

Child Begging - An Organized Crime?

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ABSTRACT

“The children must, at last, play in the open veld, no longer tortured by the pangs of hunger or ravaged by the disease or threatened with the scourge of ignorance, molestation and abuse, and no longer required to engage in deeds whose gravity exceeds the demands of their tender years.”- Nelson Mandela. This paper focuses upon incessant act of “child begging” imposed upon infants by the begging mafia. How an act of survival is now shaped into satanic act by few. Children are forced, beaten, burned, maimed, exploited, drugged and trafficked to collect alms. Time and again media have tried to uncloak these crimes while authorities deny their existence. Author have raised various questions in this article regarding who those people are, what do they want from children and why nothing have been done yet to resolve the issue. Most importantly, “**Is child begging an organized crime or part of one?**” Paper also covers the cause and effect of horrifying crime against children. The deadly combination of mafia and terrorists are recruiting children as soldiers, making their life miserable and violating their human rights. Author concludes this paper with suggestive pointers to eradicate child begging and other acts causing human (child) rights violations.

KEYWORDS: Children, begging, exploited, mafia, authorities and rights

INTRODUCTION

India is the world’s most child-inhabited country with 400 million people under the age of eighteen. This imbibe huge responsibility on country’s shoulder to ensure their protection from any exploitation causing mental, physical or sexual harm and to provide proper nourishment, healthy environment, including all the essential needs for their better upbringing such as education, food, shelter, medical treatment etc. They are the most vulnerable and purest mankind, often entitled as “country’s future” thence our duty and responsibility to ensure their welfare. Considering children to be weaker section of society Art 15 (3) of Indian Constitution provides, “*nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provision for women and children*” which led to amendment of Article 21A providing “*free and compulsory education to all children under the age of six to fourteen*” as their fundamental right, ensuring availability of all their needs. Even though Article 23 and 24 prohibit ‘traffic in human beings, beggar and forced labor’ and ‘hazardous employment’ of children below 14 years of age; Child begging could be easily

traced in every nook and corner of the country. Is the child begging a need or forceful act to satisfy selfish motive of greedy monsters? Earlier poverty, lack of education and hunger were the willful rationale behind infants to beg. But with the evolution of society it’s motive took a satanic-turn, orphaned, abandoned, trafficked, easy-earning, kidnapped, disabled, sympathy-driven, violence, torture or forced by mafia and need of extra-income are paramount causes for coercing infants to indulge in involuntary child-begging. Reports have been acknowledged according to which women’s with infants in their arm asking for money to feed her child is merely an ‘act’, to shed some light on the truth ‘the child isn’t hers’. The infants are often sedated via milk to avoid any nuisance. Children could be witnessed rambling barefoot on the roads with open wounds and skeleton-like bodies asking for money near tourist spots, cinema halls, temples, traffic lights, hospitals, street corners, markets, under flyovers or monuments.

According to Indian National Human Rights Commission there are over three lakh child-beggars

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in India among the total population size of 1.2 billion¹. Thousands of kids are abducted every year rendering it as a huge problem and an important issue in need of quick surveillance by the authorities. Knowing the existence of 'begging mafia' capturing infants from public spaces and reshaping them into their slaves make it although-more an issue of concern. Lack of understanding and immaturity makes them an easy target of heinous crimes such as rape, sex-slaves, forced begging and child-trafficking resulting in violation of children's rights, their human rights.

In India Child begging has a hidden facet which needs to be uncloaked before the society; as rightly said, "things aren't always what it seems to be". Children asking for money on streets hovering by the women holding infants aren't always the family member. Then who are those people? Why children who beg looks so malnourished, disabled, burnt, amputated or wounded? Why do they beg? Who is behind the act? There is possibility of many answers but only the correct one can lead to actual source. With every passing minute a child gets trapped in the vicious cycle of torture and pain making him loses his very chance of normal-healthy life.

Is Child Begging An Organized Crime Or A Part Of One?

Child Begging is a multi-billion dollar industry run by mafias and cartels across India. Metropolitan cities such as Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai record cases of child abduction and trafficking on daily basis. According to National Crime Records Bureau, the total number of cases of missing children between 2015 & 2019 in India increased by about 16.3%.² What could possibly be the reason that they are been neglected by the authorities responsible for their protection but has keen eye of terrorists and mafia? There's a high possibility that their leaders has internal connection with the very system of the country, making it difficult for the authorities to connect the dots. Meanwhile, those little ones are brain-washed, sedated or drugged and later trained as soldiers. They are then trained to use deadly weapons, resulting into change in personalities and behavioral pattern.

Child Begging is a part of an organized crime in India that involves group leaders who maintain the regulation of the system. Children are abducted, kidnapped or tricked in order to trap them in the

system. The children are then used as pawns by these groups indulging them in illegal and dangerous businesses such as, trafficked in exchange of money, laborers, prostitutes, child-soldiers, beggars; forced to beg by beating, throwing acid, burnt by cigarettes, amputated, tortured, threaten, blackmail to harm the dear ones, sedated using drugs or opium; organ trafficking or are used for child pornography. In 2006, CNN-IBN media channel had an undercover investigation exposing the real faces of doctors involved in amputating healthy limbs of children in consideration of 10,000 to 40,000 rupees, named "arms for alms scandal"³. It is exercised in order to gain more sympathy from the passerby believing amputate/maimed/disable child makes twice more money than the others. At the end of the day all the hard-earn money are then handover to the group leader in the hope of getting food and shelter. But instead they are more starved, abused and drugged to keep them skinny and calm. They teach them all the tactics and the mannerism of how, where and from whom to beg. Some are even trafficked to other states or countries making it impossible for them to ever come out and live a normal life. Anti-social and terrorist groups sold them off to mafia who ensure the infants are away from their domestic locations.⁴ Iveta Cherneva in her book 'Trafficking for Begging: Old Game, New Game' warns the readers to not get fooled by children and women begging on the street quoting them as "forced beggars – victims of human trafficking".⁵ A daily target is fixed by the leaders which the children have to submit as the night falls, inability to meet the demand brings sufferings in form of physical abuse by bashing their head on walls or burning their skins by wood, isolation with no food or water, chained their limbs or bound their moment within four walls of dark room. It won't be wrong to call it a business treasuring pockets of mafia via mutilation and exploitation of children.

EFFECT OF CHILD-BEGGING

Industry of exploitation and mutilation ("begging mafia") impacts mental, physical, sexual and psychological health of the child. As per i-India, many of the abused children they encounter are traumatized and do not speak for months.⁶ Trauma reasoned to be the biggest killer among 0-14

³<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jul/31/india.ran-deepamesh>

⁴ <https://www.marketingmind.in/begging-in-india-complete-case-study-of-1-5-billion-industry/>

⁵ <https://globalmarch.org/children-forced-into-beggary-and-coerced-to-produce-earnings/>

⁶ <https://blog.ipleaders.in/help-child-beggars-india/>

¹http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-04/22/c_136228255.htm

² <https://factly.in/data-number-of-missing-children-cases-increase-to-1-2-lakh-in-2019/>

years.⁷ With the continuous doses of abusive substance on the streets affect their understanding and creative ability abruptly, making them addicted to those drugs. The children suffering in the vicious cycle of exploitation vary from a month to 15 year of age. Lack of proper nutrition and medical aid make them vulnerable to the diseases having long term effects. This violate their right to health, food, shelter, medical aid and right to life provided under Art 21 of Indian Constitution. As per study conducted by Temitope M. Ojo and Titilayo A. Benson entitled “Street Begging and its psychological social effects in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria”, the psycho-social effect of street begging leads to development of inferiority complex, lack of social interaction, loss of self-respect and dignity, increased mindset of poverty and loss of self-confidence.⁸ They might show sign of aggression, change in behavioral pattern, lack of understanding; thence proper counseling sessions and medicines could be helpful.

The curse of child-begging is not limited to beggary, instead they are often found to be engaged in other crimes such as theft, child-prostitution, pick-pocketing, robbery and extortion. Children on streets are always in threat of sexual harassment, accidents and violence, but who is taking care of them? Are laws in India sufficient to ensure justice, to enlighten the darkest phase of lost souls, to rehabilitate the survivors, to provide facilities to helpless or to prevent this “Organized crime”? If yes, why aren’t those criminals behind bars. If not, where are we lacking? It implies, framing of law is not sufficient enough until it’s effective enough to put the criminals where they are supposed to be. In 2017, The New Indian Express⁹ covered a report in which an NGO named Help Organization alleged its struggle and pressure they faced while rescuing children from mafia. They told that these gangs are dangerous and are backed by politicians. Such hard- truth realities makes it difficult for the citizens to believe justice could be prevailed, actions will be taken, no repercussions will be faced by the victims themselves and “truth triumphs”.

⁷ MM Harjai, N Chandrashekhar, “Terrorism, Trauma and Children”;

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4922923/>

⁸ Temitope M. Ojo & Titilayo A. Benson, “Street Begging and its psychological social effects in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria”;

<https://zenodo.org/record/1133039#.YEErIVUzbIU>

⁹ <https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/andhra-pradesh/2017/mar/10/political-blessings-to-organised-begging-mafia-1579785.html>

CAUSE OF CHILD BEGGING

Not all street children are part of begging mafia or terrorist groups rather forced by their own parents due to lack of food to eat, beaten by alcoholic father to beg or need to pay gambling debt or because they have son to feed and educate (while girl child have to give up their comfort and need), loans to be paid, parent not educated enough to know the other way to earn or the child is the only bread-earner in the family. Growing up on streets, they face many challenges such as bodily harm or verbal abuse, vulnerable to disease and violation of their human rights. Is Child Begging an only approach to earn? Despite the fact that govt. have formulated certain policies and programmes for vocational training or providing jobs through MGNREGA, ration cards to those below poverty line etc. to ensure no one sleeps hungry and to provide better livelihood alongside promoting education for kids via Mid-day Meals, free stationary and dress, free education, scholarships and other incentives. “Education” is the primary requirement to achieve societal-upliftment, development and progress. Why govt. policies aren’t effective enough? Where’s lacuna, is it in framing policies and schemes or implementation? Many will agree, if said implementation. Policies are well-framed but the irony is those who are poor and illiterate, belong to rural areas and locations not traceable in the maps doesn’t get it’s benefit. Then who does? If while framing policies and casting votes those people are counted then why not while providing resources? Alka Parikh, Uplift, NGO said, “These schemes have been a drain on national resources so far”.¹⁰

While there is other truth as well, an organized network, “Begging Mafia” and “terrorist organization”. It’s a group forcing children into begging by beating, abusing and disfiguring them. A highly advance network engaged in trafficking, smuggling, exploitation and terrorism. They use children as an exchange commodity meanwhile others are used to collect funds on streets. Each of these causes, whether forced by social or economic factors, family members or cartels run by mafia, “child begging” shall be introduced as crime violating human rights.

¹⁰ Shilpy Sinha, Govt-sponsored schemes: Meant for poor, but beyond their reach, Economic Times, Aug 29, 2012; https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/wealth/insure/govt-sponsored-schemes-meant-for-poor-but-beyond-their-reach/articleshow/15914642.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

DRIVE TO RECRUIT CHILD-TERRORISTS

Organized criminal groups and terrorist organizations are deadly combination of human rights exploiters. Children are trafficked by these groups from various regions and countries then forcefully recruited them into terrorism, sexual exploitation, drugs and organ smuggling. Those belonging to lower occupation strata or illiterate are much vulnerable to such offence. Their infants are either kidnapped, tricked in the name of service or extort from their homes to recruit them into their gangs. Victims are made to work according to their gender, females are forced into sexual exploitation, marriages, sex-slaves or as an exchange commodity for arms and weapons; male are taught and tortured into using dangerous weapons. Skin are sliced through in order to smuggle drugs, organs of victim are considerate in exchange of huge amount. Meanwhile due to lack of strings attached, bribed authorities and huge chunks of funding, local authorities are clueless in naming the master-minds or sight-in their camps.

Children of various nationalities, such as Central Africa, Nigeria, South-Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan etc., were dragged into the vortex of such violence. But whenever the term “child-soldiers” pops up, Africa is one such continent which never escapes the eye of human rights advocate. Since, 19th century it is known alongside responsible for majority of exploitation and recruitment of child-soldiers in armed conflicts. Reed Brody, Advocacy Director of Human Rights Watch, stated that “African children are being targeted across the continent as tools of war”¹¹. Comparing African child-soldiers with that of India’s recruitment of child terrorism, there is however prima facie difference i.e. where Africans do terror and violence in open and own onto their acts (consist of state armed groups), mafias in India acts with anonymity. In continent such as Africa, where some countries consider it illegal for a child below 18 to be involved in conflicts, in other parts there are radio announcements suggesting children “in want of work” to look it as an option, infact education institutes are influential centers for children to prioritize their career into military or state army. Whereas, India is a democratic country with no influence upon a child’s mind, however mafias and terrorist organization leave no choice for those who get trap into their vicious circle. In order to survive, meanwhile country’s facing political instability, disease, and famine, ethnic strife, war, exploitation and many such issues, picking up gun by young hands seems to be their only option to own their security.

¹¹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/1999/04/18/more-120000-child-soldiers-fighting-africa>

Those referred as ‘child-soldiers’ suffer immeasurable amount of exploitation and abuse, such kind, impossible to explain in words. If one analyze the situation of both the countries (i.e. Africa and India), although latter have few cases in that aspect, due to lack of internal instability, it still seems to be a matter of concern. Irrespective of nationalities, race or gender it imply heavy toll on children’s mind and body, attesting violation of child rights (human rights) and international humanitarian law.

INDIA & OTHER COUNTRIES

Since past few years India is having a situation of “begging mafia” walking right under their nose, capturing and forcing children into begging and other criminal activities. Being a part of “organized crime”, child begging is another such offence done against children across the globe. It’s a network of mafias and terrorist organizations working in groups across the continents. Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 2020 reported that 50% of victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation, 38% for forced labour, 6% into forced criminal activity and more than 1% to beg.¹² Countries such as Senegal, Pakistan and South-Sudan are few examples of those facing alike situation.

SENEGAL

Senegal, West African country is a hub of child traffickers. In the name of religious teaching, they trick parents to send their children, pick abandoned and orphans from the streets, and make them beg. ‘Forced Begging’- ‘Child Begging’ is the most prevalent form of trafficking in Senegal. Children are asked to bring a decided amount of money back to “religious-school” (Daaras) by nightfall, if fail gets beaten harshly. It was supposed to be a place where children get education for free, instead it becomes nightmare and prison for the juveniles. They face hunger, exploitation, violence, rape and unhygienic surroundings, altogether a traumatic phase of life. In an interview, The CNN Freedom Project, Begging for Change¹³, “A boy name, Mamadou, 10 year old told the reporter that he lives with 40 boys in daara sits atop a garbage dump. He told marabout (teacher) beats him if he doesn’t fulfill his quota”. According to Human Rights Watch, approximately 100,000 children (Talibes) are forced to beg there. The act

¹² https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tip/2021/GLOTiP_2020_15jan_web.pdf

¹³ Lisa Cohen, “Thousands of boys forced to beg by religious school in Senegal”, The CNN Freedom Project, Begging for Change; <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/08/africa/forced-child-begging-senegal-intl/index.html#:~:text=It%20is%20a%20fact%20of,schools%20to%20learn%20the%20Quran>

amounts to slavery, thence those involved shall be dealt accordingly. Government of Senegal is working on several projects with organizations in order to curb out the offenders and protect the human rights of victims.

PAKISTAN

Asian Human Rights Commission reported that 1.2 million children are begging on the streets of Pakistan.¹⁴ Evidently, 'begging mafia' enforcing child begging and organized crime is not new for the country. Poverty, unemployment, hunger and illiteracy are the reasons, why people beg. But in no time parents started sending their children on streets to bring food and money back at home in order to survive. Clearly, Mafia saw it an opportunity to sit back and enjoy the funds collected by children. These groups kidnap or abduct kids from their homes, parks or streets and change their look, making unrecognizable to their family. Children are taught to beg, and then pushed out on the streets with their buckets to collect alms. Masters often beat, disfigure, maim, burn or exploit those who disobey or unable to complete their given tasks. Child-begging is not limited to beg, their chain extend to other criminal activities such as drug abuse, terrorism, sexual exploitation, organ smuggling, prostitution and human trafficking. The US State Department's 2011 Trafficking in Persons Report on Pakistan says "children are frequently "bought, sold, rented, or kidnapped to work in organized, forced begging rings."¹⁵ Active participation of these rackets, even in year 2021, shows lacuna in system. Forced Child-begging is crime in the country and is punishable with 3 year imprisonment. In Dec,2020 The Sindh High Court¹⁶, Pakistan directed police authorities to submit report on cases of child-begging to analyze the actions taken by the authorities against those mafia. While in India, authorities are still questioning their existence due to lack of evidence.

CONCLUSION

"Children are like wet cement whatever falls on them makes an impression." - Haim Ginott, child psychologist.

In the tender age of playing and learning (what is right and wrong), need of extra care and attention, children are getting kidnapped and trafficked away

¹⁴ <https://dailytimes.com.pk/259380/action-against-begging-mafia-must-be-taken-now-enough-is-enough/>

¹⁵United States Department of State, "2011 Trafficking in Persons Report - Pakistan.";

<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/213396191.pdf>

¹⁶<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/764641-mafia-involved-in-child-beggary-shc-seeks-progress-report-on-cases>

from their family and home. Child Begging forced by mafia is not an organized crime but a part of one, it's a huge network of terrorist organization, corrupt politicians, businessmen and international organizations enforcing begging, prostitution, labour, terrorism, smuggling of organs, drugs and arms on children. Selfish motives behind such diabolical act is to rack up funds in order to implement their evil-plans by making them beg on streets, use them as pawns in conflict, reshape them as child-soldiers, trained to use deadly weapons, sexually exploited to meet their demands or desire, forcefully married, use as sex-slaves, considerate in exchange of arms or weapons and are victims of organ-smuggling waging it with huge chunks of money. Those who try to run-off/deny the orders or incapable to complete the task are punished harshly, some lose their life in doing so. In the 21st century where laws are evolving and there is no place for an act causing violation of human rights. Innocent souls are raped, beaten with rods, maimed and burnt with acid, if resist. Such acts leave irreparable impression on the child's mind, leaving them speechless for months and change in behavioral pattern. It's a crime against humanity and must be dealt accordingly. The network of these groups are enhancing with passing period. It requires immediate action by regional, state and international authorities.

In order to answer what can be done to prevent such act, suggestive pointers are provided-

- A. Install CCTV's on the public hotspots to identify suspects.
- B. Formulatean intelligence committee on regional and international platform to track the network.
- C. Society must provide a helping hand by communicating the misconduct to local authorities, if witness any wrong happening/ commission of an offence against a child.
- D. Strict surveillance on country's borderlines. Drone technique can be useful to restrict illegal movements.
- E. IT intelligence shall be involved to trace accounts, transactions or any digital footprints across the network.
- F. Authorities must be appointed at all possible local levels to keep record of citizens in their area, to ensure no one goes missing.
- G. There must be transparency between the government and citizens regarding their profession and the assets they are holding.
- H. Need to activate a helpline no. to call, on-sight of child beggars.

- I. Strict policy formulation and projects shall be commenced in order to eliminate organized crime.
- J. If locate a child with unusual cuts, wounds, scared or suspicion in behavior it's best to report Child welfare authorities or police.
- K. Commencement of Intra-government dialogues on the subject matter of "child-begging and organized crime".
- L. Child begging shall be introduced as crime without any exception.

"United we stand, divided we fall", rightly stated by John Dickinson. It's not the duty or responsibility of one, but as a part of "society"- politicians, businessmen, authorities, intelligence, organizations, technologies and citizens if work together can eradicate this network of organized crime accountable for human rights (child rights) violation.

