A Study of Mystery and Misconceptions about Children having Microcephaly

CHUA’S OF SHAH DOULA PEER

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ABSTRACT

The present research is an attempt to study the mystery and misconceptions about ‘chua’s of shah daula peer”. The article reviewed previous literature reported doubt and suspicions regarding artificial deformation of children’s heads to produce Microcephalus children, and also those that rejected artificially produced microcephalus children. Still, many others reported begging as well. But none of them provided any evidence to support artificial microcephaly. The present research revealed that misconceptions prevailing in the society are the root cause of the miserable condition of microcephalic children. People think of these children as source of prayers who can fulfill their wishes or can punish them (baddoa). So, by giving them money either in sympathy, for prayers or to evade baddoa, they unfortunately make them beggars. In other words, the money they give these children to buy fortune for themselves brings bad luck for these children because it puts them in a risk and increases the chances to be manipulated and exploited by beggars. They are poor as being micro-cephalic but they cannot fulfill any one’s wish or cannot give them punishment (bud doa). Instead, due to these misconceptions their own life becomes miserable. The more you give them money, the more pathetic and miserable you are going to make their life and strengthening and promoting child abuse. Baggers mafia may use them for money making and will not hesitate to violate any human rights for making money. There is a misconception that Darbar intezamiya used these children for begging but they negated it strictly. After investigating the issue carefully, the study offers some recommendations to be followed.

Keywords: Microcephalic children, Beggars mafia, Child rights, disabled rights

Introduction

Microcephaly is a condition in which a baby’s head is much smaller than expected. Microcephaly can occur because a baby’s brain has not developed completely or has stopped growing after birth, which results in a smaller head size. Microcephaly can be an isolated condition, which means that it can occur with no other major birth defects, or it can occur in combination with other major birth defects. People with this feature do not actually look like rats or other creatures, but something in the association of forehead and eyes probably suggests this undignified name. Such a name then reinforces their decline to 'animal status', with loss of human dignity, respect and rights. These microcephalic children are called as “Rats” in our society. They are mostly found on religious places such as “Darbar (Shrine) of Saints”.

In Pakistan, Gujrat city has a famous Darbar of a Holy Saint named as “PEERSHAI DOULA’s Darbar“. He settled at Gujrat, and credited various buildings, charitable work, teaching and counseling. Shah Daulah is said to have cared for wild creatures. Sometimes women seeking a treat for infertility would come to Gujrat, hoping that the holy man would pray for them. After such prayers, some of these women were believed to produce chuas. In one side of the myth, the first child born after the holy man's prayer was a chua. Later, more chuas were conceived, because other women saw one of the chuhas who was already there. Another idea held that Shah Daulah's prayers led to the first child being a chua, and by custom these were left at the shrine after they were weaned.

However, some exploitation of people with microcephaly did happen and the government took control of the shrine in 1969. Begging continues within the religious tradition of the itinerant 'faqir' (beggers) and some microcephalic adults earn their living independently in this role. The 'deformation myth' continues to be a staged focus. There are many stories about Shah Doula’s rats. Some are proven as right while some are still mysterious.

Children having Microcephaly, that make them to be called 'rats' or 'mice', lived at Shah Daulah's shrine in the city of Gujrat, Punjab, for two hundred or more years with little concentration paid on them. In 2009, only one or two chuas were found there. These children are no longer received by their families. There are many different views about Darbar rats.
It has been published that their head were donned with iron helmets when they were infants to make sure that their head wouldn’t grow naturally and they wouldn’t have a normal life. It was claimed that Shah Doula Peer can punish the rebellious parents with small head children. He used to put an iron cap on children and bring them to his shrine to help him by begging and getting money for him, those ill-fated children were called as “Rats of Shah Dola” or in Urdu, “Dola Shah ke Chouhay”. From there this terrible ritual actually started. Native people started to deem that Shah Dola has the power of making unable women fertile, it was also famous that those women who were blessed with children after praying at the shrine will donate their first born baby to shrine to be a “Rat of Shah Dola” or the rest of their children will bear disabled.

So as that’s why many women came to Darbar every month and hundreds of newly born babies were left at the shrine to become a Rat of Shah Dola’s Shrine. There perhaps be above 10,000 Rats of Shah Dolas in Pakistan. This is a very sad example of human rights abuse that is in the name of religion, people using name of religion for their personal interests.

**Literature Review**

Ali, S. (1847, p. 63) visited Gujrat and reported about Daula shah and Micro cephalic children as: “here is the Tomb of Daula shah, a saint who is highly respected in Punjab. It is superstitiously visited by barren women, who, if they afterwards bear children, bring their first-born to the shrine of saint, who are called chuas. I saw some of them thus presented” (Cited by Miles, M 2010). Cust, R. (1879) and Eastwick, E. B. (1883) reported the resemblance of chuas’ heads with ‘Azteks’. Center, William (1886) described three microcephalic children at Punjab Lunatic asylum and reported their resemblance to those seen in Europe asylum. A number of investigations rejected artificial deformation of children’s heads to produce Microcephalus children, while considerable several others reported the artificially produced microcephalus children. Still, many others reported begging as well.

**Studies Reported Artificial Microcephaly**

Rivett-Carnac, H. (1879, p177) observed small headed child begging with a faqir and reported it with the legend that heads were purposelessly deshaped during infancy using clay covering. Punjab Gazetteer (Gujrat District, 1904) such children are occasionally born shsh daula’s priests
acquire them for begging. Some of them result from parents compressing their heads in infancy, to fit them for the shrine. Rose, H.A., Elliott, A.C. (1909) stated that to increase the supply of naturally occurring chuas, some were artificially produced for financial reasons. Dames, J.M. Longworth (1915) chuas were produced by mothers by deforming their heads to dedicate their children to the saint. H.S. Williamson (1921) casts doubt and suspicions regarding chuas. Sharif, M. (1960) stated that “sometimes the development of the brain is willfully arrested by making the child wear a rigid metallic cap”. Khokhar, Zaman (1991) mentioned his observation as: “still now a day chuas can be seen begging, wearing green gowns and children are made disabled and used for begging”.

Studies Rejected Artificial Microcephaly

Gray, Robert (1884) recorded the head appearance and behavior of a micro cephalic female in the Lunatic asylum in Punjab, not similar to Gujrat chuas and reported that no there was no evidence of forcible head deshaping. Many other reports (Gazetteer of the Gujrat District (1883) 'Shah Dowla's Mice (1984) found no evidence of forcible moulding or compression of chuas’ heads and instead stated that such deformed children are occasionally born from which the superstition arises however, some parents might be compressing children head to fit them for the shrine. Latif, Mahomed (1896) also negated artificial moulding or iron skull caps: “they were neither supernatural, nor artificial but merely extraordinary creatures born with small heads”. Ewens, George Francis William (1903) reported detail examination of 15 chuas mental health by specialist but found no evidence of any artificial deformation but recommended ‘itinerant begging’ should be stopped. Lodge Patch, C. (1928) investigated why iron-cap hypothesis was so much popular but argued against it and rejected it. Hussain, M.F. (1984) asserted that ‘chuas are still made by artificial deformation by using caps made of flat metal round the skulls, for begging to enrich the shrine custodians’.

Studies Reported Begging

KHAN, Khan Ahmad Hasan (1933) stated “chuas are kindly treated but they are taken about as beggars”. Khan also refered to Macmunn, Sir George (1933) report about ‘Mudavandi- lame beggars’ who claim all lame children as their right. Mudavandi and Chua of Gujrat were somehow a parallel case, because there were similar situation with chuas of Gujrat. Disabled
children had been collected from their family and have been adopted for begging purpose. Ghosh, A. (1974) reported that chuas are still trained to beg by the fakirs controlling the shrine of dula shah. Frembgen, J. W. (2006) while discusses ‘unusual and eccentric individuals embodying different forms of divine madness’ suggests that “they are feared for their curses (baduua) which are attributes of their authority”

The issue under investigation is a puzzling predicament no doubt; very limited recent research is available in this context. The present research is an effort to investigate the matter in current situation and bring update information.

Miles, M (2010) stated that the gathering of microcephalic chuas at the shrine of Shah Daulah possibly begun in a charitable spirit. It weakened overtime to become a form of misuse. Some of the older chuas grew up to live semi-independent lives. They earn income by their self-efforts, and they were held in some respect and fear, by the rural population. Some probably had enough considerate of their situation. The “Auqaf Department” of Pakistan was very likely right to intervene in 1969 on welfare grounds, and as part of the country's upgrading of attitudes for disabled people. Yet no proof has ever been presented to support charges of cephalic bend.

Method

Multiple Personal visits were made to observe these Microcephalic children. Interviews were conducted from caretakers and visitors. Data was collected by using semi structured interviews, questionnaires and personal observations. Mujavar of darbar, villagers/visitors of darbar and sajada nasheen of darbar were interviewed. The data was analyzed qualitatively. The questions were also asked from the people related to Darbar in any aspect.

Data Analysis

There were many different types of myths about the microcephalic children of Darbar. Some people said that the “Peer (Saint) of Darbar” used them for begging and also that they were the result of punishment which he gave to disobedient parents. While, others said that these children are result of those prayers of Peer Sahib which he did for those women which were not having children and as a result of his prayers ALLAH gave them child. The first child of these parents
was having small head and they were not even able to speak. There is also a concept that those women who got child in result of Shah Doula Peer’s prayer believed to devote their first child to Darbar as their first child produce is micro cephalic. In order to find out the facts and truth behind these myths, the researchers visited the shrine and conducted interviews. The responses of the Mujavar of Darbar, Sajjada Nasheen of “Shah Doula Peer Darbar and of different visitors were recorded, who used to come there from far of places to visit Darbar and to pray for their wishes.

1. Mujavar of Darbar

Mujavar of Darbar working there from last ten years said that the small head children who are named as chuas of Shah Doula were brought in Darbar by their parents. Parents came to Darbar for their “Mannat” to have child. When those parents get child, their first child is a chua (microcephalic kid). It is noted that these same parents leave them at Darbar. According to his account, these parents never come back to investigate what happened with their kid.

2. Mujavar of Darbar

Another Mujavar of Darbar named “Muhttar” informed that these chuas are no longer present at Darbar now. From last 8-9 years, all these chuas were sent back to their home. There is only one chua here who is being looked after by the Sajjada Nasheen of Darbar.

3. Mujavar of Darbar

A senior Mujavar of Darbar named as “Raffique” provided information on the begging myth about chuas of Darbar. Chuas of Darbar are never used for begging. He said that authorities of Darbar neither used chuas for begging nor even gave them to any one for this purpose. Those kids who used to do begging are used by the villagers. They are not chuas of Darbar but disabled persons who look like chuas.
Interview with a Visitor of Darbar

The first person inquired Darbar was a visitor named as Hassan. Hassan told, “I came here from Wahga border Lahore with family because I wanted to get prayed from the “Holy Man”. I believed that if he will pray from ALLAH for me than my Mannat will surely be fulfilled. As, he is more pious and near to ALLAH. I have lit up here a “Diya of Mannat”.

Interview with a Villager at Darbar

The second person interviewed at Darbar was a villager. He told that he felt sad when he used to see chuas begging. They used to do begging in different villages near to Gujrat. Everyone gave them money because people are afraid of chuas’ anger. Thinking, if they get angry than ALLAH will also be angry with them (the villagers). But from last five years, we have never seen any chua begging on roads.
Detailed Interview of Sajjada Nasheen of Darbar

Sajjada Nasheen of “Peer Shah Doula” Darbar shared history and present story of Chuas of Shah Doula. He told, “I am here from last more than 40 years. I and my family served a lot here. SHAH DOULA Darbar is the Darbar of a Holy man of ALLAH who named as “Syed Kabirudeen Shah Doula” famous as Diryai Peer. He came to Gujrat many years ago. He settled at Gujrat and began to work for the welfare of society. He did much charitable work for the benefit of human beings. He was a very pious man. People used to come to him and asked him to pray for them. Infertile women came to pray for having a child. They prayed that if they had a child, they would devote their first child to Darbar. When they would get a child; it would be a micro cephalic child. Then, by fulfilling their Mannat, they would leave their child at Darbar. Since then, there were found thousands of children at Darbar. Darbar intezamiya, "shrine administration" is taking great care of them. They were famous as named by CHUAS because of their small head but we do not called them chuas as they are kids for us. They live the life as human and also die at their time. They are treated by Darbar as normal person as when they died, we used to bury them in the qabristan (graveyard) of Darbar. They are not normal children as their food is different from normal person and they cannot speak a single word. Their head is small and they don’t seem to have ability to think. They have a small black spot in their head which make them different from other disabled persons. I also want to make clear that there is a concept that Darbar intezamiya used these children for begging. But it is totally a wrong perception because we never did it. We don’t have any need to do it as Allah is always there for managing food and our needs. Those kids who beg are not real chuas of Darbar but just look like them. They are disabled kids who are used by villagers for their own purposes. Villagers take these kids from their parents by giving them money and make them bareheaded. They put a green stoller at their head. Wear them a green gown and put different ornament like tasbeeh and taveez. But they are not the real chuas as they do not have a black spot on their head. Those kids who beg can speak little bit or speak some learnt words but the real kids (chua’s ) at darbar cannot speak a single word. There are misconception spread by villagers that Darbar Chuas beg. But from last 10 years, there are no more children here at Darbar, we have sent them back to their parents. It is known universally that only parents can take better care of their kids. There is
only one chua named as **Nadia** whom I have brought up. She is almost 70 years old now. This is all what I can tell you about Darbar and its association with micro-cephalic children”.

**Conclusion**

From the detail study of these micro cephalic children, it is cleared that they are different human beings. They cannot even talk. They are left at Darbar from different areas of Pakistan. There are many mishaps happened in respect to these children. The role of Darbar intezamiya is sad as they didn’t take much care of these kids as they should have taken. They didn’t pay good attention towards them. People used them for their interest and many mishaps happened with them. The role of parents is also very depressing. Parents who have children with small head and micro-cephalic by birth, just left their children at Darbar to make themselves free from their responsibilities. They never went back to see their children that are they alive or not. They didn’t care for their children’s betterment. The role of government is repulsive as they never paid any attention to them. Govt. never used money to provide them better facilities and never put any check and balance on Darbar intezamiya that whether they were taking good care of the kids or not. Government and Darbar Intezamiya should have checked who made the kids to beg. So that, these children who cannot speak would have been treated as normal human beings.

**Recommendations**

On the basis of all the above thorough investigation and discussion following recommendations are presented to protect microcephalic children and to evade chances of artificial microcephaly by beggars mafia.

1. Darbar intezamiya and relevant government authorities should take immense care of them. They should not hand them over to anyone who can misuse them. They should not urge them for begging rather should take enormous care of them. If possible, Govt. must take them in their own custody and Darbar intezamiya must not be allowed to keep them. Because it’s causing misconception in the society that Darbar is using them for begging. The begger’s mafia is getting benefit out of this situation. Anybody who makes them beg must be held responsible and punishable.
2. Parents should never leave their micro cephalic children at Darbar because it is uncertain that their kids will remain under protective custody. As parents, they should not run away from their responsibilities. These kids are gift of GOD and they should be cared a lot.

3. People should not think these children as a source of their prayers. They are poor as being micro-cephalic but they cannot fulfill any one’s wish or cannot give them punishment (bud doa). Instead due to these misconceptions their own life becomes miserable.

4. Government should play a major role in this entire context and should pay attention on these children. They should make such schools or protective shelter homes for these children where they can live freely without any fear. Government should take great care of them and also put check and balance on the handlers of these disabled children so no one can ever misuse them and violate their human rights.

5. As begging is a demoralizing aspect of our society. So people who make these children beg should be punished strictly. Government should take steps to eradicate this sickening act from roots of our society.

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