

EXPLORING CRUEL BUSINESS OF BEGGING: THE CASE OF BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

Begging is a common scenario of Bangladeshi society like other developing countries of the world. Of estimated 700000 beggars in Bangladesh, Dhaka alone has 40,000. They beg due to the victim of poverty cycle. Apart from this, a significant amount of beggar population is forced to beg where most of them are children. A vested syndicate is involved in this heinous activity. Every year they abduct thousands of children from the countryside disfigure them barbarically and force them to beg on commission of salary basis. The research, mainly based on secondary data, attempts to investigate the malicious business at the back of begging in Bangladesh. This paper also tried to identify the masterminds who are engaged with this ruthless trade. At the end it suggested some initiatives to tackle the beggar's mafia.

Key Words: Cruel Business, Beggary, Bangladesh

1. INTRODUCTION

Beggars are found begging in the villages, in towns and cities, in a word, every where in Bangladesh. Mainly they gather on Friday near the mosques in the towns, bus stand, railway stations, in front of markets, and in the traffic signals. About 700 thousand people in our country are seeking out their living from begging (Khan, M. A., 2011). There are believed to be 40,000 beggars in Dhaka alone, a city of 12 million people (Anbarasan, E., 2011). Out of these vast population of beggars a great portion were abducted and maimed when they were young. Their job is only to solicit pity and beg from people. At the end of the day many of these beggars have to hand all the alms and charities they have earned from kind people to the beggar mafia leaders in exchange of a shelter or morsels of stale food or perhaps for free drugs and alcohols (Tearsofdhaka, 2011). At past people beg who are not able to earn money or not able to survive in this world. But today begging is like a business and truly it's a profitable business. Now many people are willingly beg even they are ably to earn money and some people are forced to beg also (Sabina, 2010).

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The concept of beggary is now emerged as a business as mostly the general public believes that inability of authorities concerned to control beggars reflects that there is a strong mafia behind the beggars (APP, 2012). Plus, begging is a commercial business worth multimillion dollar in this subcontinent run by powerful beggar mafias. This mafia's are so violent and amoral and so blind and intoxicated in their spree of making money out of commerce of begging (BLITZ, 2011). According to an unofficial rough estimate, every year not less than 5,000 Bangladeshi children are abducted by the Bangladeshi beggar mafias which may have syndicated links with their Indian counterparts for cross border trading of abducted and maimed children. The job of such mafias is to abduct, drug, maim and force the children to beg at designated places that are assumed to be guarded and controlled by mafia leaders (BLITZ, 2011). These mafias comprise some rich businessmen and women who exploit the destitute to make millions of money

annually. They do not only recruit the poor, but also targets disabled persons such as the blind, the deaf and cripple. The syndicate has become big business involving the use of taxis and other private cars, which convey the destitute and drop them at vantage points in the cities, particularly at traffic intersections, to carry out their business (Mirror, 2002). Some children who know that they were maimed by their bosses are also too terrified even to speak out the truth; instead of blaming their masters for their mutilated body they would rather say their limbs 'just disappeared' or they would blame untrue 'accidents'. If law enforcement people try to catch them for their rehabilitation they would just flee away, lie low, bide their time and return eventually to their used livelihood of begging. No other pathways are open to them (BLITZ, 2011). Instinctively, we all knew that there was something wrong with the freak show that we witness on a daily basis (Tearsodhaka:2011). Despite of having legal safeguards, some vested syndicates doing business behind begging day after day.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cherneva, I (2011) explored that, children are trafficked from their villages and are forced to beg on the urban streets. The children and elderly women begging on the street are often forced beggars – victims of human trafficking. For their destination, traffickers chose high wealth concentration cities. There is a physical archetype that traffickers follow when choosing beggars. Often they chose children with handicaps', explains the author. In a number of reported cases cited in the study traffickers hurt and mutilate beggars on purpose. By maiming and deforming them they create more revenue. A handicapped child earns three times more than a healthy child.

Hara, M. S., (2012) observed that, nowadays, many beggars use babies as instruments to arouse sympathy from passersby and get more alms. Begging with an infant has become a new trick. It is the highest point of inhumanity and cruelty. Author urged, it is high time the government take strict action against those people who treat babies in this cruel way.

Yusuf, A., (2012) said that, Bangladesh has 700,000 beggars, with those in urban areas earning an average of 100 taka (1.50 dollars) a day, according to a 2005 study. Yousuf also said that, some beggars are recruited by organised gangs and forced to give a part of their takings to crime syndicates.

Global March (2012) an international NGO, who is working against Child Labour, quoting the international framework explains “This is the ugly, dehumanizing and criminal aspect of exploitation. Child begging is not only one of the worst forms of child labour, but one of the worst violations of a child’s right and absolutely against the dignity of a child. Beggary is slavery and forced labour, children and adults are trafficked from poor areas to big cities and are forced to roam the streets and beg. All the state authorities, civil society and the community, in particular the law enforcement agencies must act in a coordinated manner to prevent this crime, protect the victims and prosecute the culprits.

Gloria, O. E. and Samuel, A., (2012) explored, In Europe, women from poorer countries like Bulgaria were engaged by organized ‘gangs’ to beg in cities. The gangs usually collect the proceeds from them. Some beggars print illegitimate materials or posters related to church programs or any charitable organization, which were found to be either disbanded or non-existent. Experience has shown that this practice is common in Nigeria, where beggars use posters or envelopes with pictures of terminally ill people to solicit for money meant for their won personal use. Self-acclaimed healers of mental patients are fond of using them to beg for money from unsuspecting members of the public while their ‘masters’ watch from a hidden place.

Tanvir (2001) identified the child bearing Beggars. These beggars are usually women with very young babies in their laps. Most of the time these babies are do not belong to them but are rented from somewhere. However, the sight of them carrying a destitute child causes people to give them alms. It is cruel to use a very young baby for the purpose of begging, but that is the cruelty of life. Give them something or else the child might suffer.

Schafer, A., (2007) viewed that, some critics argue that begging is not an expressive activity and that, in consequence, it should not attract the special protection we accord to free speech.^{ix} They view the beggar as engaged, essentially, in a commercial transaction whereby s/he is attempting to obtain the means to deal with poverty or homelessness or perhaps to buy booze or drugs. Other critics point out that most beggar do not advocate any political ideology; they don’t 10 advance, at least not by intention, any abstract political or social view or argument. Thus, they can scarcely be said to make a conscious contribution to the free marketplace of ideas.

4. LEGAL PROVISION TO PROTECT FORCED BEGGING

According to the Prevention of Oppression Against Women and Children Act 2000, “Whoever damages hands, feet, eyes or any other limb of a child, or makes disabled or disfigured by any means, for the purpose of making him a beggar or to sale any part thereof, he shall be punished with death or rigorous imprisonment for life and also with fine. Recently, government of Bangladesh has approved new laws to tackle “beggar masters” who force people onto the streets and sometimes amputate their body parts to increase their value under the Vagabond and Street Beggars Rehabilitation Act 2010. According to this law forcing anyone to beg would be punishable by five years in jail and an additional 500,000 taka (7,000 dollar) fine if anyone is found guilty of severing a limb of a beggar and then sending him or her onto the streets (Sabina: 2010).

5. LIMITATION

As commerce at the back of begging is absolutely secreted, it is difficult to collect information from the respondents. Despite having available evidence from Secondary data, informants strategically avoided giving information about beggar’s mafia. So, this paper is only based on secondary source.

6. OBJECTIVE

It is known to all that beggars are victim of poverty cycle. But nowadays a significant number of people are sufferer of force begging in the capital Dhaka and country side of Bangladesh by the vested syndicate. Fundamental objective of this paper is to reveal that cruel commerce behind begging in our country which comprises some additional objectives:

- (i) To know the nature and extent of cruel trade of begging
- (ii) To explore the mechanism of this business
- (iii) To find out the gang who are engaged with this trade

7. METHOD

Mainly the paper was based on secondary information. Since the manuscript was aimed to disclose the evil trade behind begging, article of national and international journals, books, news paper were

scanned in order to gather the data that mitigated study purpose. Some data were also collected from internet browsing. Besides, documentary programs telecasted in different satellite channels on beggars' mafia who targets the able bodied people afterward make them disable and force them to beg, were reported in the study as well. However, to complement this paper a number of resource-persons and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were consulted.

8. DISCUSSION ON CRUEL BUSINESS

Forced child begging is a type of begging in which boys and girls under the age of eighteen are forced to beg through psychological and physical coercion (Delap, E., 2009). A vested syndicate is actively involved in this trade. the syndicate has become big business involving the use of taxis and other private cars, which convey the restitutes and drop them at vantage points in the cities, particularly at traffic intersections, to carry out their business Mirror (2002). They are adopting heinous strategies such as kidnapping children and making them disabled forever in order to deploy them in begging. This sort of monstrous incidents has occurred in different parts of country (Helal, M. A., 2011). Though the beggars generally do not want to disclose the information about the gangs who are engaged with the barbaric trade of begging, evidence from print and electronic media confirm that these gangs abducting children afterwards making physically impaired and pushing them begging. Some evidences are mentioned bellow for realizing this nasty trade.

Case 1: CNN telecasted news on April 04, 2011 that a criminal gang abducted a boy of seven years old name Deep in order to force to become a beggar on the street of Dhaka city, Bangladesh. After abduction Deep was slashed many times, his healed wounds now forming a large cross in scar tissue across a section of his chest and from his throat to his pelvis. Deep said,

“They beat me. They said they would make me beg. They would kill me,” the boy said. “I threatened to tell my father and police on them. They cut my throat, they cut my belly, they cut my penis.”

When his mum found him, he was hardly recognizable because of all the blood. This young boy survived and now is the key witness in a national investigation and case building against the gang

members in question. Regarding the causes of abduction spokesman of RAB (Rapid Action Battalion) said,

“The gang members were trying to kill him because he refused to beg and would be able to identify them to the police.”

Within weeks of the boy’s identification of the five men who allegedly tortured him, they were arrested, and two suspects confessed in front of TV cameras at a police news conference (CNN, 2011).

Case 2: On September 6, 2010, the media reported one such incident where a man named Omar Faruq kidnapped a seven-year-old named Niyamul from Kamrangir Char in Dhaka. The thugs severely injured the children with sharp blades. A case was lodged in this regard. However, the victim’s family was threatened, allegedly in cooperation with the police. Some human rights organisations raised their voice against such barbaric activities. In the end, Rapid Action Battalion arrested Omar Faruk, who confessed involvement with many illegal businesses. (Helal, 2011). The televised confession of Faruq, leader of beggar’s mafia, described how he and his men were involved in amputating limbs of at least 15 children, giving them drugs, and making them dependent and leaving them no other choice but to become street beggars. Listening to him was like revisiting *Slumdog Millionaire*. The only difference was that the incident was more real and near than the ones depicted for the silver screen (tearsofdhaka: 2011) .

Case 3: On 28 December, 2010 authorities arrested a suspected member of a gang based in the Kamrangirchar area of the capital, Dhaka. The arrested man, identified as Shariful Islam, alias Korban, told interrogators how he and his accomplices abducted children, kept them for months in confined spaces or even in barrels and deprived them of food. He said,

Permanently disabled by their confinement and virtual starvation, the children were then sent on to the streets of the city either accompanied with a woman posing as their mother or alone, according to police. The gang had maimed at least five children aged between seven and eight who subsequently earned between 500 and 1,000 taka a day (£4.50 to £9).

Detained Korban, who was produced at the media briefing, said,

The gang abducted many children. A hand of one such child named Sharif was chopped off, and then he was used for begging.

“Sharif who is only 15 years of old, came from Khulna to the city in 2004. In another incident, the gang kept an eight-year old child from Jessor stuffed in a large aluminium pot for six months, to cripple the boy, and then used him for begging. The gang also abducted a number of girls, who they used for forced sex trade.” Said Korban (Hammadi S.,2011).

Case 4: The UK based news paper Guardian reveals that, gang leaders took much of their earnings. According to Mohammad Nasim, 35, who begs in Bijoy Nagar, each gang of beggars consists of around 500 members, with syndicates of beggars working under sardars (leaders).

"The children are kidnapped, put under the bed and left without food for several months, so that they became weak and disabled," said Nasim (Hammadi S. :2011).

Case 5: Four Bangladeshi children below the age of 14 have been rescued by southeast district police and Child Welfare Committee (CWC) of Lajpat Nagar. The children were staying under the Nizamuddin flyover and had been forced to live like beggars. They were allegedly brought to India by a Bangladeshi national named Jewel, who has been running an organized begging racket.

"We are looking for Jewel, who is on the run. He forced these children to beg near the flyovers and would always snatch their earnings of the day. He would buy smack with the money. He was also involved with a drug cartel," said a senior police officer (Ghosh, D., 2011).

9. MECHANISM OF BRUTAL TRADE

The executors intentionally impair healthy children in various cruel methods and forced them to get into beggary (Helal, 2011). They know that the more a child is tortured and tormented the more unfortunate s/he would look. To a beggar mafia a child with the worst injuries is his prize earner as s/he can melt the hearts of the sympathetic passers-by. These young beggars are trained to learn how to choose the most appropriate place to beg in, the kind of people to approach and

the kind of mannerism to mimic to make people sympathize. These children are tutored how to make their appearance as pitiful as possible to get money from people like elderly men and women who they would assume as soft-hearted. According to norms practiced by mafia leaders, the abducted children are first made dependent on drugs or alcohols. Physically maimed children are drugged to be maimed also mentally before they are sent on to the streets for begging, always with someone of the gang overseeing their movements. These crippled children desperately beg all day long and go home in the evening with a hope that they would be getting something that their addicted body and mind needs. They rather prefer hunkering down beside their mafia lords to leaving their begging profession. (BLITZ, 2011) Hundreds, maybe thousands, of children are thus being crippled so they look helpless evoking pity among people and become potential earners of alms. “Sometimes they kidnap the children and hold them captive for many days. After that they cut different body parts to prepare them for begging,” explained Mohammad Sohail, head of the media wing of the Rapid Action Battalion. The children are fed very little food and water, are hidden in large vessels for months and suffer from nutrition deficiency, he added. The gang has also killed children and thrown their bodies into the river, Sohail said (CNN, 2011).

According to Hara, M.S. “The children are kidnapped, put under the bed and left without food for several months, so that they became weak and disabled” The children are then sent on to the street and forced to beg for money. Nowadays, many beggars use babies as instruments to arouse sympathy from passersby and get more alms. Begging with an infant has become a new trick. It is the highest point of inhumanity and cruelty (Hara, M. S., 2012)

10. A BRIEF IDENTIFICATION OF BEGGARS MAFIA

More than 30,000 beggars, under the control of about a hundred unscrupulous influential people, have been begging in groups in different places in Dhaka. The groups that trade in beggary collect paralyzed, blind, disfigured children, men and women and deploy them to beg at public places on a salary or commission basis. The owners of the beggars take all the money from them except their contractual salary or commission. The money earned in hardship by these beggars has turned these bosses into millionaires with luxurious houses and cars. There are lots of complains against the syndicate in the capital city. Some people have been arrested several times. Not only do they get the beggars into begging, but also they involve them in terrorist activities.

They are also involved with drug business. In connection with some dishonest government officials, the bosses of beggars allegedly earn money in illegal ways (Weekly Robbar, 2011).

Regarding the identification of beggars mafia, Chairperson of Bangladesh Human Rights Foundation Alina Khan said,

“We have heard that some people involved are politicians. Even some journalists are involved. So we think it is a very dangerous situation. Even I myself [been threatened] twice,” Khan said. “They are terrorists because this is not a small group.”

Omar Faruk of the city's Kamrangirchar, who was arrested by RAB for involving in kidnapping and maiming children of low income group families and later on using those children to earn money through making them beg on city streets, is known as local leader of ruling party. He admitted to being involved not only in maiming children but also in running prostitution; he would kill the male partners of the couples who came to visit the damn-side roads, rape the female partner and force them into prostitution (Daily Star, 2010).

Likewise, One of the gangsters, according to the news report, is a notorious criminal named Solaiman Matbar against whom there are numerous criminal charges like murder, abductions, extortion, land-grabbing and smuggling. Under Solaiman, the report said, there is a network of dozens of agents who are engaged in abduction and maiming of children who are later forced either to begging or to prostitution (BLITZ 2011)

So, they are not only involved with begging business but also engaged with drug trade, prostitute even killing people. Under the political banner he used to do these heinous deeds. They use political banner in order to get privilege from the police department. For example, daily star published a report (Daily Star, 2010) that Neyamul's father tried to file a case with Kamrangirchar Police Station after his son's maiming, police watered down the case by recording that the incident had been a result of a feud among peers, all of whom are neighbours. At last Bangladesh Human Rights Foundation moved and helped him to file case against the masterminds (CNN: 2011).

Their syndicate is so strong that after being arrested, within a very short time they get exemption in association with some unscrupulous police officer. So, it won't be a surprise if it is found that a great number of elements in political domains and law enforcement agencies are also involved in the lucrative businesses of the beggar mafias.

11. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bangladesh is a second largest Muslim country of the world. People of this country love religion from their core of heart. As Islam instructs not to neglect any person and help the helpless, poor, some people apart from morality have taken this opportunity and adopt it as source of income by abducting people and forcing to beg after maiming. In such way hundreds of children are being compelled to beg every year which is one of the worst violations of a child's right and absolutely against the dignity of a child. In order to stop the brutal trade the following initiatives can be taken:

1. To know the number of genuine beggars a survey can be conducted by the government in association with non government organization
2. The government has already passed law against force begging. These laws have to be implemented properly. .
3. To improve the socio-economic security of low income families by transferring resources to the poor through direct assistance programme with emphasis on high risk groups.
4. Technical and vocation training has to be arranged for capacity building of these beggars so that they can get involved with job.
5. Government should launch rehabilitation program for these underprivileged people.
6. The government-sponsored rehabilitation programme may include small projects on poultry, handicraft, sewing, etc. Children of beggars' families need to be brought up properly so that they are not forced to depend on begging.

7. Government and non government organization should give emphasize on poverty alleviation.
8. All the state authorities, civil society and the community, in particular the law enforcement agencies must act in a coordinated manner to prevent this crime, protect the victims and prosecute the culprits.
9. Mass awareness has to be raised against the culprits by organizing seminar, symposium. Print and electronic media can play pioneer role in this regard.

The terrible conditions in which Bangladeshi children are forced to beg is truly heart rending. Force begging must be stopped by tackling the beggars' mafia. People do not want to see anymore picture of inhumanity the civil society. Government should give due attention to the issue and launch a massive drive against the beggars mafia with the help of police and other social organizations.

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