

# When Beggars Choose ...

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## Abstract

This short essay is about beggary in India growing beyond a mere social ill into an institution tied to the criminal nexus that is slowly demanding its own rights.

Of late, I have traveled to the flagship Indian cities, Bangalore, Pune, Chennai, Hyderabad and Delhi. All the cities are (over)packed with vehicles, heavily polluted and crowded. Some of these cities have growing water problems, others have absolutely no water at all. In this Pandora's box, we also have beggars on the street.

Driving in any of these Indian cities (you'd surely be wishing you aren't), you notice beggars at every traffic junction troubling you. The more troubling fact is that these are little children. If you have ever paid alms to any of them, you are bound to notice that they prefer only cash/coins! I believe that there are several organizations (both governmental and non-governmental) running schemes to help these children. In spite of whatever help is being rendered, I see them back on the streets, at the signal junctions day after day.

In this regard, I'd like to narrate an incident involving one of my friends in his recent trip to Bangalore. He had been to Bangalore for a business trip and landed up eating food in a restaurant, which was more than filling. He had the rest of the food packed and walked out of the restaurant hoping to have it later in the evening, being a late-night-workaholic himself. He noticed a beggar woman with her child begging him for alms as he was walking to the nearest auto stand. Feeling civic and charitable, he parted with the parcel of food hoping it would help the two poor souls beat their hunger for the night.

He had just walked a few paces away, when he noticed that the woman had thrown the parcel of food away onto the floor, next to a drain. They were commenting that this was useless and they would need only money. He was disgusted by the act which drained out every ounce of charity he had in mind. Today, he makes certain that he doesn't turn his eye toward the begging community in India.

I have also been ripped off while trying to wear my charitable mask. I am sure many of us can relate to a similar incident. Far too many thieves and people with unscrupulous mindsets have used up the image of the begging community to their advantage.

If a community below the poverty line requires charity and the instruments of charity to survive, how and why do they get to choose what they receive? There have been reports of organized beggary institutions which exist as a nexus to the criminal community. While it is in the interest of the governmental and social institutions to raise the quality of life for each and every citizen of the country, who's job is it to identify, mark the population of beggars, raise their quality of life and disociate them from the criminal nexus?

The longer this question remains unanswered, our very own sense of charity is held at ransom ... Elements of universal brotherhood are slowly finding their gates of exit in our meandering diaspora of cultures. One wonders how long they will stay on.