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The Current State of India and its Effect on the Urban Hungry

India, a nation known for its impressive population, ever-growing economy, diverse culture, and expansive land mass makes up its very own political and cultural subcontinent. The motto of such a glorious nation reads: "The Truth Alone Triumphs". While pleasant sounding, this saying could not be further from the reality of the current state of India. Modern India is plagued with an inability to secure property, incapability to address problems, and a failed food market infrastructure. This unfortunate state of affairs has created a serious problem with education and the economic state of the lower class, leading to a cyclical pattern of urban hunger.

Urban families are victims of this cycle of hunger. The average composition of any Indian family is the "Hindu joint family." This means that the family is comprised of the combination of several nuclear families, all joined by blood relation under one household. These household typically include three generations of the family, a common worship place, and single kitchen. The decisions of the house are made by the patriarch, most usually the eldest male, of the family. However, due to urban migration, many of the families that suffer from urban poverty and hunger in India follow the „nuclear family" composition. Often when rural families move to urban areas, there is only enough funds to move a small portion of the family, in hopes that they will make money and be able to return for the rest of the family later. A nuclear family then consists of a mother, a father, and their children. No extended family members share the household in this composition of family.

Modern Indian culture is composed of a mixture of its own Hindustani heritage, along with the bits and pieces of its previous occupiers (Mughals, Mongols, and the British) as well as its neighbors. India, because of this, is comprised of several different regional cultures. North India is heavily influenced by Buddhism and the nearby East Asian cultures, South India most predominately by the Hindustani, and West India influenced by the nearby Arabic cultures. Not only is India divided culturally, but it is also split religiously. Much of India subscribes to the Hindu faith; this means they follow the „caste" system. The caste system is divided into five divisions, and each of those sectors is divided into several different subsets. The caste of a person, determined by the caste of their parents, decides whom they can marry, what kind of jobs they can hold, and even where they can live. India is thus a nation divided by region, religion, and culture.

This great division, combined with the fact that India is a democracy, makes any amount of bureaucracy incredibly slow moving. Democracies, by their political nature, are incredibly slow moving. In an ideal situation, each person must have their say on every single action. While of course, in the modern democracies, representatives are in place to speed up the process, democracies are still considerably slower than other forms of government. First, representatives must be elected, then bills must be made, and then legislation passed, the bureaucracies created, then administration maintained. Such a drawn out process of a democracy is only magnified by India's massive population. As representing every single person becomes more difficult, the bureaucracy becomes thickened. India has created an excessive amount of bureaucracy in an attempt to handle its population; however, it has instead just made it impossible to solve problems within the nation, clouding the process with unnecessary paperwork and regulation. Such road blocks are not easily overcome by the government and the people themselves, leading to a nonfunctional bureaucracy. Today, India is ranked as having the world's most inefficient bureaucracy in the world.

Because India's democracy is so slowly moving and the nation is so divided, there have been many problems created with the nation's ability to secure property. The problems with security of property, in the case of the urban poor, are not in the form of land property, but monetary property. The caste system has forced many people

of the lower castes to embezzle in order to attain wealth of any kind. These low castes, being the most populous, have the greatest voting power. Those who make it from the slums of Mumbai to the upper classes, then, are exalted as heroes. For instance, Mayawati, the current Chief Minister of the Indian state of Utter Pradesh, is said to have embezzled thousands of dollars from the Indians of her very own state. Yet, because she was born in the lowest caste, like many people living in Utter Pradesh, and was able to rise to political power, they continue to vote her into power. She is then able to maintain power faster than the bureaucracy can punish or prevent such embezzlement. Mayawati's situation is not alone. Many private companies also are known to have embezzled money, money which could be used to stabilize and feed the poor. It is this constant reward for ill-achieved success that has created India's troubles in addressing the problems of the urban poor and securing property rights.

India's food market infrastructure is also in shambles. Due to India's mass urban growth, much of the population has migrated to the cities. This change in population densities requires a change in food infrastructure as well. While small villages were once able to thrive on small subsistence farms, the urban population of India cannot. It is this gap in agricultural levels (between subsistence and commercial farming) in which the infrastructure has failed. The urban poor in India still rely on these small subsistence farms. While some commercial farms do exist, they are often too expensive for the urban poor, so they are forced to rely on cheap farmers markets. The only flaw with such reliance is the vulnerability of the system. If one small subsistence farm does not produce enough food, a likely event, then the urban poor must go hungry. If more commercial farming techniques were in place or any other reliable form of food infrastructure was in place, this would not be the case. Currently, though, India has absolutely no food infrastructure.

The corruption in the Indian economic and political sectors has had a considerably adverse effect on education. When working India, everything becomes much greater because of the population size. Even small projects, like the building of plumbing in school systems, require hundreds of thousands of dollars and an immense labor force. With so many people involved in projects, such a slow moving bureaucracy, and so much money available, crime becomes easier. Because of the massive scale that India operates on, the temptation of fraud and embezzlement is often too great, even when schools are involved. This means that the building of schools and other educational projects are not always completely successful. For every four steps forward the Indian government makes in investing into fixing the education system, it must take one backward due to such frauds. This situation has created an unbalanced environment for schooling. Many schools are unfinished, and only 75% of all teaching jobs are filled. Such corruption falls, unfortunately, upon the urban poor. Education amongst poor, urban Indian families is inadequate. 61% of the population is literate, leaving over 454 million Indian people unable to read or write, with approximately 29% of those living in an urban setting. While recent governmentally instituted programs have helped to increase the literacy rate nearly twofold, much of the poor, urban people remain uneducated. Some Indian states report a Primary School (up to age 14) enrollment rate of nearly 93%. Unfortunately, however, less than 40% students ever attend secondary schools. Even then, only 15% of all students ever complete secondary schooling. India only has enough schools to seat 7% of its college aged students and 57% of all college professors lack a Masters or Bachelor degree. Up against these odds, it is unlikely that most urban slum dwelling families boast any education at all.

Food market infrastructure is the most direct reason that the urban poor go hungry. The insecurity of food quality and quantity is the greatest contributing factor to urban hunger in India today, a factor whose failures come completely from poor infrastructure. Somewhere between 30-35% of all of the food production in India is wasted, typically because of poor transportation and storage methods. This lack of proper food handling has created a "street market" situation in India. Most of the urban poor get their food from rural farmers whom bring in, by train, their assorted crops from their small subsistence farms in the heart of India. While this does in fact provide a market of food, it is an incredibly vulnerable system. Due to the lack of food infrastructure, a localized drought could ravage the only affordable food source available to India's urban poor. This unreliability in food source,

with the one third of unnecessary wasted food, displays just how the lack of food market infrastructure within in India has created an insecure food source for the urban poor, causing them to go hungry.

The diet of the urban poor is especially susceptible to the flaws in the food market infrastructure. The typical diet of an Indian family consists mostly of vegetables and dairy products. About 80.4% of all people living in India are followers of the Hindu faith. Due to the reincarnation philosophy of this religion, the consumption of meat is highly forbidden. Thus, the diet of most Indians, including those living in urban slums, is made entirely void of meat and meat products. The most common ingredients to an Indian diet include: milk, yogurt, lentils, breads, beans, and potatoes. Unfortunately, all of these foods are very susceptible to the aforementioned waste. Because these foods are all unprocessed, they can easily become victims of molds and bacteria as well when exposed to the heat of the Indian climate, waste becomes almost inevitable if the product is not shipped and consumed immediately. Yet, such a transportation and consumption rate cannot be achieved due to the lack of food market infrastructure in India. Provided though, that the other 65-70% of the food is capable of making the journey from rural India into the markets of the urban poor, there are other problems. While all of these foods are great sources of carbohydrates, much of the urban population remains undernourished. In a study of 540 North Indian children, ages 1-6, 310, or 57.4%, were found to be undernourished. This rate was nearly doubled in the children of illiterate mothers. Provided that 52.2% of women in India are illiterate (due again to corruption within the construction of the education system), this is an alarming statistic that creates an unfortunate cycle of poverty. As the children of illiterate mothers grow older, they must leave the school system in order to help make money to feed themselves and their families. These children then grow up to be uneducated adults, who then have hungry children, and the cycle continues. The same study found that the greatest source of malnutrition was low caloric intake. This means that it was not an improper or unbalanced diet which resulted in the malnutrition, but a lack of food. The parents of these children have likely fallen prey to either the lack of economic security or the absent infrastructure in the food system, causing their children to go hungry.

Wealth distribution in India is a key factor in exposing the effects of corruption and embezzlement due to lack of property security. The economically highest 10% of the population controls 31.1% of the nation's wealth, while the lowest 10% controls only 3.6%. As previously stated, 29% of India's population resides in an urban setting. Of that population, 25% live below poverty line. Approximately 85% of those living below poverty line have an income of fewer than two US Dollars a day, 44% have an income of less than one US Dollar a day. Of that, 25% do not make enough to adequately feed themselves or their family on a daily basis. However, though the income of the urban poor is quite low, unemployment is remarkably minimal. About 6.8% of the working force is unemployed. This is impressive, considering it ranks lower in unemployment that many western economic giants, such as the United Sates (7.2%) and The European Union (7.4%). The Indian economy is ranked 41st in GDP Real Growth Rate, with an increase of 6.6% each year. As previously stated, this economic success is not equally distributed amongst the Indian population. This is due to the lack of ability to secure property rights. India is ranked 85th on the world's most corrupt countries, but even that seems modest for the amount of corruption that plagues India. It is this very corruption, in combination with the lack of food infrastructure and the government's inability to solve the problems which face India, which has created the current state of urban hunger in India.

Though the problems facing the urban poor in India today seem over-bearing, there is a light in such darkness. India has begun to fix some of the problems. With an increase in education, a creation of a food market infrastructure, and the maintenance of economic growth, India's urban poor could experience some relieve.

Education is perhaps the most important factor to securing property and creating a plausible food market infrastructure. With a greater educated body, corruption could be easily removed from the private sectors and the thickening bureaucracy of India sped up. Though it would be gradual at first, due to India's mass democracy, an educate mass could relinquish such leaders as Mayawati, and rid the system of such embezzlement. If the embezzlement done within the government, itself, was removed, it would then likely not be long until the people

turned to private corporations. Education would also likely diminish the intensity of the caste system, as children learn ideals separate from those of their parents. This would then remove the need to "cheat" to make it to the top. Additionally, by educating the urban poor, an entirely new workforce would become available. Such a workforce could not only help sustain and boost India's economy, but could also create a competitive infrastructure for the food market. With a new system of growing, transporting and selling food, food quality, quantity, and stability would be increased. If education was spread amongst the urban poor, there would be a relief not only on the security of properties but also upon the food market infrastructure.

Food infrastructure is the greatest problem to overcome for the urban poor, but once it is created, it would provide the greatest economic boost and hunger relief. From an economic stand point, the creation of a food market infrastructure would profit immediately. Not only would there be a more stable food source, meaning a more stable income, but the yield would also be much greater. By reducing waste from its current 30-35%, there would be an instant profit. Such a profit could either be on the side of a greater yield, or perhaps on the side of lower costs for food, something that would surely help the urban poor of India. This would also provide instant hunger relief. By creating an infrastructure, as previously stated, there would be an increased yield, less waste, and a more accessible and reliable source of food. By introducing a food infrastructure, the urban poor would benefit immediately.

India, a nation plagued by a slow moving bureaucracy, lack of market infrastructure, property insecurity, and hunger. India's great diversity has made it a vibrant nation, but it has slowed its progress, as thick bureaucracy is implemented in an attempt to mitigate such a massive population. The cultural and religious divisions have caused flaws in the security of property within the nation as well as slowed its ability to handle such corruption. In addition, the farmer's have not been able to provide an infrastructure for the massively urbanizing state of India. This creates an economic unbalance, such that children of uneducated parents must leave schooling to provide food for their families, yet they too become uneducated, completing the cycle of hunger. However, if a food infrastructure were to be created within India, corruption amongst property security removed, and education spread and sustained within the urban poor, there might come a day when the urban poor are no longer the urban hungry.

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