



Study of child beggars in India's Punjab state: Children's rights perspective

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Abstract

The article examines the nature as well as types and degree of the violations of the rights of child beggars in India while focusing on its Punjab State as a universe of study. Conducted through the empirical-observational approach and taking into consideration the quantitative as well as qualitative methods and techniques, the study reveals that pursuance of begging results into the physical, emotional and psychological abuse of children. Moreover, child beggars, especially the females, are more frequently and severely exposed to sexual abuse, besides being victims of social neglect and economic exploitation. Vulnerability of child beggars instigates from the level of families and further exacerbated by the society due to its attitude of neglect and state due to its lackadaisical approach.

Keywords: Children's rights, beggars, health, education, abuse

Introduction

Childhood embodies a fundamental stage in the cycle of human life and hence, is considered as the most tender, formative and impressionable stage of human development (Freeman 2020) [7]. The children must be brought up in an atmosphere of affection, under the warm care and attention. Only in these favourable conditions, they have the ability to attain full emotional, intellectual and spiritual stability and maturity along with acquiring self-confidence as well as self-respect. Beside this, they need to be properly clothed, adequately fed up, effectively socialised and attentively protected against various hurdles that inhibit their overall growth (Brems 2017) [2]. The prosperity and development of any society is primarily determined by the health and well-being of its children (Cowden 2016). Conducive and congenial environment is the necessity for children to develop as good civilians, eligible of contributing for the wellbeing of society. However, the tragedy is that children are the passive victims of abuses and exploitation as due to their age and social standing, they Very reasonably, the international fraternity has taken remarkable initiatives for the adequate recognition of the rights of children. The Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924) was the first and foremost priority for the material, psychological and social rights of the children (Covell 2012) [4]. Later, various efforts have been made by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) since 1946 considering food, health care and education as primary rights of children (Jaiswal 2000) [10]. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) also focuses on the equality of all human beings and emphasizes the rights of the children in terms of social care and assistance. The UN specifically prepared a draft on child rights on November 20, 1959. It envisages the provisions of ten basic rights for the development of the children (Goodhart 2013) [9].

Consequently, a variety of initiatives have been taken by the international agencies through different other international instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966 (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Culture Rights, 1966 (ICESCR). The article 24 of the ICCPR worked as a major lifeline for

children and it envisages the right of every child, on the basis of their status as a minor, the measures of protection on the part of their family, society and state without discrimination (ICCPR 1996). Later on, the year 1979 was acknowledged as the International Year of the Child. Furthermore, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 (UNCRC) had confined to four main areas of the lives of children such as survival, development, protection and participation (Lundy *et al.* 2011) [13]. Nevertheless, while observing the international framework of child rights, it appears that there is scope for more sincere efforts for delivering child friendly justice through the child friendly methods Stalford *et al.* 2017) [23].

Expressing the precedence towards child rights and acknowledging its commitment towards international humanitarian law, Indian state has recognized child rights through its constitutional-legal framework. The article 15 (3) of the Indian constitution empowers the state to make special provisions for the rights of children; Article 21A urges for the free and compulsory education to children within the age of 6 to 14 years. Furthermore, the article 23 lays down the provisions for the prohibition of trafficking of human beings (including children) and forced labour; the Article 24 considers illegal the employment of children in any factory or mine or any other hazardous employment less than 14 years of age. Under article 39(f); children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation, moral and material abandonment. As per the Article 47, the state shall raise the level of nutrient food and the standard of living among children. Apart from this,

An Overview of Child Begging

As per the Cambridge Dictionary, beggar is "a poor person who lives by asking others for money or food". The Encyclopedia of Social Work in India (1968) defines the beggars "as charity seeker people, who could easily be noticed by the way they subsist and earn money essential for survival; and bulk among them who are destitute and live in the open or in the impoverished huts". International labour organization defines begging as, "A range of activities

whereby an individual asks a stranger for money on the basis of being poor or religious reasons with no intention to reimburse money or provide the service in return. Generally, a beggar is one, who asks for alms or charity or performs such actions deriving sympathy from others with the endeavour of giving something in return (Madan 2009) ^[14]. There are numerous methods of begging such as selling material items, washing windshields on the road junctions, singing on the street, selling flowers or other articles" (Delap 2009) ^[6]. In true sense, begging is a social deviance as well as social problem, which comprises gaining material advantage by asking for money from other persons, with no intention to refund the money or to provide service in return (Sambo 2017). Above all, begging involves the beggar exhibiting his depressed plight by words or actions and demanding for alms by words (spoken or written) or actions (Ramanathan 2008) ^[19]. In case of the Third World countries, it emerges as a more prevalent and numerous social problem.

Children are most frequent and vulnerable parties indulged into the practice of begging. This the naked reality of the society that children are compelled for begging for the purpose of getting some amount of money or other materialist benefit such as food or clothes by the parents or any third parties involved in the practice (Regional Report on Child Begging 2011). The child beggars, mostly living on the footpaths or streets, are always vulnerable to physically abused, economically robbed and sexually exploited. These poor and innocent children, spending their childhoods under the challenging physical, social and psychological conditions are always deprived of the access to various rights and freedoms recognized for them through the international humanitarian law as well as various constitutional-legislative provisions at the domestic level (Vedackumchery 1996) ^[24]. In most of the cases, the children commonly become the victims of such type of situations, where they are compelled to beg for themselves, for their families or any third party. In most of the cases, the children, who beg, are not properly dressed, often barefooted, half-naked and completely unprotected from the extreme cold or high temperature (Pjano 2011) ^[18]. Along with this, these vulnerable groups are also facing poverty, loneliness, are prone to abuse, deprivation of basic needs and continue surviving as the miserable beings (Kaushik 2014) ^[11].

Child Begging in India

The dilemma of begging is a worldwide phenomenon; it is not peculiar to any part of the country. India has the largest population of children in the world that goes to bed, lacking of any food, and deficient of attires to wear and thus astonishingly comprises largest number of beggars (Sailaja 2016) ^[20]. According to the Census of India 2011, there were 413,670 beggars and vagrants in India. With regard to the number of child beggars, the data revealed by Thomson Reuters Foundation (2016) divulges that there are 300,000 child beggars in India (Nagaraj 2016) ^[17]. Child beggars are usually deprived of the right to food, shelter, parental care and are frequently vulnerable to economic exploitation (Bajpai 2017) ^[1]. Further, the children indulged into begging grow as physically underdeveloped, psychologically depressed and socially passive citizens (Menka 2014) ^[15]. Consequently, the twenty States and two Union Territories of India have either enacted their own Anti-Beggary

Legislation or adopted legislations enacted by other States/UTs, but the practice of begging still exists in every nook or corner of the country. In urban areas, child beggars can be found everywhere in public spaces, such as mosque, gurudwara, church, temple, filling station, restaurant, bank, railway station, bus stand, traffic lights, shopping mall, super market etc (Chopra 2015) ^[3]. Unfortunately, efforts made at the Constitutional-legislative as well as policy making level in India have been insufficient and practically unrealised to counter the problem of child beggary (Gangrade 2013). In order to control begging in India, the Union government has taken initiatives that mainly include:

- The Government of India passed the Indian Railways Act, 1941 prohibiting begging in the railway premises and in trains.
- The Section 109(6) Criminal Procedure Code 1868 could be used to prohibit begging or forbidden vagrancy. A vagrant is defined therein as one who has no ostensible means of subsistence or who cannot give a satisfactory account of himself.
- The Section 363 (A) of Indian Penal Code (IPC) provides for punishment up to 10 years (kidnapping or maiming a minor for purpose of begging)
- The Section 42 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 1986 also envisages the punishment with imprisonment for the accused, who force the minors into begging.
- The Abolition of Begging Act Bill, 2010 was passed by the Parliament of India to impede begging. As per the provisions of this bill, the Union government shall constitute a fund for the purpose to rehabilitation of beggars.
- The Section 85 of Children Act, 2013 states that the homeless, destitute children found in begging will get proper cloth, education, and shelter from the state.

Apart from the above measures, there are various legislative provisions at the state level to prevent (child) begging. The Bombay Prevention of Begging Act (BPBA) 1959 lays down certain guidelines for the defaulters and suggests remedies by providing maximum punishment of 3 years or monetary fine to the accused for forcing people (including children) into begging.

Child Begging in India's Punjab State

Similar to other states, Punjab is not an exception to the child beggars. The religious momentum and the economic prosperity of Punjab have always granted favorable conditions for the patronage of the practice of begging, particularly among children. Recognising the magnitude of the problem, the state government had passed 'The Punjab Prevention of Beggary Act, 1971. The Act considers the child 'as a person below the age of sixteen years'. With regard to the beggars, including the child beggars, the Act inculcates that if the court is satisfied from the enquiry of the competent authority that a child has been found begging, he/she would be detained into the Certified Home or the Special Home for a period, not less than one year, and not more than three years. Further, section 9 of the same Act asserts that whosoever employs or causes any person to solicit or receive alms, or whoever having the custody, charge, or care of a child, connives at or encourages the employment or the causing of a child to solicit or receive alms, or whoever uses another person as an exhibit or the purpose of begging, shall on conviction be punished with

imprisonment for a term, which may extend to three years, but which shall not be less than one year. Further, there are directions from the Punjab State Commission for Protection of Child Rights to all district child rights protection officers for strict obedience of the Punjab Prevention Beggary Act, 1971, so that the inhuman act of begging could be eradicated.

Unfortunately, despite the existence of the formal legislations, the child beggars can be seen in all urban segments of Punjab. Noticeably, huge number of child beggars can be frequently traced in the major cities of the state. In fact, several socio-economic and socio-religious features of these major cities attract the beggars. Therefore, the beggars, including children from the peripheral areas of the cities as well as from other states reside in these cities, finding begging as a lucrative practice there. Amongst the entire state of Punjab, the three cities i.e. Ludhiana, Jalandhar and Amritsar can be traced as the major cities, where majority of the child beggars have been reportedly found (Khaira 2013).

Methods and Techniques

Research Design

To make the sample universal and representative in nature, three million-plus cities of Punjab (as per the Census 2011) were selected based on the level of urbanization, transportation correspondence to the railways as well as roadways connectivity, and size of populations. From these three cities, Amritsar was selected due to its religious character, Jalandhar for its remittance economy and Ludhiana for its changing demographic profile due to migrated population. Amritsar represents the highest tourist footfall. Jalandhar has been having most dense diasporic population. Ludhiana receives and bears largest number of inter-state migrants.

Unfortunately, the concerned governmental authorities have not maintained any data about the population of the beggars, including the child beggars. An RTI had been filed to the nodal authorities but no conducive information was obtained in the response. Therefore, it was planned to carry out a precise study by choosing a purposeful sample size to arrive at conclusive results.

While conducting a pilot survey in case of each city, five places with most dense and vibrant presence of child beggars were identified. Five each child beggars males and females were selected from each site comprising the total number of ten child beggars from each site. The cumulative number of child beggars from one city comprised of 50 child beggars. It established total 150 selected child beggars from all three selected cities.

In the Amritsar city, the child beggars begging at the outer premises of the Golden Temple and Jallianwala Bagh premises, Gurudwara Shaheedan Sahib, Durgiana Mandir, Shivala Mandir, Lawrence Road. In Jalandhar, the child beggars had been identified from five selected places, i.e. Jamma Masjid, Devi Talab Mandir, Mata Rani Chowk Mandir, PAP Chowk, opposite to the DAV College. From Ludhiana the five places selected were Do-moria Pul, Bhaiwala Chowk, Model Town, Ghanta-Ghar and Durga Mata Mandir.

Applying the appropriate methodology and obtaining the most precise results was the most challenging part of the study. Primarily, the findings of the study are based on the unscheduled interviews of the selected child beggars, along

with focused group discussions with the selected child beggars, their family members as well as the shopkeepers, vendors and neighbours of the child beggars. Largely, the study is observational in nature. After selecting the places for the field study, the selected child beggars were identified. Afterwards, the timings of arrival at the places of begging and the departures from those places of the selected child beggars were noted. Then, the process of non-participatory and distance observation was started reaching at the spots before the arrival of the selected child beggars. All relevant queries were appropriately noted down, which were adequately completed at every night. To earn acquaintance of the child beggars, they had been frequently offered tea, samosas, bread pakoda, ice creams and other eatable available on the sites. Several child beggars were served food to earn their reliance. There were plenty of child beggars to whom rupees twenty, fifty or hundred, as per the circumstances, were given to make them speak about their personal, familial, social and occupational lives.

Results of the Study

Age and Gender Variables

Age, is acknowledged as a significant factor for the study of child beggars to determine the pressure of livelihood and social roles. The age variables both among boys and girls had been cataloged into three groups, i.e. up to 5 years; 06 to 10 years and 11 to 14 years. The considered age has been asked from the child beggars during informal conversation with them. In the study, 41 children (include boys and girls) had been found as belonging to the age group of up to 05 years. The maximum number of child beggars were found belonging to the age group of 6 to 10 years (comprising 78 child beggars); while very few (31) child beggars were of the age group of 11-14 years.

Table 1: Age Variables of the Child Beggars

Age Group	Number	Percentage
Up to 5 Years	41	27
6-10 years	78	52
11-14 Years	31	21
Total	150	100

Having a quick glance at the table, it is clear by age and sex variables that girls are represented in all age categories parallel with boys in the profession of begging. Further, the most agonizing concern in this finding is that the children beneath and up to 05 years of age has been indulged into the profession of begging. The age group of up to 6-10 years had the maximum percentage into this profession whereas for the age group of 11-14, the percentage was the least. Majority of child beggars belong to the age group of 06 to 10 years. Reasonably, these minors are able to stimulate the mercy of the people due to innocence expressed and at the same time, they are at least matured enough to take care of themselves independently in the crowds. The least number of beggars have been found as representing the age group of 11-14 years. Reasonably, during the age of puberty and adolescence, child beggars, both males and females, prefer to adopt other economic activities as they are not able to attract the mercy of people while appearing as physically grown.

Educational Profile of the Child Beggars

To be acquainted with the educational profile of the selected child beggars, they had been divided into three categories as per their access to the schools, i.e. ‘school going’, ‘school dropouts’, ‘never admitted to school’. It had been found that only 44 out of 150 selected child beggars (only 29 per cent) had been going to the schools. While 24 child beggars (16 per cent) were recognised as the school dropouts and the remaining 82 child beggars, who comprises 55 per cent of the sample, had never been admitted to the schools.

Table 2: Educational Profile of Child Beggars

Educational Profile of Child Beggars	Number	Percentage
School Going	44	29
School Dropouts	24	16
Never Admitted to School	82	55
Total	150	100

Worldwide, education has been considered as prerequisite fundamental human right for each person. In Indian context, Article 21 A of the Constitution affirms for free and compulsory primary education to all children (of the age of six to fourteen years). Further, Directive Principle of State Policy Article 45 also grants free and compulsory education to all children until they attain the age of 14 years, which was implemented as per the Constitutional 86th Amendment Act 2002. Along with this, it was made mandatory fundamental duty for the guardian or parent to admit their children into the school. Furthermore, a formal legislation, the Right to Education Act (RTE) 2009, has been passed and implemented since 2010 to make the constitutional guarantee and asserts that the state must endeavour that every child, belonging to the age group of 06 to 14 years should obtain free and compulsory education. Nevertheless, the data illustrates that majority of the child beggars’ i.e. 82 per were never admitted to the schools. Reasonably, these child beggars belong to highly poverty ridden families which are not aware and even financial insufficient to pay schools expenses of their children. Further, study depicts that 16 per cent of child beggar were noticed as school dropouts. Due to poverty of families, death of the bread-earner in families, ignorance to the education and particularly deceitful efforts of the state to make right to education a reality can be recognized as causes for the school dropouts of children. However, only 29 per cent child beggars had been found as admitted to schools and going to schools frequently or occasionally. They pursued begging after school hours and /or during weekends. It has been noticed that they all of them were enrolled to the government primary schools. Among them only 03 child beggars out of 44 child beggars had been studying at the secondary level. It is interestingly to mention here that when the researcher used to offer note-books and pencils to the selected child beggars to earn their acquaintance, only those who had been going to the schools received the same and rest of all denied those.

Health Profile of the Child Beggars

Another significant query had been made about the health profile of the child beggars. It was not feasible to diagnose the child beggars as per the medically prescribed standards. Hence, following the advice of a formally qualified

pediatrician, it was decided to observe the physical health of selected child beggars on the bases of a number of general factors which comprised physical appearance, number of meals taken per day, source of meals, compatibility of the clothes to the weather and whether wearing footwear or not.

Physical Appearance

As mentioned above, a qualified pediatrician was consulted and as per his advice, a structural chart representing the standard height and body weight of the children belonging to the different age-groups was prepared. Besides that, other relevant physical attributes including illness, persistence of any chronicle diseases, physical disability were also observed by the researcher. In addition to that, the approximate body weight, colour of face etc. was also specifically observed. On the bases of the information obtained from the selected child beggars as well as the individual observations compiled in the specified structural chart, majority (56 per cent) of the child beggars had been found as physically sound; whereas, remaining 44 per cent had been found as physically weak.

Table 3: Health Profile of Child Beggars

Physical Appearance	Number	Percentage
Appearing as physical weaken	66	44
Appearing as physical sound	84	56
Total	150	100

It is quite visible from the abovementioned data that forty-four per cent of the child beggars were observed as physically unhealthy as per the standardized the medical chart. Among them, some child beggars were found presenting pale faces, yellow eyes, and extremely dry and torn lips. Several children belonging to the age group up to eight years were found with wet and running noses and sneezing frequently. However, other 56 per cent had been found as reasonably healthy. Nevertheless, in the category of physically weaker, majority numbers of the child beggars were observed as physically underweight and with improper heights as per the medically prescribed standardized chart for different age groups of children. Noticeably, the child beggars, particularly those belonging to the age group of up to ten years, were found with imbalanced bodies, inclined legs, paled eyes, dry/frayed lips and cheeks. Child beggars, especially under ten years of age were also observed as suffering due to malnutrition. Additionally, numerous child beggars were identified as suffering from different skin diseases, such as rashes, acne, itches and blemishes. It is noteworthy to mention here that in a noticeable number of cases, the children revealed that they were suffering from the sleeping disorder, cripples, minor injuries on their foreheads, hands or foets. The child beggars themselves, and in several cases, their parents unambiguously mentioned that no proper vaccination was given to them. More worryingly, child beggars do not receive any routine medical facilities in the situation of injury or sickness.

Source and Place of Food

It has been found that majority of the child beggars, i.e. 59 per cent eat the food cooked at their homes. A marginal percentage of child beggars, i.e. 06 per cent child beggars purchase food from small eateries. However, 34 per cent child beggars beg the food from dhabas, tea-stalls and the vendor/hawkers selling the street-food. Worryingly, 01 per

cent child beggars were observed in the study as eating the waste and the filthy food from dustbins that was thrown down by the eaters.

Table 4: Source of Food

Source of Food	Number	Percentage
Home-Made Food	88	59
Food from Begging	51	34
Food by Paying	09	06
Eating Waste Food	02	01
Total	150	100

It is worth mentioning that majority of the child beggars who live with their parents in slums or rental accommodations take their breakfast and dinner from their own homes. After taking meals, they start pursuing begging at different marked places. At the end of the day, they take dinner at their homes. Noticeably, 34 per cent of child beggars, largely among who are homeless, depend on the food begged from various channels, such as dhabas, tea stalls or hawkers selling street food. In several cases, child beggars get food from Langars (free kitchen at religious places). More worryingly, a number of child beggars are also observed as eating from the food wastage thrown by the eaters or the food-vendors.

Degree of the Availability of Food

Another significant objective of the field study was to obtain the data about the number of meals taken by child beggars within a day. To attain the information, accumulated on the statements of the child beggars and further verified them while observing the each subject for whole day. Noticeably, 38 per cent child beggars had been observed as taking three meals a day while 56 per cent were seen taking two meals. Upsettingly, 06 per cent child beggars were observed as taking only one meal a day.

Table 5: Number of Meals in a day

Number of Meals (per day)	Number	Percentage
Thrice a day	57	38
Twice a day	84	56
Once a day	09	06
Total	150	100

As per the data, sixty-two per cent of the child beggars actually do not get adequate meals per day. Unfortunately, 06 percent child beggars take only a single diet per day. This is the prime cause of the inadequate physical health and undergrowth of child beggars. Interestingly, among those 38 per cent child beggars who have been found as taking at least three meals a day, majority among them are those who are up to the age of 7-8 years beg along with their mothers or elder sisters; hence, they are able to get three meals per day.

Right to Appropriate Clothes

From the perspective of the access to the proper clothes, the attires of the selected child beggars had been observed during the field study. Thus, the researcher cataloged his observations into two categories, i.e. proper clothes and improper clothes. The term ‘proper clothes’ here represented the clothes which were complete, comprised compatibility to the seasonal weather conditions, hygiene and the purity of the attires and inclusion of proper

shoes/footwear etc. Furthermore, the term ‘unsuitable clothes’ denoted to the imperfect, unhygienic, contaminated or incomplete dresses uncomplimentary to the weather, including wandering bare-footed. Worryingly, majority numbers of the child beggars, i.e. 55 had been noticed as wearing improper dresses whereas remaining 45 per cent of the child beggars had been found wearing proper dresses.

Table 6: Nature of Attires

Dress	Number	Percentage
Proper Clothes	68	45
Improper Clothes	82	55
Total	150	100

The study corroborates that majority number of the child beggars wear inappropriate or improper attires. In addition, majority among them had been wearing filthy, ragged, undersized clothes and they largely appeared barefoot. Several of them could be observed as have not bathed for days. Their nails were uncut, and hair uncombed. The researcher also witnessed various cases of the female child beggars experiencing the age of puberty and still wearing torn and undersized frocks, exposing their thighs and shoulders. This obviously increases the risk of them being sexually abused. Besides that, the female child beggars, below the age of 10 years were noticed as wearing only *kameez* with only knickers to cover the lower part of their body. More sadistically, that nudeness of the body of female child beggars owing to unavailability of the proper dresses or perhaps to look more miserable made them vulnerable to the sexual exploitation by the adult strangers. In a few cases, it was further observed that middle-aged men in the cars abused the female child beggars belonging to the age group above ten years and those female child beggars were helpless to tolerate the inhuman experience of eve teasing and groping. Unfortunately, majority of female child beggars had been found wearing unclean shirts/t-shirts with unhook chest as well as belly due the breakage of the buttons of the shirts/t-shirts. In other cases, it was observed that children had tied up their knickers and panties around their waist with the plastic twines or raw-strings. Moreover, other few child beggars, especially belonging to the age group of 5-8 years were seen holding their shorts with their hands due to the unavailability of any elastic, buttons or hooks to grip them uptight. During the chilling winter conditions, only a few child beggars had been wearing any footwear, whereas maximum of the child beggars had been observed as totally bare-footed wandering on the concrete roads, filthy footpaths and dirty paths during the rains. Worryingly, those who were wearing footwear, majority of them were wearing only chapples. Further, it was also observed whether the selected child beggar wore clothes compatible to the contemporary weather conditions or not. The observations obtained were classified into two categories i.e. Children, wearing clothes compatible to the weather and wearing clothes incompatible to the weather. The data depicts that 62 per cent child beggars had been wearing clothes compatible to the contemporary weather conditions, whereas, 38 per cent had been noticed wearing incompatible dresses.

Table 7: Suitability of Clothes

Compatibility of Clothes	Number	Percentage
Wearing Clothes Compatible to weather	93	62
Wearing Clothes incompatible to weather	57	38
Total	150	100

The field survey was conducted during the winters of December 2017 to February 2018. Hence, while observing the dresses of the child beggars, the compatibility of their dresses to the contemporary wintry weather conditions was also examined primarily. As mentioned above, majority number of child beggars were seen wearing clothes compatible to the weather conditions, nevertheless, in the cases of male child beggars, majority of them were seen as wearing only shirts/t-shirts or *Kurtas* to cover up upper parts of their bodies and knickers, shorts or even panties as lower attire were worn. Further, in the cases of female child beggars, the majority of the girls were found wearing undersized clothes, i.e. frocks, shirts, *Kurtas* during the season of winters. In case of the remaining 38 per cent of the child beggars who were observed by the researcher as wearing the incompatible clothes they were observed as wearing the insufficient and inappropriate clothes which might expose them to numerous seasonal and chronic diseases such as the nasal infection, chest infection, throat infection, fever and pneumonia.

Problems Faced by the Child Beggars

Based on the informal interviews with the selected child beggars and empirical observations obtained through field survey, approximate 20 per cent of the child beggars frequently faced ignorant attitude of people and other 25 per cent experienced abuses (including the physical, psychological and sexual abuse). Approximately, 55 per cent of the child beggars did not mention any specific problem being faced by them generally.

Table 8: Problems faced by Child Beggars

Problems faced by Child Beggars	Number	Percentage
Ignorant attitude of people	30	20
Abusive attitude of people	38	25
Do not face any problem	82	55
Total	150	100

Through observations as well as interactions with the child beggars it had been noticed that majority of the child beggars in the different cities of Punjab reportedly do not face any major problems while begging. However, worryingly, there were 25 per cent of the child beggars who admitted that they were frequent victims of abusive attitude of the shopkeepers, security guards outside the shopping complexes and the volunteers of the different worship places. Further, the female child beggars belonging to the age group of 10 to 12 years were observed as vulnerable, and in a number of cases of sexual abuse. These female child beggars were found as very frequent victims of the incidents of eve teasing by the felonious-minded males, especially youth who compel them to make eye contacts with them, ask them to goggle and intend to touch their body parts. Reasonably, it has been noticed that female child beggars beyond 12 years of age in normal circumstances abandon begging and start pursuing domestic works, probably due to the risk of being sexually abused. In

addition to this, in a number of cases, the male child beggars, particularly belonging to the age group of 6 to 10 years, were observed as being slapped and beaten up as well as abused by shopkeepers or their guards. In 20 per cent cases, child beggars realized that ignorant, negligent and merciless attitude of strangers usually becomes problematic for them.

Child begging is not only a physical, economic or social activity for the child beggars, but it is that state of their personalities which certainly hinders their physical, psychological and social development. Reasonably, it infringes those favourable and prerequisite conditions from the child beggars which are necessary for their all round growth. If acknowledged more precisely, indulgence into begging breaches the conditions of rights and freedoms of the children. The street children as well as the children forced into begging by the criminal gangs not have any access to the rights to enjoy the right to parents, thus denying their natural requirement of feeling the affectionate care of the parents. They are also deprived of the right to nutritional food and survive in the unhealthy and unhygienic environment. Their right to education has also been denied as they do not have any time, arrangements and circumstances to obtain formal education. Furthermore, their right to health and protection from the diseases is totally ignored by their poverty-ridden self-centered parents as well. Besides these, they do not have any access to the right to leisure and play as well participates in other recreational activities. Their right to social security is also violated as it is their compulsion roaming helplessly into the markets, at the religious places, on the roads and other crowded areas. It obviously aggravates their chances of being physically or sexually abused. The female child beggars suffer from these sorts of painful experiences quite often. Moreover, while observing in broader milieu, child begging emerge as a form of child labour where the minors are forcefully or due to their ignorance, are engaged into begging under dangerous physical and social circumstances which harms them physically as well as psychologically. It is in fact a form of child abuse, where the childhood, innocence and helplessness of the child beggars have been abused by their own parents, guardians or the criminal elements.

Conclusion

While observing the child beggars from the perspective of child rights, the study divulges a number of findings. Principally, it corroborates that the child beggars experience violation of various kinds of rights recognized for them. With regard to the nature of the violation experienced by child beggars, it primarily has three types, i.e. denial, neglect and abuse. Child beggars are denied the rights to dignified life, education, hygienic food, shelter and healthy physical environment. They are deprived of several other rights such as parental care, appropriate clothes, recreation as well as health and medical care as the granting institutions such as family, community and state express denial of the rights for them. More worryingly, child beggars very frequently experience violation in form of physical abuse, mental abuse or sexual abuse. Further, while identifying and institutionalizing the perpetrators in these cases of the denial, deprivation and neglect, the institutions of family, community and state appear as reprehensible agents. Families are responsible for

indulging the children in the practice of begging and thus denying them the rights to parental care, education, food, care etc. The community deprives them of the rights to respect, and social recognition. The state, through its structural policy, recognizes the rights of children (including child beggars off course). However, the state neglects the rights of child beggars while not realizing the same through its functional process.

The deprivation and neglect of these primary rights hinder the physical growth, psychological development, social perception of children. There may be several causes of the indulgence of children in practice of beggary, but largely, the trend of begging as a parental occupation compels the young children to either pursue begging as familial occupation or as an economic activity to provide supplementary economic support to family. There are always possibilities that children, kidnapped from distinct regions are forcefully indulged into the organized profession of beggary.

Indian state, through its constitutional-legal commitments has recognized the rights of children. Still a lot has to be done by the state to protect the children from beggary and rehabilitate, educate and socialize the children indulged into begging. Society has to change its mindset about child beggars. Society either witnesses child beggars mercifully as victims of destiny who cannot be escaped or extremely as agents of organized begging-gangs who are anti-social and criminals. The society has to perceive child beggars as victims of the unbalanced economic order, biased social value system and inactive political establishment. This is matter of national embarrassment for India as a nation that the foundations of the future of the nation, the children, are found begging to sustain their present.

Notes

1. As per the Punjab Prevention of Begging Act, 1971, Section 2 (2), the Certified Home means a home certified by the State Government or by any subordinate authority empowered by it in this behalf to be a fit place for the reception of beggars suffering from leprosy or any other infectious or contagious disease notified in this behalf by the State Government.
2. As per the Punjab Prevention of Begging Act, 1971, Section 2 (13), the 'Special Home means a home notified by the State Government as suitable for the reception of beggars not physically capable of ordinary manual labour but not suffering from leprosy or any other infectious or contagious disease.

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