offense in India. However, at present, there is no scheme of the Central Government to prohibit the practice of begging

Generally, beggars are called 'bhikhari' in India, and they live on the mercy and charity of the people and earn their livelihood by begging the people for money or basic materials. India is the place with largest population in the world that goes to bed devoid of any food and highly deficient of attires to wear. Among the poor countries in the world India occupies 123rd position out of 127. Despite this we cannot brand all such deprived population within the category of beggars. Thus the crisis of begging is different and is deep rooted in the Indian culture. Apart from poverty and deprivation religious faith also encourages begging due to the belief that it is one way to please the Almighty God and seek access to Heaven. This myth has encouraged beggars to inhabit footpaths and steps leading to the religious places whether it is Church, Mosque, Temple or any other religious place. Further, begging has been a traditional profession in India as "Charity" is considered as one of the noblest of human virtues according to the Vedic traditions. Ancient Indian thinkers acquainted their vision regarding problem of begging differently. As per the Yuga theory, the imperative features of ancient Indian thought is the view regarding the deterioration of Dharma (righteousness), from Yuga to Yuga (from age to age). According to the ancient thinkers, each Age has got its own specific virtue and way of life. For instance, according to the great law-giver Manu, in the "Kruta Yuga", the chief asset is "Tapas", meditation; in the "Treata Yuga" the chief virtue is "Jnanam" (Knowledge); in the "Dvapara Yuga", it is "Yajna",

(Sacrifice) and in present "Kali Yuga", the chief virtue is "Daanam" (Charity). Charity is defined as Alms giving or Bhiksha to Brahmins

The Varna theory also stipulates the rules for giving Daanam and for obtaining Bhiksha. Manu declared that during the recitation of hymns only the members of the Brahmana Varna are entitled to receive Daanam. Conversely, the Kshatriya and the Vaishya are sanctioned only to give Daanam, but are forbidden from receiving Daanam. In addition, Manu advocated the institutionalized charity. He entailed that the king should offer gifts to those who are afflicted by disease, orphans and old age. Besides, the Kautiliya also expressed his views in Arthashastra that "the king shall provide the orphans, aged, infirm, afflicted and the feeble with protection. He shall also endow with nourishment to helpless women, when they are concerning and also the children they give birth to". There are also reference of Bhiksha in Buddhism and Jainism. The institution of Bhikus in Buddhism and Arhats in Jainism incorporated a cluster of men and women who abandoned the worldly life for the sake of religion and survived on the Charity and Alms of others. Among Muslims the Clergy interpreted Zakath as poor due instead of correct interpretation of "others' due" and brought Zakath to the level of Alms giving. To gain God's grace they give Zakath or alms during their holy month of Ramzan. Muslim kings and rulers dispersed alms and other necessary substances to 'Fakirs' and to those, called Soofis who had renounced the world.

In the Sikh religion, the habit or act of begging or asking alms has been predestined in the Adi Granth. Guru Nanak Dev strongly condemned the tradition of begging, proclaiming it as parasitism in society. He advocated the honest labour, honest earnings and help for the indigent and disabled. He argued that a beggar receive no respect in the society. Thus, he contemplated that one should beg only from the Munificent Lord and receive everything desired. Sikh philosophy condemns even those mystics who live on begging because such people are actually burden on the society and encourage indolence. They feel no shame in begging from door to door and this shamelessness accompanies them throughout the life. Thus this practice is not considered as respectable as per the Sikh Philosophy.

Begging is an annoyance for any society. But for a developing country like India it is not only curse, but a great financial burden too. Additionally, the problem of beggary is not only economic; it also contains social and moral aspects. The overseas press and television have put India to disgrace by graphically screening pictures of beggars fighting like dogs for a few coins, swarming like bees for the left-overs in hotels and restaurants, naked women sleeping on floor and with their children sucking breasts. Such sense shows India in very lurid colors. After all, begging involves the beggar displaying his miserable plight by words, forms or actions and requesting for alms by words (spoken or written) or actions. Begging is defined as "asking for alms or charity given out of sympathy to the poor".

The state of Karnataka has the Mysore Prohibition of Beggary Act 1954. It defines beggary as follows. "Begging contains wandering from door to door, soliciting alms, exhibiting or exposing sores, wounds, bodily ailments or deformities, or making false pretence of them for exciting pity for securing alms"

The state of Maharashtra has "the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959" which defines this as anyone, "having no visible means of subsistence and pleading for or receiving alms in communal places whether or not under any relevance such singing, dancing, fortune - telling performing tricks and selling articles, exposing or exhibiting any sore, of the purpose of obtaining or exhorting alms. Further it also defines begging to mean exposing or exhibiting, with the entity of gaining or extract alms, any painful, wound, injury, deformity or disease whether of a human being or beast

The Encyclopaedia of Social Work in India (1968) defines the beggars as "Charity seeking people, who could easily be noticed by the way they subsist and earn money essential for survival; and bulk among them who are destitute and live in the open or in the impoverished shelters". Beggary is an indicator of social disorganization and the extensive custom of alms-giving by individuals and institutions by which the disability, helplessness or social inadequacy of the beggars has been assumed to be mitigated in India. Panhandler is a particular variety of beggar who carries a begging pan in his hands and can be defined as "A person who publicly and habitually requests for money or goods for personal use in a face to face manner from unfamiliar others without offering a readily identifiable or a valued consumer product or a service in exchange for items received."

Child Begging, reveals that "begging is a social deviance and social problem, which includes gaining material benefit by asking for money from other persons, with no intention to return the money so collected or provide the service in return". The Delhi Commission for protection of Child Right argues that, "Child begging has sometimes been presented as a survival strategy, since children engaged in begging come from impoverished families who do not have an alternative income-generating activity" According to the Census of India (2001), beggars are "vagrants, prostitutes and persons having unidentified source of income and those with unspecified source of subsistence and not engaged in any economically productive work during reference period"

Inferences and conclusion

1. The historical and philosophical analysis of the practice of begging in India explores a number of findings. Firstly, beggary has been practiced in India since time memorial. Beggar and begging are formally acknowledged not only in the philosophical narratives but also the socio-cultural discourses.
2. Secondly, significant and equally interesting part of these narratives and discourses is that there are totally different, rather contrary positions with regard to beggary and beggar. During every historical era and in case of various socio-cultural narratives and discourses, beggary is recognized as unsocial, profane and hence, a forbidden activity. On the other side, beggar is largely perceived not as unsocial or immoral but more as deprived and vulnerable.
3. Thirdly, in the historical context, there is largely similarity and indeed uniformity in the philosophical and sociological positions towards beggary in all regions of India irrespective of the regional, cultural and religious distinctions.
4. Fourthly, the religious discourses condemn beggary but paradoxically forcefully advocate merciful approach towards beggars in our country.
5. Above all, the modern legal framework which deals with defining and discussing the legal aspects relating to the practice of beggary is largely based on the religious claims of beggary.

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