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Sociology and the Vagrant: Beggars, Welfare and Tradition in Writing about the New Citizen in 1950s India

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ABSTRACT

Exploring the work of M.S. Gore and the Delhi School of Social Work on Delhi's 'Beggar Problem', which was published in 1959, this article shows how the ostensibly 'secular' solutions to the phenomenon were premised on a series of assumptions about caste-oriented mores and traditions of religious gifting, suggesting normative categories of citizenship based around these forms of identity. The article explores, in depth, the sociological approaches of Gore's (and others') study of beggary and argues that the emergent social policy on vagrancy connected to emergent concepts of social citizenship and rights to welfare. In the body of the reformable beggar receiving indiscriminate religious charity lay one of the core symbols of India's drive towards a modern citizenry. This position on the sociology of beggars was also the product of two larger processes at work in mid twentieth century social sciences: firstly, the development of interdisciplinary approaches by anthropologists and sociologists as they came to terms with new research challenges in democratic India, and secondly, the move to consider new forms of direct social policy applications for research, via government sponsorship. Using Gore's study, the article looks in detail at researchers' concerns with labour productivity, religious charity and the possible secular forms of beggar rehabilitation. But ultimately, the School of Social Work's study, in its apparent critique of draconian colonial controls, did not overturn the continued application of Indian anti-beggary laws in subsequent decades. This article argues that this was a product too of its configuration of social welfare as an outcome of longer-term societal change rather than state policy.

KEYWORDS

Citizenship; Delhi; Gore; social work; sociology; vagrancy

Introduction

This article explores how the relationship between sociological research and social policy on vagrancy and beggary in India changed over the period from the 1930s to the 1950s as it came to terms with new spatial and conceptual frames of national belonging and citizens' access to welfare. My central argument is that some of the

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main research on vagrancy in India highlighted it as a societal rather than individual problem, in which group norms and traditions of giving were at the centre. This in turn exemplified new intellectual trends in India's social sciences that set out the relationship between poverty and social tradition as embodied obstacles to the formation of a fully democratic citizenry, epitomised by the body of the beggar. Specifically, ideas about tradition, family and the community, rooted in paradigms of social theory in Indian sociology, created a framework for thinking about the new, productive Indian citizen—a trend which research on internal pariahs (in this case beggars), threw into sharp relief. In other words, within the body of the reformable beggar, receiving indiscriminate religious charity, lay one of the core symbols of India's drive towards a modern citizenry.

This article takes this relationship between sociological research on the beggar and concepts of citizenship a step further by arguing that the very project of liberal democracy, set out in 1950s India, shaped sociological approaches to poverty and the enjoyment of civic rights or projection of duties. In this discourse, the prerequisite for the enjoyment of rights was the absence of forms of absolute poverty, represented in the figure of the beggar. Yet, unlike previous arguments that explore this in terms of technocratic planning,¹ this article suggests that mid century sociologists directly associated begging and vagrancy with forms of premodern, pre-capitalist and anti-liberal forms of social organisation that militated against the exercise of rights. This relationship between begging and modernity was further shaped by the recognition that contemporary urban life created proximate conditions for beggar poverty. Existing as agents that therefore complicated the project of mid twentieth century modernity, beggars were thus the ultimate subjects of postcolonial governance: the full rights-bearing citizen was, inherently, a figure who not only held financial security, but who was also invisible to official and academic scrutiny. By contrast, the poverty of the beggar meant that they became a subject not simply of general sociological interest but, as the main studies of 1950s vagrancy show, of detailed everyday scrutiny. This was not just down to the 'problem' of poverty, but the ways in which beggars embodied premodern social interactions and modes of giving.

Research into vagrancy in mid twentieth century India, then, helped to shape normative concepts of the citizen. Studies of citizenship in India have shown that while class strongly mediated relationships between citizens and the state, the social and economic rights of the citizen were relegated in the Constitution to the Directive Principles of State. Despite the powerful arguments of K.T. Shah and (for a time) B.R. Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly, the rights to economic security were deemed non-cognisable in a court of law, or non-justiciable.²

In mid twentieth century India, the question of beggars went right to the centre of tensions and debates about social and economic rights for reasons that take us beyond these formal constitutional decisions. Social citizenship, in the shape of welfare, was considered legally non-enforceable on account of India's financial resources,

1. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993): 200–17.

2. Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Citizenship and Its Discontents: An Indian History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013): 105, 148–50.

but this sat in tension with other, powerful ideas of citizen-solidarity, especially in the first decades of India's independence, when the ideals of Planning itself were designed to draw in citizen volunteerism.³ Since social welfare in India in our period only really existed in relation to the larger project of national economic development, and the project of equality was predominantly political rather than economic, this placed emphasis on the discourses of charity and relief. The latter became a subject of sociological scrutiny of citizenship values in terms of a relationship *between* new citizens, and a concept of gifting or giving which did not implicate the state but the duties of others. Beggars, meanwhile, did not fall into a constitutionally defined 'category' for welfare, as would later be the case more clearly with the concept of Scheduled, Backward and Other Backward Castes or Tribes.

Therefore, the process whereby beggars came to recognise their rights and duties as citizens did not arise simply through the top-down paternalism of the state, but rather the assumed paternalistic structures of society itself. As Partha Chatterjee has argued in a broader sense, concepts of modernity (in our case, the concept of the modern citizen) sat in a space of homogenous time, in which any impediments to its achievement were considered inherently premodern, archaic or backward.⁴ If the modern citizen was the utopian unit of society in mid twentieth century India, the beggar embodied heterotopia—the ultimate object of the governmentality. As the opposite of the other side of the conceptual citizen, then, the world of the beggar became, as its 'other', a necessary subject of enquiry in defining the shape of India's substantive citizenship regime.

Looking at studies of vagrancy in the crucial first decade after Independence, when the experiments of what one scholar has described as 'economic democracy', the right to basic standards of living and food, were being discussed,⁵ gets to the root of how the citizenship regime developed then. Most of the formal work on concepts of welfare has explored the idea in terms of formality and informality in the workforce,⁶ or larger-scale themes of the larger context of welfare development via the Planning Commission.⁷ Welfare, inherently in all of this work, also sat in relation to the ethnographic state—older forms of governmentality that situated or shaped the requirements and rights of the poor in relation to instruments of categorisation, enumeration. etc.⁸ Within these paradigms, some of the most recent literature on contemporary systems of state welfare have examined, in detailed case studies, the practices of claims-making, the visibility of the state to the poor, and the uses they make of it.⁹ Much of this work tends

3. Nikhil Menon, *Planning Democracy: Modern India's Quest for Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Meraj Ahmad, 'The Concept of Welfare State with Special Reference to its Implementation in India', in *Research in Sociology and Social Work: Radhakamal Mukerjee Memorial Volume*, ed. S. Zafar Hasan (Lucknow: Department of Sociology, 1971): 11–107.

4. Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 5.

5. Jean Dreze, 'Democracy and the Right to Food', *Economic & Political Weekly* 39, no. 17 (2004): 1723–31.

6. Rina Agarwala, 'From Work to Welfare: A New Class Movement in India', *Critical Asian Studies* 38, no. 4 (2006): 419–44.

7. Menon, *Planning Democracy*.

8. Partha Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed*, 37–38.

9. See, for example, the work of Gabrielle Kruks-Wisner, *Active Citizenship and Social Welfare in Rural India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Nayanika Mathur, *Paper Tiger: Law, Bureaucracy and the Developmental State in Himalayan India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

to create a picture of what James Holsten has described as a form of ‘auto-constructed’ citizenship, in which how the poor make use of their rights is premised on local contingencies, sometimes formally illegal practices, or via informal and new community channels.¹⁰ As I aim to show later, some of the basic presumptions of the research around bureaucratic or institutional solutions to welfare took a peculiar form that stretched the relationship between a utopian concept of the citizen and the notion of a governable population, when it came to beggars.

Work on the historical development of food policy and welfare has, however, identified a trend in the coexistence of ‘secular’ or ‘modernising’ trends in bureaucratic food control/welfare alongside older ideas of religious charity, community and suffering. Sunil Amrith, for example, explores the existence of a Gandhian moral economy, which juxtaposed religious community/tradition with modernising bureaucratic statist trends.¹¹ At another level, early examples of proto welfare in India, especially in relation to famine, created detailed population surveys and measurements as a means of controlling the inherent disorders of mass starvation.¹² This required the input of researchers, statistics and the tools of the social scientist. These ideas, this article argues, were also at the root of projects in which social scientists attempted to have an impact on social policy, and to a great extent explains the wide-ranging interdisciplinary experimentation that also took place in the middle of the twentieth century. At the centre of one of the key and distinctive developments of sociology, especially as it pertained to social work around such themes as urban poverty, was an attempt at disciplinary synthesis or holism.¹³

The mid 1940s to the mid 1950s was a period in which nation-building themes dominated wider discussions of academic and intellectual change in the social sciences, creating new relationships between those disciplines and governance. In this embrace of now radically changed territorial and ideological contexts, social scientists often struggled to reconcile the utopian visions of democratic India with their own ideas about societal traditions. The latter were, of course, conditioned by longer-term colonial approaches in anthropology and sociology on the one hand, and directly for our purposes, longer-term presuppositions about vagrancy. David Arnold has shown that in colonial India, the lines between vagrancy and criminality among European communities were frequently blurred, and that this also generated a class dynamic to institutionalisation in workhouses, with the poor being more directly associated with the conditions of control.¹⁴ That vagrancy was directly linked to political control has been an abiding feature of work on India’s Criminal Tribes,¹⁵ but could also be

10. James Holsten, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

11. See Sunil Amrith, ‘Food and Welfare in India, c. 1900–1950’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 4 (2008): 1010–35.

12. Sarah Hodges, ‘Governmentality, Population and Reproductive Family in Modern India’, *Economic & Political Weekly* 39, no. 11 (2004): 1157–63.

13. See for example, the range of approaches in S. Zafar Hasan, ed. *Research in Sociology and Social Work: Radhakamal Mukerjee Memorial Volume* (Lucknow: Department of Sociology, 1971).

14. David Arnold, ‘European Orphans and Vagrants in India in the Nineteenth Century’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 7, no. 2 (1979): 104–27.

15. Andrew J. Major, ‘State and Criminal Tribes in Colonial Punjab: Surveillance, Control and Reclamation of the “Dangerous Classes”’, *Modern Asian Studies* 33, no. 3 (1999): 657–88.

extended, as Catharine Colborne and Maree O'Connor show, to wider policies in the legalisation of spaces in colonial India.¹⁶

For India's early post-Independence social scientists, the problem of vagrancy and beggary was necessarily framed in different terms when compared to the early twentieth century, although certain political and security concerns remained.¹⁷ Now the vagrant was also a potential rights-bearing citizen—a productive body in the larger schema of the body politic. At the same time, the state in India was unable to match its ambitions for the productive citizen with infrastructure and resources, especially when it came to welfare and public health. Arguably, state welfare has not easily rooted itself in Indian political culture, largely because of the presumption that state largesse did not meet the requirements of India's poor.¹⁸ Although there were some important changes in the 1940s (not least surrounding the 1946 Bhole Committee), the continued gulf between rulers and ruled persisted, and there was a preference for delegation of work to non-government organisations.¹⁹ There was also dissonance between the intellectual principles behind welfare and the strictures and approaches of legislators and administrators. As time went on too, party politics led legislators to prioritise visible rather than less obvious public goods—a trend which diverged from theoretical approaches to welfare.²⁰ While, as we will see below, beggary was a problem of social integration for many academic social scientists, it was a continued issue of public security and discipline for the state. There is no doubt the raft of regional legislation on beggary was (and continues to be) the target of academic critique. This included the Bengal Vagrancy Act, 1943, the Madras Prevention of Begging Act, 1945, the Bihar Prevention of Begging Act, 1951, the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959, the Jammu and Kashmir Prevention of Begging Act, 1960, the Assam Prevention of Begging Act, 1964, and a host of bills that followed for other states through the 1970s.²¹ Begging was treated as a cognisable offence under these Acts, and permitted the use of special police forces to arrest, detain and eventually prosecute beggars.²² Some scholars have argued that Acts such as that of Bombay, 1959, are effectively unconstitutional, denying citizenship rights to the 'ostensibly poor'.²³

This article explores one central study on beggary and vagrancy as its main case study to examine these arguments: an extensive study by the Delhi School of Social

16. Catharine Colborne and Maree O'Connor, 'Vagrancy, Mobility and Colonialism', in *The Sage Handbook of Historical Geography, Vol. 1*, ed. Mona Dornosh et al. (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2020): 374–89.

17. For a discussion of the Congress governments' approaches to the political mobilisation of 'Criminal Tribes', see Dakshinkumar Bajrange, Sarah Gandee and William Gould, 'Settling the Citizen, Settling the Nomad: "Habitual Offenders", Rebellion and Civic Consciousness in Western India, 1938–1952', *Modern Asian Studies* 54, no. 2 (2020): 337–83.

18. For a discussion of the historical changes in this approach to state welfare, see Devesh Kapur and Prakirti Nangia, 'Social Protection in India: A Welfare State Sans Public Goods?', *India Review* 14, no. 1 (2015): 73–90.

19. Sunil Amrith, 'Political Culture of Health in India: A Historical Perspective', *Economic & Political Weekly* 42, no. 2 (2007): 114–21.

20. Anandi Mani and Sharun Mukand, 'Democracy, Visibility and Public Good Provision', *Journal of Development Economics* 83, no. 2 (2007): 506–29.

21. Dyutimoy Mukherjee, 'Laws for Beggars, Justice for Whom: A Critical Review of the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act 1959', *The International Journal of Human Rights* 12, no. 2 (2008): 279–88. The implementation of anti-begging programmes is contained within the jurisdiction of state governments.

22. S.K. Bhattacharya, 'Beggars and the Law', *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* 19, no. 4 (1977): 498–502.

23. Usha Ramanathan, 'Ostensible Poverty, Beggary and the Law', *Economic & Political Weekly* 43, no. 44 (2008): 33, 35–44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40278127>.

Work carried out in 1955 (published in 1959), headed by the sociologist Madhav Sadashiv Gore, entitled *The Beggar Problem in Metropolitan Delhi*. This multi-authored research project and book-length report stood out as the most developed single empirical study on the subject at the time, although, as will be explored later, it drew on or related to a number of other studies of beggary and wider theories of social change and poverty. These included the work of B.N. Ganguli in Kolkata,²⁴ the mid 1940s–50s work of M. Vasudeva Moorthy (Sir Dorabji Tata School of Social Work),²⁵ a ‘Report on The Beggar Survey in Madras’ in 1956,²⁶ and S.K. Iyengar’s socio-economic and health report on Hyderabad city.²⁷ But perhaps the most important context for much of 1950s work in this area was the research of Radhakamal Mukerjee, both in the specific subject of urban vagrancy and also the impact of his larger theories of Indian society.

Mukerjee is considered by historians of India’s social sciences to be one of the founding figures of what is typically described as ‘the Lucknow School’ of Indian sociology.²⁸ Arguably, his approach challenged what he perceived as Eurocentric models of social analysis and concepts of development,²⁹ but it is how and why he developed a holistic approach to the social sciences and its connections to Indian tradition that are of particular importance to later studies of beggary. From its earliest stages, Mukerjee’s career drew connections between principles of economics and early sociological theory, further connecting them to wider explorations in psychology, ethics/philosophy and the biological sciences. Crucial in his influence on work surrounding beggars was his 1950s work on the relationship between social structure and the concept of ‘values’. Here, he pleaded for the integration of an approach to society that would combine what he described as ‘biopsychological’ approaches to spiritual values, as a total model of Indian society.³⁰ It is significant too, that Mukerjee pioneered the founding of the Department of Sociology and Social Work in Lucknow in 1956, reaffirming this commitment to holism and applied research.³¹ As we will see below, this totalising or holistic vision, which drew in the spiritualism of the individual alongside a notion of societal values, was a key frame for thinking about reform of beggary.

The work of India’s pioneering sociologists was not, of course, the only intellectual influences on beggary research. There is no doubt that many of the pivotal figures exploring poverty at this time, including Gore, were influenced by other non-Indian developments in their discipline. When it came to a study of urban spaces, the

24. B.N. Ganguli, ‘The Street Beggars of Calcutta: A Study of its Problem and its Solutions’, *Indian Journal of Economics* 1927–1928 8 (January 1928): 374.

25. M. Vasudeva Moorthy, *Beggar Problem in Greater Bombay: A Research Study: Report* (Bombay: Indian Conference of Social Work, 1959).

26. P.T. Thomas et al., *Report on the Beggar Survey in Madras City* (Madras: Madras School of Social Work, 1956).

27. S.K. Iyengar, *Report on Socio-Economic and Health Survey of Street Beggars in Hyderabad-Secunderabad City Area* (New Delhi: Government Press, 1956).

28. T.N. Madan, ed. *Sociology at the University of Lucknow: The First Half Century 1921–1975* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013): 28–34.

29. P.C. Joshi, ‘Founders of the Lucknow School and Their Legacy: Radhakamal Mukerjee and D.P. Mukerji: Some Reflections’, *Economic & Political Weekly* 21, no. 33 (1986): 1455–69.

30. Radhakamal Mukerjee, *The Social Structure of Values* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1950).

31. S. Zafar Hasan, ‘Preface’, in *Research in Sociology and Social Work*, ed. S. Zafar Hasan (Lucknow: Department of Sociology, 1971): i–iii.

Chicago School, with its departure from general theory and social philosophy to grounded ethnographic research in the field combined with some quantitative methods, influenced India's links between sociological research and public policy in the 1920s–30s.³² This intellectual context also needs to include an ambivalent but important connection to British social anthropology and physical anthropology. Anthropology was, in many respects, tainted by this latter relationship to the colonial or postcolonial gaze. Many of the Indian sociologists of this period, for this reason, tended to have a cautious attitude towards the application of their research to policy—a significant tension in the light of the context of how social scientists were brought into planning.³³ Nevertheless, from a very early stage, even before Independence, there was an attempt to include social scientists in projects of planning. R.K. Mukerjee—also a key author on beggary—was on the 1938 National Planning Commission set up by the Congress party while in power at the state levels, and developed the notion of 'rational family planning'. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, as national planning progressed, new interdisciplinary conversations helped to encourage the field of 'Applied anthropology'. Social scientists were subsequently implicated in a range of state-sponsored projects that required rapid mobilisation of field data, a classic example being B.S. Guha's work on Partition refugees in Bengal.³⁴

One of its more ambitious forms in the 1950s came in the shape of the Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs). As in the case of work on beggars, the core underlying principle in this project for the application of research to welfare was the idea of a dichotomous tension between a concept of community tradition and religious culture, and a model of 'modern' secular citizenry. The former did not, for researchers, tessellate easily with the latter. During the Second Five-Year Plan, B.S. Guha actively lobbied the government to set up Tribal Research Institutes in Assam.³⁵ Parallel efforts were made to look into how research was furthering 'tribal welfare' across different parts of India.³⁶ It was also clearly evident in a number of contemporary academic publications produced by, for example, D.N. Majumdar, L.P. Vidyarthi and S.C. Dube.³⁷ Sol Tax's notion of 'action anthropology' was also an influence behind a number of projects that were conspicuously driven by contemporary government initiatives.³⁸

32. For a detailed account of the history of the Chicago School, see Martin Bulmer, *The Chicago School of Sociology: Institutionalization, Diversity and the Rise of Sociological Research* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

33. For a discussion of how this applied to the central group of Lucknow-based anthropologists and sociologists in this period, including D.P. Mukerji and D.N. Majumdar, see T.N. Madan, ed., *Sociology at the University of Lucknow: The First Half Century (1921–1975)* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

34. Abhijit Guha, 'Nation Building on the Margins: How the Anthropologists of Indian Contributed?', *Sociological Bulletin* 70, no. 1 (2020): 59–75.

35. Copy of letter no. TAD/CO/6/56 dated February 17, 1956, from the Government of Assam addressed to the Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi, Department of Anthropology—Establishment of a Tribal Research Institute in Assam at Shillong—agreed, Ministry of Education, C-1 section, File no. 8–13/57 CI, National Archives of India (hereafter, NAI).

36. Text from the Tribal Affairs Conference, held in New Delhi, December 4–5, 1954, 'Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Party of Tribal Affairs, New Delhi, December 1954—Welfare of Tribal People', MHA, file 74/57/54—Public II, NAI.

37. D.N. Majumdar, 'The Changing Canvass of Tribal Life', *Eastern Anthropologist* 3 (1949): 40–47; S.C. Dube, 'Approaches to the Tribal Problem', in *Indian Anthropology in Action*, ed. L.P. Vidyarthi (Ranchi: Council of Social and Cultural Research, 1960).

38. Fredrick Gearing, 'Micro-Analysis and Action Anthropology', in *Currents in Anthropology: Essays in Honor of Sol Tax*, ed. Robert Hinshaw (The Hague: Mouton, 1979): 391–408.

Unlike the idea of the marginal citizen in India's remote forests and hills, however, the beggar was a marginal citizen in the heart of India's cities. In its early years, the Planning Commission was quite extensive in what it supported around urban studies and politics too, including O. Lewis and H.S. Dhillon's studies of power and faction and Robert Redfield, Milton Singer and McKim Marriott's work on urban studies.³⁹ The broader context for Gore's Delhi study, then, was work on other cities—Calcutta (now Kolkata) by N.K. Bose, a study of Kanpur by D.N. Majumdar and work on Lucknow by R.K. Mukherjee and Baljit Singh. Irawati Karve worked on urbanisation and displacement under the auspices of the Planning Commission. Much of this work related to the multidisciplinary projects on newly independent nations that were launched from the US, such as Morris Opler's Cornell India Project in the mid 1950s, which involved S.C. Dube and Leela Dube working on two villages in Uttar Pradesh.⁴⁰ Thus, the relationship between academic social scientists and policymakers, transformed by the circumstances of early post-Independence planning, had reconfigured the relationship between different disciplines by the 1950s.⁴¹

Gore's study on beggary and the development of disciplinary holism

This trend towards interdisciplinarity played out in work on beggary and poverty too, but in different ways. As noted earlier, the Lucknow sociologists of the 1930s–50s promoted forms of holism in sociology.⁴² For R.K. Mukerjee, this was about the relationship with economics. In his 1945 piece on beggars, for example, he explored the relationship between economic change in the countryside and land reform and urban poverty.⁴³ This, in turn, naturally stressed the relationship between the economy and sociology of the beggar. Gore's *The Beggar Problem in Metropolitan Delhi*, published in 1959, was influenced by this larger context of disciplinary holism and itself contained within a series sponsored by the Research Programmes Committee of the Planning Commission. A movement between disciplines and approaches also marked his personal career. Gore was a trained sociologist but also worked in social work administration. His specialism was clearly rooted in urban studies, and his PhD from Columbia in 1961 involved urbanisation and family change in Mumbai. Later, he became director of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) and vice chancellor of the University of Mumbai. In the last stages of his life up to 2010, he worked as chancellor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in Delhi.

39. See, for example, Oscar Lewis and Harwant Singh Dhillon, *Group Dynamics in a North Indian Village: A Study of Factions* (New Delhi: Programme Evaluation Planning Commission, 1954); Robert Redfield and Milton B. Singer, 'The Cultural Role of Cities', *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 3, no. 1 (1954): 53–84.

40. This resulted in S.C. Dube, *India's Changing Villages: Human Factors in Community Development* (London: Routledge, 1958).

41. This was, for example, a theme of the discussion of S.C. Dube in 'The Urgent Task of Anthropology in India', in *Proceedings of the IVth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences Held in Vienna*. International Union of Anthropological and Ethnographical Sciences (IUAES) (A159) (Royal Anthropological Institute Archive, London, 1952).

42. Manish Thakur, 'Radhakamal Mukerjee and the Quest for an Indian Sociology', *Sociological Bulletin* 61, no. 1 (2012): 89–108.

43. R.K. Mukherjee, 'Causes of Beggary', in *Our Beggary Problem: How to Tackle It*, ed. J.M. Kumarappa (Bombay: Fadma Publications, 1945): 27–28.

The Delhi School of Social Work (DSSW) in the 1950s had clear and direct links to work sponsored by the Planning Commission and other administrative agencies. Founded in 1947, within a year, it was recognised as a postgraduate training institution for social workers, which comprised of an MA covering two years, and by the mid 1950s, it was taking about 40 students per year. Its areas of training specialisation were the following: rural social work (centred on eight villages), labour welfare and personnel management, medical social work, and institutional and after-care services. In describing the training, M.S. Gore pointed out that unlike in the US, where research was based in particular methodologies, in the Delhi school, methods were adapted to social contexts. The classroom work did, however, include the study of sociology, political science, economics and psychology.⁴⁴ Its reports and publications included *The Need for a Department of Social Welfare as a Part of the Proposed Corporation for Delhi*; *Mental Hospitals in India and Social Work Services* (authored by a Fulbright Fellow, Arthur J. Robins); *India Village Service* (exploring the work of voluntary agencies and rural extension and community work in western Uttar Pradesh); *Organization of Social Service Leagues in Colleges*; *Field Work Practices in Schools of Social Work in India* and *Field Records in Group Work, and Community Organization*. Gore's focus in this department was not, as he himself directly stated, simply welfare for the 'needy and handicapped', but also assistance in 'reconstruction and revitalization' of the basic social institutions of the family and village panchayat, while discouraging caste stratification.⁴⁵

In 1955, the DSSW began its detailed sociological study of 'the beggar problem' in Delhi at a time when Gore was its principal. There is little doubt that the study represented the most complete sociological analysis of vagrancy and begging of its time. Drawing up detailed data from 600 interviewees (out of an estimated beggar population of 3,000), and conducting fieldwork on five separate settlements or colonies, *The Beggar Problem in Metropolitan Delhi* employed some of the latest approaches in the discipline.⁴⁶ Other studies commissioned around the same time included socio-economic studies of Hyderabad, Baroda (now Vadodara), Hubli, Jamshedpur and Poona (now Pune), work on small-scale industries in Delhi, Sivakasi and Sattur, research into the working of Tenancy Acts in Bombay (now Mumbai) and Baroda, studies on the economics of farm management in Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, surveys of the dam projects in Mettur (Tamil Nadu) and Bhakra-Nangal (Himachal Pradesh), and a survey of employment/unemployment in Assam.

The DSSW study ostensibly used the disciplines of sociology and social psychology and was overt in exploring how beggary connected the two disciplines in direct fashion: the problem of the beggar was, according to Gore, one in which individual behaviour had to be studied in relation to societal conditions, with 'behaviour' being a part of the social system itself. This relationship, as we will see below, was also

44. M.S. Gore, 'Training for Rural Social Work at the Delhi School of Social Work', *Community Development Bulletin* 11, no. 4 (1960): 93–100.

45. *Ibid.*, 93–94.

46. *The Beggar Problem in Metropolitan Delhi* (Delhi: Delhi School of Social Work, 1959) (hereafter, *BPMD* 1959). For some near contemporary accounts of the history of the Planning Commission in this period, see H.K. Paranjape, *The Planning Commission: A Descriptive Account* (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1964); D.R. Gadgil, *Planning and Economic Policy in India* (Poona: Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, 1962).

crucial to larger considerations about welfare, the role of the state, and the assumed remedies of both tradition and modernity. Gore's study was firmly situated, therefore, in a global sense of social welfare, and the research drew extensively on scholars of welfare policy in England and USA,⁴⁷ ideas of 'public relief' in other contexts,⁴⁸ and professional standards in social work.⁴⁹

The interdisciplinary frame of the project shaped the nature of the study's five principal aims: to approximate the total size of the beggar problem in Delhi, to explore samples of individual beggars, their 'willingness for rehabilitation' and to uncover their community networks. Finally, the study aimed to offer solutions and explore rehabilitative and preventative possibilities. The city itself was spatially mapped into 36 zones, with demographic calculations recorded in the mornings and afternoons in areas such as Chandni Chowk/Red Fort; Kashmere Gate; Gole Market, Connaught Circus; Kakanagar, Sundernagar; India Gate and Bengali Market; Jawaharnagar; Bazar Sita Ram, Turkman Gate and Ajmeri Gate. The areas with the greatest concentrations of beggars, the study argued, were Chandni Chowk, Turkman Gate, Jamna Bazar, Bela Road and Patharwalla, Nicholson and Hamilton Road, Mori Gate, Jumna Par area and Paharganj Bridge.⁵⁰

Gore and his three co-authors collected data on family, family habits, schooling, childhood experiences, religious background, vocational and work history, personal life and friendships, current 'professional' life (based on 39 detailed questions meticulously capturing daily life); attitudes towards the future; disability; and mendicancy. The study therefore explored the broader societal conditions for beggars in a large Indian city. As a result, it revealed (and self-consciously examined) the nature of interactions between policies of development/planning, the welfare state and social science research. But as we will see below, it also showed how the application of the social sciences was conditioned by ideas about Indian secularism, modernity, the role of the state, and a historicism drawn from Europe.

Society, religion and 'giving'

The DSSW study was in many ways less about the problem of the individual in society, and more about the frame of societal responses to the individual (or community of) vagrants. It explicitly admitted the importance of the discipline of psychology but deliberately omitted its approaches in a direct form. In other words, rather than simply focusing on the beggar, the study elaborated a series of assumptions about changes to welfare over time, the role of the state and the notion of the new citizen. Should we see the beggar as a 'problem' or as a deviant? Gore asked. Rather than deviancy, he concluded, it was about the social relationship between beggar and giver, and therefore involved interaction between two institutionalised roles. Both groups, for the study's researchers, were acting within the frame of certain 'norms' of their group. Ideally, one therefore needed to study the person who gave as well as the

47. Karl de Schweinitz, *England's Road to Social Security* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1947).

48. J.C. Brown, *Public Relief, 1929-39* (New York: Henry Holt, 1940).

49. United Nations, *Methods of Social Welfare Administration* (New York: Department of Social Affairs, 1950).

50. *BPMD* 1959, 21-23.

beggar and, arguably, the motivations of the giver were more complex. For Gore then, trying to understand this phenomenon via the individual beggar was ‘fallacious’. It was, rather, a larger sociological phenomenon.⁵¹ Overall, the sociological approach positioned the study in the framework of society as a whole rather than simply the focused study of a community or discrete group as part of a micro-study, as typically found in most anthropological projects of the period. This, as we will explore further below, situated the study in terms of an assumed breakdown of social traditions, in the fact of urban modernity. In other words, beggary was premised, both in its forms and its proliferation, as something related to mid century changes in the family, the structures of caste and the role of religion in society.

This set of principles about the contextual societal elements of begging conditioned the core approach and method of the researchers. In its detailed exploration of ‘beggar attitudes’, which took up an entire chapter, the study argued that the wider societal response to begging as a dynamic of those attitudes was less important than the attitude of the society that the beggar understands. In other words, reference group theory was central, not least in the authors’ choice of six distinct and comparable beggar colonies. In the mid twentieth century, this type of approach built on C.H. Cooley’s social constructivism, and the work of Herbert Hyman in 1940s USA.⁵² Delhi’s beggar colonies also perhaps corresponded in some ways to Srinivas’ bounded but organically shifting village, and crucially, Gore was very sensitive to the urban-rural and family dynamics of his fieldwork in Delhi.⁵³

If the study of beggars could only be located in a wider societal frame, then the position of the researcher, too, needed situating, although there are no explicit clues as to how Gore placed himself or his fellow researchers into this matrix. How did sociologists explore their own relationship to the ‘reference group’? Most Indian sociologists working in this period were essentially middle-class, high-caste men observing and recording the poor. This has been explored in European contexts, via concepts of middle-class masculinity, whose capital was invested in himself in class terms too.⁵⁴ In 1950s India, the gaze of the sociologist was not simply class-based but also Brahmanical, bureaucratic and technocratic, and the fact that there was little direct self-reflection on this is telling in itself. As we will suggest below, the normative Indian citizen was, in some ways, the person invisible to sociological study—educated researchers themselves. The Indian sociological approaches to the poor and to vagrancy in particular—an ambiguously deviant poor—positioned them as an anthropological other in a different sense: marginal, albeit not in spatial terms, as was typically the case with anthropologists’ ‘tribal’ subjects.

In reflecting on how beggar society formed its own social ecosystem, Gore’s study set out to unpack the central logic of beggars’ interaction with society, rooted in the concept of giving/receiving and what the authors described as ‘indiscriminate charity’. How far beggars might be rehabilitated, according to this logic, depended on the

51. *Ibid.*, 72–73.

52. C.H. Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, rev. ed., 1922 [1902]); Herbert Hyman, ‘The Psychology of Status’, *Archives of Psychology*, no. 269 (1942): 94.

53. M.N. Srinivas, *The Remembered Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

54. See Priti Joshi, ‘Edwin Chadwick’s Self Fashioning: Professionalism, Masculinity and the Victorian Poor’, *Victorian Literature and Culture* 32, no. 2 (2004): 353–70.

extent to which begging had become socially acceptable—an idea reflected in other studies of beggars in different urban contexts.⁵⁵ The study suggested, crucially, that the very practices of giving and receiving in this context related to much older practices and ‘modes’ linked to village society and Hindu cultural ideas about gifts. The act of giving fulfilled a social function, which included atonement for sin and acquisition of merit.⁵⁶ But such giving was not unambiguously religious in nature and bore some resemblance to the liminal act of the bribe—another act of giving which had potentially corrupting effects.⁵⁷

Central too in these formulations was the social economy of the caste system, in which the Brahman and sanyasi could legitimately maintain himself on the charity of fellow men. Concepts such as *dakshina* and *bhiksha*—the giving/receiving of donations given to Brahmans in religious charity, which characterised both mendicant begging, but also extended to other forms of ‘indiscriminate charity’—was its archetypal form. This led to ‘dissociation between the act of giving and the situation of need and gave some social status to receiving’. It obliterated the distinction between ‘work’ and ‘begging’. By extension, individual charity did not help ‘re-education’. Instead, the authors wrote, ‘they [are] attitudes more characteristic of a class and caste-ridden society than of the equalitarian society which we visualise’.⁵⁸

Although the study drew on the *Bhagavad Gita*’s three principles of ‘giving’ (from the dutiful to the contractual and the violent),⁵⁹ it implied that a serious programme of rehabilitation would necessarily be secular, not simply in the forms of state-run institutions created, but also in terms of how giving and charity itself might be secularised. In the chapter on ‘Society and the Beggar’, the DSSW argued that ‘[r]eligion, thus, not only accepted and encouraged “giving”, it made “giving” a necessary part of the way of life that it enjoined through its caste structures’. Therefore, ‘the giving was not for the taker but for the giver to fulfill a sense of religious merit ... if a recipient could not be found he had to be discovered’.⁶⁰ This led to ‘dissociation between the act of giving and the situation of need’ and gave some social status to ‘receiving’. It obliterated the distinction between ‘work’ and ‘begging’. Yet, the authors concurred, it was often difficult to distinguish between the outward material conditions of existence of India’s low-income groups and the destitute in the country’s cities.

There was, therefore, a concept of ‘good’ giving and alms-taking and ‘bad’ giving, depending on the conditions in which it took place. The ‘good’ form was exemplified by the passive mendicant who did not actively beg, but simply received. Although the difference was, in practice, quite slim, the main contrast lay in the social legitimacy of the sanyasi, following an avocation in life, which effectively

55. See, for example, Moorthy, *Beggar Problem*, 17–18, which highlighted the pragmatic importance of temple and mosque localities to Hindu and Muslim beggars, respectively.

56. *BPMD* 1959, 80–81.

57. For an exploration of this idea, see Jonathan Parry and Maurice Bloch, ed., *Money and the Morality of Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

58. *BPMD* 1959, 203.

59. *Ibid.*, 78.

60. *Ibid.*, 77. The idea that mendicant beggars would disappear with the development of the modern Indian city was also suggested in B.D. Tripathi, ‘The Religious Mendicants of Uttar Pradesh—A Sociological Study’, in *Research in Sociology and Social Work*, ed. S. Zafar Hasan (Lucknow: Department of Sociology, 1971): 132–44.

required living from the offerings of others. ‘When the mendicant asks for alms’, the study noted, ‘he is not appealing to your sense of pity and sympathy but to your sense of religious and social duty. He is in fact, not appealing, but asking or directing you to act in accordance with the norm’.⁶¹ Despite this general view of mendicants, among the 115 interviewed in the Delhi area, only around 20 were from identifiable sects, suggesting that most were ‘fake’: ‘... a large number of them admitted having sexual perversions. Their average daily routine did not provide for any prayers, meditations or other religious pursuits. Indeed, on the negative side, some of them did not mind uttering a few indecent and abuses phrases for God, occasionally’.⁶²

Rather like D.P. Mukerji’s innovations in anthropology, which, according to T.N. Madan, devised a balance between the modern structures of his discipline and his own tradition, Gore’s study of beggary also implicitly involved a critique of modernity.⁶³ Both of the 1940s studies that preceded the Delhi one, that of Moorthy and Mukherjee, suggested beggary could be related to a breakdown or change in social traditions.⁶⁴ But these studies tended to focus more on alternative forms of social welfare provided by families and the caste panchayat. In contrast, for Gore, the group dynamics found in beggar communities and neighbourhoods—studied in depth in his narrative—created new quasi-family relationships. Here, the analysis was brought back again to reference groups which generated their own family norms. However, the extent to which these ‘new’ norms were established did not necessarily affect the degree to which begging itself had become normalised. Beggars from linguistic minorities (i.e. non-Hindi) were more likely to have established these new family forms, and also to have connections to other minority language speakers who were not begging. Since begging was better tolerated by the wider linguistic community, their motivation to give up was relatively weak. By contrast, a group in the eastern part of the old city, he argued, had closer ties to village-based families, and were therefore less inclined to normalise begging.⁶⁵ The dynamic of tradition and modernity, then, was also a defining feature in the very analysis of beggar motivation, but not, for Gore’s study, in a simple linear way. Begging was also mediated through rural family traditions as well as specific religious traditions, but in a way that was, for the DSSW study, in a process of transition in mid century India.

Labour and the productive citizen

Gore’s beggar typology prioritised the element of work capability ahead of nearly every other characteristic. Types of beggars in the study were defined in terms of being ‘able-bodied’ or disabled, with both criteria relating less to health than to

61. *BPMD* 1959., 80.

62. *Ibid.*, 221–24.

63. T.N. Madan, ‘Search for Synthesis: The Sociology of D.P. Mukerji’, in *Anthropology in the East: Founders of Indian Sociology and Anthropology*, ed. Patricia Uberoi, Nandini Sundar and Satish Deshpande (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007): 256–89.

64. Moorthy, *Beggar Problem*, 21–22, listed changes in landholding and family background—i.e. home district ‘push’ elements—as the most important background causes.

65. *BPMD* 1959, 23–24.

propensity to work. The category of 'mendicant able bodied' further reinforced this notion, although complicated it too, as we saw in the previous section. In addition, the research examined the 'childhood conditions' and family backgrounds of beggars as a means of ascertaining how far the original family constituted a viable economic unit: 62 percent of beggars were found to come from families at or below subsistence level, and 54 percent had lost their fathers (the principal family wage earner) before the age of 17. Consideration was taken of whether backgrounds were 'agricultural' (42.5 percent) or 'non-agricultural' (53.4 percent)

The 'problem' here, however, was not just the existence and proliferation of fake mendicant beggars with dubious sexual proclivities (which the report noted in its case studies). The more important problem was one of wastefulness, and the encouragement of unproductivity. The wastage on 'indiscriminate charity' was set out in lost labour hours, amounting, the report claimed, to three million 'man hours', or ₹9 lakh per year. In contrast, the authors analysed the work, attitudes and social realities of 'handicapped' beggars according to different criteria, since it was assumed that they were inherently 'unproductive'.⁶⁶ Labour was conceived of as productive or unproductive—a theme that came up around beggar disability, and the notion of the 'able-bodied', in both Mukerjee and Gore—again an idea drawn from English nineteenth century poor law principles. The 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act aimed to eliminate 'able bodied pauperism' via its tenet of 'less eligibility'. It is likely, too, that this discourse also drew partly on colonial stereotypes of the urban poor as inherently lazy.

Arguably, these class positions came with a particular approach to liberal democracy, capitalism and the project of nation-building. Prominent in Gore's study was a notion of human capital: 'A large number of beggars', he wrote, 'means a non-utilization of available human resources as also a drag upon the existing resources of our society. Beggars are also a public health problem...'

At certain points in the report, this was presented using econometric frames. There was an attempt to explore the loss to national income of the act of giving to beggars. 'This is a considerable sum of money when we take into consideration the general paucity of our resources. This expenditure must be looked upon as a complete waste of national resources, because it does not add anything to the results of the productive efforts of the community. It cannot be regarded as investment either. The people, who are being helped, are not being given any education nor any vocational skills; they are only being encouraged to lead a vegetative existence'.⁶⁷ The activity of begging, then, was marked out in terms of labour hours, which positioned the individual as part of a larger political economy. There was also a political economy of shame that connected to the world of work: where work had ceased to be of value, for the reference group of beggars, there was less shame in begging. But the act of begging was also expressed as an alternative form of labour: a significant amount of space in the study was therefore dedicated to a study of the differential daily income of beggars according to type, and to expenditure heads.⁶⁸

66. *Ibid.*, 152–53.

67. *Ibid.*, 70.

68. *Ibid.*, 58–61, 65–68.

The theme of labour and productivity was also one frame for exploring disability. The latter was explored less in terms of its health implications, and rather more in the context of its dynamic in the economic function of begging. Gore's team found that 'able-bodied' beggars had, on average, a lower daily income due to the larger societal perception of pity for those with disability, but also because of the relatively larger proportion of women and children in the able-bodied section who begged collectively.⁶⁹ One of the 'types' of beggars identified in the study were those who begged both because of disability and also in the public display of disability. In discussing the exposure of a disability or deformation, the authors pointed out that 'this approach' was 'an offence under section 326 of the UP Municipalities Act 1911 which has been extended to Delhi and under which a beggar can be arrested and detained in the Poor House'. Juxtaposed to the discussion of bodily display around disability was a section on hereditary mendicants, who 'pierced their fore-arms, cheeks or even their tongues with a sharp iron bar or some other metal piece at one or more places, and with blood dripping... they went round and begged'.⁷⁰ Disability, then, was framed as part of a function of performance or as integral to a *modus operandi* of beggars. Within the section on bodily disability and self-harm were paragraphs on 'Tone of Begging Requests' and 'Posture and Movement While Begging', which were described in terms of their effects on 'their clients'.⁷¹

In the DSSW study, the recording of fake disabilities was part and parcel of the dynamic of attitudes within the reference groups themselves. In other words, feigned disability or real disability structured moral culpability around the act of begging, which in turn was set out as part of a larger potential programme of social reform. In all, 58 informants (or 10 percent of the study) admitted to using 'fake handicap'. Although feigning blindness was considered to be the easiest trick, fake bandages, or the pouring of 'lac' onto limbs to attract flies (a finely developed skill) could be part of a beggar's means of association or moral justification. These, rather than the deserving 'unproductive' beggars, were the 'deviants', moving against the normative categories of society. Further problems of degradation and moral decline included the 'high proportion' of childhood smokers among the sample (70 percent) and what the study considered to be 'perverse sexual practices', including 'masturbation and homosexuality', again at a similar sample proportion.

In the larger political economy of beggar work, Gore's team concluded that given the total expenditure generated through the collection of alms and private donations from within the city, a more carefully structured system of local government support would be more economically efficient. 'Delhi', he wrote, 'spends less than a lakh of rupees on five hundred inmates per year in the Poor House; whereas over nine lakhs of rupees are spent in distributing charity to 3000 beggars on the streets. There could not be a stronger case for organized charity'.⁷² In other words, the costs for keeping beggars on the streets were considered higher than what it would cost to house them in institutions. In keeping with the larger sociological frame of the study, Gore also

69. *Ibid.*, 58.

70. *Ibid.*, 60–61.

71. *Ibid.*, 62–63.

72. *Ibid.*, 71.

concluded that the costs were societal in a larger sense, rather than purely about the local economy of welfare provision. Beggars were also thought to ‘constitute a serious danger to public health and morale generally’.⁷³ Institutionalisation, then, as well as making sense for local budgets, was premised on a concept of civic rights more generally—a pattern which reflected older concerns about the continued need for internment of India’s Criminal Tribes in the early twentieth century.⁷⁴

Conclusion: The beggar, citizenship and the nation

Research about beggars in urban contexts brought some of the larger concerns of India’s early postcolonial regimes into sharp focus—labour, welfare and urban control were often at the core. Studies such as Gore’s also connected to the concerns and debates among social scientists across other themes: interdisciplinarity, nation-building, disability, class, family, modernity/tradition and secularism. In this sense, it represented, in one set of thematic studies, a microcosm of how scholars explored ideas of national development, as well as the new paradigms of national belonging and citizenship. The DSSW study further explored the possible new roles of the state in alleviating the welfare ‘problem’ of begging in the context of a rapidly changing society. As a result, the study was concerned by changes to family structure and the authority of the caste panchayat created by rapid urban growth, and the ‘break up’ of family was a primary factor in explorations of beggar motivation. Begging then, as a sociological phenomenon, epitomised the overarching frame of social change in this period, in which national development had to be squared with the decline of tradition.⁷⁵ Importantly, these kinds of conclusions, connecting detailed sociological research to questions of citizenship value, were much more pronounced in the quasi-academic studies (such as Gore’s) than in the contemporaneous and less clearly academic studies undertaken in Bombay and Madras (now Chennai) in the 1950s.

The precipitate enfranchisement of the poor by 1951 meant that questions around such things as beggary were also part of larger intellectual debates on political development in a Third World society. From the beginning, the poor, among whom beggars were the ultimate subalterns, represented the ‘problem’ of India’s new citizenship regime—something reflected on in the contemporary reports on India’s first general elections. Some of these premised the problem of political awareness/education on socio-economic measures and cultural isolation.⁷⁶ The normative Indian citizen, by contrast, was typically an individual invisible to sociological study—including the educated researcher themselves. Arguably, as this article has indirectly shown, these class positions came with a particular approach to liberal democracy, capitalism and the project of nation-building, which gauged social hierarchies in material terms.

73. *Ibid.*

74. Bajrange, Gandee and Gould, ‘Settling the Citizen’.

75. As a result studies of beggars and vagrant gangs by sociologists continued to explore the ‘caste’ dynamics of these formations. See for example, S. S. Srivastava ‘Juvenile Vagrancy—A Socio-Ecological Study of Juvenile Vagrants in the Cities of Lucknow and Kanpur’, in *Research in Sociology and Social Work*, ed. S. Zafar Hasan (Lucknow: Department of Sociology, 1971): 14–25.

76. See, for example, Richard Leonard Park, ‘India’s General Elections’, *Far Eastern Survey* 21, no. 1 (1952): 1–8; Irene Tinker and Mil Walker, ‘The First General Elections in India and Indonesia’, *Far Eastern Survey* 25, no. 7 (1956): 97–110.

Prominent in Gore's study was a notion of human capital and the resource-waste implications of begging. In many respects then, Gore's study—in its positioning of the beggar as citizen—tends to support the idea that sociological research largely sustained a paternalistic (and high-caste) approach to the new institutions of liberal democracy. Although rights assertion and the proliferation of democratic values may have existed in relation to specific legal and political combinations,⁷⁷ there was no evidence that studies such as Gore's created a space for beggar agency in the interpretation of their civic rights.⁷⁸

Given its further focus on labour and productivity as we saw above, Gore's study also clearly situated the research within the frame of development and associated national-level surveys. In its larger demographic questions, the study drew directly from Census of India categories, making direct parallels between its findings and that of the official population study. In exploring sex ratios among beggars, for example, Gore directly compared the findings of his study with the India-wide suggestions in the All-India Census of 1951. Beggars then, as stated in the introduction, were the ultimate subjects of early postcolonial instruments of governance. More implicitly, the narrative was presented throughout as a series of social policy recommendations or observations that related social science research to policy. In this sense, it compared to the work of the Anthropological Survey of India (between January 1948 and 1961 called the Anthropology Department), an intermediary institution that both served the purposes of its discipline and was simultaneously shaped by new national initiatives in development and planning. The mission of the latter was, by its own account, to apply a sense of spatial conformity to India's margins. At another level, the DSSW indirectly connected to policies relating to refugee rehabilitation following Partition, with the practice and discourse of 'rehabilitation' creating a context for beggars. Around 17 percent of the beggars were refugees, the DSSW study noted—a figure well below the refugee population in the early 1950s, estimated to be about 28.8 percent of the population.

One analysis technique throughout the DSSW study, therefore, mapped the predicament and practice of begging to national geographies. Specific research was done on the points of origin of beggars in Delhi as well as languages spoken. Those originating from Uttar Pradesh and from Madras State made up 41 percent of the total research sample, although within the roughly estimated 3,000-strong beggar population, 57 percent were from the northern and 25 percent from the southern states. When asked about why they had ended up in the city, the most common response (38 percent) was 'higher earnings', followed by a mixture of responses about Delhi being on an itinerary of wandering 'routines' or a stop during a pilgrimage. One of the advantages of moving around, according to the study, was that a relatively large proportion of beggars in the city were 'multi-lingual'.⁷⁹

77. For examples of this process and a more optimistic view of the citizenship regime in this period, see Rohit De, *A People's Constitution: The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

78. Another study that unravels some of the myths of postcolonial democratic principles in India is Taylor Sherman, *Nehru's India: A History in Seven Myths* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022).

79. *BPMD* 1959, 20–23.

As we have seen in the section above, the dynamic of quasi-family structures and notions of ‘community’ within the groups studied was conditioned by linguistic origin too, which in turn determined the relationship between beggars and their proximate non-begging communities. Gore’s study concluded that a surprisingly large number of Delhi’s beggars were from other states, but that those from the most distant regions—particularly Madras and other southern states—were more likely to build quasi-family bonds. But, tellingly, these informal ties were not considered appropriate bases for state intervention, and Gore concluded that ‘from the view point of rehabilitation it would be better if they were sent to their respective cultural environments’.⁸⁰

Like other studies of its time, the DSSW positioned its research and recommendations as self-consciously postcolonial. The body of the beggar was very much at the centre of discussions about national belonging and the creation of substantive citizenship rights, and the methods and analyses adopted by sociologists were framed with those considerations in mind. As a result, many of the solutions fitted in with larger state institution-building initiatives. India’s Constitution drafters sought to reform older, colonial views of inherited criminality, and its attendant assumptions about primordialism and evolutionism.⁸¹ Similarly, in studying beggars, the DSSW study sought to establish the ‘rehabilitability’ of vagrants rather than the reinforcement of penal institutions and punishments. It called for the association of beggars in the management of new institutions, and recommended policymakers move away from anti-beggar legislation in the form of long-standing Municipalities Acts and Police Acts from the 1910s–20s. These were associated with older European legislative approaches to vagrancy. Instead, the authors stressed the need to recognise the ‘social realities’ of beggars. The study, therefore, implied that programmes of rehabilitation, as well as being secular, should be based in the development of new institutions, framed with reference to the breaking down of older social institutions from the village and family.

Ultimately, however, the recommendations of this research on vagrancy and begging did not play out. By 1983, there were 15 different beggary Acts operating in 13 different states and union territories. For decades to come, begging was controlled by the highly punitive Bombay Prevention of Begging Act of 1959. This Act gave enforcement agencies extensive powers to arrest without warrant, summary police detention, and to imprison up to a year on first offence and up to ten on subsequent. One scholar has suggested that this has led to arrests of disabled people who are presumed to be beggars, and that ultimately, the operation of the 1959 Act is unconstitutional.⁸² Perhaps what this shows is that despite its ultimate logical conclusions for rehabilitation, the 1940s–50s research was never able to fully distance itself from the underpinning logic of older colonial approaches to poverty and the vagrant. This too was a result of a study of vagrancy that situated itself in notions of social change, in which the ultimate problems of dependency could be rooted back to unreformed social and religious traditions. The problem was not, then, the devastating

80. *Ibid.*, 145–47.

81. Sarah Gandee, ‘The “Criminal Tribe” and Independence: Partition, Decolonisation, and the State in India’s Punjab, 1910s–1980s’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Leeds, 2019).

82. Ramanathan, ‘Ostensible Poverty’, 33, 35–44.

effects of economic change brought on by what the authors might have described as the forces of modernity, but, rather, in the final analysis, the inadequate promotion of modern values to overcome traditions which included indiscriminate giving. In this scenario, it was more pertinent to stress the duty of the body of citizens at large to 'rehabilitate' beggars, than the rights of beggars to claim their due from the state.

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