

## They help beggars get a second chance

Viju B

[ 14 Feb, 2007 0222hrs IST TIMES NEWS NETWORK ]

MUMBAI: She lost her life, but in death unknowingly helped her son from being condemned to beg for the rest of

Sixty-five-year-old Archana Gaikwad was living on the streets, seeking alms for her daily bread after being thrown by her son-in-law. Her 18-year-old son had already taken to the streets, after having fought with his brother-in-law earlier.

Three months later, the streets had taken their toll on the elderly woman. She grew frail and became gravely ill. V from the **Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)** found her, she was in the last stages of life. "She was admitted and died a few days later," said **M Tarique, a project officer with TISS.**

What followed was a drama made possible only due to the Koshish project begun by some **TISS** professionals. A went to claim her body, but he did not have the money to perform the last rites. Tarique said, "We then called Archana and son-in-law. Initially, he was reluctant to even see the body, but after a few hours of counselling the couple realised their mistake and took the body."

Not just the body, but the son and daughter-in-law also helped Archana's son get off the streets and put his life back on track. They took him back into their home.

In early August 2006, **TISS** had begun Koshish, a project to help estranged beggars reunite with their families. Once counsellors had achieved this goal, they proceeded to act on the second part of Koshish's mission, which is to help them find a trade and not return to the streets.

"**TISS** is now helping the boy become independent and lead a normal life," Tarique said. The boy now works with a company and has enrolled himself at the University of Mumbai.

However, in many cases people end up as beggars after having left families to escape sheer poverty. "When they do not find adequate employment on the roads, they are forced into begging," said Yashwant Gaikwad, under-secretary for the Department of Women and Child Welfare.

The Beggar's Home in Chembur, the only receiving centre in the city under the department, currently has over 70 inmates. Some of these inmates are sent from there to six rehabilitation homes across the state. "Some of these homes have arable land where inmates work as farm hands till their conviction periods are over," Gaikwad said.

But government officials admitted this is not a permanent solution as many return to the street. On the other hand, the department aims to rehabilitate beggars and teach them productive work.

"We have selected 15 inmates aged 25 to 60 for the Koshish project. The idea is to make them self-reliant and help restore their self-esteem," Tarique said.

Along with another NGO, Saki, **TISS** is also starting a paper-bag manufacturing unit at the beggar's home. "We are finding suitable buyers. The inmates who work will receive a stipend that will be deposited in an account in their name," he said.

[viju.balanarayanan@timesgroup.com](mailto:viju.balanarayanan@timesgroup.com)