

Beggary a stigma

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As the Ramazan starts we see countless beggars pestering people everywhere in society, knocking doors, ringing bells and making noise in different ways for alms are the practices of beggars. Public places, parks, railway stations, trains, wagons, hospitals, bus-stands, mosques, shrines are the places where we come across beggars.

Begging is not a new phenomenon. It can be traced back to ages. During the Medieval period in the West and the East beggars were respected and called holy men as they had no property and belongings and worldly ambitions. Answering to their call by alms-givers was thought the holiest practice in society. And they would serve the beggars with the hope that their prayers must be answered by God in their favour. In India satisfying beggars was a centuries-old tradition. Rich and noble traders arranged free food for beggars on various occasions. Indian emperors were known to help beggars. It is said about the Mughal emperor Akbar that he was enough kind to beggars. When a beggar approached to his court, he was granted relief. When changes took place in Europe in 17th century, the attitude of people also underwent changes towards beggars. Strict laws were implemented against begging. Beggars were shaven or expelled from cities. They were termed a stigma of society. In the industrial age, there was concept that able-bodied person should not



be granted any favour rather he should be confined to work-house to compel him to do work.

Uneven distribution in society and ever widening gap between haves and have-nots germinate begging. When people are deprived of opportunities of earning by the wrong policies of rulers and when the rich are unwilling to circulate their money in society, ultimately the deprived people are left nothing except restoring to mendicancy.

Beggary denotes a state of extreme poverty and destitute.

Penniless, homeless and destitute persons fall into the category of beggars. This definition of begging must be a yardstick to gauge the condition of a begging person whether he is a professional bum or real one. It will be safe to say, 99 per cent beggars are professionals in our society and they adopt mendicancy by choice not by force of circumstances. They beg not because of being penniless but because of being lazy, sluggish and shrinking from doing work. Giving alms and charity is the part of every religion. Beggars

...a on society



Illustration by Khalid Hussain

know this well. They invoke religion to get charity from people. Where a religion emphasizes giving alms and charity, at the same capacity it asks the philanthropist to choose deserving persons for their alms. Islam has underscored some principles to deal with beggars. There are many examples in Islamic history to follow how to deal with beggary. Once a man came to the prophet of Islam and asked for some money to fulfill his needs. The prophet asked him whatever he possessed to sell it and purchased

an axe to cut woods and sell these in a bazar for earning. The man acted upon the prophet's advice. After a few days he again came to the prophet and told him about his prosperity that he enjoyed after following the instructions of the prophet of Islam. The way of prophet to deal with the person is a golden example for those who really want to eliminate poverty from society. One must keep in one's mind that charity and alms can not eliminate poverty in a society unless these are given to deserving persons

with the purpose of enabling them to stand their own feet economically and with some instructions to them that they will not beg next time.

Enabling a begging person to earn by his own is the real sympathy towards him or her. If a beggar is not willing to work or earn by his own, he does not deserve to be shown any favour. Merely giving alms to beggars is not enough to reduce poverty and end their suffering. This practice makes begging person more sluggish, lazy and criminal. This act must be condemned by all means. Such alms-givers must be discouraged socially and professional beggars too by enforcing strict laws against them.

Beggary is a worldwide phenomenon. There is hardly a country without a beggar. Beggars have a same aim, but their methods of begging are different. Though beggars exist every where in the world, yet their ratio varies from country to country. In the Third World countries beggary is in a large scale and growing day-by-day. The mushroom growth of begging in the Third World countries was due to the reason that these states do not satisfy basic needs of their masses. Unemployment, hunger, corruption fighting, population explosion etc breed poverty and the mendicancy is the worst of it. Unfortunately most of the countries of the Third World are confronted with these problems. Beggary is not only a social evil but also causes crimes in society. Drug trafficking, dacoity, and other heinous crimes were committed under the cover of begging. Using of drugs, pickpocketing, gambling, pilferaging, sexual harassment and other crimes are so often found in child beggars. Government attention is needed to make laws to curb professional beggars and nab gangs working behind them.