Bride Trafficking: An Emerging Institutionalized Social Practice

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Abstract

Variation in the types of social problems depends upon number of factors like Global, national, local as well as regional. Human Trafficking is considered as a major issue globally. This research elaborates the term Bride Trafficking in India so here it is concluded especially as regional social evil. Firstly, this study explains the actual definition of the above-mentioned term described by the renowned institutions like United Nations. Secondly, the consequential factors which are accountable for the emergence of such a devastating problem. Later on, this research emphasizes the impacts of this social disease on the victims. Therefore, the overall function of this research paper is throwing light on bride-trafficking which was earlier exist in hidden form but now a days emerging as institutionalized social practice.

Introduction

Human trafficking, as a social evil, exists in human societies for ages. It has become a global problem and affecting people of all castes, classes, ages and gender, in fact, it is the new form of slavery (UNODC, 2013). According to Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2016), "the term 'modern slavery' has recently been used in the context of different practices or crimes such as trafficking in persons, forced labor, slavery, but also for child labor, forced marriages and others" (p 16). The Global Slavery Index (2016) estimated that 45.8 million people are trap in some form of modern-day slavery in 167 countries of the world and 18.35 million people are living in India.

India is one of the most populated countries in the world and it has huge markets for the sex trade, like the many other consumer goods. There are a lot of things that provide a perfect place for human trafficking for the sex trade in India such as illiteracy, poverty, political corruption, patriarchy and lack of awareness. According to 'The Protection Project Report' (2012), India is a country of source, transport and destination area for human trafficking. Almost 90 percent of human trafficking in India is intra-national and targets national markets. Most internationally trafficked Indians are sold in the Middle-East countries to sex work, forced marriages and forced labor. India, being one of the largest source and destination areas of human
trafficking, sufficient attention is not given to the increasing gender gap and gender issues. It gave rise to human trafficking in this region (Hossain and Turner, 2001).

Understanding Bride Trafficking

The ‘Palermo Protocol’ of United Nations, also known as ‘The protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons’ (2000), gave the most acceptable and broad definition of human trafficking. Article 3, paragraph (a) of this protocol defined human trafficking as “Trafficking in Persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (p. 2).

Trafficking is an act with clear intentions, means of recruitment and exploitation purposes. Besides, the UN definition, the trafficking is defined as a trade-in something that should not be traded in for various social, economic or political reasons. Thus, the researchers use terms like drug trafficking, arms trafficking and human trafficking to differentiate from the larger paradigm of trafficking, in fact, human trafficking is associated with the purpose of unequal treatment of women and children (Sen & Nair, 2005). Bride trafficking as part of the broad concept of human trafficking involves the illegal transport of women and girls for marriage.

The incidents of trafficking of women and girls for marriage have been reported from time to time in the past but now it has become more prevalent, organized and practice on a large scale. In South-Eastern parts of Asia, it involves forced marriages in which the consent of victims or women is not taken. Trafficking of women for fake marriages is more prevalent in developed countries but nowadays it is prevalent in developing countries like India and China. The women and girls are trafficked from their native areas by the false promise of marriage and jobs (Kara, 2011).

In several Indian states, women are trafficked and buyers forcefully get married to them and then in several cases, they sold from hand to another hand. Many victims are trafficked several times. The situation looks like a marriage but it has a specific purpose such as for labor work, for a male child and sexual exploitation, etc. After the purpose served, the victims are sold to another person. This practice is prevalent throughout Haryana, Punjab and parts of Rajasthan and Western Uttar Pradesh. The Mewat region, which is spread in three states Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, is the main destination area of bride trafficking in India. Victims of bride trafficking in northern India called paros (stolen) and Molki (purchased). The word has its origin in Mewat, a district of Haryana (Rahman, 2013).
Causes and Factors Leading to the Problem of Bride Trafficking

Despite the illegality of sex-selective termination of female foetuses, the introduction of sex determination by ultrasound has seen some areas of India experience significant gender disparity and a dearth of available brides. The subsequent demand for brides, particularly in rural communities where many girls of marriageable age have migrated to cities for employment, has fuelled the trafficking of women for forced marriage. It is reported that in some instances, girls are forced into marriage and then used as unpaid laborers (GSI, 2016). The skewed ratio is not the sole reason for bride trafficking but there are some other reasons for this practice like, poverty, dowry, caste and Gotra system and illiteracy etc. The main causes/reasons of bride trafficking are the following:

Skewed Sex Ratio and Female Feticide

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2013) study blamed the skewed sex ratio of north Indian states for the large-scale trafficking of girls from other states for forced marriages and forced labor, such as Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and western Uttar Pradesh. With the skewed sex ratio of Punjab-895 and Haryana-879 and Uttar Pradesh-912 females per 1,000 males, it's impossible to find a bride for each man, and the only solution to import a bride (Census, 2011). Such states' demographic situation has become so skewed that the stabilization of the situation will take many years. The demand for marriageable age girls is so high that organized trafficking rackets have begun to operate in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh (TPR, 2016). Trafficking in forced marriages has also been reported from the Kutch region of Gujarat. Lots of Bengali-speaking women are being trafficked from West Bengal and Bangladesh to Kutch, where they are sold off as brides due to the skewed sex ratio of the region and the desperate search of wives by unmarried men. A significant number of these women are also coerced into the trade of sex (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Female feticide is a significant factor in the exploitation of women for forced marriages in Haryana and Punjab. Haryana is famous for the feticides of females in the region. Patriarchy, gender discrimination and low status of women in the society provide a suitable environment for female feticide in many Indian states. Women and girls being trafficked mainly from the Eastern and North-Eastern states to Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh is also the outcome of a large-scale feticide of women in these states (UNODC, 2013).

Dowry and Poverty

Dowry and poverty are also the causes of trafficking of brides in both source and destination areas. The dowry has been the key reason for the trafficking of brides in destinations such as Haryana, Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh, where the dowry system is associated with marriages. Some people couldn't afford all the costs of marriage, so it's very hard to find a bride for them. In this case, they buy a bride through the traffickers and take it to Haryana and Punjab. They just have to pay a certain amount of money to buy a bride, which is not a huge amount. The buyer is saved from spending the money on other traditional rituals that are important to a marriage (Sarkar, 2014).
Poverty and dowry are both quite closely linked to the trafficking of brides. Almost all source areas are very poverty-stricken and dowry is very prevalent in these areas. Parents are unable to look for a local groom in some areas of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, due to the high demand for dowry (Raza, 2014). In some cases, the parents of the bride are very poor and cannot afford the expense of dowry. So marrying their daughters with an outsider remains the only choice for them, since an outsider does not ask for a dowry. For certain cases simply, all marriage expenses are borne by the buyer/groom (Rahman, 2009). In this situation, the groom gives the money to the bride's parents to get their daughter married. So these kinds of areas are the hot spots of bride trafficking, as the traffickers find it very easy to traffic girls from such areas. The main reasons for trafficking in Assam and Bihar are poverty, unemployment, migration from rural to urban areas, armed conflict, communal conflicts, natural disasters, etc. There is a trend to send children to other states for education, which sometimes ends in the exploitation of children (Khan, 2013).

Lack of Awareness and Limited Intervention by Government and NGOs

The National Human Right Commission (NHRC) Action Research Report (2004) point out about the fact that there is a very low level of awareness and sensitization about the crime of human trafficking among the people of source areas and law enforcement agencies and this continued to be a low priority area. The data produced by the study showed that thousands of missing women and children are still missing. The Ministry of Home Affairs realized the severity of human trafficking that preyed on human suffering and constituted a severe violation of the civil and fundamental rights of individuals guaranteed by the Government (NHRC, 2004). The mainstream media did not give much attention to this problem. Only some newspapers especially English newspapers covered some reports on this issue.

A number of organizations are working on various issues, and some of them are also focusing on women's issues in source and destination areas. However, there is limited intervention by non-governmental organizations. Some organizations in North India are battling the evils of trafficking in brides, such as Empower People and Shakti Vahini.

The Problems Faced by the Victims of Bride Trafficking

The victims of the Bride Trafficking faced several problems. First, they are used as bonded labor in agricultural fields and animal husbandry then after some time they are sold to another human. This cycle of selling and buying occurs several times in their lives. Many people who buy them, exploit sexually and physically. They are often sexually exploited in many cases by other members of the family. The main problems experienced by the victims are as follow:

Sexual Exploitation and Use as a Bonded Laborer

Often projected as voluntary marriage, every year, thousands of young women and girls are lured into the idea of a happy married life with a rich man in Haryana and Punjab. One thing that is very similar to trafficking in brides and prostitution is that both victims are sexually and physically abused. In some cases, the victims of bride trafficking are used as "sex slaves" and male members of the buyer's family have
access to sexual exploitation (Rahman, 2013). Victims also face a lot of physical violence when they resist. After a certain period of time, the victims are sold to another person and the same exploitation cycle is repeated (Singh, 2016).

Most purchased brides are exploited sexually, denied basic rights, used as maids or laborers, and eventually abandoned or sold to another person. Haryana, Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh have recorded the lowest sex ration in the country (UNODC, 2013). These areas are also the agriculturally rich and have a high demand for agricultural laborers. The victims of bride trafficking are also used as bonded labor and perform both agricultural work and household chores (Rahman, 2013).

**Selling and Purchasing of Paros**

Empower People, an NGO fighting against bride trafficking in India, conducted a study in the Mewat district of Haryana in 2013, that find out that seventy-nine percent of paro women in Mewat were Muslim, seventeen percent from the Scheduled Tribes (ST) and four percent were Dalits. Fifty-six percent of them were sold twice, twenty-one percent thrice and six percent more than three times. Most (seventy-six percent) did not have a say in family matters, seventy-one percent did not participate in functions or festivals. Eighty percent women said that their names did not figure in the ration card or voters list (Rahman, 2013).

**Health-Related Issues**

In addition to being a criminal and human rights problem, bride trafficking has serious implications for public health. Victims of trafficking also suffer from violence resulting in physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Health threats and outcomes include sexually transmitted infections, premature pregnancy, forced abortion and abortion-related complications, rape and other physical attacks (Sarkar et al., 2008).

**Language Issues and stigma**

According to Rahman (2009), the victims of bride trafficking who are trafficked from the North-Eastern states, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal and brought north Indian states, face various problems like food, cultural differences and language constraints which lead to stigma. These victims speak their native language and are not able to speak Haryanavi, Punjabi or Hindi fluently. People of the destination areas easily identify victims from their speaking tone that they are an outsider and a purchased bride. All these things lead to a stigma which is known as paro. Paro is an abusive word that is given to the trafficked women. These marriages are not really accepted and respected in destination areas. They are not the only victim of this kind of social stigma, their children also bear the stigma of being a son/daughter of a paros. Sometimes this stigma leads to the social exclusion of victims and their children (Maddox, 2011).

**Property Rights and Social Support System**

Women who are victims of bride trafficking are not registered on the local ration cards or the voter's list. This means that they are not recognized as permanent members of the family. Who somehow manages to live with the husband's family has no claim to the property of the husband. Their lives became pitiable after
the death of their husband. These 'widows' are sold and changed hands, and if not, their families will disown them. There is no social pressure or organization to meet the basic needs of these women. If we look at the whole situation, it is obvious that their social status is nothing more than a sex toy (Rahman, 2013).

**Conclusion**

The evil of bride trafficking is destroying hundreds of women's lives every year. There are a lot of problems which are very closely associated with this problem. The problems like bonded labor, forced sex with multiple members of family, prostitution, domestic violence, culture differences issue and social stigma are some of them. Skewed sex ratio is believed to be a prominent reason for the bride trafficking in North Indian states like Haryana and Punjab but there are a lot of other reasons like poverty, dowry, illiteracy and demand for agricultural labors which are rarely discussed. Poor areas of Bihar, Jharkhand, Hyderabad and North-Eastern states, etc. are the source of bride trafficking. Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Western Uttar Pradesh and some districts of Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat are the destination points of bride trafficking. The lack of government and NGOs' attention toward addressing the issue is also responsible for this problem. The law implementing agencies do not take strict action to stop the bride trafficking. The police rarely file a complaint of bride trafficking because they thought there is no such thing as bride trafficking.

**References**


