

Addressing Beggary: From Cause to Reform

Addressing Beggary: From Cause to reform in India.

India's cities have been called 'a city of beggars' by foreigners due to the increasing number of beggars. There is a need to reforms rather than just investigating the causes and effects of beggary. The beggars are evident to foreign visitors because of their large numbers. One of the major reasons behind the increased rate of beggary is the religious beliefs of elite. They believe that helping the needy would ensure them a good life in the hereafter. Similarly, beggars target those who are desperate to attain heaven by helping beggars. Unfortunately, beggary has become a profession for many. Those who are physically capable of working choose to beg instead. Nobody dares to take action against these beggars as they are afraid of their curses. However, in western countries, beggary is considered a serious crime. Poverty and unemployment contribute to beggary, but it is deeply ingrained in our social mindset. Any effective reform must address these underlying societal attitudes. The state needs to implement strict laws against vagrants across all the

ities in india, especially in holy
cities. To eradicate beggary, promoting
a sounder outlook on life is crucial.
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even modernized beggars finding
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In India begging has become a profession and the beggars continue to increase in numbers. So, vast indeed is the fraternity of these beggars that foreigners visiting India, especially, cities like Varanasi, our cities of pilgrimage, have been led to call our cities the cities of beggars and of dust! There are no statistics available for estimating their number, but that is not needed for our present purpose. Of course, any practical reform in this matter does not require a close investigation into the causes and conditions of the existence of beggars, but we are here concerned with the question of seeing how these beggars live and what, in particular, is the effect on society of their existence. As already suggested, the vastness of the number of the Indian beggars is evident to any visitor from a foreign country. The causes of the increase in the number of beggars are many, but of these we may just consider only a few. For good or evil, Indians have been very religious in their outlook on life, and also very generous and hospitable towards those who go to them for begging. Our Puranas and Shastras point out that giving charity to beggars ensures Moksha in the next world. The social conscience developed from such an article of faith has been the main cause of the increase in the number of beggars. They are always sure of finding people anxious to go to heaven by offering doles and donations to the needy and so they are thriving. There are many beggars whose profession has been hereditary—a strange perversion of human nature, which, as we are told, ought to eat out of the sweat of its brow. The most amusing spectacle from the point of view of reason, is to see able-bodied persons, dressed in abundance of rags and many coloured clothes wandering about the streets and going from house to house regularly at certain hours for no more serious a purpose than that of begging! This might be seen at almost any village and town in our country. For ages uncounted this thing has been going on. The ignorant masses have a fear of the curse supposed to emanate from the mouths of angered beggars, and thus the beggars get more than they need. In fact, strange as it might seem, a considerable number of these beggars are richer than their poor patrons! With the percolation of social consciousness among the modern educated Indians, the problem of beggars is today being seriously thought about and ways and means are being seriously mooted on how to solve this problem. When we read how in the West, for example, begging has become a crime coming under the vagrancy acts of Parliaments and when we know that in some countries people are warned that “Those who do not work, neither shall they eat” we begin to think how depressing is the situation in India. Poverty, no doubt, is one of the major causes of begging, and unemployment and increase in population have also been responsible for the same, but the disease of begging has deeper roots in the social consciousness of us all, and it is to this that any reformer has to turn. We must make it clear to the masses that there is no special glory of Punya in giving charity to the able-bodied persons, and that such misplaced charity is only increasing idleness and chronic poverty. If the masses are educated in social science, its elementary principles at any rate, there will be a gradual lessening of the number of beggars in our country. The State, too, has to devise laws for checking the growth of beggars. Some strict laws against vagrants must be put into practice in every city and village in India. It is more important to introduce them in holy cities where the beggars are leading the most unholy life. Finally, it is for the development of saner outlook on life that we must agitate if we are to root out this evil of beggary. In one form or another, begging has become the most widespread thing today. Some are honourable, modernised beggars in pants and boots and ties and they have subtler ways of exploiting their patron victims.