

BEHIND THE CINEMA FANTASY, MAFIA GANGS ARE DELIBERATELY CRIPPLING CHILDREN FOR PROFIT

Alone and afraid, Aamir was initially grateful when a 'kind' older couple befriended him on his arrival in Mumbai. This chaotic urban sprawl is now India's largest city and home to more than 20 million people. More than nine million of them live in slums, raising families in shacks built from rubbish on top of open sewers. For a homeless 12-year-old child freshly arrived from the countryside, it is a terrifying place to be.

But for many on the Indian sub-continent, Mumbai will always be the city of dreams — a place of Bollywood film stars and gold-paved streets. It was certainly the image that brought Aamir here.

Fleeing a violent, drunken father in rural India — his mother had died years before — the 12-year-old had sneaked on to a train bound for the city. And when he got there, he hoped to make his fortune.

It was not to be. Alighting at Victoria Station, the city's main terminal and an architectural monument to the days of the British Raj, Aamir was penniless and bewildered. He started begging for food.

Within minutes, a couple emerged from the crowd and approached him. They gave him cakes and said they'd take him away to start a better life.

'I thought they were maybe social workers or religious people,' he told me.

But Aamir's food was drugged and when he became drowsy, the couple put him in a rickshaw and took him to the city's municipal hospital, which is where the real nightmare began.

For at the hospital, a doctor was paid to amputate one of his healthy legs. Now speaking in the third person, as if to pretend it didn't happen to him, Aamir tells me 'the child' was in 'great pain' after the operation.

'The leg is removed here,' he says, pointing to his own stump and grimacing. His limb had been severed mid-calf, leaving him without a foot.

Now in hiding after being rescued from the hospital by a charity, Aamir is one of hundreds of Indian children deliberately crippled by gangs so they can earn extra money begging. He still struggles to talk about his experience.

Asked to describe what he thinks about those who ruined his life, he just stares at the ground in silence. Crippled for life, he is now the lowest of the low.

Dalbeer, 15, is another victim of this shocking industry. Reduced to begging at the railway station after his parents died, Dalbeer was approached by two friendly older strangers one day. 'I thought they were maybe social workers,' he told me. 'I thought they could help me.'

But he was taken from everything he knew to Nagpur, a city a thousand miles from Mumbai, after the woman told him it would 'be better there'.

And there, along with several others, he was deliberately crippled before being brought back to Mumbai and put to work begging. His leg had been severed in the same place as Aamir's.

BEHIND THE CINEMA FANTASY, MAFIA GANGS ARE DELIBERATELY CRIPPLING CHILDREN FOR PROFIT

1. Two people helped him

- A. Aamir
- B. Dalbeer
- C. Both of them

2. His dad was a drunkard

- A. Aamir
- B. Dalbeer
- C. Both of them

3. His parents had died

- A. Aamir
- B. Dalbeer
- C. Both of them

4. He was moved to a far away city

- A. Aamir
- B. Dalbeer
- C. Both of them

5. His leg was cut off by a doctor

- A. Aamir
- B. Dalbeer
- C. Both of them

6. His food was drugged

- A. Aamir
- B. Dalbeer
- C. Both of them

7. He travelled to Mumbai by train

- A. Aamir
- B. Dalbeer
- C. Both of them

8. He thought social workers wanted to help him

- A. Aamir
- B. Dalbeer
- C. Both of them

KEY:

1C

2A

3B

4B

5C

6A

7A

8C