



The Ugly Face of Begging

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The practice of begging has started since time immemorial. No one can exactly tell when the practice began. However, one can make an intellectual guess that begging could have come to an effect with the accumulation of wealth and the classification of social strata. Those with power and more access to the blessing of the earth went on hoarding their abundance at the expense of the social group at the lower stratum. The accrual of wealth enabled the rich to go from strength to strength. On the contrary, the concentration of affluence at the hands of the few made the poor weaker to the extent that they were obliged to beg to eke out a living. The objective of this piece is not to give a historical or a social analysis of begging. Rather, it is aimed at bringing in to forth how the practice of begging is being abused by some shameless citizens, who aspire to become rich overnight.

These days, begging in the city buses has become rampant. The beggars in city buses devise and employ various techniques to garner coins from the passengers. Some claim to be suffering from diseases. Others allege that they

used to be high-ranking military officers of the defunct 'Derg' army. And yet, others act like a rich farmer, who came to town to sell their grain but were forced to beg because they had been robbed of some thousand Birr (Ethiopian currency), which they secured from the sale of the grain.

The other day I was traveling on No. 3 bus. I caught the bus at a locality called Lideta. It was heading towards Piazza, the center of the city and was crammed with people from various walks of life. Some of the passengers were starting to sweat, as the suffocation inside the bus was rising. In front of me there was a group of youngsters comprising of both sexes. They were chatting and laughing above the roof. Right next to me there was a chubby and fat woman clinging herself to one of the bus' iron mast.

The bus pulled over for a while at one of the stations. More passengers got on. More suffocation and more noise. All of a sudden, a coarse and powerful voice was heard from the rear gate of the bus. All that ear deafening noise died down at once. "Ladies and gentlemen, we are three. Two of my buddies are at the front of the bus..." I was gripped by a chilling fear as the thought of being hijacked by some terrorists ripped through my flesh.

The voice continued. "We were

members of the ex-army. I was Lieutenant. My friends who're with me here now were sergeants under my direct echelon." This time around, I became sure that a certain group of desperate ex-army members were going to commandeer the bus raising some sort of political demand.

I peered towards the direction from where the voice was coming. I saw a tall man with a face exhibiting the effect of a hangover. Dressed in a tattered military uniform of the ex-army, he stood firm holding the mast on one hand and a club on the other.

"We fought for our country like a lion. We were feared and respected by people. We were comrades with happy marriages in a warm home like you have now." This time, the "Lieutenant" seemed to have a lump in his throat. That voice which was echoing an aura of self-confidence suddenly faded away. He, the "Lieutenant", picked out a piece of rug from his chest-pocket and wiped his eyes that were beginning to shed some drops of tears. He gave a brief analysis of his heroic deeds at the battle field. "... but..." he continued, "... our bad fate made us stand before your burning face and beg for coins."

This time my respiratory organs resumed to function properly. Realizing that the people on board were simply poor beggars not

'terrorists', my fear of being 'kidnapped' disappeared into the thin air.

Some innocent elderly people were touched by the speech of the "Lieutenant". They began to fish their handkerchiefs and pockets for some coins. The youngsters in front of me increased their laughter. They seemed to get another source of fun. The "Lieutenant" was still talking. "Dear fellowmen, don't hesitate to contribute what you have. We receive any contribution starting from five cents. Those of you at the front can give your contribution to my friends there." I admired the "Lieutenant's" diction of "contribution" instead of "alms". "Lieutenant, how many people did you kill at the battlefield?" asked one of the youngsters mockingly.

Suddenly, the "Lieutenant" lost his temper and began to display his real self. "Shut up! you son of a bitch... when I was in the army I used to order soldiers of your like to do ten push ups in a minute for misbehaving. But, today I became a mocking toy to you. What a miserable chance!." The youngsters roared with laughter. The "Lieutenant" continued the talking and collecting a good amount of alms from his sympathizers. I got off the bus irritated by the begging techniques employed by the self-claimed ex-army officers.

Let me add one more incident. This time, I was on No. 6 city bus, which shuttles between a place commonly called "Semen Mazaegaja" and "Kera". As usual, the bus was full beyond its capacity. At the middle

gate of the bus, a self-ascertained "vocalist" was singing. He was holding a fake microphone on one hand and snapping his fingers of the other hand.

To be frank, the guy had a sweet voice. He was mimicking the songs of renowned vocalists. At the end of every music, he reminds the passengers that the show was not for free. Some out of joy and others out of sympathy poured lots of coins into the pocket of the "musician." But, what was saddening was the "musician's" naked rudeness to throw some disgusting words against those passengers who got off the bus without slipping coins into his pockets.

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Ethnicity: A world phenomenon

By Abas Ahemed, Lecturer ,SMUC

The past three decades have seen a remarkable

change in the language and reality of group relations around the world. Identifying people by race and social class has become less meaningful than viewing them in terms of ethnic allegiance. In this pretty little article, I will try to examine the emergence of a new world wide trend of social conflict based on ethnicity.

Admittedly, there are problems involved in the determination of whether there is an increase in ethnic conflicts. Thus, we have the persisting conflict, for instance, between the French and

English speaking peoples in Canada. Is that an ethnic conflict or a language conflict, or the struggle of a suppressed nation for independence?

There is a rift between native Indians and Spanish elements in a number of Latin American countries. Are those ethnic conflicts? There had been a tragic conflict between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. But is not that an essentially 'religious' conflict?

There was a movement for Scottish and Welsh autonomy in Britain, the difference between Northern and Southern Italy, some observers (Barry, 1986:41) would define these as 'regional' rather than 'ethnic' movements. It seems that in each case, the

peripheral section of the country has not shared the prosperity of the center and this seems to have awakened some marginalized ethnic consciousness.

There has been a conflict between the Kurds and the Arabs in Iraq. Currently the Kurds are pressing for stronger autonomy within the new federal Iraq. After the US-led invasion of Iraq this conflict has assumed quite different dimensions and it has begun creating a wedge between marginalized Sunni and Shia Arabs who constitute a majority in the government. In both cases an international element enters into the conflict, because, there are Kurds in Turkey and Iran while both the Sunni and Shia Arabs live outside Iraq.

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The ugly face of begging is visible not only in city buses but also along the streets and various corners of Addis Ababa. A sizable number of people from the rural parts of the country flock to the metropolis every day hearing the myth that puts Addis Ababa as a gold mining field.

It goes without saying that begging has a myriad of adverse social effects. Primarily, it promotes dependency syndrome and drags the national efforts geared towards extricating the country from the abyss of poverty. It saps out the moral and motivation of able citizens with sound health not to engage in productive activities.

Secondly, as most beggars naively believe that foreign tourists come with bags full of dollars, they mercilessly pester the travel makers for money to the point that the latter may lose the appetite of coming back again to Ethiopia. Moreover, they may disseminate this negative side of our nation to others in their country. This has a huge repercussion on the

nation's tourism industry at large.

Further, the widespread begging spree affects the endeavors to create a green and clean Addis Ababa. This becomes evident when one observes plastic sheeting and makeshift houses right at the centre of the metropolis and adjacent to the headquarters of international organizations.

Last but not least, begging

contributes to the ever-rising population increase as most beggars give little or no attention to family planning and contraceptives. In addition, some desperate beggars may resort to theft and robbery when the begging business fails to fetch the desired amount of income.

Currently, the Ethiopian government is taking several practical measures to rehabilitate beggars in Addis Ababa in a sustainable manner. It is mobilizing thousands of such people to their respective places of abode to help them become self-sufficient by engaging in income-generating schemes such as agriculture.

In fact, though begging is an absolutely deplorable act, nevertheless, citizens who fail to make their living by working due to various disabilities may ask for alms to support themselves. What is inappropriate and disgusting is the way some beggars employ to get coins from people. It is really annoying.

Sometimes, it becomes very difficult to make a distinction between begging and nagging. People engaged in this non-taxable "industry" should change their attitude and must be

determined to be self-reliant instead of facing the burning face of alms-givers. At the same time people who are fond of giving alms should bear in mind that they have to scrutinize to whom they must extend their helping hands. They have to realize that not all those begging people do deserve alms. Understandably, we all should agree that begging must be the last resort to those extremely needy citizens who don't have any option of survival due to mental and/or

physical disability.



"In the north,
Beggars use dull, fixed stares
To freeze you with their eyes,
To see whatever you
are eating,
Or the way you pick your
teeth with your fingernails."

Ai Qing (1910 - 1996)

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- Prepare guide lines and regulations, and
- Conduct workshops and training for the concerned staff members are the main points to be focused on to achieve the purposes of the resource center.

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