



CURRENT HUMAN TRAFFICKING SCENARIO IN INDIA: ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract:

In the current context, human trafficking—including the trafficking of women, children, and other vulnerable groups—is seen as one of the most heinous abuses of human rights. History has shown that human trafficking is not a brand-new or particularly Indian problem. It is frequently likened to prostitution. After the smuggling of weapons and drugs, it is regarded as the third most lucrative category of organized crime. It would also be accurate to state that it is a complicated problem that is seen as the main cause of crime in India and that it is a kind of exploitation that infringes upon the most fundamental rights of the victims of human trafficking. In this connection the paper tries to highlight the present situation and the various dimensions of human trafficking. The paper briefly explains the various causes and contributory factors for human trafficking.

Keywords: COVID-19, Trafficking, Human Rights, Crime, Prostitution, Women and Child etc.



Introduction

The aforementioned remark is taken from the well-known Philadelphia Declaration, which outlines the objectives of the International Labour Organisation. The latest COVID-19 outbreak demonstrated that, just as human trafficking anywhere is a threat to security everywhere, vulnerability everywhere poses a threat to sustainability everywhere. Due to other related regional problems including illegal migration, poverty, gender discrimination, illiteracy, unemployment, ethnic strife, political turmoil, etc., human trafficking has grown increasingly difficult in India. Since the early history of the world, trafficking has been there. Now human trafficking is a global phenomenon. It is also a transnational organized crime. Present study wants to emphasize on understanding human trafficking in India.

However, it is generally acknowledged that human trafficking is heinous crime and a gross abuse of fundamental human rights. According to the United Nations (UN), human trafficking involves an act of recruiting, transporting, transferring, harboring or receiving a persons through a use of force, coercion or other means, for purpose of exploiting them (UNODC). It is fact that poverty has a direct link with some special evils, especially human trafficking. It has been reported in the Human Security Report (HSC, 2005) that the victims of trafficking mostly belong to the countries suffering from weak or corrupt governments, economic downfall, social upheaval, organized crime and violent civil conflicts. Some reports go on, claiming that "poverty appears to be the single most significant driver of human trafficking" (HSC, 2005, p.88). The literal meaning of Human Trafficking is selling any human being only for making money. In this process, human beings are sold at every step from the first stage of luring, to people who are buying it. Human trafficking for sexual desires was

over the course of time. According to Doezema (1999). Most commonly, the victims of trafficking are women and children. The countries of South Asia and its peoples have been exposed to heinous crimes, particularly trafficking in women and children for prostitution. It happened because of the cross-border linkage between the groups trafficking women and children into sex industries in South Asia and beyond.

An overview of the past

Human trafficking is not a recent phenomena; it has been present in various forms since the dawn of civilizations. It is accepted that the problem originated when a physically strong person in ancient or prehistoric times would enslave a weak person and use him for domestic work, sexual labour, or other services. Since ancient times, slavery in the West and devadasi on the Indian subcontinent have been common customs. Thousands of war slaves were produced throughout the mediaeval dynastic struggle for control of the throne, and the victorious regimes continued to take use of them. This issue was made worse by the practice of apartheid and discrimination based on race and gender. Moreover, in the 20th century, two world wars were fought, and millions of people were killed and displaced, becoming more vulnerable to trafficking. After the Second half of the 20th century many countries in the world particularly Asia and Africa got independence and established a democratic form of government where each individual granted equal rights to their life and liberty. However, the trading of humans was still running on a large scale. The awareness to combat trafficking started to take momentum in the late 19th to early 20th century through different slavery conventions. There are multiple layers of laws which directly or indirectly address trafficking including protection of human rights, anti forced labour, abolition of child labour, illegal migration, women's rights and prostitution. In 2000, A significant step forward in the fight against human trafficking was made when the UN passed a convention against transnational organised crime that included a protocol to prevent, suppress, and punish human trafficking, particularly involving women and children. The 117 nations that joined this convention by 2021 were keen to enact anti-trafficking legislation in order to abide by this global agreement. With the exception of India, other South Asian nations that signed the Trafficking convention 2000 have not completely approved all of its provisions. Pakistan and Bhutan are not even parties to the convention. Despite several efforts at the national and international levels, the issue persists as trafficking networks become more sophisticated, complicated, and consolidated globally.

United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on the occasion of the World Anti-Trafficking Day in 2021, "The COVID-19 epidemic has pushed nearly 124 Million people towards extreme poverty, as a result, many people are at risk of becoming victims of human trafficking". Among them children are at greater risk and it is growing every year. 1/3 of the human trafficking victims are children. This rate has tripled in the last 15 years. 50 percent of the victims of human trafficking in poor countries are children. Most of the women are trafficked for forced labor and sexual exploitation. In most cases, criminals are using technology to identify, control and exploit vulnerable people, especially children. The rate of targeting of children through online platforms for sexual exploitation, forced marriage and other forms of abuse is on the rise. Although the problem is global, the rate of child trafficking in India is on the rise. According to the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), a child goes missing every 8 minutes in this country. There are many villages where girls are still considered a burden. Still in many places it is believed that marriage is the main thing in girls life and there can be no better security than

that. As a result, child marriage are on the rise across the country, and this child marriages, even at advance ages, are accompanied by false marriage, human and child trafficking.

The nation's social security system's strength is determined by each citizen's access to basic amenities like as wholesome food, clothes, housing, healthcare, and education, among others, but inequality is rising. As a result, traffickers purchase a large number of the house's unique females for a nominal sum of money. Additionally, the traffickers are avaricious, taking these girls for a pittance in exchange for an illusory life of happiness. Many end up at red light areas after getting easily caught on the way. Boys are also victims of this trafficking, in addition to girls. When discussing human trafficking, comes up. There is no denying that West Bengal is one of the source, transit and destination of trafficking. According to records, the prevalence of trafficking has been high in West Bengal's South and North 24 Parganas and Murshidabad for a long time. But the issue should be considered in a larger context rather than just state centric.

According to the published data, international human trafficking has gradually become a profitable business. In this context, information mentioned in the 2018 report of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) can be looked at. According to the report, the income from this lucrative business is about 150 Billion US Dollars worldwide every year. These statistics show how wide the web of this crime is. Due to COVID-19 epidemic, an unprecedented situation has arisen, especially in countries where the rate of employment growth is not good. A sharp rise in unemployment there has exacerbated human trafficking. Criminal business such as human trafficking are so intricate, technologically and secretly organized that accurate data is difficult to obtain, And in the world's most trafficking prone countries, including South Asia, it is almost impossible to reach those figures.

The COVID-19 crisis has a potentially far-reaching, long-term negative impact on trafficked and exploited persons. Although at this stage it is not yet possible to assess the full impact of the pandemic on human trafficking, it is sure that its socio-economic consequences are already making precarious and marginalized people more vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. Children have been extremely affected by the social and economic upheavals caused by COVID-19. The pandemic unleashed a perfect storm into the lives of most marginalized children. A single disaster can produce a cascading effect that would create an unforeseen chain of secondary or multiple risks.

Here's a brief overview view of these impacts:

1. Education:

School Closures: Lockdowns and safety measures led to widespread school closures, affecting millions of students worldwide. This disrupted education and exacerbated educational inequalities.

Shift to Online Learning: Many educational institutions transitioned to online learning. While this helped maintain some level of continuity, it highlighted the digital divide and unequal access to quality education.

Mental Health: The pandemic had a significant impact on the mental health of students and educators due to the stress, isolation, and uncertainties it brought.

2. Economy:

Job Losses: Lockdowns and business restrictions caused mass job losses in various sectors, especially those dependent on physical presence, such as hospitality, tourism, and retail.

Economic Recession: The pandemic triggered a global economic recession, affecting GDP growth, trade, and overall economic stability. Governments implemented stimulus packages to counteract the economic downturn.

Digital Transformation: The crisis accelerated digital transformation in many industries, leading to increased remote work, e-commerce, and tech adoption.

3. Social Sector:

Healthcare Systems: The pandemic strained healthcare systems, revealing weaknesses in preparedness and healthcare infrastructure. It also highlighted the importance of accessible and efficient healthcare services.

Mental Health Impact: Social isolation, fear, and grief took a toll on people's mental health, increasing the need for mental health services and support.

Social Disparities: The pandemic disproportionately affected vulnerable communities, such as low-income individuals and minorities, highlighting existing social disparities.

Community Resilience: On a positive note, the crisis showcased the resilience of communities and the importance of mutual support during challenging times. These impacts varied from region to region and were influenced by government responses, healthcare infrastructure, and pre-existing social and economic conditions. The long-term consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on these sectors will continue to be studied and addressed for years to come.

Nature of human trafficking in India

Human trafficking in India is a complex and multifaceted issue that takes on various forms, targeting vulnerable individuals for exploitation. The nature of human trafficking in India can be summarized through the following key aspects

i) Forced Labor: India is a hotspot for forced labor, with millions of people subjected to exploitative working conditions in sectors such as agriculture, construction, brick kilns, and domestic work. Vulnerable populations, including migrant laborers and low-income individuals, are often lured with promises of employment and then forced to work under coercive and degrading conditions.

ii) Sex Trafficking: India also faces a significant problem of sex trafficking, with women and girls being trafficked for sexual exploitation. This includes forced prostitution, the operation of brothels, and online sexual exploitation. Victims in this category often come from marginalized and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

iii) Child Trafficking: Children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking in India. They are trafficked for various purposes, including child labor, forced begging, sexual exploitation, and adoption. Traffickers exploit the vulnerability of children from impoverished backgrounds or those who have been orphaned or abandoned.

iv) Bonded Labor: Debt bondage is prevalent in India, where individuals are trapped in a cycle of debt and forced to work to repay it. These individuals, known as bonded laborers, often work in harsh and exploitative conditions, with little hope of ever breaking free from their debt.

v) Organ Trafficking: In some instances, human trafficking extends to organ trafficking, where individuals are coerced or deceived into giving up their organs for illegal transplantation. This is a particularly heinous form of trafficking that preys on the desperation of vulnerable individuals in need of money.

vi) Cross-Border Trafficking: India shares borders with several countries, and cross-border trafficking is a significant concern. Victims are trafficked across borders for various forms of exploitation, including forced labor and sexual exploitation. This complicates efforts to combat trafficking, as it involves international dimensions.

vii) Online Exploitation: With the increasing use of the internet and social media, online exploitation has become a growing concern. Traffickers use digital platforms to recruit, groom, and exploit their victims, making it challenging for law enforcement to track and combat these activities.

viii) Inadequate Reporting and Prosecution: Human trafficking often goes unreported due to fear, stigma, or lack of awareness. Additionally, prosecution of traffickers can be challenging, and cases may face delays or lack of evidence, leading to impunity for many perpetrators.

ix) Gender Disparities: Women and girls are disproportionately affected by trafficking in India. They face a high risk of exploitation, especially in the form of sexual trafficking and forced marriage.

Causes and modes of trafficking in India

There are several contributing factors for trade in human beings particularly in women and children. The factors of trafficking in women and children can be divided into two categories: push and pull factors. The push factors include: poor socio-economic conditions of a large number of families, poverty coupled with frequent, almost annual natural disasters like floods leading to virtual destitution of some people, lack of education, skill and income opportunities for women (and for their family members) in rural areas, absence of awareness about the activities of traffickers, pressure to collect money for dowries which leads to sending daughters to distant places for work, dysfunctional family life, domestic violence against women, low status of girl children, etc. It appears from the case studies that extreme poverty and other causes of deprivation not only push people to fall in the trap of the traffickers, they also create for some an incentive for trafficking. Often the prostitutes, who have no option to come out of the exploitative environment, gradually develop intimate connections with the traffickers and follow in their footsteps. The pull factors are: lucrative employment propositions in big cities, easy money, promise of better pay and a comfortable life by the trafficking touts and agents, demand of young girls for marriage in other regions, demand for low-paid and underage sweatshop labor, growing demand of young kids for adoption, rise in demand for

women in the rapidly expanding sex industry, demand for young girls in places of military concentration like Kashmir in India in recent times, demand for young girls for sexual exploitation as a result of the misconception that physical intimacy with young girls reduces men's chances of contracting HIV/AIDS, or of the myth that sex with a virgin can cure HIV/AIDS and impotence. The rampant practice of female feticide in the northern states of Haryana and Punjab have also fuelled internal trafficking. Since there is a shortage of women in these states having a low female to male ratio, they have become fertile ground for the operation of traffickers. Traffickers procure girls from faraway states like Assam and Orissa; trick their families into believing they are to be married, only to later push them into prostitution. India is also experiencing rapid changes in economic, political, demographic and labor trends as an outcome of globalization, increasing demand for cheap labor and heavy population growth in the region encourages migration whether legal or illegal. The movement of young girls and women from Bangladesh and Nepal into Indian brothels is common. There is further movement of these women and girls to the Middle East as well as other destinations. At times of hardship, this starts out as illegal migration and ends up as trafficking. Such migration occurs in the backdrop of supply and demand in the sending and receiving countries.

On others to send letters or make phone calls to their relatives. Of ten the guardians of law do not support the victims. It has often been alleged that police harass the victims more than those who have committed the crime. All these limitations not only make the socially and economically deprived sections of society vulnerable to trafficking, but also explain why re-trafficking is so rampant in our society. Apart from the increased demand of cheap labour in the production sector, globalization has played a major part for the growth of tourism business and entertainment industries the world over. As a result, the sex related trades like sex tourism have registered rapid growth. At the same time, rising male migration to urban areas as well as stressful working conditions of the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector workers have also contributed to a growing demand for commercial sex in the cities. Our experience also reveals that trafficking is closely associated with child marriage. Child marriage is one of the easiest modes applied by the traffickers to send young girls from one place to another. In a traditional village community, there is a stigma attached to single women. Inability to arrange the marriage of a daughter is a cause of embarrassment and a matter of shame for the parents. In this situation, when the traffickers approach the poor families with marriage proposals (sometimes with cash rewards between Rs.1000– 5000 on an average) minus dowry, the parents find it hard to refuse the offer. After marriage, the girls are sold and resold, until she reaches the ultimate destination. Apart from child marriage, other modes of trafficking are fake marriage, false recruitment, kidnapping and abduction of children, transportation of children with the consent of guardians, adoption of children, using poor families with jobs and better living conditions in cities.

A report published by UNODC in 2020, provides some insight into South Asia. The report states that detection rates for children and adult women are almost equal, 45 percent (boys 24 percent and girls 21 percent) and 44 percent respectively. Most of the victims of this human trafficking are trafficked for forced labor which is 52 percent of the total number. But most of the time it is seen that many women who leave their homes as laborers in the early stages and migrate to distant countries, are settled in a forbidden village. The flow of this trafficking skyrocketed during the epidemic. Net-based data shows that the number of women caught at the international border between India and Bangladesh from the beginning of 2020 to August was 915. The number was 936 in 2019 and 1077 in 2018. The total 915 women caught at the border in 2020, 888 were from South Bengal, 14 from Tripura, 6 Mizoram and Cachar and 1 person from Meghalaya. A joint report by BSF and Bangladesh found that, in the last decade, the number of Bangladeshi women and children between the ages of 12 and 30 who have illegally been sent to India is close to 5 lakh. On the other hand, according to a report of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), about 35 thousand Nepali citizens (15 thousand men and 15 thousand women; 5 thousand children) were trafficked to India in 2018-19.

Government initiatives

Acknowledging the gravity of the problem, the Indian government launched a number of campaigns to stop people trafficking both during and after the pandemic. India has taken action against human trafficking through legislation and enforcement. Numerous governmental and non-governmental organisations endeavour to save lives, offer assistance and healing, and increase public knowledge of the problem.

- a) **Rescue and Rehabilitation:** The government intensified rescue operations to free victims from traffickers. These operations were conducted in collaboration with NGOs and law enforcement agencies.
- b) **Awareness Campaigns:** Public awareness campaigns were launched to educate vulnerable populations about the tactics used by traffickers and the importance of reporting suspicious activities.
- c) **Strengthening Legal Framework:** The government introduced amendments to strengthen anti-trafficking laws, making it easier to prosecute traffickers and provide better protection for victims.

d)Economic Support: Financial aid and employment schemes were implemented to help those affected by the economic fallout of the pandemic, reducing their vulnerability to trafficking.

The Role of NGOs and Civil Society

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society played a crucial role in the fight against human trafficking. They provided support to victims, raised awareness, and worked in collaboration with the government to combat this issue effectively. NGOs(Non-Governmental Organizations) play a crucial role in combating human trafficking in India through various means:

i)Awareness and Prevention: NGOs work to raise awareness about the dangers of human trafficking, educating vulnerable communities and individuals on how to recognize and avoid traffickers.

ii)Victim Assistance: NGOs provide essential support to trafficking survivors, offering shelter, medical care, counseling, and legal aid to help them recover and reintegrate into society.

iii)Advocacy and Policy Influence: NGOs advocate for stronger anti-trafficking laws and policies at the local, state, and national levels. They also collaborate with government agencies to improve the enforcement of existing laws.

iv)RehabilitationandSkillTraining:ManyNGOsoffer vocational training and livelihood programs to survivors, equipping them with skills to build a sustainable future and reduce their vulnerability to re-trafficking.

v)Research and Data Collection: NGOs conduct research to better understand the dynamics of human trafficking in India, helping to shape effective interventions and strategies.

vi)Community Engagement: NGOs engage with communities to foster a sense of responsibility and vigilance against trafficking, encouraging people to report suspicious activities.

vii)Collaboration: In order to develop a coordinated approach to combat human trafficking, they frequently work with international organisations, other NGOs, and law enforcement authorities. In general, NGOs are essential in supporting government initiatives to combat human trafficking in India since they provide valuable support to survivors and strive to prevent and eradicate the practice.

conclusion

In conclusion, human trafficking in India is a grave violation of human rights and a complex issue that affects a wide range of individuals, particularly those who are marginalized and vulnerable. It requires comprehensive efforts from government authorities, civil society organizations, and the international community to prevent and address this deeply entrenched problem effectively.

The COVID-19 pandemic had devastating effects on various aspects of society, and human trafficking was one of the areas that witnessed a disturbing surge. While the government and NGOs have made efforts to mitigate the impact and combat this crime, there is still much work to be done. It is imperative that efforts to address human trafficking in India continue to evolve, adapt, and strengthen to protect the vulnerable and bring perpetrators to justice. The pandemic served as a stark reminder that this issue cannot be overlooked, even in the face of global crises.

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