

# Scenario of Begging in Punjab: A Case Study of Women Beggars in Patiala

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**Abstract** -This study had examined the experiences of women beggars in Patiala district of Punjab and has analysed the factors contributing in the begging. In the form of case studies the experiences of eight women beggars had been included in this study from Patiala district of Punjab. The case studies were formed on the bases of an interview. Observation was also used while interviewing the beggars. During the interview much emphasises was laid on their personal and familial relationships and the different factors which nudged them towards the begging. Overall, it was found that women beggars are living very pathetic and depressed lives. Also, it was found that the phenomenon of begging is an outcome of factors like poverty, unemployment, physical disabilities, death of parents, and family disintegration etc. Based on the field findings, the study recommends immediate and long term approaches to be adopted to curb the menace of begging.

Keywords: Women, beggars, case studies.

## Backdrop

The historical background of Indian society reveals that a woman was given a high status in Vedic times. It is an old saying, “Where women are honoured, gods reside there.” She was acknowledged as „Ardhangini’ – one half of husband’s body .In Hindu religion, At the time of marriage, A woman as a bride was allowed to attain certain solemn vows from the bridegroom before the ritual fire. No religious ceremony by the husband could bear fruit without her participation. She occupies an honoured place as a mother, wife and sister. She is the epitome of courage and boldness, love and affection, sacrifice and suffering. But in recent year it has been seen that women lost their honoured place due to social, economic and political factors. Evil customs like sati, Purdah, child marriage, enforced widowhood, dowry system, has led to decline in women’s status inside and outside the home. During the last few years, the prevailing incidents like sexual harassment at work place, eve teasing, abduction and female foeticide has affected the status of women so tremendously. Majority of women live a life of dependency that does not possess any self-identity. ‘Matri Devo Bhavo’ (Mother of Goddess) is an old sentiment shared by the Indians. From time immemorial, women have been considered as goddesses like Durga, Parvati, Kali, Shakti, Vaishnomata, Bhairavi so on and so forth. Indians put them on the pedestal and offer prayers and sacrifices. In contrast, more ‘goddesses’ are seen begging in streets , public places and being killed in womb, burnt alive for dowry, harassed in workplaces and streets, raped, abducted and now seen begging for her survival on streets, public places due to poverty, isolation, non cooperation of family, separation and harassment by husband. On one hand, they worship this mother and on the other hand, they disregard their sisters, mothers and wives. It has been revealed from some research studies that some women are also indulged in begging activities. The research disclosed that many factor such as non –cooperation of family, deserted by

families, early pregnancies at young age, poverty and negligence of society are responsible for their indulgence in begging activities.

In its very essence, begging connotes the desire to get something from others. According to Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA), the concept of begging can have various meanings based on the type of people engaged in the activity and the purpose of begging. Some beg as a ritual, others may have religious reasons, while the majorities drift to the activity because of economic and social reasons. A technical committee in MOLSA defined begging as “a method of earning one’s living from the income obtained by others using age, health and economic condition as a means for gaining sympathy”.

Begging is an activity emanated from poverty and destitution. It is practiced to obtain from others what one is unable to get by oneself to bring oneself out of misery and poverty. Begging did not exist in primitive societies, which were characterized by small groups of blood relatives living together and supporting each other. The existence of the support systems for the economically dependent limited the spread of the practice. Begging began with the emergence of private property. In traditional societies, where small group of people (especially relative) live together and come to help one another, it was very uncommon to see begging. (Khan, et al., 2014)

Though it is clear that the complexity of “social structure and support system” was responsible factor for begging, it is hardly possible to mention the exact starting time of begging and Experiences of beggars’ in some countries. The phenomenon of begging is a result of a number of factors, such as Poverty (real poor or fraudulent poor), religion, physical disability, culture, national disaster, civil war, bad habits (drug, alcohol, and gambling dependencies), family heritage, unrestrained rural to urban migration, and psychiatric disabilities and disorders, etc. In the dearth of any means of livelihood, a large number of people were driven to begging, some temporarily and some permanently (khan et al., 2013). This study has tried to explore women beggars’ experiences of begging as way of life by examining psychological, social, biological and economic aspects of the person and their Interaction with the surrounding environment.

### **Scenario of begging in India**

The enormity of problem of beggary is very much affecting in developing countries and particularly in India. There is no appropriate record of beggar available in the country. As far as India is concerned 25 percent population is below poverty line. i.e. 28 crore populace in India suffer from this conical trouble. As per census of India, there were 750307 beggars and vagrants in India. The 1931 census mentioned just 16 percent women beggars. The figure shot up in to 49 percent in 2001. There are 10 million street children many among them are who beg for living. Delhi School of social work survey depicts that in a decade since 1991 their number has gone up by a lakh. There are some 60,000 beggars in Delhi, over 3,00,000 in Mumbai according to a 2004 action aid report; nearly 75000 in Kolkata says the beggar Research Institute; 56000 in Bangalore according to police records. In Hyderabad one in every 354 people is engaged in begging according to Council of human welfare in 2005. Begging has become the foundation for a quite

large segment of populace. Furthermore it is seen that problem of child beggars is also increasing and it is estimated that there are 300,000 child beggars in India, although some organizations claim them to be one million. Every year, 44000 children fall into the clutches of gangs (Mishra, 2013).

### **Scenario of begging in Punjab**

The scenario is no more different in Punjab. As per the various reports Punjab has become a safe heaven for begging which has spread its roots to almost all the cities of Punjab and even the state capital Chandigarh, an Union Territory where kidnapped children are pushed into begging. It has been detected by Police department that begging mafia are working in an organized manner in major cities like Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Bathinda and Patiala. No doubt, that there are numbers of beggars in Punjab who are occupied in begging activities, but the number of child begging is at an alarming stage. As per the survey conducted by students of Punjab University, Chandigarh in the guidance of Chandigarh Commission for the protection of Child Rights, it has been revealed that 40 percent of children between 6 and 12 years begging in Chandigarh belonged to different cities of Punjab such as Ludhiana, Kapoorthala, and Amritsar. The others belonged to Bihar, Rajasthan and even Chandigarh. It has been disclosed that most of child beggars were drug addicts and use to purchase drugs with earning ranging between 200 to 300 per day. It has been found that police was not taking any strict action against mafias and issue has been raised with the help of high authorities by NGO to help these children and eliminate scandal of begging but their efforts did not prove useful as the accused was bailed out same day. (Punjab News Express, 2015).

### **Research Methodology**

To obtain the clear understanding of the plight of the women beggar in the Patiala district of Punjab the current topic was selected. Purposive sampling method was used to collect the data. The sample of the study was eight women beggars from different places of Patiala.

Based on the comparability of the female beggars, the interview timing was scheduled with them, as the researcher has to make sure that their begging activity is not disturbed by the interview. Even though, the female respondents were easy available at Gurdawars, temples, busy markets, and other public places, but due to their reluctance and other personal issues they don't want to be interviewed. , so, is the reason only eight case studies were included in the current study.

The broader objectives of this study were to examining the perspectives of women beggars, to explore the causes of women begging and to offer useful suggestions in the light of finding. Based on the interview with the selected female beggars detailed case studies were formed. Apart from the interview the researcher used the observation method of data collection.

### **Case Studies of Women Beggars of Patiala District:**

A female named Pritabha 38 year's old women beggar revealed in interview when asked by researcher about how she came into begging. Pritabha told that she was six years old when her father died .Her mother solemnized second marriage and her step father left her in an orphanage. At the age of eighteen years old she got married with a person who used to sell paan at the corner of street. Soon after her marriage she

realised that her life has become hell as his husband was an alcoholic and used to beat him every day. She said that she became mother within one year and by next two year she had two children. His husband was not able to fulfil even the basic needs of his family. Pritabha realised that she herself has to earn for her children as his husband give up doing any work and compelled his wife to earn and bring money by any mean. She was not too educated to work in any office or factory. She was illiterate and started begging in order to get roti for his family. She said that she beg everyday with her children at different places and sometime she travel to nearest city to earn more money. She said that she get 120-150 rupee per day and sometime people offer her food, clothes and other things like blankets, medicine and biscuits for her children. She said that she feels ashamed on her begging activities but she is helpless and she had no choice except begging. She also said that she would give up begging if she get some work. Moreover she mentioned that she faces many problems like negative commenting, abusive languages, and harassment during begging. She feels bad and pathetic on her begging activities but she is extremely helpless. She suggested that some employment schemes for beggars need to be enacted when asked by researcher how the life of beggars can be better.

Banoo 52 year's old beggar was handicapped from one leg revealed that she is begging since thirty five years. She said she belonged to village Giddhar of Bathinda and now living in Patiala since two month. She said that at the age of sixteen she met with an accident and her leg was broken .Soon after her accident her parents also got expired. Her father was expired due to tuberculosis. They don't have sufficient money for his father's treatment and lack of awareness about sickness was another major cause for her father's death. Her mother also died due to kidney failure after one year of her husband's death. But here the miseries of her life did not end. She explained that her sister-in-law and brother also started harassing her. Her Bhabhi was not in favour of keeping her at home. One day she was expelled and became homeless. She was only 18 years old at that time. Some generous men of that village offered her shelter and offered her two time's food. In this way she was surviving herself. But within two month she realised that people started neglecting her and did not offer her any food. One night the owner of that place came to her room and tried to molest her. She was asked to leave the place immediately when she resisted. Initially she moved to Bathinda and started living near gurdwara. Soon she got familiar with other beggars who used to sleep there. She also started begging with them and became a member of their group. But soon she realised that people of that group were cunning and used to take a big amount of her earning. So she left that place and shifted to Barnala. She started moving from one city to another city. She also said that she is living in Patiala last two-three month and earning 100-120 per day. She said that she also used to present in Bhandara and huge gathering where a number of people are supposed to come and expected to give her good alms. She said that she earn good money due to her disability. People took pity on her and offer her food, medicines, biscuits, clothes and money. She said that she does not feel ashamed on her begging activities as it is the only way for her living. She said that attitude of people toward her was sympathetic and genuine. She also said that she is alone in this world and has accepted her condition. She said that she would not give up begging if get

another option of earning livelihood. She blamed government when asked her that what she expects from government really need to do for making the quality of life beggars better.

Agrima 43 years old migrated from Uttar Pradesh shifted to Patiala along with his husband and children. She said that she moved from Patna due to poverty and lack of employment. She said that she begs on fix places and her husband work in a factory. She also said that she has three children among them two are married and one is going to be married soon. She said that she beg in order to help his husband as his alone income is not sufficient for fulfilling the entire family; s needs. She said that she also does part time labour and she begs only two or three days in a month. She said that she earns 100- 200 per week as she does not beg daily and sometime people do not pay any attention to her and left the place without giving any alms. She used to spend 3 to 4 hours in begging and she used to spend her leisure time by talking to co- beggars and sleeping. She said that she was fond of listening music on Television at home. She mentioned that she celebrated all festivals with his family .She does not feel ashamed on begging activities as she was of the opinion that it was the easiest and simple way for earning. The problems faced by her during begging were ignorance and negligence. She said that she uses many tactics like singing, merciful gestures and pleading appeals and uses various slogans e.g. you may live long, get good health, wealth to attract the attention of public. The passersby some time offer her cash in response to her pleading appeals and slogans. She said that she prefer to beg alone as she does not has to share her earning with anyone. She said that no one compels her for begging and she is indulged in begging by her own. She did not have any awareness of any of government schemes and laws relating to begging.

The beggars named vidya 65 years old told that she is living in Patiala since her birth. She said that her parents also used to beg so she is also begging since her childhood. She said that her children are also beggars and begging is their ancestral profession. She said that his husband is on bed since two years so she is the only earning member in her family. Her children got separated after their marriage and did not come to see their parents. She said that begging is the only means of their livelihood. She said that she beg on fix places and do not roam here and there due to old age and sickness. She said that she is suffering from respiratory infection and skin disease. Initially she was taking treatment from civil hospital but she said then she started taking medicine from chemist as she observed that she is being neglected by doctors and her complaints are not being treated. As a result she left the treatment and started taking medicine as and when needed. She said she spent more than nine hours in begging. She was living in rented accommodation near railway station and some generous people use to come and offer them two times food every day. She said she does not cook food at home and use to sometime eat food from Gurdwara and Langar. She said that she begs at railway station for two reasons; first it was near to her residential place, secondly a number of known and unknown people supposed to come here during day and nights. She said that she does not feel ashamed on her begging activities and do not bother about public opinion. She said that most of time the railway officers do not allow them to beg here and she has to face the negative commenting and humiliation

from railway employee. She said that she earns 120-140 rupees per day and she spent her money on medicines, in paying home rent and purchasing some eatables. She said that she save money sometime for old age and sickness. She was not having any information of laws in relation to begging.

Ashita, 17 year old girl was found begging in torn clothes near Railway Station.. It took a long time to convince her for interview. She told that she had migrated from Faridkot and not a native of Patiala. She explained in detail when she was asked the reason of her migration from Faridkot to Patiala. She said that her parents and five siblings used to live in Faridkot. Her mother left them due to alcoholic nature of his father and married to other man. His father started beating her after the leaving of his mother. Her brothers also started abusing her. His father rarely used to go on work and forced her for work. One day she left the home and went to Bathinda where his uncle used to live. But his uncle refused to offer her shelter. She was familiar with the place so she started sleeping near local gurdawara of Bathinda. But one day child help line took her to their organisation and sent her back to Faridkot. She once again was in crisis. This time his father harassed her more than previous time and one night she was raped by her father. Her brother also started molesting her. At that time she was merely fourteen years old. She decided to leave the place. One day when his father was out of his house she somehow gets able to reach Patiala. She said now she lives her life by her own wish and she does not have to bear the pain anymore. She disclosed that she feels ashamed on her begging activities but she was helpless. She said it is humiliated to beg but she has no other way for survival. She said that the earning from begging is not fixed. Sometime she is not able to eat two time's bread from collected alms. She disclosed that sometime people offer her food and some time she quench her hunger by eating leftover food outside hotels, restaurants or eating places. She did not respond when she was asked whether she would give up begging if offer another option for livelihood.

Ashu, 32 year old women belonged to Jalandhar was begging near railway station along with her mother. Her mother revealed that she was begging since her husband left her and started living with another women. Ashu did not respond anything in interview when she was asked the reason that how she resorted to begging. Her mother said that her husband used to sell vegetables in sabzi mandi and sometime she also used to accompany with her and help her in selling vegetables. But some other man from sabzi mandi started teasing her and alleged her that she is in relationship with him. His husband was alcoholic and of dubious nature, did not believe her and started abusing her. She was beaten many times and forced to leave her. His husband used to go brothels and brought other women in house. She has no option except leaving so she came to her mother's home. Her mother used to work at other's home to earn her living but due to some health issues she has to discontinue working and started begging as it does not require hard work and labour. She revealed that they earn 120-140 rupees both and in festive occasions they earn more money and get extra things except cash such as clothes, biscuits, fruits and blankets. She said that the attitude of people is generous towards them but sometime they used to get harassed by the authorities of religious places and threatened to leave the places. She said that they do feel ashamed on begging activities but they had no other

option except begging as they had no other earning member available in their home and it is the only source of income for them. They were not aware about any law and legislations in relation to begging.

Raina, Muslim girl 32 years old beggar disclosed in given interview that she was begging for twenty five years. She said that she got married at the age of eighteen years. Her husband is a rag picker. She said that she lives in rented accommodation with his family. She is from Kalyan, a village near Patiala and used to beg in Patiala. She said that she travel fifteen to twenty kilometre everyday for begging. She begs on non fixed places with other beggars who also used to come from Kalyan. She said that she and other beggars used to travel together but they do not beg together. They used to beg two or three beggar together and they have fix places of begging. They have their fix donors on that places and at the evening they returned to their home together. She said that her earning is not fixed. She also revealed that poverty and presence of more children in the family was the major cause behind her begging. She said that she has never faced abusive or negative commenting during begging. She said that she does not use any tactics for seeking the sympathy or attention of general public. She said that she does not feel ashamed on her begging activities and she was of the view that begging is an occupation for her in the same way like other occupation that people run for their survival. She said that she spent her money on food, clothes and in paying rent of their accommodation. She said that she has mobile phone and get her phone recharge from collected alms. She said that she does not have any information regarding law in relation to begging.

### **Causes of begging**

From the case studies, it is found that following causes were responsible for their association in begging:

**Poverty:** it is seen that most women beg because they and their families are very poor and some have lost their parents due to death or desertion. Some women have been deserted by their husband and are not supported financially. The money that these women take home by begging makes a difference to their lives and help them to support the basic needs of their family. They probably do not have any substitution and hence they resort to begging.

**Marital discord/ domestic violence:** Women reported that they are compelled by their husband to bring money at home. It does not matter to their families that how they are earning money. It was found that when they do not give money to their husband, they are abused and beaten. They often get tortured and raped by their husband if they are not supposed to earn.

**Humanism:** People feel bad and pathetic when they see women in distress and need and hence they give alms in the form of cash and other needful things to such women. However this encourages women to take up begging as profession and as a result they stop doing any manual work and all avenues to a respectable life close before them. They also lose their self respect and it is seen as well that they lose all inhibition towards begging.

**Family pressure:** The women who used to beg belong to poor families and their family encourages and compels them to beg. Most women in the study said that their families / husband forces them to bring money at home as they do not even pay attention to their basic needs such as food, clothes and shelter .In order to fulfil their basic needs they have to resort to begging. In case if they returned to home empty handed they get abused and beaten.

**Physical disabilities:** The physical disabilities like blindness, deafness, dumbness compels women to beg as it was seen that families are not supposed to take care of their need and sometime the economic conditions of their family is not as such as to afford the maintenance of these disabled persons. Women who were suffering with chronic and incurable diseases when not look after by family member, they had no option except resorted to begging.

**Religious sanction:** In India Seeking and giving alms has the approval of all the religions and people regarded it as an opportunity to do punya. In this study the women were using the religion slogans like god would fulfil all your dreams, god bless you if you help and asked people to give alms in their names. They also ask for alms on some specific days at some specific places for example on Tuesdays and Saturdays they use to beg around the temples of Lord Hanuman and Sai Baba. On Monday they seek alms near Shiva temples.

**Failure of governance:** It seems these women are visible to everyone except government. There seems to be no initiative from the side of government to help these women lead dignified and respectable lives. Easy option: For some women begging is an easy option. These women do not want to indulge themselves in manual work and hard labour and want to make money by sitting freely.

### **Recommendations**

The following suggestions may be put forward to improve the conditions of women beggar population in the study area:

- Proper education is to be provided to women and corrective actions need to taken by government regarding them.
- There is need to spread the knowledge regarding rights of women among villages as well as in urban areas.
- Self-employment must be encouraged among women and women beggars.
- The attitude of Society should be helpful towards the weaker section women and women beggars.
- Special training programs can be started by the government.
- Welfare policies for women beggars and their families such as monetary help, health and residence etc.
- Shelter homes for women beggars without close relatives.
- Elimination of beggar mafia.



- Punishment for kidnapping and trafficking of women
- To provide accommodation and medical facilities to the beggars at cheaper rate.
- To provide financial assistance and social security to women beggars.
- To improve the literacy level of women beggars and to make them aware about the various government poverty alleviation programmes.
- To provide assets to make enable them for earning the means of their livelihood.
- To bring change in the negative attitude of general population towards the women beggars.
- Last, but not the least, it is obligatory that women beggars receive respect from every citizen of India because they are also the part and parcel of the society, help them with responsibility not with sympathy, and tried to employ them in prolific works according to their potentialities and skill rather than give kind and cash to get rid of them.

### Conclusion:

The finding of the present study indicates that women beggars were the victims of isolation, separation, negligence and mal treatment by their family member. All female beggars belonged the poor strata of society and hardly able to earn their two end's bread. It was revealed that the majority of beggars were involved in begging activities by factors like poverty, maltreatment and isolated by family members, exploitation by husband and sickness. The majority of women beggars disclosed that they were ashamed on their begging activities but they had no other alternative except begging.. They were in the favour of giving up begging if they provide some other work. The biggest problems faced by beggars were poverty, negative and abusive commenting, staring and exploitation. Some of them reported that they most of time get exploited by their male co-beggars who use to sit around them and knows them very well. They also reported that sometime they get molested and raped by rickshaw puller of the same place where they used to sleep. In case of being married, they get beaten, abused and tortured by their husband as well. They were not having any information the laws related to begging.

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