

DOING DEVELOPMENT...THE “RIGHT” WAY?

A CASE STUDY OF ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS IN INDIA: HOW THEY ACT AS A FACTOR OF “SITUATEDNESS,” IMPACTING DEVELOPMENT AT THE LOCAL SCALE

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Post World War II, there has been an increase in the flow of development aid and efforts from the developed world to the developing. However, these measures are seen as universal tools that can be “manufactured” in the First World and applied elsewhere. In this paper, I argue that such universalization of development efforts does more harm than good due to the “situatedness” of a particular place: the social, economic, cultural and political factors of the place lead to the development intervention playing out in a way different from, and even contradictory to, the intended. To illustrate this phenomenon, I look at a specific activity of organized crime groups in India - the Begging Mafia - that is perpetuated by macroeconomic policies such as neoliberalism and minimized role of state combined with existing problems of poverty, corruption and crime set in India’s unique social and cultural environment.

INTRODUCTION

“We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.” This was the statement made by United States President Harry Truman during his inaugural address in 1949, famously called the Point Four Speech.¹ His words set in motion the notion that the “developed” West has to put to use its “advanced” knowledge, skill and technology to help develop the “others.” Development strategies are often assumed to be universal tools that work similarly in all places. These strategies ignore the culture, politics and other factors unique to the place being “developed.” Hence, when the development project is implemented on the ground, the results vary vastly from the expectations, often worsening the present problems. To study this further, I look at one such factor of “situatedness”: organized crime in India, especially Mumbai. In particular, I focus on one such transnational organized crime group, the D-Company.

In this paper, I will argue that the factors unique to a place play a vital role in determining the outcomes of a development strategy and thus, have to be taken into consideration. Before diving into how this applies to my case study, I give an overview of the literature on organized crime, the topic I have chosen to situate my thesis in. I delve into the reasons behind the formation of organized crime gangs, the activities they are involved in, and how these activities impact development at the local, national and international scales. While looking at the origins and reasons for the survival of organized crime, I emphasize the influence of globalization and neoliberal policies, and argue that these processes have aided organized crime gangs. While I cover the

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impact of organized crime at various scales and on different factors such as economic growth, international relations, corruption, trafficking, financial crimes, security, and human rights, for the purpose of this paper, I highlight the impact of organized crime at the local level.

I posit that there are many works that study the impact of organized crime in the Americas but there is a lack of focus and research specific to Asia. I argue that there is a crucial need for such research if we want to conceptualize and implement place-specific development policies. For this purpose, I narrow my focus to organized crime in India, drawing on the limited academic literature available, along with newspaper articles, documentaries, commercial films and other visual media. At the local level, these mafias in India (including the D-Company) have a tremendous influence on the local population, especially the poor and the slum dwellers, often taking the role of the state.² For the case study, I elaborate on one of D-Company's criminal activities—begging mafia—and how the reduced role of the state exacerbates the problem. Many criminal activities such as corruption and terrorism often transcend scales and trickle down to impact the local level in the form of unequal development, communal tensions and loss of lives and livelihoods. I argue that many of these activities and the nature of their impact are unique to India because of the complex and intricate setting (comprising of religion, caste, socio-economic condition, gender dynamics and politics) that characterize India.

A BRIEF BACKGROUND ON GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME

As mentioned earlier, the Four Point Speech and subsequent related ideologies have gained weight; however, they have also been critiqued by many who espouse a more tailored place-specific approach to development.³ Solutions to obstacles to development, be it the Washington Consensus or the multiple military interventions, often generalize problems and represent the neoliberal ideals of development.⁴ Such solutions often ignore social factors, hence making the situation on ground worse.⁵ The flows and networks in our world have become so interconnected that all spaces seem to have come together to make one place.⁶ However, most often, development strategies are not universally applicable policies that can jump scales and work in a similar fashion everywhere; they have to respect the “situatedness” – keeping in mind the socio-economic, cultural and political factors unique to that region.⁷

One such factor of “situatedness” that I focus on in this paper is organized crime. Research on gangs and organized crime has been conducted across a wide range of disciplines and using various methodologies, such as investigative journalism, economics and statistics, sociology, security, ethnographic research, compilation of existing literature, autobiographies of gang leaders and members, government research.⁸

‘Organized crime’ doesn’t have one set definition; Woodiwiss describes it as “systemic illegal activity for power or profit.”⁹ It is a crime that aims to amass wealth through mediation and violence.¹⁰ Such criminal activities are committed by an orga-

nization with hierarchies, specialization, and division of labour for economic gains or public influence.¹¹ While organized crime is not always committed by gangs or mafias, the former has become synonymous with the latter in recent years.¹² Some gangs have goals that revolve around violent criminal activities which often take the shape of organized crime.¹³ Nor is there one definition for a gang, however, generally, gangs are groups that perform illegal actions with some level of organization.¹⁴ More recently, there has been a focus on criminal activities, territorialism, more defined leadership and organization structures.¹⁵

Originally, the formation of gangs was believed to be due to urban socioeconomic reasons such as poverty and lack of other employment.¹⁶ Many theories have emerged that assign the reason for joining gangs to other things such as lack of family bonding and an unstable childhood, peer pressure and desire to create an identity, a lack of social institutions and other opportunities.¹⁷ The notion that gang membership is limited to poor, unemployed minorities and that gang locations are limited to big cities has been contradicted by the increasing emergence of ethnic-majority gangs from a higher socioeconomic classes.¹⁸

The types of activities that gangs are involved in are constantly changing as gangs adapt to the changing legal, social and economic environment to survive.¹⁹ Organized crime groups were initially focused on financial crimes but are now expanding into trafficking, terrorism and even legitimate businesses. The reasons for the existence of organized crime groups go beyond the economic to include religious, social and political rationales.²⁰

A range of works expound upon how globalization and neoliberal policies have aggravated the problem of organized crime. Globalization is a process that encourages social, economic, and political interactions, relations and exchanges across regions, creating a power hierarchy and leading to unequal growth in the process.²¹ Neoliberalism is an ideology that promotes free, global markets, trade and minimized role of the state in controlling or protecting the economy.²² Many criminal activities like money laundering, corruption, child labour, human trafficking, tax evasion and terrorism are becoming more and more transnational as result of a more neoliberal, globalized world.²³ Some authors have gone to the extent of arguing that organized crime and its activities are still flourishing because global markets, neoliberalism, capitalist ideals of cost cutting and efficient production depend on these very criminal activities.²⁴ Globalization and the neoliberal policies have weakened the Third World's ability to control their markets, economy and have decreased their sovereignty.²⁵ This has led to the emergence and strengthening of a global underground economy, expanded illegal markets, and the facilitated tax evasion.²⁶ Neoliberal ideals decreased social spending of the governments in developing nations and increased their focus on privatisation and land "development" (slum land reclamation), thus creating a wider divide between the poor and the state and increasing the influence of gangs.²⁷

In addition to the multiplicity of definitions of gangs and organized crime, the impact of the activities of these organized crime gangs are multi-fold and spread

across the local, national and international scales. At the local level, in many regions such as the Americas and in India, organized crime gangs are powerful non-state actors and impact development by organizing, coordinating and stabilizing the territories they occupy, assuming the role of the state and acting as middlemen of development projects.²⁸ Due to the local influence that gang members have, they are often invited to join political organizations and parties and maintain close connections with bureaucracy and elected candidates, thus enjoying safety from legal actions to curb their criminal activities.²⁹

Organized crime groups affect the development at the national level by interfering in and influencing the working of the government and private businesses.³⁰ One way in which they do this is through money laundering which refers to transferring money (often made through illicit activities) outside the economy and the nation's banking system to evade taxation and hide the source of the income. This harms the country's economy by causing disinvestment, inequality and emigration.³¹ Money laundering is aided by globalization and global financial organizations which have led to increasing shell companies and black markets transactions.³² The illicit activities that this income is made from include drug, arms and human trafficking and the laundered money is used to further fund such crimes and even terrorism.³³

Organized crime groups influence the government and the private sector through bribery. Corruption at various levels in the developing countries have led to inefficient use of external aid, investment and have caused delays and cancellations of development projects, which results in economic stagnation and inequality.³⁴ Political inaction is often due to this influence and fear of such gangs.³⁵

Another profit earner, the illicit trade of illegal drugs across borders, is often facilitated by organized crime groups due to the financial incentive.³⁶ It harms the economy of the developing nation where it is produced as precious resources are directed towards production of drugs over other necessities, making them very dependent on the world and increasing chances of an unstable society and insurgency.³⁷ Trafficking is not limited to drugs; humans are trafficked by coercing people and transporting them (or their organs) from one country to the other for the purpose of prostitution, menial labour, slavery, organ trade etc.³⁸ According to the U.S. State Department, almost 900,000 people are trafficked around the world.³⁹

There are many works that bring up the increasing Organized crime and Terrorism nexus.⁴⁰ Terrorist groups have become more secure in funding due to diversification of funding sources (which includes organized crime groups) and ease in hiding/investing the money as a result of the global financial systems and tax havens.⁴¹ Organized crime groups have helped terrorist organizations by providing finances, recruiting new members and through arms and ammunition trafficking via their well-established channels.⁴² United States' "War on Terror" in Iraq and Afghanistan has led to instability in the society and the creation of organized crime groups.⁴³ There is evidence of organized crime influencing governments, such as that of Pakistan, to help the terrorist groups survive.⁴⁴ Organized crime-terror nexus has led to

communal tensions, violence and international conflicts due to the religious bent of some of these organizations.⁴⁵ An example is the involvement of organized crime groups in narcotics trade in Kashmir, a bone of contention between India and Pakistan.⁴⁶

Despite the above mentioned literature that incorporates multiple lenses to look at organized crime, it is usually limited to the Americas as most of the research is done in United States.⁴⁷ Some believe that this research and United States' policies can be "exported to other parts of the world."⁴⁸ But such research also explicitly states that they aim to further United States' security interests.⁴⁹ Specific activities of gangs as well as the impact that these have on the people vary based on location, economy, government, economic opportunities, local culture, societal structure, and gender dynamics.⁵⁰

D-Company, a very influential transnational organized crime group in India, is a big player in criminal activities but only few authors, such as Weinstein, Sharma and Clarke, have written about it.⁵¹ Most authors focus on crime-terror nexus, not on impact on women, children, the poor, slums etc. that is place-specific. At the same time, spaces are so interconnected that the world seems to have become one place that is interdependent and it is vital to garner international help and cooperation to solve this transnational issue.⁵²

D-COMPANY: A CASE STUDY

D-Company is the largest organized crime group in Asia with over 5,000 people involved in the syndicate.⁵³ Dawood Ibrahim, the leader of this gang, ranks second on FBI's ten most wanted fugitives list.⁵⁴ The D-Company is highly transnational with its reach spreading from Pakistan to South Africa and UAE to Thailand.⁵⁵

Ibrahim is a Sunni Muslim from Bombay, India.⁵⁶ Born to a police constable, Ibrahim started off at a young age with petty crimes and offered services such as extortion or collecting money from debtors/smugglers.⁵⁷ Ibrahim got involved in the smuggling of drugs and precious metals like gold and silver.⁵⁸ Gathering many family members and close contacts, Ibrahim built his empire, the D-Company.⁵⁹ With liberalization and removal of trade barriers in India and around the world in 1990s, the smuggling business was no longer profitable as the goods were available legally at an inexpensive rate, and hence the demand for smuggled good decreased.⁶⁰ This prompted gangs like the D-Company to move into other profitable ventures such as land development and real estate, especially with India and Mumbai becoming world financial hubs with MNCs investing and the value of land going up at an exponential rate.⁶¹ The D-Company also started investing in legitimate businesses such as shopping malls, hotels and travel agencies and this alone brought the gang a revenue of 2000 crore rupees (equivalent to roughly \$302 million) per annum.⁶² The list of D-Company's activities is varied and includes financial crimes such as extortion, tax evasion, counterfeiting, smuggling, and branches out into those involving loss of lives and dignity of humans such as human trafficking, contract killing and terrorism

financing.⁶³ The D-Company has developed close relationships with politicians and political parties, often influencing them with monetary and even criminal favours, and benefiting in turn by being able to escape the law and the law enforcers.⁶⁴

In the past decade in India, there have been many financial scams involving political parties and businesses. Dawood Ibrahim was involved in many such scams two of them being the Indian Premier League (IPL) spot-fixing case and the 2G scam. IPL is an Indian cricketing tournament that garners lots of attention, fan following and monetary investment through sponsors. Dawood Ibrahim and his associates were declared offenders by a court in New Delhi in case involving match fixing.⁶⁵ The second scam, 2G scam, is the biggest financial scam that India has ever seen. It involved some politicians wrongly favouring undeserving telecom companies in an auction for the 2G telecom spectrum. Dawood Ibrahim was an alleged investor in one of these undeserving firms.⁶⁶

In general sense, organized crime gangs are thought to be focussed on economic gains while terrorist gangs are seen as those driven by political or religious ideologies. What was unique about The D-Company was that it brought these two together creating a unique terror-organized crime nexus.⁶⁷ D-Company was initially a secular gang with members from both the Hindu and Muslim community.⁶⁸ However, after the infamous demolition of Babri Masjid (a religious place for Muslims) in Ayodhya, U.P., India, the D-Company had a drastic change in its ideology, with undertones of Islamic extremism in its activities, such as funding terrorist groups that attack Hindus.⁶⁹ After the post 9/11 backlash on terrorist groups, which included freezing their funding sources, terrorist groups like the al-Qaeda developed closer ties with organized crime groups like the D-Company for financing through drug trafficking, etc.⁷⁰ The D-Company has used its contacts and clout to help recruit terrorists, provide ammunition to terrorist groups as well as to provide terrorist groups access to the routes that it had initially established for smuggling.⁷¹ Dawood Ibrahim was behind the infamous and very fatal 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts which comprised of 13 coordinated bomb attacks across the city leading to almost a 1000 casualties.⁷²

Dawood Ibrahim is currently alleged to be sheltering in Karachi, Pakistan and is said to often travel between Pakistan and Dubai (his base of operations).⁷³ Despite increasing global connections and trade, it must be noted that similar connectivity and mutual understanding is not shared between all countries and in all fields; the lack of extradition treaty between India and UAE and India and Pakistan prevents India from trying Dawood Ibrahim for his crimes.⁷⁴ The D-Company's has allegedly bribed the Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's intelligence service, with a share of its profits, thus securing a safe house in Pakistan for Ibrahim.⁷⁵

Zooming In: The Begging Mafia

The D-Company engages in a range of criminal activities. Zooming in on one of these – the Begging Mafia – and analysing its features, causes and effects could give us a more detailed picture of what organized crime's impacts are at the local level.

The Begging Mafia is a network and “industry” comprising of mafia leaders and “recruited” beggars that runs on the income earned through child beggars. Most of the children coerced into the begging mafia are between two to eight years old, belong to the lower socio-economic class and were kidnapped off the streets, schools, parks and other public places.⁷⁶ According to police reports, 44,000 children are kidnapped every year but the actual figure could be close to a million due to the unreported cases all over India.⁷⁷ The Begging Mafia earns around \$3.6 million annually in Mumbai and, in Delhi, the figure is almost \$7 million.⁷⁸ The more money people give to the beggars, the more this mafia earns.

The Begging Mafia has a horrifying impact on the lives of the children and their families. Since handicapped and starved looking kids can elicit more sympathy and earn more money, the mafia cripples, burns and beats up children and refuses to give them meals.⁷⁹ New Delhi itself has around 12,000 crippled beggars on the streets. Most often, young infants are used and put next to slightly older children or female beggars to garner more pity. They are not fed, leading to chronic nutrition deficiencies and marasmus, and are often drugged to keep them quiet.⁸⁰ The mafia intentionally gives the beggars gangrene by cutting off blood supply to a part of the body and disfigures their face/body with acid.⁸¹ These children who are forced into begging are also introduced to drugs and the drug trade by the mafia.⁸² Because of the ensuing drug addiction, even if some children are rescued, rehabilitation doesn't work on them. They can't find an alternate livelihood due to the lack of any education or skillset and they often escape back to the streets.⁸³

Corruption plays a huge role in the Begging Mafia. Senior doctors are paid to surgically remove limbs of the children to cripple them.⁸⁴ Though the government is aware of the begging mafia, it has taken little action due to wide network and underground nature of the mafia. The mafia has been able to bribe the police and other officials, even if caught.⁸⁵ There are laws such as The Bombay Beggary Prevention Act of 1959, according to which begging is illegal, but it has not been implemented effectively.⁸⁶ Also, the most visible part of the begging “industry” are the beggars and law enforcers often target and arrest them, considering them to be the criminal.⁸⁷ The actual culprits are still loose and are still earning huge revenues despite the arrests since there are many beggars in the system and arresting a few doesn't make a difference to the mafia leaders. Instead it worsens the already deteriorated lives of beggars, excludes any hope of getting an alternate job, and makes them face further humiliation and torture in jail.⁸⁸ Due to these issues as well as the lack of help and security, many child beggars grow up to become criminals.⁸⁹ After the kids become older (and the sympathy they can draw decreases), they are forced into prostitution and the black-market organ trade.⁹⁰ Due to increasing global networks, these children are sold across borders to forced marriages, adoptions, child labor in factories and to the pornography industry.⁹¹

The child beggars are not dependent on the begging mafia just for their own survival; they have to support their family so that they can afford the *roti* and *makaan*

(basic food and shelter) needed to survive.⁹² They can't leave the mafia even if they have an alternate option as they are emotionally blackmailed and threatened that their family would be killed. For the same reason, they never divulge information about the mafia leaders they work for to anyone.⁹³

There is a correlation between the lack of basic amenities and the increasing number of children forced into begging. Those who do not have adequate food, shelter and health facilities, those who live in localities where violence is prevalent and those out of school are most likely to be forced into child labor.⁹⁴

The issue of child beggars has longer, complicated roots including the economic and social condition of their parents and the generations before them. Factors such as unemployment and landlessness have been prevalent in slums in India as most residents of these slums are migrants who came from villages to find jobs in the cities.⁹⁵ However, as a result of growing neoliberal ideas, there has been reduced state spending on education, health, housing and employment generation.

Any aid from external sources to curb the begging mafia would pass through the government or the police and corruption is prevalent in both these institutions, leading to very little being passed on to where the resources are actually needed. If the money is given directly to the beggars, all of it goes to the begging mafia, thus further encouraging the mafia with more revenue.⁹⁶

The begging mafia chooses the locations for begging strategically; these are places of worship and tourist hotspots, places where there are fewer people who would refuse to give money to a starved-looking child.⁹⁷ Around religious places, beggars are made to carry photos of deities.⁹⁸ Religion plays a big role in the lives of people in India and they are often generous in places of worship; Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Jainism and other major religions in India profess that one ought to share their wealth with those in need.⁹⁹ In such a setting, it is difficult for the state (or any other actor) to intervene as it cannot tell people to stop donating, as people believe that they would be blessed by God if they donate to the poor in religious places.¹⁰⁰ Tourists, especially foreigners, feel a similar sense of obligation to give money under the notion that it would help eradicate poverty in the third world but, in reality, it does more harm than good.¹⁰¹

In fact, any external source of aid has to consider various factors such as familial ties, people-government relationship, corruption, access to basic amenities, social norms, religion, class and caste structure.

Zooming Out: Taking on the Role of State

Begging Mafia is one the many activities that are run by D-Company and other gangs. One of the reasons that has perpetuated the begging mafia has been alluded to earlier: the reducing role of state in providing essential services to its people. Not just the begging mafia, even those most vulnerable of being pushed into sex trade, slavery and other forms of trafficking are women with limited or no access to education and health services.¹⁰²

Many slum dwellers are illegal settlers who lack land and political rights and are hence denied basic public services.¹⁰³ Due to the magnitude of people moving to urban locations for job opportunities, the government and its Housing Board has not been able to provide or manage shelter, leading to the new immigrants becoming illegal squatters in unsafe, unhygienic and densely populated localities.¹⁰⁴ In fact, the government intentionally refused to take action against gangs because they are able to provide to the poor what the government isn't able to: housing, water and electricity connections etc., albeit through corrupt and violent means.¹⁰⁵

A complex, indirect quid-pro-quo relationship exists between gangs, the government, political parties and the slum dwellers. Gangs get the illegal squatters to register so that they can have an identity as well as the ability to vote for local politicians. The gangs bribe local policemen for the purpose of shielding their own illegal liquor businesses as well as to protect the temporary shelters of squatters from being removed. At the same time, the squatters are subjected to an insecure and violent environment and often have to dance to the tunes of the mafia leaders and members due to the dependency.¹⁰⁶

Juxtaposing gangs in the Americas and India, one can see a difference in activities, position in society and impact of gangs on the respective community. In Haiti (and even in other countries in Latin America), there are some influential gangs that are seen as vital to the development of their locality by coordinating and policing the community, leading to a drop in homicide rates, offering better services to citizens, housing in slums, mediating development projects and external aid and managing employment of their residents.¹⁰⁷ This is not necessarily the case in India where the gangs' interference in development projects has had a more detrimental effect. Recall that the gangs that provide these local services in India are the very same gangs that take part in transnational criminal activities such as drug and human trafficking, funding terrorism and involvement in high-level national business scams. This is different from the gangs in Mexico or Haiti which are more local, their activities limited to "defending" their zones often with use of violence.¹⁰⁸ Also, the status of the citizens is different in a slum in Bel Air, Haiti as opposed to Dharavi, a slum in Mumbai, India. In the latter, slum dwellers are illegal immigrants and squatters. Clearly, a solution for the problems in Haiti would not work in Mumbai due to the multiplicity of differences that are either embedded in the very structure of the society or were formed as a result of different processes.

IN CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I reiterate that development measures cannot take the form of a one-for-all strategy since every place and its people are inherently different from each other due to various economic, social, cultural and political factors. Differences also arise because of the way a particular place responds to and is affected by global processes such as globalization and international relations. The D-Company is a powerful transnational organized crime syndicate and the presence of its activities in India

is a factor of “situatedness” that makes the scenario in India different. Furthermore, D-Company’s criminal activities negatively affect various scales - local, national and international. In the case of the Begging Mafia, corruption at the level of the higher-ups (police and political parties) protected the mafia leaders and helped the begging mafia survive. Additionally, the plight of the poor forced into begging translates into poor growth and loss of productivity at the national level. The impact of the begging mafia on the beggars is unique to India because of factors such as religious beliefs, social norms, class and caste structure and gender hierarchies. Hence, any solution to the problem of gangs in India has to consider these various factors of “situatedness” as well as the fact that multiple scales are being affected.

Global processes such as globalization and the neoliberal ideology have created international product and labor markets for D-Company’s illegal activities. The increasing global financial networks have made it easier for D-Company to keep its funding and money sources away from scrutiny and legality. Neoliberal policies encourage minimal government expenditure on services such as education, health and housing; this has made the poor even more vulnerable to the gang’s activities. It has caused a distance between the state and its very own people.

While the concept of a universal solution is inept, global cooperation is a necessity to the solution. D-Company and its impacts are highly transnational and multi-scalar. At the same time, international cooperation and solutions should be taken up in tandem with grass-root measures to build the relationship between the state and the poor and initiate development from bottom up. We live in a highly globalized world with everything being so interconnected that inaction from any side or at any level could negate the actions being taken by everyone else.

NOTES

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