The Forgotten Humanity Behind Closed Doors - Research Article

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In the struggle for survival, countless people are compelled to risk their lives merely to earn enough to keep their families alive. On scorching afternoons in May and June, one finds men standing beside blazing tandoors, baking bread amid suffocating heat. Others toil beneath the relentless sun, repairing roads, lifting stones and carrying loads until their clothes are soaked with perspiration. Thousands more travel to distant Gulf countries, labouring as masons and construction workers, often at dizzying heights more than temperature of 50 C, far from their homes and loved ones.. Their only ambition is to secure a modest livelihood for their families. Such people endure hardship without complaint, for poverty leaves them with little choice.

Yet, among the many forms of human suffering, few are as disgraceful as the exploitation of those who have no voice, no influence, and no means of defending themselves. Across several parts of the country, families working at brick kilns remain trapped in generations of debt. Their labour is exploited, their freedom restricted and their dignity denied. They are treated not as human beings entitled to respect, but as possessions whose lives and labour belong to their employers. It is a tragedy that such practices continue in a society that frequently speaks of compassion, morality and religious responsibility.

The shame becomes even greater when cruelty is found not merely in remote rural settlements but behind the guarded gates and imposing walls of wealthy urban households. In villages, feudal landlords and tribal chieftains have long exercised authority over their workers in ways that resemble servitude. Such conduct is sometimes defended under the convenient expression of local custom or tradition. But no tradition can justify the humiliation of another human being. What is even more disturbing is that similar attitudes have found their way into the homes of the affluent and influential in our cities, where wealth and social standing are often mistaken for the right to command without restraint.

Among the most vulnerable victims are young domestic workers, particularly girls between the ages of eleven and seventeen. Many are brought from distant villages by their parents, who are themselves struggling against poverty. The promise of a small monthly payment, food and accommodation, together with an assurance that their eventual marriage expenses will be borne by the employer, appears to offer some relief to desperate families. Trusting these assurances, parents place their daughters in unfamiliar households, hoping that they will find security and a better future.

For these children, however, the promised opportunity can turn into a life of fear and humiliation. From the early hours of the morning until late at night, they are expected to remain at the constant service of their employers. They are deprived of the ordinary pleasures of childhood, the freedom to play, the opportunity to study and, sometimes, even the right to rest. A minor mistake, an accidental breakage or an inability to fulfil an unreasonable demand may provoke an outburst of anger and violence. In some horrifying cases, such brutality has resulted in the loss of innocent young lives.

Reports of these incidents have become increasingly disturbing. The details emerging from medical examinations and post-mortem reports often reveal a degree of cruelty that is difficult for

any civilised conscience to comprehend. Bruises, burns and other injuries tell stories that the victims themselves were never permitted to narrate. The silence of the dead becomes the most painful testimony against those who were entrusted with their care but instead subjected them to unimaginable suffering.

Equally troubling is the manner in which many such cases are handled. Families, already poor and powerless, are sometimes pressured into silence through threats, influence, or financial compensation. The death of a child is reduced to a matter of negotiation, as though a human life could be valued in monetary terms. Meanwhile, those who possess wealth, influence and connections often seek to escape accountability. Society watches, expresses temporary outrage, and then moves on until another innocent life is lost.

This is not merely a question of domestic employment; it is a question of humanity, justice and the moral character of our society. The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees dignity, protection against exploitation, and safeguards for children. Our laws must not remain confined to official documents and courtroom declarations. Their purpose is defeated when a child can be abused within a private residence simply because the household belongs to someone influential. The state must ensure effective inspections, prompt investigations, protection for vulnerable children, and exemplary punishment for those found guilty of such crimes. No private boundary should become a sanctuary for cruelty.

Parents, too, must be made aware that a child's future cannot be secured by surrendering her childhood to strangers. Poverty may compel difficult decisions, but it should strengthen our collective responsibility to provide families with education, social protection and dignified employment rather than leave children exposed to exploitation.

At this point, the words attributed to Hazrat Umar (May Allah be pleased with him) deserve particular reflection: "If even a single dog were to die of thirst on the banks of the Euphrates, I would be held accountable for it on the Day of Judgment." These words represent a remarkable understanding of responsibility, in which even the suffering of a voiceless creature is not beyond the concern of a ruler.

If such accountability was recognised for an animal, how can we remain indifferent to the suffering of innocent children entrusted to human care? The question is not only what their employers have done, but also what we, as a society, have allowed to happen through our silence.

A nation cannot claim to be civilised merely because its cities are adorned with magnificent houses, its roads are paved, and its markets are prosperous. Its true character is reflected in the treatment it extends to those who possess neither wealth nor power. The hands that bake our bread, construct our buildings and clean our homes deserve respect, not exploitation. Above all, a child deserves protection, affection and the opportunity to live.

The time has come to open not only the doors of these houses but also the doors of our conscience. For when the cries of the helpless fail to disturb a society, its greatest tragedy is no longer poverty, but the death of its humanity.