

Chapter II

METHODOLOGY, STUDY AREA AND THE POPULATION

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This study is exploratory in nature. It makes an attempt to understand the life of the street children living in Howrah railway station and its adjoining areas of West Bengal. Particularly the Howrah station and its surroundings, within the jurisdiction of ward No 19 of Howrah Municipal Corporation (HMC), is the place which had been selected for the purpose of present study. A large number of street children is always found in and around the Howrah station premises like Howrah bustand, Martin bridge slum, *Sabji* (Vegitable) Market, Ganga ghat area and Rail museum etc. On an average around 170 to 180 street children are found around this place of which 75 were selected as informants for in depth interview. They were selected randomly from different platforms of Howrah station and from its adjoining areas. They were interviewed with an interview schedule. The sample survey was conducted on the street children belonging to the age group between 6 to 15 years.

Method of Data Collection

At the outset a census schedule was administered to make a quick enumeration of the street children living in the study area with an aim to get an idea about their socio-economic background in general.

Secondly in the present study, an interview schedule, especially designed for the street children, was used for data collection. The sampled respondents were interviewed personally in view of following reasons.

1. Respondents were mostly illiterate. So they were needed to approach individually and to record their answers properly.

2. There was a need to explain the purpose of the study and the meaning of each question asked them to answer.
3. This method gave an opportunity to come in close to street children and to observe their behaviour in natural setting.
4. The face to face interview gave an opportunity to handle the situation in which the questions were asked and answered.
5. The respondents had not much time to answer all the questions at a time. They were often approached repeatedly and where this interview method found quite advantageous over other methods in getting data at individual level.

Interview Schedule for Street Children

Other than a census schedule used to enumerate the entire population of street children found in the Howrah station area there was a special schedule exclusively for the sampled children. The interview schedule used for the street children was divided into nine parts with different sets of questions. The total number of questions accommodated in the schedule was 58. The first part of the schedule was devoted to background and demographic information. The second part dealt with socio- economic conditions and resources related questions. In part three the questions relating to health and everyday life of street children were framed. Part four was devoted to questions relating to rehabilitation.

Pre-Testing

Pre testing of the interview schedule is the pre requisite for the data collection. Prior to the finalization of interview schedule 30 interviews were taken as test

cases from different places of Howrah station and its surroundings. They were 20 from Howrah station, four from Taxi stand, four from Bus stand and eight from Gangaghat. Accordingly some modifications were made wherever required in the interview schedule. In the response score of the pre-testing it had been observed that certain questions were either illegible to the respondents or not all that relevant. Thus few questions were reframed in the schedule. Finally a comprehensive interview schedule was prepared to elicit relevant data.

Observation

Observation was one of the principal techniques of this research. At the time of interview phase of data collection it was decided to conduct the survey by combining observation with interview method. A systematic controlled observation technique was followed to collect data. The standardized instruments like camera and voice recorders were used to record certain observations with more accuracy.

Focus Group Discussions

According to the classic definition (Morgan, 1988), the focus group discussion represents a qualitative method of social research which consists in recruiting one or more groups of six to twelve individuals selected from criteria of homogeneity, initiating open discussion on topics under consideration and then producing an immediate analysis by collating the viewpoints of the participants (Abro, Amir Ali, 2012: 94-95). In the present study, two group discussions were organized to discuss and to obtain comments and views of the participants on certain specific topics. The first group discussion was held in Howrah station in which representatives from porters were participated. There were altogether eight

participants: four were from 'Red Coolee' and four from non red category. The second group discussion was held in goods yard of Howrah station in which representatives from hawkers were participants. The total number of participants in this group discussion was eleven.

The group discussions were held based on a guide as included in the Annexure I. The aim of these group discussions was to identify and record the views of different stakeholders. The discussions were held on the following four major areas of consideration.

1. Demographic problems
2. Socio-Economic and resource problems
3. Nature of abuse faced
4. Problems relating to rehabilitation

Interview process

The location of the present study was Howrah station and its adjacent areas. Data collection continued for a period of five months from November 2012. It started from Howrah station, then Taxi stand, Ganga ghat, goods yard, Bus stand, Martin bridge, Tikiapara slum and *Sabji* market with some intermissions. Before actual data collection, various spots/ places were visited where the street children used to spend most of their time with the assistance of NGOs working for the welfare of the children in the area. Initially they were approached and informed about the purpose of the present research and interviewed.

Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was prepared to interview 25 government officers and 25 N.G.O representatives to get their opinion on the concerned problem and issues. This method was somewhat helpful to get some official views about the problems of the street children.

Analysis of data

In the present study the collected data were properly coded, edited and verified with the help of code design which was prepared exclusively for this purpose. Coded data were recorded/ transcribed on separate spread sheets. After data entry in computer they were analyzed by using SPSS.

THE STUDY AREA

The fieldwork of the present study was conducted in Howrah railway station and in adjoining areas. This is to mention that Howrah is one of the densely populated and highly industrialized district of West Bengal. It is located opposite to Kolkata (the state capital) and on the bank of river the Ganga. The larger population of Howrah city belongs to working class and is mostly engaged in different industries including jute mills. Many of the children of the urban poor work as 'table boy' in hotels, tea-stalls, shops etc.

There is greater concentration of street children in the Howrah railway station and in adjoining areas. So it was selected as the spot of intensive field study. Howrah railway station since 1854 is considered as the largest railway complex in India. Even today it provides shelter to large number of unauthorized people including beggars and children in its porches and platforms. Their omnipresence in and around the station complex is quite conspicuous and their activities draw

considerable attention to others. So the present study confined its observations mainly among those street children located in this spot.

Howrah: A Brief Historical Background

Many early sacred texts and old scriptures of Jainas and Buddhists mentioned Howrah as a famous Sen-Port of Eastern India. In the early historical records, Howrah was narrated as a low-lying fen land bounded by great waterways with fishing and boating tribes. The one third of the total population of the district was occupied by Kaibarttas, the great Bengali caste of fishermen and boatmen. During the period of HiuenTsiang i.e. first half of the seventh century A.D., this portion was under the jurisdiction of Tamralipti, which was mentioned as a separate Kingdom. Later it was extended up to old Damodar (Uluberia Subdivision) by King Anangabhimadeva and it was inscribed in the Palm-leaf chronicles of Jagannath Temple (Circa 1300 A.D.). Purah (the modern Boro, in which lies Howrah town), Bhosat (the modern Bhursut of Howrah), Dharsa were found in Stgaon region of Bengal in 1582. The places like Gusuri, Bator also mentioned in the Bengali Poem of Bipradasa in 1495 A.D. (O' Mally and Chakravarti, 1909:17).

The first mention of the district appeared in a writing of Venetian Cesare Federici who left an interesting account of Bator (a place of Howrah). Cesaro Federici visited the place around 1578 and described that the place as Bator (a place of Howrah), near the river the Ganga, was populated with a great number of people, with the infinite number of ships and bazaars (Howrah District Gazetters, 1909: 19-20). So Bator, the present days Howrah since long back was a place of trade in Bengal.

Howrah was identified as the most important commercial place by the colonial rulers. Mr. J.C. Marshman, C.S.I. mentioned in 1845 that the places like Ghosury and Bali in Howrah became busy centres for industrial life. In 1872, when the first census was taken, Howrah, which then had two subdivisions, Howrah and Mahishrekha, with a total area of 539 square miles, was treated as part of the Hooghly district. The Khanakul Thana was transferred from Mahishrekha to the Jahanabad (now Arambagh) subdivision of Hooghly after the census of 1881; and Singti with a number of villages extending over 34 square miles was added to Thana Amta after the census of 1891. At the time of census of 1901, the district had an area of 510 square miles; it was not only the smallest of all the districts in Bengal, but was smaller than many a subdivision. The population of the district, as now constituted, was 635,878 in 1872 and rose to 675,394 in 1881, to 763625 in 1891, to 850,514 in 1901 and to 4,850,029 in 2011.

Emergence of Howrah as an Industrial Town

The increase of the great industrial activity in the metropolis of Calcutta (now Kolkata), in Howrah city, and along the river bank up to Uluberia was seen during the colonial and post colonial period. The numerous mills and other industrial establishments attracted a large number of labourers from other parts of India, and the locals from within the state.

Howrah was selected for the terminus of the East Indian Railway and the construction of the bridge over the Hooghly gave an impetus to the industrial development of the rivarian tract. Iron foundries and engineering works were erected and they were followed by cotton mills, jute mills, jute process, flour mills, oil mills, sugar factories and distilleries etc.

A special enquiry regarding the adequacy of the supply of labour for mills, factories etc. was carried out by Mr. B.Foley, I.C.S., in 1905. The enquiry extended to other districts, but its results were especially applicable to Howrah. It was found that in spite of large increase in the number of looms and operatives and absence of any recruiting agency, the jute mills obtained sufficient labour except for three months during the hot weather. The shortage was mostly felt by those mills which were dependent on up-country labour only, men from Bihar and the United Provinces insisting on going away between March 15th to June 15th. So migration from other parts of India had taken place in Howrah especially for industrial purpose. So the vast majority of the factory operatives were immigrants. It is also seen that the labour force also came from Orissa, Bombay etc. Oriya people preferred to work in the cotton industries whereas Bombay workers preferred to work in the engineering industries. In Howrah, the mill authorities were already forming the nucleus of a permanent labour force by building community settlements near the mill premises and quarters for their operatives. Most of the mill hands in other factories in and round Howrah used to live in the bastis of the town.

The statistics showing the volume of immigration were quite remarkable. The number of persons (144,620) recorded as residents in the district in 1901 were born elsewhere. In other words, the proportion of immigrants to the total population was 17 per cent. Among these immigrants natives of Bihar and United Provinces bulk largely, accounting for a little over 70,000 or nearly half the total number, while Oriyas number over 8000 and natives of the adjoining districts 49,000(Howrah District Gazetteers, 1909:30). This influx of immigrants was due to growing demand for labour in the industrial establishments (Howrah District Gazetteers, 1909: 29-31).

Howrah and Kolkata are twin city in West Bengal. Howrah is the second smallest district after Kolkata. The total area of Howrah district is 1467 Sq. Km. Total population of the district as per the census 2011 was 1,072,161. The population density was 730 per sq.km' and the literacy rate of Howrah district excluding 0-6 age group was 83.85per cent (see Table 2.1). According to the census 2011, there were 1449 families who used to live on footpath or without any roof cover in Howrah. The total population who lived without roof at the time of census 2011 was enumerated as 5699. That was about 0.12 per cent of total population of the district.

Table 2.1
Census India 2001, 2011
Howrah 2011.

Description	2011	2001
Actual Population	4,850,029	4,273,099
Male	2,500,819	2,241,898
Female	2,349,210	2031,201
Population Growth	13.50%	14.57%
Area sq. KM	1,467	1,467
Density/sq. Km	3,306	2,913
Proportion to West Bengal Population	5.31%	5.33%
Sex Ratio (per 1000)	939	906
Child Sex Ration(0-6 Age)	962	956
Average Literacy	83.31	77.01
Male Literacy	86.95	83.22
Female Literacy	79.43	70.11
Total Child Population(0-6 Age)	522,802	513,218
Male Population(0-6 Age)	266,472	262,391

Description	2011	2001
Female Population (0-6 Age)	256,330	250,827
Literates	3,605,206	2,895,625
Male Literates	1,943,824	1,647,348
Female Literates	1,662,382	1,248,277
Child Proportion(0-6 Age)	10.78%	12.01%
Boys Proportion(0-6 Age)	10.66%	11.70%
Girls Proportion(0-6 Age)	10.91%	12.35%
Population (%)	36.62%	63.38%
Total Population	1,775,885	3,074,144
Male Population	909,519	1,591,300
Female Population	866,366	1,482,844
Sex Ratio	953	932
Child sex Ratio(0-6)	965	960
Child Population(0-6)	205,158	317,644
Male Child(0-6)	104,382	162,090
Female Child(0-6)	100,776	155,554
Child percentage(0-6)	11.55%	10.33%
Male Child percentage	11.48%	10.19%
Female Child Percentage	11.63%	10.49%
Literates	1,256,266	2,348,940
Male Literates	682,352	1,260,472
Female Literates	573,914	1,088,468
Average Literacy	79.98%	85.21%
Male Literacy	84.75%	88.19%
Female Literacy	74.96%	82.01%

Source: Census India 2001, 2011.

A General Profile of the Universe

This section provides a general profile of the universe under study. From an universe of 177 children a sample of 75 children was finally drawn. The findings presented here were derived from a preliminary census conducted among the entire population of street children found in the area in the very beginning of the study. The aim of this census was to get a preliminary idea about the background of the population under study and from which we picked up the sample.

Table 2.2 shows the distribution of 177 street children (the total population), by place of birth, age, marital status, education, occupation and monthly income.

The geographical location of Howrah station in the district is such that it is easily accessible to the street children by rail and road. The demographic profile of the street children in Howrah station area reveals that majority (20%) of them were from within the Howrah district itself. The distribution of street children from the neighbouring were; Bolepur (2%) of Birbhum district, Hooghly (2%) and Baidyabati (2%) of Hooghly district and Katowa (2%) of Bardhaman district. Those places are well connected with Howrah by train and not so far from it. Among the street children of distant places about three per cent were the native of Malda district and only two per cent were originally from Samastipur of Bihar.

It is interesting that among the street children of Howrah district, five per cent were originally from Tikiapara. Tikiapara is a place close to Howrah station and at a distance of 10 minutes walk. There are many slum dwellers particularly near Tikiapara railway station and Martin bridge. Children from these places use Howrah station area as their place of stay, work and earning. They have their family and keep in touch with their family members regularly. Three per cent

children were from Uluberia, a sub-divisional town in Howrah district. It takes half an hour to reach Uluberia from Howrah station by train. Uluberia is also a place of many slum dwellers. Some of them with their children regularly come to Howrah station area for earning and go back to their slums at the end of the day. A portion of them however prefer to stay on the station platforms bus stand, taxi stand and near the bridge and where they stay on the street.

Majority of street children (49%) was in the age group between 9 and 12 years, 57 per cent of them were illiterate and 33 per cent had an earning between Rs. 2000 and less than Rs 5000 per month. The street children were mostly rag pickers by occupation and had lower income. For another 23 per cent of children their monthly income was more than Rs 5000. They were engaged in multiple activities including petty crimes. The 21 per cent of the children who had an earning of less than Rs 1000 per month were mostly new comers and used to work under a group leader in the street.

By religion majority of street children (66%) were Hindus, 32 per cent were Muslims and one per cent was from Christian community. Among the street children 95 per cent were unable to specify their caste. In fact majority of them did not have any idea about their official caste status like schedule caste or schedule tribe etc. A few (5%) children knew about their own caste as they are drop outs from school. When they were in schools and continuing their studies, their caste identity was important in receiving support from the government. So they could specify their caste name. It has been observed in the station premises that a child who was telling his name as RajuSk to the people referring another name as Raju Das to some others. They did not have any clear idea about their religion also.

Table 2.2

Distribution of total population of homeless children by selected socio-economic indicators

1.Distribution of population by sex	N=177
Male	158 (89.27)
Female	19(10.73)
2.Distribution of population by age	
6 years to less than 9 years	33(18.65)
9 years to 12 years	86(48.58)
Above 12 years to 15 years	58(32.76)
3.Distribution of population by marital status	
Married	1(00.56)
Unmarried	176(99.44)
4.Distribution of population by education	
Literate	76(42.94)
Illiterate	101(57.06)
5.Distribof population by monthly income	
Less than Rs 1000	37(20.90)
Rs.1000 to less than Rs.2000	42(23.73)
Rs. 2000 to less than Rs.5000	58(32.77)
Rs. 5000 above	40(22.60)
6.Distribution of population by religion	
Hindu	117(66.11)
Muslim	57(32.20)

Christian	2(1.13)
No response	1(00.56)
7.Distribution of population by caste	
Schedule caste	8(4.52)
Schedule Tribe	1(00.56)
No Comments	168(94.92)
8.Distribution of population by origin *	
Place of Origin	
Baidyabati	4 (2.26)
Bolepur	5(2.28)
Hooghly	5(2.28)
Howrah Station	7(3.94)
Katowa	5(2.28)
Tikiapara	8(4.52)
Uluberia	5(2.28)
Not known	6 (3.39)
9. Distribution of population by native district**	
24 Prg(N)	13(7.34)
24 Prgs(S)	6(3.39)
Bardhaman	17(9.6)
Birbhum	9(5.08)
Hooghly	19(10.73)
Howrah	35(19.77)
Kolkata	11(6.21)

Malda	6(3.39)
PaschimMedinipur	9(5.08)
Samastipur	4(2.26)
Not known	6(3.39)

Figures in parenthesis are percentages

*,** In case of distribution of population by origin and their native district, it has been observed separately because in few cases under those categories number of informants are very less and they are below two per cent so those are not taken into consideration.

A PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Street children have always been there for a long time in Howrah. They are subjected to various types of migration. In general they mostly belong to the impoverished section of the society. It has been observed that 80per cent of the street children used Howrah station area as their place of stay. They identified Howrah station as the place of their better stay and income than the other places. The street children were found in different proportion in places like Bus stand (8%), Taxi stand(6%), Gangaghat(4%) etc. In the station premises they sleep at night and are found in all the platforms. The law and order of Howrah station is managed by Government Railway Police (GRP) and Railway Protection Force (R.P.F) whom they anyhow manage and stay over there.

The field data indicate that distance was a factor behind pulling the street children to Howrah station. Majority of the street children (71%) were from West

Bengal itself. Another 12 per cent were from Bihar and five per cent from Odisha. Most of the children have come to this place mainly from different districts of West Bengal adjacent to Howrah. Surprisingly there were a few children who have hailed from Uttarpradesh and Assam.

By their place of origin majority (19 %) of street children were from Howrah district alone. Another 11 per cent street children were from Hooghly district and North 24 Parganas district each. Among the respondents seven per cent were from Kolkata and five per cent were from South 24 Parganas. The proportion of children from other districts were Bardhaman (4%) and Birbhum (4%). Another four per cent street children were from Samastipur district of Bihar.

The representation of street children from the other districts was : Darjeeling (1%), Uttardinajpur(1%), PurbaMedinipur(3%), Nadia(1%), Bankura(1%), Malda (3%), Jalpaiguri (1%), West Medinipur(1%) of West Bengal; Patna(3%), Muzaffarpur (1%), Laxmisarai (Kiul) (1%) of Bihar; Sundargarh (4%), Kendujhar (1%) from Odisha; Kamrup (1%), Nawgaon (1%) from Assam; Allahabad (1%), Agra (1%) from Uttarpradesh, Delhi (1%) and Chennai(1%). So it appears that children mainly from the neighbouring districts came to Howrah station area and identified it as their place of stay and earning.

Hooghly is the neighbouring district of Howrah. Many small and medium sized industries are located there. Also there are many slums in the nearby areas of Hooghly. North 24 Parganas district is another industrial district close to Howrah. Both these districts have sizeable share to street children found in Howrah station

area. Majority (49%) of street children were found staying in city for more than two years. The duration of stay for another 23 per cent children was more than one but less than two years and another nine per cent were for last 6 months. Majority (55%) of the street children used to stay alone (without adult's presence). They may be missing, abandoned, lost children or ran away from their family or use street as their place of stay. On the other hand another 21 per cent were in the area with their parents and 11 per cent with their friends and peers. In Howrah station area, 65 per cent of street children were found to live in company with their friends and peer groups. Another 19 per cent stayed with their parents and who work in the station premises with their children. Among the respondents nine per cent live in the Howrah station with their employers. Only three per cent were found in the station premises living alone.

In Howrah station area, majority (97%) of the street children were Indian by birth. Only one per cent was identified illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. These Bangladeshi children were also staying in the station area along with the Indian children without any surveillance. They were mostly the victims of man made calamities like communal riots etc., high prices of consumable goods, and the unemployment in their country.

The field data indicate that the street children belonging to the age group between 9 and 12 years were more in number (59%) in the study area. In the age group of 6 to less than 9 years, there were about 23 per cent children and by proportion it was a significant size among the street children. Compared to them the children in the senior age group (above 12 to 15 yrs) were relatively less (19%). However they were the hard core street children.

Among the respondents street children, the males were more (92%) in number than the females (8%). Normally the families of such impoverished classes keep their girls engaged in family work or allowed to do work as maid servant or in other domestic help. In contrast their male children may join in any sort of activities convenient to them. That is why male street children were found numerically more in number in the station area. By marital status most of the street children (99%) were unmarried. Only a boy admitted that he married to a street girl because the girl got pregnant and started to stay on the street. By religion majority of the respondents (68%) were Hindus and (31%) were Muslims. Street children (83%) did not know in which caste they belong.

The children were staying on the street with different length of time. Among the respondents, about 85 per cent were found living on the street for last two years or so. For another seven percent it was about a year or so. Only eight per cent were there on the street for less than one (see table 2.3).

Table 2.3

General background of the respondents

1. Distribution of respondents by location of stay	N=75
Name of the place	
Howrah station	60(80.00)
Bus stand	6(8.00)
Taxi stand	4(5.33)
Ganga ghat	3(4.00)
Others	2 (2.67)

2.Distribution of respondents by age	
Range of age	
6 years to less than 9 years	17(22.67)
9 years to 12 years	44(58.67)
Above 12 years to 15 years	14(18.67)
3.Distribution of respondents by sex	
Male	69(92.00)
Female	6(8.00)
4.Distribution of respondents by material status	
Unmarried	74(98.67)
Married	1(1.33)
5.Distribution of respondents by religion	
Hindu	51(68.00)
Muslim	23(30.67)
Christian	1 (1.33)
6.Distribution of respondents by caste	
Schedule caste	10(13.33)
Backward class	2(2.67)
Schedule tribe	1(1.33)
Do not know caste	62(82.67)
7.Distribution of respondents by native state	
West Bengal	53(70.67)
Bihar	9(12.00)
Odisha	4(5.33)
Others	9 (12.33)

8.Distribution of respondents by country	
India	73(97.33)
Bangladesh	1(1.33)
Unknown	1(1.33)
9. Distribution of respondents by their district of origin *	
Howrah	14(18.67)
24 Prgs(N)	8(10.67)
Hooghly	8(10.67)
Kolkata	5(6.67)
24 Prgs(S)	4(5.33)
Bardhaman	3(4.00)
Birbhum	3(4.00)
Samastipur	3(4.00)
10.Distribution of respondents by duration of stay in city(months)	
Less than 6 months	7(9.33)
6 months – 12 months	14(18.67)
Above 12 months- 24 months	17(22.67)
Above 24 months	37(49.33)
11 Distribution of respondents by company of stay	
Alone	41(54.67)
Parents	16(21.33)
Friends	8(10.66)
Combined(own brother, employer, alone, friends)	8(10.66)

Relatives	2 (2.67)
13. Distribution of respondents by company of stay in Howrah station	
Parents	14(18.67)
Friends	49(65.33)
Alone	2(2.67)
Any other (employer, own brother, foster mother)	7(9.33)
Combined(parents, friends)	3(4.00)
14. Distribution of respondents by their duration of stay on the street	
Last 24 months	64(85.33)
About 12months	5(6.67)
Less than 12 months	6(8.00)

Figures in parenthesis are percentages

*In case of distribution of respondents by district of origin , it has been observed separately because in few cases under this category number of respondents are very less and they below two per cent so those are not taken into consideration.