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Barefoot Children Have No Bootstraps

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Abstract: The popular film, *Slumdog Millionaire*, provides the basis of what many people in the United States know about Indian culture in general and Indian street children in particular. But is this the reality? In this paper, I compare and contrast *Slumdog Millionaire* and the documentary, *Chasing Childhood*, in their portrayals of Indian street children. Structure vs. Agency as a theoretical framework is utilized in my analysis of the vulnerability of street children in India. Several themes emerge from both the movie and documentary such as escapism as an example of agency, lack of trust of adults, and physical and mental neglect and abuse of street children. Finally, I posit several possibilities for alleviating some of the structural forces negatively impacting street children and for increasing their agency.

Keywords: homeless children, India, street children

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INTRODUCTION

"Jamal Malik is one question away from winning 20 million rupees. How did he do it? (A) He cheated, (B) He's lucky, (C) He's a genius, and (D) It is written" (Boyle, 2008). Jamal Malik, the main character from the popular film, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), attributes his success on the game show, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, to destiny. Throughout the film, Jamal escapes exploitation, avoids or outsmarts the police, cheats death, and even wins 20 million rupees. Although this rags to riches story is moving, inspiring, and entertaining, most stories about the street children of India are nothing like Jamal's story. For example, *Chasing Childhood: An Analysis of the Future of Street Children in Calcutta* is a 2009 documentary set in Calcutta, India, that examines the lives and challenges of street children based on their interviews. In contrast, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) is a mainstream British romantic drama that premiered in 2008 that focuses on the lives of three impoverished homeless children from the slums of Mumbai. Both portrayals of the life of an Indian street child are informed by reality, but they have dramatically different endings. In this paper, I compare and contrast the suggested experiences presented in *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) and the documentary, *Chasing Childhood* (2009). This comparative analysis of secondary data (movies) using content analysis to uncover themes that emerge from them is used to consider the following research questions - What is the life of a street child in India really like? What are potential solutions to increase the agency of Indian street children and alleviate some of the structural forces that negatively affecting their lives? This research note, informed by the Structure versus Agency discourse, examines the lives and experiences of some of the most vulnerable children in the world as well as their attempts to survive despite dire circumstances.

The Lives of Indian Street Children

With over 1.2 billion inhabitants, The Republic of India is the second most populated country in South Asia. Studies show that the British had economic and political dominion over India from 1858 – 1947, largely through military control and trade. Rule by British East India Company, Queen Victoria, a series of wars, as well as internal cultural friction provide the backdrop for a country that is now considered the world's tenth largest economy and one of the fastest-growing economies. However, despite its rapidly industrializing state, India continues to face challenges associated with poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, and poor public healthcare (Chandra, 2009; Metcalf & Metcalf, 2006).

Sharma et al. (2011) describe India as having one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Within the global community, they contend that, along with China, India is on its way to becoming one of the world's economic superpowers. Although the two countries are compared in this article, thus far, India is known more for its growth than for its social and economic support for many of its residents, particularly the poor. Sources suggest that in the 1990s, India began its steady growth in the international market largely due to corporate investing (*The Hindu*, 2011). Despite its impressive growth, Balakrishnan (2004) compares India to China based on Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). India's FDI is about 0.5% of their GDP, while China's is 5.0%. To further consider both countries monetarily, China's FDI exceeds $50 billion, compared to India's $4 billion. Therefore, although India is experiencing substantial economic growth, its role as an economic superpower is debatable

(Balakrishnan, 2004; Chandra, 2009). The daily lives of Indian street children play out in this growing, yet precarious economic setting.

There are an estimated eighteen million street children in India (Gupta, 2008). Such children are classified by Nigam (1994) as "any girl or boy who has not reached adulthood, for whom the street (in the broadest sense of the word, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc.) has become her or his habitual abode and/or sources of livelihood, and who is inadequately protected, supervised or directed by responsible adults" (p. 1). This population is particularly vulnerable because of their lack of protection and supervision. Some scholars suggest that such children should be divided into two categories, including *children on the street* and *children of the street* (Nigam, 1994). According to the same scholar, the United Nations (UN) refers to the latter group as "homeless children who live and sleep on the streets in urban areas. They are totally on their own, living with other street children or homeless adult street people" (p. 1). And the former group is children who earn a living or beg for money on the street and return home at night. Some children overlap and therefore fit into both categories. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, I will examine children in both categories because both groups lack the same basic human needs and are vulnerable in similar ways. The most common profile of a street child is a boy aged 10 to 14 years old. Children who are most vulnerable for becoming street children are those whose families have abandoned them or those whose families have moved into the city because of their impoverished situations. This often forces children to work on the streets during the day to help support their families. Children also leave their families because of physical, mental, and/or sexual abuse (Gupta, 2008; Kanth & Harris,

2004; Nigam, 1994). These are just a few of the innumerable reasons that children end up living on the streets in India. The struggle of Indian street children is a very important issue because of the deleterious conditions in which they live in addition to the structural forces that have forced them to become street children. This analysis presents several of the more common forces that push Indian children onto the streets as presented in the above mentioned films and help illustrate some of the more sobering ways in which *art imitates life*.

Research Methodology and Film Analysis Process

In order to analyze aspects of the media's presentation of Indian street children, one popular movie was chosen due to its widespread influence. *Slumdog Millionaire* was premiered or screened internationally in locations such as London, Toronto, Mumbai, and the United States (U.S.) and won eight Academy Awards in 2009. Because of its extensive exposure and influence, *Slumdog Millionaire* was the first film to be analyzed here. In an attempt to compare and contrast the reality of a documentary with the media's portrayal of Indian street children, *Chasing Childhood: An Analysis of the Future of Street Children in Calcutta* was chosen for its candid depiction of daily experiences and challenges a child's life on the streets. Many documentaries focus solely on abuse or economic conditions, or health problems for street children. However, *Chasing Childhood* analyzes their difficult situations from a multitude of perspectives, including those of children themselves and police officers, two perspectives which are often ignored. Despite their fundamental differences as a mainstream movie and a documentary, respectively, both films attempt to present the experiences of Indian street children

from multiple perspectives and to include the voices of children.

I acknowledge that I could have used a variety of methods to study this subject, including examining a larger sample of films. However, I elected to select and focus my attention on two films in order to go into more detail during the comparison and contrasting process as well as to closely consider the diverse points of view used in each film. Content analysis is used to examine how each film presents the lives and experiences of Indian street children. Interviews are analyzed to determine meanings for speakers as well as uncover representative patterns and themes (Krippendorf, 1980). Although my findings cannot be generalized, results from this explorative project may foster future studies about this important subject.

Summary of the Two Films: Chasing Childhood and Slumdog Millionaire

Chasing Childhood: An Analysis of the Future of Street Children in Calcutta is a 2009 documentary set in Calcutta, India, that analyzes the plight of street children mainly through interviews with street children themselves. Other perspectives are provided through interviews with police officers and healthcare officials. In addition to providing insight from various points of view, this documentary provides actual footage of the everyday lives of Indian street children. Some clips show children abusing drugs and discussing their drug use. Such troubling, raw subject matter is seldom explored in many documentaries. Journalist Aafreen Alam spent a month capturing the lives of the over fifty thousand children who permanently live on the streets of Calcutta. The film also attempts to question how a country that is experiencing economic growth in the international market seems to ignore street children and almost accept their existence. The film presents the 15 million residents of Calcutta, the 2nd largest city in India, and its estimated 300,000 street dwellers, of which 25 percent are children. The street-smarts that such children must acquire to survive are shown as well as the overcrowdedness, poverty, pollution, and malnourishment they face.

Slumdog Millionaire is a British romantic drama directed by Danny Boyle that premiered in 2008 and grossed over $377 million worldwide. It was adapted from the novel *Q & A* (2005) by Indian author Vikas Swarupet. The film details the experiences of three Indian street children from the slums of Mumbai, brothers Jamal and Salim Malik and their female friend, Latika, as told retrospectively by Jamal as he appears on the Indian version of the popular game show, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*. Full of romance, crime, and adventure, the film was screened worldwide and has offered a perspective from popular media on how street children live. The movie won eight Academy Awards in 2009 and was applauded for its presentation of the harshness of street life of children. However, the film also had its critiques who felt that it romanticized and over-dramatized the plight of Indian street children (Hornaday, 2008; Lane, 2008; Phillips, 2008; Singh, 2009). The following section contains a comparative analysis of both films' presentation of the lives and experiences of Indian street children.

STRUCTURE VERSUS AGENCY AND THE LIVES OF INDIAN STREET CHILDREN

The Structure versus Agency framework is a theoretical perspective that can be used to describe and explain society and human behavior. Structural forces, also known as social forces, are commonly defined as macro-level beliefs, institutions, and organizations that shape people's lives. Structural forces are prevalent in society and

can push or pull a person many ways. For example, the economy, social values and norms, and the legal system are just a few examples of structural forces that may impact our lives. Structural forces such as poverty, racism, classism, and sexism are negative; other structural forces can result in negative outcomes, such as healthcare inequality as a result of global economic competition. On the other hand, agency is defined as the ability to make choices or free will. It reflects a person's ability to make individual decisions to impact his or her life. Although structural forces can be extremely influential due to their historical existence in society and because it is difficult to fully understand and dismantle them, individuals still have the ability to make certain choices. For example, a person influenced by economic depression may invoke his agency by interviewing for jobs or attempting to locate employment in the informal sector. Furthermore, people can choose to unite and act as a structural force to cause change in society. Both structure and agency are contrasting forces and are used to explain aspects of society. Yet scholars often debate about the merits of each line of reasoning and whether each can adequately explain society. However, I contend that the Structure versus Agency discourse can help us better understand the lives of Indian street children. The following sections summarize my findings about some of the economic, legal, and cultural forces the affect such children, some of the choices they make to survive, and possible strategies to respond to this social problem.

Economic Vulnerability in the Land of Millionaires

What are some of the macro-level forces that negatively influence the lives of Indian street children and what choices do such children make as a result? I contend that the experiences and depictions presented in both

Chasing Childhood (2009) and to a lesser degree, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), help us understand how the Structure verses Agency discourse can play out in real life.

A strong argument can be made that the lives of Indian street children are one of the more negative outcomes of global capitalism where groups like children in general and poor children in particular are often the most vulnerable to economic changes (Marx, 1963; Wilson, 1996). Although they use different terminology, both of the aforementioned scholars describe instances of exploitation and alienation of vulnerable groups in society. Furthermore, both illustrate society's often divergent views about how to address economic-based social problems. The structural nature of global capitalism is also evident in world systems that divide core countries from periphery ones in terms of international relations (Wallerstein, 2008). This framework delineates periphery countries as mainly developing countries that have lower wages, worse working conditions, and relatively more vulnerable people than their counterparts in core countries. Because street children of India are located in a periphery country, they are among the most vulnerable residents based on their position as members of the *poorest of the poor*.

Although both Marx's (1963) and Wallerstein's (2008) descriptions do not perfectly explain the complexities of our global society, their arguments can be broadly applied to life among the disenfranchised in India – particularly when one considers poverty. For example, Nigam (1994) suggests that, "In India, 90% of street children are working children with regular family ties who live with their families, but are on the streets due to poverty and their parents' unemployment. The remaining 10% are either working children with few family ties who view the streets as their homes or abandoned and neglected children with no

family ties" (p. 1). If his assessment is correct, most street children live with their families, but are forced to live and work on the streets because of poverty. Furthermore, according to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (2009), over 25 percent of Indians live in poverty. This means that no matter how strong familial bonds are, they are insufficient to combat the realities of poverty for Indian street children.

Similarly, Kanth and Harris (2004) state, "children who are vulnerable to street life include those who have been abandoned by their families or sent into cities because of a family's intense poverty, often with hopes that a child will be able to earn money for the family and send it home" (p. 3). Therefore, family poverty usually means that their children are vulnerable economically, educationally, and in terms of healthcare. A poor family means children often have less food, less access to formal education, and less access to clean water. This dynamic is an example of the *domino effect*, as vividly described in Hays' *Flat Broke with Children* (2003) when one negative event, such as job loss, often leads to others such as loss of housing and healthcare. For Indian children, the domino effect can lead to a life on the street;

> Street children in India are of moderate health status, suffering from various chronic diseases and undernourishment. They are deprived of all health programs, but seem to prefer government hospitals in case of dire need. Street children often have to pay for water. Almost 97% in Calcutta, 99% in Bangalore, and 90% in Madras reported having no access to toilet and bathing facilities…almost 40,000 children die every day in developing countries, 25% of whom are in India. (Nigam, 1994: 1)

Classism as a result of poverty in a global economy is particularly evident in *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). For example, Jamal is consistently referred to as "the chai wallah"

(term for someone of a lower class who sells or brings tea) instead of by his name. When Jamal is being investigated by the police, he says, "Because I'm a slumdog chai wallah, I'm a cheat, right?" to which the officer replies, "Most of you are" (*Slumdog Millionaire* 2008). Although he was able to locate a job, his apparent class position targeted him for negative comments and stereotypes. Despite economic abundance around them, the rigidity of class structure means little chance for upward mobility for most Indian street children. Information from the above noted scholars provide insight into the contrasting existences of the wealthy and Indian street children who co-exist in the same spaces.

No Protection from the Law

The second major structural force that impacts child homelessness and poverty in India is the legal/police system. Laws in India to protect children are inadequate. Indian police are often described as corrupt and are known to treat street children poorly (Gupta, 2008). In *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), the opening scene depicts a police officer chasing street children off private property. Although this is a legitimate offense in the US, it may be shocking to many people to imagine 5- and 6-year-old children chased with bats by officers on motor bikes who plan to beat the children. Therefore, although US police may be associated with safety for many people, their Indian counterparts are not considered as such for many street children. In another scene from the movie, Muslims are being attacked by a group of Hindus. Jamal and Salim run over to the police, who simply continue their card game and tell the children to leave, despite the fact that a man in front of them is engulfed in flames. In this example, the police do not seem to care about the plight or the concerns of street children. According to both scenes in

Slumdog Millionaire (2008) and interviews in *Chasing Childhood* (2009), both laws and street children themselves are often ignored.

The latter film emphasizes the lack of trust in the police; "children complain that they are often beaten up by the police. The police regard all street children as criminals. As a result, most children believe that the police are a threat" (*Chasing Childhood,* 2009). For street children, the lack of trust for law enforcement appears to be a direct result of abuse at the hands of the police. According to the documentary, "the general feeling amongst them is law enforcement is not going to help us. Every element of society is against us". This statement is similarly illustrated throughout *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) when street children are chased by the police in the opening scene as well as when Jamal is tortured by the police based on his continued success on the popular television game show. However, in contrast, Debashis Roy, Police Officer of the Kolkata Police, states in the documentary, "we hardly wield the baton unnecessarily" and another officer comments more openly that in order to "avoid the kids who pickpocket or loot people, we chase them away" (*Chasing Childhood,* 2009). Yet neither officer acknowledges any abuse of street children by police officers. However, research by Nanjunda (2008) describes police abuse of street children;

> They were held for excessive periods of time in police lockups, for days and even weeks, usually mixed with adults. In jails they were sometimes further beaten by police, or forced to pay bribes in order to be released. Girls were sometimes coerced into providing sexual services to police in exchange for release, or were raped. (P. 426)

Thus both academic research and the documentary examined here are reflected in the popular movie – and illustrate the challenges Indian street children face and their expectation of neglects and/or abuse at

the hands of persons expected to provide protection and safety.

A Culture of Neglect

Each of the following sources further illustrates a *culture of neglect* in which many Indian street children find themselves. Such a culture appears to reflect norms and values that ignore street children or tacitly condone their ill treatment. Their existence and lives of squalor seem socially acceptable. According to Veena Lakhumalani, Director of the Calcutta Branch of the Child In Need Institute;

> People come to the big cities in search of work from the rural areas and they have nowhere to stay so the street is a place where children are with their families . . . There are also children who run away from home, in search of either work opportunities or they run away because they have problems at home. (*Chasing Childhood,* 2009)

These problems suggested by Lakhumalani often include abuse. Moreover, according to the Consortium for Street Children (2009), "the overall incidence of physical abuse among street children, either by family members or by others or both, was 66.8% across the states. Out of this, 54.62% were boys and 45.38% were girls" (p. 4). Furthermore, street children are more vulnerable to sexual abuse than other children. For example, in *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), the three main characters, all street children, are abused by their teacher, by the police, as well as by Maman, the leader of a street gang who exploits children throughout the movie. *Chasing Childhood* (2009) also describes a broader culture in Indian society that indirectly or directly condones the mistreatment and neglect of street children.

Because of neglect and/or abuse, street children tend to generally distrust adults (*Chasing Childhood,* 2009). During a specific interview in this documentary, a 14

year old street child named, Govind, describes how abuse caused him to leave home. In addition to beatings from his father, school supplies are withheld from him, which result in Govind's poor treatment by his teacher. Ultimately he stops attending school. According to Govind, he ran away from home because of both his grandmother's and father's mistreatment. He states, "My grandmother never used to give me proper food. Whenever I asked for food she used to bully me. When my father got back from work she used to say false thing about me and then my father would beat me." Govind's continued abuse finally results in life on the streets. Another aspect of a broader culture of neglect appears to be the beliefs that street children do not *deserve* to have their needs met like the rest of Indian society (Gupta, 2008).

According to one UN report, "about 60 million Indian children under the age of 6 live below the poverty line. The problem has become particularly acute for homeless children, one-fifth of who receive no education" (Slumdogs, 2011). Furthermore, despite a mandate by the Juvenile Justice Act that all children should be educated, laws are not enforced and about 20 percent of street children do not receive an education at all (*The Gazette of India,* 2011). Street children also lack basic education about safe sex and sexually transmitted diseases. For example, a survey of 100 street children at the New Delhi Railway Station in India shows that, "86% of boys in the age group 14 - 18 years were sexually active; however a very low number of them knew about safe sex protection and condom usage. Not one of them reported having ever used a condom" (*Consortium for Street Children,* 2009). If this report is accurate, street children are also vulnerable as a result of increased exposure to sexually transmitted diseases which compound their challenges.

Research is clear that sexual abuse causes many negative repercussions for children. According to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (2006), "A child who is the victim of prolonged sexual abuse usually develops low self-esteem, a feeling of worthlessness, and an abnormal or distorted view of sex. The child may become withdrawn and mistrustful of adults, and can become suicidal" (p. 1). Children who are sexually abused must deal with the effects long after the assaults are over. The long-term consequences of sexual abuse and neglect are honestly presented in *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) as Latika is sexually abused by Salim. Although she ultimately overcomes her abuses and establishes a relationship with Jamal, such "happy endings" do not appear common for most Indian street children (*Chasing Childhood,* 2009).

Exploitation as an example of neglect and abuse is evident in *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). For example, the antagonist Maman recruits children who are rag-picking to sing for him. They believe he is a good man because he provides them with food and shelter. However, once Salim realizes that Maman also blinds children and cuts off their limbs so that they can make more money for him, he convinces Jamal to escape before they are seriously injured. Although Maman is initially believed to be their leader, the three children quickly learn that he does not have their best interest at heart. According to (*Chasing Childhood,* 2009) exploitation of children is common in India because they lack supervision and are already vulnerable. Abuse by both family members and police officers were depicted throughout the documentary and provide the real backdrop for many of the scenes presented in the above noted popular movie. The above economic, political, cultural, and health-related problems illustrate some of

the common challenges most Indian street children face as a result of negative structural forces and adult neglect in varied societal arenas (Gupta, 2008; Kanth & Harris, 1004; Nigam, 1994).

Choices Indian Street Children Make in Response to Challenges

How do street children in India combat the many challenges they face? What choices do they make to stay alive in the face of poverty and danger? And what insights can be gained from their stories in academic, documentary, and mainstream sources? I contend that these sources provide evidence of the adaptive, resilient nature of many Indian street children as they establish networks to care for each other and locate work as well as engage in forms of escapism during particularly difficult times. Examples of these themes are provided below.

In *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), the three street children take care of each other by forming a coalition to help them become stronger than the forces acting against them. And in doing so, they help each other survive. Although the story is romanticized, their alliance enables them to escape nearly every dangerous situation they encounter. Despite limited agency against social forces and many adults, the three children strategically rely on each other for food, shelter, protection, as well as to create a non-traditional sense of family (MacLeod, 1995). Similarly, *Chasing Childhood* (2009) discusses work that street children do to survive. Informal jobs include selling trinkets, rag-picking to find recyclables, and performing. These types of jobs are also depicted in *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). The movie also attempts to illustrate the anxiety, fear, and uncertainty of life on the street. Although similar types of informal jobs are common in the U.S. (Hays, 2003; Wilson, 1996), their dire nature appears to be

compounded when performed by children who are often without homes and adults to care for them.

The culture of neglect towards Indian street children has resulted in the tendency for them to engage in literal and mental escapism in order to survive. According to Gupta (2008) the public in India view their own children positively, but often consider street children to be little more than *rats* who are simply criminals. Because of the public's negative view of street children, they have become the *Other* in society – outcasts to be devalued, ignored, and mistreated (Hays, 2003). According to this same author, Indian adults often view street children as *them* and believe that they are significantly different from *normal people* and therefore deserve poor treatment. According to *Chasing Childhood* (2009), street children often use drugs to mentally escape the cruelties of the street as well as to forget about their problems and mask their hunger. Although drug use is not as evident in *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), the film depicts a variety of instances in which the three street children have to physically escape abusive situations such as Jamal and Salims' escape from the antagonist Maman and their escape from the religious confrontation during which their mother is killed. Although their choices are extremely limited, street children do attempt to evoke agency in response to negative structural forces in society. Their attitudes and actions are examples of everyday resistance common among vulnerable groups who face many problems, but who tap into existing resources and group strengths to fight back (Hays, 2003; MacLeod, 1995; West, 1993).

SOLUTIONS: TURNING HURT TO HAPPILY EVER AFTER

The issues affecting Indian street children are complex and cannot be described or solved in the scope of this

paper. However, I offer two suggestions, one short-term and one long-term, for supporting street children of India by providing them more choices and combating structural forces that are working against them. These two suggestions are the following - providing basic rights to street children of India (i.e., shelter, food, health, education) and enforcement of laws to protect them. Short-term, construction of community toilets would prevent many diseases. As noted in *Chasing Childhood*, many children drink from dirty water in the same places where they also use the bathroom. Separate facilities would reduce the likelihood of both getting and spreading diseases. Nigam (1994) contends;

> Extending extra health facilities, establishing nutrition programs, providing vocational training, protecting children from abuse, distributing dry-food polypacks, providing night shelters, providing ration cards, and creating bathing and toilet facilities would go far in improving the quality of life and the future of street children in India. (P. 8)

Furthermore, most street children in India must pay for clean water, which they are usually cannot afford (Kanth & Harris, 2004). Thus they are forced to drink dirty water that makes them sick. Some of the other basic necessities that should be supplied to street children are bathing facilities, clothing, rehabilitation and counseling services, education and vocational training, shelter, and family reunification, therapy and support. All of these things could be provided by establishing comprehensive shelters throughout India, especially in urban areas, where more street children reside. One such organization that has responded to this challenge is Udayan, located outside of Jaipur, India. As noted in its mission statement, children are able to maintain familial relations if possible and if they are not abusive. Families are allowed time with

their children such that bonds are maintained. Udayan also provides education and vocational training so that once children graduate, they are able to support themselves (refer to www.udayancare.org). Additionally, as members of the global society and a core country, the U.S. should provide increased economic and political support in response to this social problem (Wallerstein, 2008).

A long term solution requires the UN to become more involved in the laws of India. The Juvenile Justice Act is in place, but is not consistently enforced such that abusive police are identified, criminally tried, and appropriately punished. Long-term public education to change views about street children is also needed to undergird UN efforts to enforce laws. Systemic changes mean better laws against slumlords who exploit children, better laws against parents who abuse their children, and more enforcement of the laws already in place. Because many police officers abuse street children, it will be necessary for governmental leaders, politicians, and non-poor residents in India to become part of a coalition to advocate for the rights of street children. Furthermore, if the public, including law enforcement officials, are educated about the plight of street children, perhaps they will stop blaming street children for their situations and begin to help them. If more children's shelters are established short-term, fewer children will be on the streets - which will ameliorate some of the public's negative views about them. Increased advocacy for the poor in general and for poor children in particular is also essential (The Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, 2009). Lastly, community organizing around the issues street children face and their families face will help provide more attention to this social problem. This analysis does not do justice to the complexities of this issue. Both

Slumdog Millionaire (2008) and *Chasing Childhood* (2009) only provide glimpses into the deleterious reality of life on the street for poor children in India. Barefoot children have no bootstraps. If they are to experience better lives, it will require united efforts at the international, national, and local levels to replace the poverty, neglect, vulnerability, and abuse Indian street children experience with the love, support, and nurturance all children deserve.

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