

WOMEN TRAFFICKING IN INDIA: AN IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES, AND COUNTERMEASURES

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Abstract

Despite being the largest democratic republic in the world, India suffers from extreme poverty and a lack of quality education, which leads to a wide range of human rights abuses, particularly against women and girls. This study provides a brief overview of the issue of women trafficking in India. Even though both men and women are victims of human trafficking, mostly women fall prey to it. This paper attempts to analyse the core reasons behind trafficking in women and suggests certain combat strategies that can prevent this heinous crime, with special reference to India. Women are especially susceptible to trafficking because of the widespread gender inequality, the demand for women's sexual services, forced marriage, domestic abuse, etc. In conclusion, the government should take a gender sensitive approach to the issue, anti-trafficking laws and regulations should be gender sensitive, taking into account the specific needs of women. To garner public attention to the issue and educate individuals, especially the women about their rights and potential legal remedies, various public awareness campaigns should be initiated.

Keywords- *human trafficking, women, gender inequality, forced marriage, social menace.*

INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking is defined by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people by force, fraud or deception, with the intention of exploiting them for profit.” Human trafficking is the most heinous form of human rights violation. Both men and women of all ages are victims of human trafficking, however, mostly women fall prey to trafficking. Women and girls are more prone to experience specific types of abuses, such as domestic slavery, forced marriage, and sexual abuse, so women and girls suffer from human trafficking more severely than men and boys. Moreover, women victims are three times more likely than men to experience physical or extremely violent treatment at hands of traffickers (UN Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2022). The Constitution of India under Article 23(1) condemns traffic in human beings, beggar and other similar types of forced labour. The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1956 (ITPA) is the primary statute for preventing commercial sexual exploitation. Moreover, the Indian Penal Code's Sections 370 and 370A outline extensive provisions to combat human trafficking. But despite being forbidden by Indian law, human trafficking is nevertheless a serious issue in this nation, with women and girls suffering the most. India has a patriarchal social structure, and because of the gender disparities prevailing in the society, women are more susceptible to human trafficking.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i) To provide a brief overview of trafficking of women in India.

- ii) To investigate the root causes of women trafficking in India.
- iii) To suggest preventive measures regarding women trafficking in India.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a qualitative, analytical and descriptive research methodology in order to examine the dynamics of women trafficking in India. The sources used for this study are secondary sources such as books, journals, newspaper articles, government reports, e-sources, etc.

TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN IN INDIA

The United States Trafficking in Persons Report 2022, states that even though India has made substantial effort in recent years, India is still on the Tier 2 watch list of human trafficking because it falls short of the minimal requirements for the elimination of trafficking. According to the data of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2,189 human trafficking cases were reported in total during 2021, with 27.7% rise over the 1,714 cases reported in 2020. The highest number of cases have been registered in Telangana (347 cases), Maharashtra (320 cases), and Assam (203 cases). Apart from this, due to the highly covert nature of human trafficking, there are many other cases that continue to go unreported and untraced.

India is the country of source, transit, and destination for women trafficking. Its prevalence is influenced by the country's vast population, poverty, gender disparity, and social standards. Women are trafficked both internally within India and internationally to neighbouring countries and beyond. The major trafficking routes include West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and the Northeastern states. Recent news shows that a number of women are forcibly transported from India to various Middle Eastern nations under the guise of offering them decent jobs, but they are later on being subjected to captivity, hunger and fight for survival in those nations. The Punjab Police, who has been receiving a number of reports in this matter have formed a Special Investigation Team to tackle the problem (The Indian Express).

REASONS FOR WOMEN TRAFFICKING IN INDIA

Gender Disparity

Gender based disparities like limited access to education, gendered poverty, a lack of employment opportunities, a lack of control over economic resources increases women and girls' vulnerability to trafficking (Gender Dimensions 1). According to the 2011 census, the rate of literacy for male is 82.14% and for female it is 65.46%. Cultural standards and expectations, the way women are viewed in society, child marriage, etc. work as barriers to women education. Moreover, women and girls are more affected by poverty than their male counterparts. In India, 70% of the people living below the poverty line are women, which places them in a position of economic dependence on men (Chowdhury). Women are mostly engaged in unpaid domestic work. According to Oxfam India's India Discrimination Report 2022, there is a 98 percent employment gap between men and women. Women are also disproportionately subjected to sexual harassment at the workplace.

Trafficking occurs from low-income to high-income regions or nations where there is a need for low-wage, low-status labour. Women and girls who are economically underprivileged in their home countries or regions are frequently the targets of traffickers who take them to wealthier nations or areas to support the commercial sex industry.

Demand for Women's Sexual Services

Sex work or prostitution is not illegal under Indian law. But trafficking for sexual violence or abuse is a criminal offence. Human trafficking has always been associated with prostitution, and women are primarily trafficked for commercial sex purposes. According to the data of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 95% of trafficked people in India are coerced into the sex industry. Trafficking for prostitution has escalated to a frightening level in India. Apart from the intra-state trafficking prevalent in India, women and girls are also being transported to the other parts of the world, especially to the Southeast Asian nations and the Gulf States from India. India is the popular location for women and girls transported from Bangladesh and Nepal to use in commercial sexual activities (Christine Joffres et al.). Typically, traffickers entice women with promises of employment, but they are instead taken to brothels to provide sexual services.

Forced Marriage

The United Nations defines forced marriage as the “union of two people, at least one of whom has not given their full and free consent to the marriage.” It is an infringement of human rights because marrying someone is a personal choice. Forced marriage reflects gender inequality, spreading the idea that women are nothing more than objects to be used for the benefit of others. The ‘adverse sex ratio’ is the major reason behind forced marriage in India, which leads to wives buying through trafficking of females. The practise of female infanticide has caused a lower sex ratio in states like Haryana, Rajasthan, and Western UP, leading to the purchase of brides for marriage from the poverty-stricken areas of other states (source states) like Assam, West Bengal, and Bihar. These brides are often referred to as ‘paro’ (from the far side) or ‘molki’ (one who has a price). Human trafficking networks are usually involved in this buying and selling of brides. A report by the Government of Haryana shows that, the state of Haryana registered 30 such incidents of human trafficking in 2016 and 48 more in 2017 (Yadav). The families in the source states sell their daughters mainly to gain financial compensation and to avoid paying dowry. In some cases, families are being persuaded to send their daughters away for work and later on without the family's knowledge, they are being sold like commodities.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is the abuse of power in a domestic setting by one person in order to exert dominance on another person. It involves the use of violence and abusive methods such as physical and psychological violence, social exploitation, economic exploitation, or sexual abuse to instil fear and authority. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) has released a report stating that 29.3% of married Indian women between the ages of 18 and 49 have experienced domestic or sexual violence. Physical violence was experienced by 3.1% of pregnant women between the ages of 18 and 49 at some point in their pregnancies. And it only includes the cases that women reported; there are invariably many more that go unreported to the police (Kamakshi

S). The victims of domestic violence, unable to bear the daily torture, attempt to flee the abusive environment. There are instances where, in this process, they got trapped by traffickers. Sometimes the victim women look for work abroad, which may put them at risk of becoming victims of trafficking. Often, the traffickers make false promises to the women to provide jobs and better lives and then traffic them for forced labour or prostitution.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PREVENTING WOMEN TRAFFICKING

Firstly, the preventive strategies against women trafficking need to be strengthened to tackle the issue more efficiently. The core reasons and factors that make women more vulnerable should be addressed as part of prevention programmes. Gender discrimination and the patriarchal mindset are significant contributors to women's vulnerability. The government should therefore revise its trafficking prevention efforts to address gender norms and unequal power structures in the society, which lead to gendered poverty, limited access for women in education, a lack of employment opportunities, a lack of control over financial resources by women and other gender-based discriminations. All these factors that make women more susceptible to trafficking need to be considered in preventive measures.

Secondly, the State should ensure that anti-trafficking laws, regulations, and programmes are gender sensitive and that resources are available to address the particular needs of women. Appropriate changes should be made in the law enforcement apparatus and the legal system keeping in mind the urgency of the hour.

Thirdly, a gender-sensitive approach is also needed in addressing the concerns and fears that keep trafficked people from seeking services and assistance. For instance, reporting can be difficult for female trafficking victims due to a variety of reasons, including a lack of female guards, concern over confidentiality, stigmatisation from their society, or attachment to their traffickers (who may also be their legal 'husbands') (Gender Dimensions 3). The establishment of support booths and helplines will be beneficial in this regard.

Fourthly, the government should take public awareness and community involvement initiatives. People, especially the female population should be made aware of the issue and the laws and programmes available in this regard so that they can seek assistance when needed. The government should also take a collaborative initiative with the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to raise awareness, conduct research, identify trafficking victims, rescue and rehabilitate victims, and so on.

Fifthly, strict vigilance is needed to monitor the trade in women in cities and tourist hotspots. To do this, it is vital to establish independent monitoring boards to look into the matter. It is worth mentioning that the Anti-Trafficking Units created by the government has been successful to some extent. In sensitive areas, neighbourhood watch groups might be established to keep a close eye. These groups can successfully make it difficult for the traffickers.

Sixthly, in order to prevent re-trafficking, the women victims who have been saved should be safeguarded and given proper rehabilitation. governments should design programmes with

adequate funding to assist them in returning to a normal, healthy, and fulfilling life by setting up for their educational and professional development. For the purpose of preventing re-trafficking, alternative income opportunities must be created for them. Establishing counselling centres, legal centres, support lines, and a suitable number of shelters and rehabilitation facilities, among other things, will greatly aid in resolving the issues faced by trafficking victims.

CONCLUSION

Heinous crimes like human trafficking are actually a joke on human civilization and progress. In India human trafficking is a pervasive issue which primarily affects women and young girls. Due to its covert and illegal nature, it is challenging to determine its actual scale. Government of India has been taking various initiatives, like the establishment of Anti-Trafficking Units to tackle the issue. The Trafficking of People (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2021 has also been introduced in the Parliament. Yet despite all these efforts to combat and eradicate this social menace, it is still prevalent throughout the society.

Thousands of women and girls are trafficked through the nation each year. It is high time for the government to take the issue more seriously and to take a gender sensitive approach to the issue. In its preventive strategies, the government should address gender norms and unequal social power structures; anti-trafficking laws and regulations should be gender sensitive, acknowledging the specific needs of women; and a gender-sensitive approach is also required in addressing the concerns and fears that keep trafficked women from seeking services and assistance. Also, the government should launch as many public awareness campaigns as possible in order to draw public attention to the issue and educate individuals, especially women about their rights and potential legal remedies.

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