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Profile and Problems of The Beggars in Visakhapatnam City of Andhra Pradesh: an Empirical Evidence

Social Science

KEYWORDS : Begging, Poverty, Destitution

Dr. P, SAILAJA — Post Doctoral Fellow (UGC), Dept. of Social Work, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh - 530003.

Dr. K. VISWESWARA RAO — Professor, Dept. of Social Work, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh – 530003.

ABSTRACT

Beggary in India has a long history. India still remains the place with largest population in the world that goes to bed without any food; the largest population who has no clothes to wear and not surprisingly constitutes biggest number of beggars. Beggary is a multifaceted problem because of its socio-cultural and economic ramifications. The present study examined the profile and problems of the Beggars in Visakhapatnam city, as Visakhapatnam is one of the fastest growing cities in India. A sample of 50 beggars- 27 men and 23 women, who are begging at various prominent temples in and around Visakhapatnam, are selected for the study by using purposive sampling method. This paper examines the socio economic and health profile and reasons of begging, and different problems faced by the beggars in Visakhapatnam city.

Introduction

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 (http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/essay). India as a nation needs to think for its begging population. Beggary in India is not something which is new to the society and has a long history in the Indian context. India still remains the place with largest population in the world that goes to bed without any food; the largest population who has no clothes to wear and not surprisingly constitutes biggest number of beggars. Beggary is a multifaceted problem because of its socio-cultural and economic ramifications. Besides posing an impediment to socio-economic development, the problem manifests as a degrading form of human existence. India is a country which is worst hit with the begging traditions, and one can find beggars in every part of India. The amazing fact is that many beggars are professional beggars and some of them are involved with criminals. All this is causing a lot of threat to India (http://www.creative.sulekha.com/why-not-legalize-begging_164645_blog). 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 (http://www.noblefoundation.in/beggary in India.htm).

Statistical Profile of Beggars India

The magnitude of the problem of beggary is very much poignant in developing countries and particularly in India. The scientific estimate of beggars in India is not available. According to a survey by Delhi School of Social Work, there has been a phenomenal increase in the numbers of beggars in India. As per the Census of India, there were 750307 beggars and vagrants in India in 1981, which declined to 542875 in 1991 and further increased to 627688 in 2001. Begging as a social event is a problem for the society. The larger the chunk of population involved in begging, the heavier the burden on working population and lesser the usage of human resources for constructive human development. Begging has become the mainstay for a quite large section of the population. Delhi school of social survey (quoted from Azad Foundation op. cited) reveals that in a decade since, 1991, the number of beggars has gone up by lakh in India. Action Aid Report 2004, (quoted from Azad foundation) divulged that "there are some 60000 beggars in Delhi, over 300000 in Mumbai." The Council of Human Welfare report 2005 (quoted from Azad foundation) disclosed that in Hyderabad, out of every 354 persons one is found begging. Further, child beggars can be seen in every city and town in India and is estimated at are 300,000 child beggars in India, although some organizations claim them to be one million. Every year, 44,000 children fall into the clutches of the gangs (Kaushik c.f., 2014).

Types of Beggars

Broadly beggars in India can be grouped into following eight categories:

1. Juvenile beggars

2. Physically and mentally handicapped;

3. Diseased;

4. Religious mendicants;

5. Able bodied;

6. Aged and infirm;

7. Casual beggars who resort to begging only as a stop gap arrangement till they are able to secure some casual employment or part time work again;

8. 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.

Literature Review

An attempt has been made to review studies relating to the beggars conducted abroad and in India to understand the situational analysis of various aspects of the beggars and begging.

Studies Abroad

Studies (Bromley, 1981; Norberg's, 1985; Lu, 1999; Henry, 2009;) conducted in developing countries i.e. analyze the relationship between the rich and poor at their closest point of contact: poor relief. Beggar-donor relationship which raises a wide range of social, moral issues, an interesting perspective on social structure and the impact of the social

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welfare policies. Most of the studies concentrated on effective methods of combating street begging as perceived by the Panhandlers and identifies the urbanization, land use and socio-cultural correlates of begging. It also identifies the potentials in different categories of beggars and the need to get same enhanced. With recourse to different aspects of the study, a comprehensive package covering such issues as physical planning, socio-economic, religious, legal and other control measures are recommended for consideration (Adedibu, A.A. and Jelili, 2011; Jabir Hasan Khan et al, 2013). The dynamics of begging behavior in big cities in Indonesia, which demonstrated religion, compassion, institutional corruption, and law enforcement, play important roles in determining preferred target of prosocial behavior (Marselly Kurniadi, et al. 2014).

Indian Studies

Studies (Kumarappa, 1945; Cama, 1945; Mukharjee, 1945; Gore, et al., 1959; Moorthy, 1959; Prasad: 1960; Ratan, 1961; Rao and Bogaert, 1970; Ramana and Rao, 1973; Jha, 1979; Pandian et al., 1979; DWCWAP, 1980; Das, 1983; Chaudhuri, 1987; Thirumalai et al., 2004; Goyal, 2005; Thakker et al., 2007; Mukherjee, 2008; Rafiuddin, 2008; Goel, 2010; Joshi and Singh, 2010) conducted in India regarding the beggars of urban centre or areas revealed a number of problems. Goyal (2005) brings forth the nature of erosion of social norms and cultural patterns among different groups of beggars who lived precariously at the margin of urban society. It also focuses on specific social, cultural and behavioural strategies by which the beggars managed to survive in their miserable socio-economic situation. Thus, the development refers to an improvement of all the sectors of economic, social and cultural pursuits. Mukherjee, (2008); Sonia Malik and Sanjoy Roy, (2012); Rubina Iqbal, (2013) in their studies described the economic growth in India is quite visible through infrastructural and industrial growth in metros but the same is overshadowed by the poor plight of beggars and the problem of beggary in India has assumed a stupendous proportion.

The causes of begging

Begging is both a symptom and a result of complex socio-economic disorganisation and breakdown of the joint family system. Factors, such as, poverty, destitution, desertion, unemployment, underemployment, famine, drought, displacement and disasters whether man made or natural, leading to migration, homelessness, etc., are pushing people into begging.

Economic Causes: 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, this is particularly relevant in case of organized or exploitative beggary. Unemployment or under-employment, landlessness, poverty, calamity, drought or famines and various other conditions of destitution are all variants of economic causes.

Religious Causes: Religious mendicancy is not only tolerated by a large section of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and other religious population, but even supported on religious grounds. A sort of religious sanctity is attached to alms giving.

Social Causes: Social disorders like anomie, cultural conflict, industrialization, community disorganization, faulty socialization, 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 forcing the persons in crises situations to a life of beggary, such as, the orphans, infirm and aged, lepers, lunatics, widows and other socially, physically and mentally handicapped categories. Social customs in certain communities 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.

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 need, the persons who are unable to find work feel compelled to beg to save themselves from starvation and death (Myneni, 2009). It is, therefore, important to protect the rights of one of the most vulnerable population who get criminalized under the state beggary prevention laws (www.delhi.gov.in).

Legislations pertaining to Beggars in India

Currently in India, 20 states and 2 union territories have anti beggary laws. The Bombay Prevention of Begging Act of 1959 applies primarily to Bombay and is extended to Delhi. Each state's approach toward the offense and the offender is different, yet all states criminalize begging. The definition of begging under state laws is so wide that a helpless person who survives on alms is made a criminal. It regards a person who appears to be poor or destitute as a beggar. The Bombay Act makes begging in public places a crime. Such persons can be arrested by the police with the assistance of officials of the social welfare department. Thus, the power to arrest under the Act is arbitrary, devoid of any guidelines or criteria essential to make a lawful arrest. States have failed to check the unlawful and unfair apprehension of people. They lack the means essential to effectively distinguish beggars from others, such as street performers, mendicants, small vendors, pavement dwellers, and migrants who might solicit alms. The Karnataka Prevention of Beggary Act, 1975, prohibits person from resorting to begging and provides for the detention, training, and employment of beggars. It also provides for the trial and punishment of beggar offenders and for the relief and rehabilitation of such persons.

Objectives of the Study:

Major objectives of the present study are to find out the socio-economic profile, reasons for begging, and to suggest of measures for the improvement in the status and living conditions of beggars of Visakhapatnam city of Andhra Pradesh.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Visakhapatnam city of Andhra Pradesh and is descriptive in nature. Beggars are found in premises of various temples located in and around Visakhapatnam such as Simhachalam, Sampath Vinayaka and Sai Baba temples. A sample of 50 beggars (27 men and 23 women), who are begging near these temples are selected by using purposive sampling method. A structured interview schedule was used to collect the data from the sample respondents.

Results and Discussion

The information obtained from the sample respondents is presented here under.

Table-1
Percentage distribution of respondents by their socio-demographic characteristics

Characteristic	Men (n = 27)	Women (n = 23)	Total (N= 50)
Age (in years)			
< 20	7.40	8.69	8.00
21 – 30	0.00	13.06	6.00
31 – 40	3.70	26.09	14.00
41 – 50	22.23	26.09	24.00
51 – 60	22.23	4.34	14.00
Above 60	44.14	21.73	34.00
Caste			
Backward Caste	40.74	47.83	44.00
Other Caste	40.74	34.78	38.00
Scheduled Caste	14.82	13.04	14.00
Scheduled Tribe	3.70	4.35	4.00
Educational Status			
Illiterate	74.07	91.30	82.00
Primary	25.93	8.70	18.00
Marital Status			
Married	14.82	43.48	28.00
Unmarried	29.63	8.70	20.00
Separated	51.85	26.09	40.00
Widowed	3.70	21.73	12.00

It can be seen from Table -1 that about one-third (34.00 percent) of the respondents are above 60 years of age, 24.00 percent of the respondents are in the age group 41-50 years, followed by 6.00 percent in the age group 21-30 years. Whereas 14.00 percent of the respondents each are in age groups of 31-40 and 51-60. Further about two – fourth (44.14 percent) of the men respondents are in the age group of above 60 years. 26.09 percent of the female respondents each are in age group of 31-40 and 41-50 years and above 60 years of female respondents are 21.73 percent. Thus, the data show that the men outweigh the women counter parts in the above 60 years.

Regarding caste of the respondents, 44.00 percent belong to backward caste, 38.00 percent to other caste category followed by, 4.00 percent of the respondents belong to scheduled tribe. Further, 40.74 percent of the men respondents each belong to backward caste and other caste category. 47.38 percent of the women respondents belong to backward caste, about one third (34.78 percent) of the respondents belongs to other caste and 4.35 percent of the respondents are belong to scheduled tribe category. It is observed from the data that there is no much variation in the number of beggars across the four caste groups as such. However, there is a significant difference in case of women and men beggars hailing from different caste groups. No men and women are found from the Muslim religion. Among the others, the highest number of men and women beggars are found from the backward caste and other caste communities. Majority (82.00 percent) of the respondents are illiterate, out of which 74.07 percent were men and 91.30 percent were women. Further, about one-fourth (25.93 percent) of the men respondents and 8.70 percent of the women respondents had only primary education.

Marital status shows that 40.00 percent of the respondents in the separated category. 28.00 percent of the respondents are married. 51.85 percent of the men respondents are in separated category, 29.63 percent of the respondents are unmarried and 3.70 percent of the respondents are widowed. 43.48 percent of the women respondents are married and next highest 26.09 percent of the respondents are separated category and 8.70 percent of the respondents are unmarried respectively. Similar findings of more number of beggars separated category were reported in the studies of Thakker et al. 2007; Joshi and Singh 2010.

Table-2
Percentage distribution of Respondents by details of native place

Details	Men (n = 27)	Women (n = 23)	Total (N=50)
Nativity			
Native	33.33	56.52	16.00
Migrated	66.67	43.48	84.00
Migrated from			
Neighboring Districts *	38.89	30.00	50.00
Coastal Districts**	22.22	50.00	30.96
Telangana state	22.22	0.00	7.14
Kurnool District	5.56	10.00	4.76
Orissa state	11.11	10.00	7.14

* Consists of Vizianagaram, Srikakulam, and Visakhapatnam Districts

** Consists of East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, Prakasam Districts

Table 2 reveals that majority (84.00 percent) of the respondents are migrated and only 16.00 percent of the respondents are native of Visakhapatnam. Among the migrated, 50.00 percent respondents are migrated from the Visakhapatnam neighboring districts i.e. Vizianagaram, Srikakulam, and Visakhapatnam districts and 30.96 percent of the respondents migrated from other coastal districts i.e. East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, and Prakasam Districts. 7.14 percent of the respondents each are from Telangana and Orissa states. Further, 38.89 percent of the men respondents migrated from neighboring Districts. 22.22 percent each are migrated from Coastal Districts and Telangana states. 50.00 percent of the women respondents are East Godavari, West Godavari, Krishna, and Prakasam Districts and 30.00 percent of the women respondents are migrated from neighboring districts. The wide spread public perception is that, when individuals do not have any economic opportunities and those who need not to do hard work for subsistence, and then they choose begging. Further, if the productive nature of surrounding districts is not conducive for gaining an employment, then push factors work on the individuals to migrate from those surroundings.

Table-3
Percentage distribution of Respondents by their Income

Income per week	Men (n=27)	Women (n=23)	Total (N=50)
Cash (in Rs.)			
200-400	7.41	17.39	12.00
401-600	7.41	26.09	16.00
601-800	55.55	43.48	50.00
801-1000	11.11	4.34	8.00
Above 1000	18.52	8.70	14.00
Rice (in Kg) per week			
< 15	55.56	43.48	50.00

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16-20	22.22	30.43	26.00
21-25	7.41	8.70	8.00
26-30	7.40	4.35	6.00
Above 30	7.41	13.04	10.00

The data presented in Table 3 show that 50.00 percent respondents reported that they have weekly income between 601-800 rupees, followed by 16.00 percent of the respondents' income between 401-600 whereas the 14.00 percent have income above rupees 1000. More than half (55.55 percent) of the men respondents had income between Rupees 601-800, about one-fourth (26.09 percent) of the women respondents had income per week rupees 401-600. This information clearly shows that most of the respondents had income between rupees 601 and 800. Apart from money, beggars also collect/receive rice and this is reported as other sources of income of the total sample, 50.00 percent of the respondents receive below 15 kgs rice, out of which 55.56 percent are men and 43.48 percent are women. Some of the beggars particularly the part-time beggars, do not engage themselves in begging everyday because their begging places are temples. These places are thronged by the pilgrims only four (special) days in a week i.e. Monday (Lord Shiva's temple) Thursday (Lord Saibaba), Friday (Durgamatha temple) and Saturday (Lord Venkateswara). This shows that most of the beggars are getting below 15 Kgs Rices. This finding is also supported by Gillin, 1929; Chaudhuri, 1987; Goyal, 2005; *Menka,et al.* 2014.

Table – 4
Percentage distribution of Respondents by the reasons for begging

Reasons	Men (n = 27)	Women (n = 23)	Total (N=50)
Poverty	37.04	34.78	36.00
Disability	33.33	17.40	26.00
Unemployment	14.81	17.40	16.00
Lucrative business	7.41	21.72	14.00
*Others	7.41	8.70	8.00

***others include destitution, desertion etc.**

Table 4 shows that 36.00 percent of the respondents are begging due to their poverty, followed by 26.00 percent by their disability and other reasons such as unemployment, lucrative business and destitution were given by respondents 16.00 percent, 14.00 percent and 8.00 percent respectively. 37.04 percent of the men respondents by their poverty and 33.33 percent by their disability. 34.78 percent of the women respondents are begging due to by their poverty, followed by 21.72 percent of the women respondents are felt begging as lucrative business. Similar findings have been arrived in their studies by Anderson (1961); Kumarappa (1945).

Table – 5
Percentage distribution of Respondents by their Problems

Problems	Men (n = 27)	Women (n = 23)	Total (N=50)
Ill health	66.67	43.48	56.00
Humiliation	37.04	56.52	46.00
Exploitation by Police	22.22	13.04	14.00
Visits of VIPs	77.78	73.91	76.00
Others*	11.11	8.70	8.00
No Problems	14.81	17.39	14.00

***Others include socio cultural and economic problems**

Table 5 reveals that 76.00 percent respondents are facing the problem by visits of Very Important Persons (VIPs) like ministers, senior government officers and politicians; cine actors etc. 56.00 percent are problems by their ill health i.e. skin diseases, weakness, disability etc. Further, 77.78 percent of the men respondents reported problems by visits of VIPs. 66.67 percent are problems faced by their ill health and 37.04 percent men respondents faced Humiliation. 73.91 percent of the women respondents faced problems due to visits of VIPs. Because of frequent visits of VIPs to the temples, they are not allowed to beg on those days and thus affecting their earnings. 56.52 percent have been reported problem of humiliation and 43.48 percent of the women respondents reported that their frequent ill health as another major problem for them.

When asked about the respondents' opinion on begging, As regards opinion, majority (66.00 percent) of the respondents felt happy with their profession. Remaining 34.00 percent of the respondents are not happy with their profession Majority (89.47 percent) of the men respondents and 71.43 percent women respondents felt that there is no need to do manual work because of this begging and is the easiest way of earning money. They can also get rice through this profession without much hard work. Sharell (2010) in culture shock in India expressed that many beggars had chosen this profession out of interest and the sad thing is that many of them prefer to beg because of it is much easier.

Conclusions

Beggary is an intricate problem because of its socio-economic ramifications. The problem manifests as a degrading form of human existence. It is not merely of offshoot of poverty, and neglect, but begging is not only an economic problem, it is intricately interwoven with various socio-cultural factors. The study found that a large number of beggars are aged persons, illiterates and migrated from various north coastal districts to Visakhapatnam. Beggars feel very bad towards begging life; still they are involved in begging activities as their major means of earning livelihood. Most of them are happy with this occupation because of no need to do manual work, it is easiest earning money. Begging flourishes because people tend to be generous. Awareness programmes and counseling services need to be conducted for the poor to help them realize how shameful it is to beg. Steps should be taken to enforce the ban. Any step towards banning, discouraging or discourage begging should be welcome. When doing so, the authorities concerned should try to rehabilitate beggars. They should be provided transit home for meeting their basic needs such as shelter, bathing etc. Educational programmes, health activities to highlight evil effects of begging should be conducted. Socio-economic measures are needed to curb the begging problem in India. The media, academic institutions, NGOs and the government should take appropriate measures to eradicate the problem of begging in India.

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