

ENSNARED INNOCENCE: A STUDY ON CROSS-BORDER CHILD TRAFFICKING IN THE CONTEXT OF WEST BENGAL, INDIA

Dibyajyoti Nag

Ph.D. Candidate, Faculty of IRTDM, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Ranchi

Dipankar Chatterjee

Assistant Professor, Faculty of IRTDM, Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University,
Ranchi, India

ABSTRACT

The present study highlights the trafficked child of the cross border regions of west Bengal, India. This paper is the outcome of the authors' qualitative thoughts regarding child trafficking issue which inspired them to deal the issue in different dimension. Research reports and publications of different organizations working in the area of trafficking were reviewed for this study. The authors visited different areas of North 24 parganna district of West Bengal for collecting data and used unstructured interview and case study methods for the purpose of this paper. The study exposes that demand for young girls is very high in sex trade especially in the bordering areas. The study identified poor socio-economic condition, unorganized labour force, political apathy, parental debt, parental attitude towards the education of girl child, lack of educational opportunities, and social inequality as the root cause of trafficking. Finally the study concludes that the children can no longer be considered as passive recipients of services. The most important issue is, being a human; a person has to be treated by another as 'human', not as 'commodity', and with this it is essential to set up a strong anti-trafficking network to combat this phenomenon and rescue the innocence of childhood.

Key Words: Child trafficking, Border areas, Vulnerable Children.

Introduction

Human trafficking is based on the objectification of a human life and the treatment of that life as a commodity to be traded in the economic market. In general terms, trafficking refers to an

illicit trade in goods. Human trafficking is the illegal sale and purchase of human beings who are often used for sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, and organ harvesting. It is a contemporary form of the slave trade, and, like the slave trade, human trafficking is marked and defined by deception, coercion, and exploitation.

Trafficking in humans is defined by Article 3 of the United Nations *Protocol Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* as “The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or the 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.” Article 3 continues, “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”(United Nations, 2000).

In essence, the definition found in the *Protocol* can be broken down into the three principal components of the offense: (1) the act, (2) the method, and (3) the purpose. All three elements must be present for a situation to be officially recognized as trafficking. The *Protocol* also establishes special regulations for trafficking in children (individuals under 18 years of age): “The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered ‘trafficking in persons’ even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in sub paragraph (a) of this article.” That is, children transported for exploitative work are considered trafficking victims whether or not they have been deceived. In the circumstances that surround child trafficking, it is nearly impossible to know if children have given informed consent or if they are simply submitting to the authority of their guardians. About 600,000 to 800,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year for sexual and labor exploitation; 80 percent of these victims are women, and 50 percent are minors (U.S. Department of State, 2003). UNICEF (2002) believes that the number of children trafficked annually, within and across national borders, is around 1.2 million. There is now a large body of research that describes the number of people being trafficked, how these people are trafficked, the countries they come from and

where they are sold, the markets for trafficked individuals, and the profits of the trade. However, most of the studies describe trafficking across national borders.

Based on these studies, it might be easy to assume that trafficking is only a transnational trade. However, according to the *Trafficking in Persons Report* of the U.S. Department of State (2003), internal trafficking of women, men, and children for sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, bonded labor, and indentured servitude is widespread. The Asian Development Bank (2002) says that cross-border trafficking affects 10 percent of the coerced migrants. Intra-country trafficking, therefore, is the fate of as many as 90 percent of trafficked victims.

One of the countries where internal trafficking is said to surpass cross-border trafficking is India. There are very few studies on child trafficking in India. Moreover, in Indian legal parlance, trafficking is used to refer only to offenses related to prostitution. Therefore, most studies in India have focused exclusively on the trafficking of women and children for the sex industry. There is research on bonded child labor that describes the conditions of trafficking without referring to trafficking as such. Using this literature, this article attempts to contextualize the current knowledge about cross-border child trafficking in West Bengal state of India and suggested the possible interventions that may provide protection and assistance to trafficked children.

Research Settings and Methodology

West Bengal, a state in eastern India, stretches from the Himalayas in the north to the Bay of Bengal in the south. It was on 1st May 1960 when West Bengal was given the status of a separate state in the Indian union, purely on linguistic basis. The state has been subjected to a variety of influences from diverse cultures. Since time immemorial, the culmination of these varied cultures along with Bengal's very own ever-growing richness has given birth to a unique Bengali culture. It is a land of varied charms. Right from the mighty Himalayas in the north to the sea-caressed beaches in the south, it is a wonderful journey over the verdant plains, hilly terrains, forests and the wonderful mangrove forests like the Sunderbans. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people of the state. Since rice is the staple diet of the people, cultivation of rice is the main occupation of those practicing agriculture. Finest quality of tea is produced in Darjeeling. Other crops produced are pulses, oil seeds, wheat,

tobacco, sugarcane and potatoes. But the states' major contributor to the gross domestic product (GDP) is the service sector. 51% of the states' GDP is from the service sector. The Durgapur-Asansol belt is home to a number of steel plants which also are a major source of income for the state.

A significant part of the state is economically backward, namely, large parts of six northern districts of Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Malda, North Dinajpur and South Dinajpur; three western districts of Purulia, Bankura, Birbhum; and the Sundarbans area. West Bengal shares international borders with Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan, and has state borders with Sikkim, Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand and Assam. Kolkata, the capital city of West Bengal, is not only the trade and cultural hub of eastern India but also of the north-eastern part of the country. On the other hand, Siliguri, the most important urban centre of North Bengal, acts as the gateway to Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and also the North-East, due to its strategic location. The total area of West Bengal is 88,752 sq. kms. Though it is one of the smaller states in the country, it has a dense concentration of population. The population pressure in the state is the outcome of its socio-economic and political history. Migration from Bangladesh to India, especially to West Bengal, has been in existence for long.

In West Bengal cases of trafficking are rampant along the border areas (India – Bangladesh border). In rural Bengal there a large number of landless labourers who neither own their land, nor has enough provision for decent earning. People living in the area experience poor agricultural produce and where there is no positive industrial initiative, and are in acute poverty. The residents in the area have no alternative source of income other than working in others land as wage labourer, or they often move to the cities as migrant labourers. The families who stay back in the villages have insufficient earning to support their family and often have to send their children out for work. The inter country borders areas also acts as a transit point of cross border trafficking. West Bengal shares a long and porous border with Bangladesh which makes it easy for the traffickers to bring women and children from the rural backward areas on the pretext of providing lucrative jobs in India. West Bengal has nine districts adjoining the border with Bangladesh and crossing the border sometimes becomes a mere trifle for a trafficker. The present study was carried out in the six blocks (Bongaon, Habra-I, Habra-II, Swarup Nagar, Basirhat-I and Basirhat-II) of the North 24

pargana district sharing border with Bangladesh and are supposed to be the most vulnerable hinterland for the human traffickers.

This paper is the outcome of the author's qualitative thoughts regarding women and children trafficking issue which inspired them to deal the issue in different dimension. Research reports and publications of different organizations working in the area of trafficking and related many other issues from journals and newspaper clippings were reviewed for this study. The authors visited different villages of North 24 parganas of West Bengal as a source area of trafficking for collecting data and used unstructured interview and case study methods for the purpose of this paper. First author being the resident of North Bengal, have encountered few victims of cross border trafficking that helped us contextualizing phenomenon in the border area of the state. But the authors faced difficulties in locating the victims because lack of cooperation from the police in finding out victim and victim's family for social reasons. Moreover, it was difficult to ask questions since the victim or victim's family were reluctant to answer. Some of the rehabilitators and lawyers were also not willing to provide data in many cases. Existing information was extracted from various sources to enable readers in understanding children trafficking problems from various perspectives.

We collected the data for this report in three ways: interviews with 55 persons, participant observation, and analysis of case histories. The individuals interviewed included trafficked children, parents/legal guardian of missing children, informants from many levels of the police and judiciary, social activist, local leaders, and representatives of non-governmental organizations. The informants were selected by snowball method and by coincidental interaction. In providing quotations, we have tried to indicate the role of each informant without intending to reveal their personal identities. However, though many aspects of the problems have been covered, yet it is believed that the study is not as comprehensive as it should have been.

Child Trafficking in India: Factors and Forms

There is no comprehensive statistical data on child trafficking in all its forms in India. We do know that child trafficking in India can serve a myriad of purposes: sexual exploitation, domestic labor, agricultural labor, exploitative work in the informal economy, forced marriage, adoption, and even organ harvesting. Sexual exploitation is a well-documented form of trafficking. At least 25,000 children are said to be engaged in prostitution in six

major metropolitan cities of India—Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad, and Mumbai (Mukherjee and Das, 1996). According to one study by an NGO, 30 percent of sex workers in India, which would mean 270,000 to 400,000 people, are minors (Centre of Concern for Child Labor, 1998). While statistics provide specific information, it is clear that the scope of this exploitation is vast, and that it demands serious attention. Children are not only trafficked for sexual exploitation by pedophiles; they are also forced into prostitution with adults. A national survey of adult survivors of sex trafficking revealed that 62 percent had been trafficked as children (NHRC-UNIFEM-ISS, 2004). A state-level study in Andhra Pradesh revealed that 15 percent of the trafficked victims had been inducted into prostitution before the age of fourteen, 25 percent between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, and 20 percent when they were sixteen to eighteen years old (Vetticattil & Krishnan, 2002).

Sex tourism and the exploitation of children have increased with the boom in the tourism industry. Some of the notorious sites visited by pedophiles are Kovalam in Kerala, Mammallapuram in Tamil Nadu, and Digha of West Bengal. Of course, as these areas strengthen law enforcement, the destinations of sex tourists shift. The latest reports on child sexual exploitation refer to an increase in offenses in other areas such as Verkala, Cochin, and Kumily in Kerala, Gokarna and Karwar in Karnataka, Puri in Orissa, and some parts of the Delhi-Agra-Jaipur triangle (Protection Project, 2002; Terre des Hommes, 2001). The demand created by sexual exploitation often leads to child trafficking. A cultural system that has been exploited by traffickers is the Devadasi system, which is a relic of medieval times. Devadasi, a term that literally means “servant of God,” refers to the practice among certain communities in India in which families dedicate their daughters to the service of the temple deity. These girls, devadasis who are dedicated to the goddess when they are very young and considered to be married to the goddess, are often sold into prostitution. This custom is prevalent in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh (Vahini, 2004). According to another study, members of the Nat community in Rajasthan not only initiate their own daughters into prostitution but also buy girls from other communities (Jagori, 2005).

Trafficking women and girls for coerced marriages is a newer form of sexual exploitation. The shortage of girls that is the result of a long-standing practice of female foeticide and infanticide in the states of Punjab and Haryana has led to a demand for brides bought from

other states. Girls from West Bengal, particularly the districts of Murshidabad and 24 Parganas, have been trafficked to Haryana for forced marriages (Protection Project, 2002). Victims of trafficking for coerced marriage also originate from Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Assam, and Uttar Pradesh (Vahini, 2003). Conversely, girls from the tribal communities of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa are trafficked into the sex industry through false promises of marriages (Vahini, 2004).

The trafficking of children to the carpet factories of Uttar Pradesh and Kashmir is a notorious example of child trafficking for labor exploitation (Burra, 1995; Mishra, 2000; Satyarthi, 1995; Sheikh, 2000; Zutshi and Dutta, 1998). Children also toil under debt-bondage and slavery-like conditions in brick kilns, stone quarries, and rice mills. Children endure involuntary servitude in domestic service as well (National Domestic Workers' Movement, 2001; Pflug and Passanha, 1999). A large number of girls from tribal communities in the Chota Nagpur belt of Bihar, Jharkhand, and Orissa have been trafficked to cities of northern India for domestic labor (Joint Women's Programme, 2001). Goa and Karnataka attract trafficked child labor for domestic servitude from the southern states (NHRC-UNIFEM-ISS, 2004).

Trafficking of young children for begging and use in petty crime has also been noted in large cities like Delhi and popular tourist locales like Goa (Vahini, 2004). Very young children are drugged by traffickers and sent out with women beggars who pretend that the sleeping infants are their children (NHRC-UNIFEM-ISS, 2004). Some sectors of the informal economy that employ child labor under extremely exploitative conditions but are not identified as hazardous work are tea stalls, roadside restaurants, small hotels, shops, and waste-recycling dealers called *kabariwallas* (Esther Benjamins Trust, 2003; Free the Slaves, 2005; Jaya, 2000; Singh, 1995; Thippaiah, 2000; Venkateswaran, 1995).

Adoption has become another mode of child trafficking. This is often accomplished by getting the female buyer admitted to the hospital, where records are manipulated and fake birth certificates are issued (Protection Project, 2002). A study by the Joint Women's Programme in 1986 documented the sale of unborn female fetuses for a price of 3,500 rupees (US\$87). While 33 percent had been sold by parents and relatives, 67 percent of these sales

profited organized crime groups, lawyers, and doctors. India has one of the largest underground markets in human organs. Traffickers target poverty-stricken families and children and lure them to trade their organs for cash. Organized crime rings facilitate organ trafficking by providing fake documents proving that the donor and the recipient are relatives (NHRC-UNIFEM-ISS, 2004; Protection Project, 2002).

Thus, India faces the challenge of combating a large number of forms of trafficking. The issue is complicated by the fact that the labor of some children may be helping their families, or that adoption may give some children a chance at a better life, but that child trafficking is an absolutely unacceptable human rights violation.

Contextual Study of Cross Border Trafficking: West Bengal as Source, Transit and Destination

The Bangla equivalent of the word trafficking is *pachar*. It has a mild connotation, which means transfer from one place to another. If the term *pachar* is used in reference to children, in *Bangla* the phrase *shishupachar* means illegal transfer of children from one place to another. Trafficking, which is a serious problem and is considered a violation of human rights, is yet to be internalized emotionally by society at large in West Bengal and also in many other countries.

Among South Asian countries Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka are the major countries of origin for trafficking. India is simultaneously playing a dual role –country of origin as well as a destination country. Kolkata and Mumbai are the major transit point of India for other destination. Illegal migration, trafficking and smuggling are of quite common occurrence along the Indo-Bangla border. Between 5,000 and 15,000 girls and women are smuggled every year from Bangladesh to West Bengal and en route to other part of India and also to the Middle East (Hoque, 2009).

Twenty-eight districts of Bangladesh have common borders with India. There are as many as 20 transit points from districts of Bangladesh bordering India through which the children and women are smuggled out of the country. The border areas of Khulna, Jessore, Dinajpur, and Sylhet are frequently used as land routes for trafficking. The most easy and well-known land route to India is Benapole border in Jessore, which is the southwest transit point of crossing

route from Bangladesh to India in which women and children are most susceptible to trafficking. The West Bengal town of Bongaon is around 10 kilometers from Benapole, where women and children are collected from all over Bangladesh. Since the area is well connected by bus and train, traffickers can easily reach Kolkata. They are taken to Bongaon, a major shipment point to be trafficked either through the legal border post or through illegal entry. For a long time, Kolkata has been well known for its prostitution and the sale of women and children. West Bengal with the red light areas of Kolkata primarily *Sonagachhi* is a major hub of trafficking activities and for forcing women and children in to commercial sexual exploitation. Traffickers are well organized to take them to Mumbai and New Delhi (Shamim,2001).99% women are trafficked out of Bangladesh through land routes along the border areas of Bangladesh and India. It is estimated that there are between 30,000 and 40,000 Nepalese girls are in the brothels of Kolkata. Reuters in 1997 quoted 30,000 as the number of Bangladeshi women in Kolkata brothels. It is estimated that 25 percent of the victims of commercial sexual exploitation in India are below 18 years. Almost 15 percent of the sex workers enter the profession before the age of 15 and 25 percent enter between 15 and 18 years. Around 60 percent of the sex workers belong to the scheduled caste, tribes and backward classes. A significant number are children of sex workers (UNICEF, 2002).

First author being a resident of the Coochbehar district and having a fair contact with the different agencies and activists working to combat human trafficking allowed him to collect some relevant information to reconcile the situation in North Bengal region about trafficked women and children, especially the number of trafficked indigenous women and children. According to a reliable source of the author stated that due to the geographic terrain, in most places it is difficult to distinguish the border giving a free run to traffickers. Presence of ‘chhitmahals’ (enclaves) add to the problem when people of one country get landlocked in the other. A typical example is the Mekhligunj- Dhapra Road, an arterial road of the region runs through Bangladesh chhitmahal where the road is in India and the adjacent lands are in Bangladesh. Apart from land route, the smugglers and other illegal immigrants also access the riverine routes. E.g. Teesta enters Bangladesh at Mekhligunj in Gitaldahpanchayat. The barbed fence is yet to be constructed and the only mark distinguishing the two countries is the border pillars. A casual enquiry revealed that most of the people are indifferent to cross-border trafficking although they’re aware that smuggling and illegal immigration are quite

frequent. It should also be mentioned apart from cross-border trafficking, trafficking of girls within the community is also frequent although most of them remain concealed due to the abject poverty and lack of knowledge of the villagers.

Down south, the Benapole-Petrapole border near Bongaon again reveals the multi-faceted issues of Indo-Bangla cross-border trafficking. Most probably Petrapole is the busiest International Check Post in south Bengal and also the most vital land route of Indo-Bangla trade. According to a local NGO functionary, Petrapole is source, transit as well as destination area of trafficking. Poor girls from Petrapole, Bongaon, Ghojadanga etc. are lured by traffickers into sex trade taking advantage of their destitution. Girls of Bangladesh are trafficked through Petrapole and sometimes kept in Bongaon to be finally whisked away to the Red Light Areas (RLA) of Kolkata, Mumbai and Delhi. Due to the presence of truckers, migrant workers etc. there are a large number of flying sex workers in the area. In fine, it can be stated here that the afore-mentioned causes along with others, creates conducive environment and encourages the traffickers to traffic women and children across the border.

Modus Operandi of Human Traffickers: Reconciling Forms from Case

Traffickers adopt different strategies and tricks to allure and enrol young children and women (and their families) into the trafficking process. The procurement process of women for trafficking in the sex industry involves skilled entrapment procedure. In studied location the traffickers hunt for their clients at the local market, bus stations, and the railway stations. At these locations, the traffickers look for migrants who come from nearby villages for jobs or for poor young people abandoned by their families and allure them with false promises of better life. The victims collected from these spots are usually sold to brothels. Procurement of victims in villages and towns in the border areas and other parts of the country are more frequently associated with the purpose of supplying sex workers for the sex industry. The case studies reveal that the following strategies are mainly adopted by the traffickers involved in the national and international human trade in border area of West Bengal.

Employment Prospects

Traffickers look for girls from poorer and vulnerable families in villages and tempt them and their parents with offers of lucrative jobs and a comfortable life in neighbouring states, such

as India and Pakistan. At times, the girls are so motivated by promises of the trafficker that they leave home without consulting their parents.

Case in point - 1: This is the case of Swarupnagar block of North 24 parganas. The victim was a girl child belonging to a poor family. There were three brothers and sister in her family. A nearby person offered a job of maid servant in daily with high payment. To combat her poverty, the father permitted her for the job when she was only 15 years old. During train journey, that very man gave her sleeping pills with food, and she was raped by both that man and his son. Thereafter they sold her in red light area of Delhi. The girl was rescued after 7 months and rehabilitated in her house. The traffickers were arrested but the father of the girl did not give witness against that man, as a result he got bail. The same person again re-trafficked the girl and that time the girls are so motivated by promises of the trafficker that they leave home without consulting their parents.

Case in point - 2: This is the case of Bongaon block of North 24 parganas district. The age of that very girl was 16 at the time of trafficking. Firstly she was offered a job of high income and later on sold in red light areas of Benaras. Almost after 8 months, with the help of others, she came out from that place and contacted local police and rehabilitated in her natives.

Love Affair

Traffickers also pretend to be in love with young girls and asking them to elope. The girls believe them and leave their parents/home with their boyfriends full of illusions about a happy married life.

Case in point: This is a case of 19 years old 4 feet 9 inches tall, good looking girl (pseudonym - Moyna), now a professional sex worker in one of the prominent RLA of Kolkata lived in a village of Jessore, Bangladesh. Her mother died when she was 14 years old. After the death of her mother, her father remarried. Her father sent her away to a nearby district to her uncle Majid's house, who was engaged with tailoring business. Many persons, especially the women, girls were his customer. Majid (39 years old) maintained a close relation with Rahman, who lived in India. He often visited to Bangladesh with the intent to take women and children to Dubai. Rahman proposed and allured Majid for engaging into the trafficking business. He offered him taka 50,000.00 for collecting a fair and good-looking

young girl. One day one of Majid's friends told about Moyna to Rahman and then he offered 70000 taka to Majid for Moyna. Then both of them planned to traffic Moyna. Rahman posed as a lover and proposed to marry Moyna. Eventually, Moyna agreed and Rahman married Moyna. After 15 days of the marriage ceremony, Rahman informed Moyna that he will take her to Kolkata with him. Moyna became so happy that she was going to Kolkata with her husband. Moyna and her husband started to live in a small room and there she came to know that her husband was drug addict.

One day some of Rahman's friends came to that room and then Rahman left the house and he did not come back. In the mean time Moyna understood that Rahman sold his wife to his friends. That man tried to make physical relation with Moyna at first night but when Moyna refused she was tortured and raped by that man. One day Moyna left that house with the help of one of her clients and she started sex business near Habra and finally reached her present destination.

Promise of Marriage

In addition to the strategy of alluring girls from poor families with love affairs, promises of marriage and a better future, the traffickers also take full advantage of the cultural practice of arranged marriages by parents. Sometimes they gain the confidence of parents, and manage to develop a close relationship with them before offering to marry their daughters. The poor parents agree, because the offer may appear to be a good opportunity for the family because of low or no demand of dowry.

Case in point: A 17 year old girl (pseudonym - Munni) was one of the four daughters of Sambhu, a day-laborer from Coochbehar. She had a relationship with a local boy who lived in Kolkata. But her parents did not like him for their family conflicts. In the middle of 2012, Munni's parents found Rotan, a 32 years old wealthy person as Munni's husband. That proposal was sent by one of the women who were their fictive kin. Munni did not give her consent to marry Rotan first but she was forced to marry him. Then she married and went to her in-laws house with her husband. Her husband, Rotan did not take Munni in his house. He took her to his so-called aunt's house in Siliguri. Rotan told Munni to live with her aunt for a few months. Because their house was being renovated and there is no room for them to stay. After that, Rotan went away in the name of his house. In reality, Munni was sold to that

woman. Rotan was a trafficker and provided girls to traffic in abroad. It was not his first marriage. He got married several times and trafficked those girls. Two weeks later, Munni was sent to Kolkata with the trafficker. After that, Munni became a prostitute and rendered services for their circle. One day Munni found an activist and told him everything. Then that person helped her to send to his village. Her father was not ready to accept Munni and finally she was rehabilitated in a home.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping, one of the methods for trafficking, is normally done by deception and by force. Now-a-days the number of kidnapping cases has increased significantly.

Case in point 1: This is the case of Habra II of North 24 parganas district. Here two girls were trafficked by two local boys namely Saddam and Sagir (as said by the girls). Their age was 10 years and 12 years respectively at the time of trafficking took place. These boys were not from their village. They were rescued from Jaipur, 6 months later from the day of Trafficking. Though no sexual hazards were committed but physical and mental torture were done.

Case in point 2: Two girls of Mashlandapur of Habra-I block were kidnapped from their surroundings and trafficked to a prominent business family to serve as domestic help. They were 14 years and 15 years old at the time of kidnapping. Due to their greed and need they agreed to continue the service despite heavy physical and mental torture. Later on they were traced from Nadia district of WB and rescued.

The above description not only entails the different means adopted by the traffickers to continue their illicit trade rather the cases also highlights the societal views towards the victims especially girl child. Once a woman or a female child falls prey to human traffickers in this male-dominated society she loses the chance of going back to their family and has to adapt her with the trafficked culture. Society treats them as ‘polluted’ or *nosta* girl. The female trafficked children are stigmatized and unacceptable by their own families, societies who regard them as ‘spoilt’ through prostitution. In other words, stigmatization leaves trafficked women and girls as social outcasts. It actually creates more vulnerability to the trafficked persons. Besides, fear and shame often lead many trafficked children and women

to remain silent about their experiences of abuse and thus they fail to warn others who might be vulnerable.

Emerged Perspectives: Why Trafficking Prevails?

Presently, trafficking has increased to such a degree of magnitude that it has turned into a global crisis (Hoque 2009). In this condition, it is urgently needed to know why this inhuman trafficking prevails and the causes of failure of the existing provisions to stop it in today's world.

Poverty and hunger, the inferior status of women and children; escape from conservative/traditional values and customs, religious values; the sexual abuse of girls, often by family members; and the willingness of poor parents and guardians to let their children go to urban centers and neighboring countries for economic benefits of the whole family (Shamim, 2001: 1), lack of shelter, environmental degradation, ecological erosion and the destruction of biodiversity- based production systems, negligence and corruption of the law enforcing agencies, coupled with political malice, lack of people's consciousness, defective moral system, greed, ignorance, open borders, cultural pluralism, polygamy, urbanization and changing nature of family functions, etc. are mainly responsible for the vulnerable condition of women and children in border areas of West Bengal. This vulnerability leads women and children to the way of trafficking.

In contemporary capitalist world, people are busy in making more and more profit and want to be capitalist easily within a short span of time through different legal and illegal means. Trafficking is considered inhuman and illegal and deviant culture of the society; yet some of people in this capitalist era consider trafficked male, female and children as 'commodity', and making money using them by force in sex industries. Sexual trafficking is highly profitable business and it has huge demand. Sex trafficking operations can be found in highly visible venues such as street prostitution, as well as more underground systems such as closed-brothels that operate out of residential homes. Sex trafficking also takes place in a variety of public and private locations such as massage parlors, spas, strip clubs and other fronts of prostitution (Mandal, 2006: 196) in different parts of the worlds. All these indicate

the high demand of human traffickers and their trafficking activities and thus trafficking is functioning as a booming business.

The prevailing cultural construction of most of the societies, i.e., 'men are economic providers and women their dependents whose role is related to biological reproduction and women's sexuality has to be controlled by men', is changing due to increasing awareness, literacy and modernity. People are now migrating from one place to another for their better livelihood. Both male and female have become the money earning engines in this free market economy. Women are now no longer dependents. Increased career consciousness causes late marriage. Interpersonal relationships are now hampered between husband, wife and children due to every one's business. Modernity, the culture of capitalistic society, keeps one person away from his or her kins by engaging in different income oriented activities, which even deprives people from having their legal sexual rights. This kind of deprivation turns people to find out any other options like having sex with any female in a brothel to fulfill biological and their mental needs. The brothels as well as the sex industries need women or female children. In meeting the great demand of women and female children of the brothels as well as the sex industries, trafficking is the best means and traffickers are the able agents. Besides, the culture of sex restriction also helps in flourishing sex industry, which ultimately facilitates in existing human trafficking in the society.

Tourism is another important factor that helps to flourish sex trade. Due to globalization tours and travels has increased; hence the tourism industry is expanding. Expanded tourism has given rise to women and child sex tourism, which has also contribution in keeping existence of human trafficking in the region.

There is a high demand of female children for domestic services in urban households. Trafficking is one of the important means through which, the demand of domestic servants is meeting up in the society. Like many other reasons, this is another important factor which is operating as a driving force to keep existence of trafficking in West Bengal as well as in the different parts of the world (Hoque, 2009).

Finally the trafficking prone villages in West Bengal are spread in the remote areas especially in the case of 24 Parganas where most of the affected villages are in the Sunderbans area like Mandirbazar, Kulpi, Canning, Joynagar. These regions are difficult to commute due to poor infrastructure and parts remain virtually inaccessible during monsoon. For this reason it is not always possible for an NGO to always keep a tab on the post re-integration status of survivor due to its logistic/resource constraints. The handholding support in the post-reintegration phase is very important and its absence multiplies the chances of re-trafficking. The skills picked up by a girl during her stay in the shelter are based on her individual aptitude and the facilities offered by the NGO. In most cases those skill sets have little relevance in the distant rural areas due to absence of market and proper linkage facilities. So these skills acquired in no way helps the girl who is living in remote parts of the studied districts to become self-reliant and hence address the poverty at home. Sometimes a girl has to be restored to her family due to external directive like court order without completing her psycho-social rehabilitation process. These girls remain vulnerable both from inside as well as from the external environment.

Conclusion: The Way Ahead

The practice of women and children trafficking, especially the rural women and children has alarmingly increased. Being facilitated by global cooperation amongst traffickers and others concerned, this flourishing industry has prospered worldwide. The industry capitalizes on the sale and trafficking of women and children through the internet and other means (Mandal, 2006). The culture of capitalism promotes the culture of human trafficking. One of the main reasons for the spurt in trafficking in this decade is the demand for trafficked people.

In recent days, the nature and method of human trafficking is changing and it is creating new challenges ahead for the government and legal support providers in addressing the issue effectively. Previously trafficking of women and children for sex industry was established as the feature of human trafficking. However, in recent times, the traffickers changed their strategy of 'victim collection' and as a result of that trafficking are increasing in the name of labour migration. Since trafficking is a clandestine matter, the accurate number is not available in the country. In West Bengal, the Department of Women and Child Development and Social Welfare is the nodal agency for the implementation of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000 to provide for the care, protection, treatment,

development and rehabilitation of Children in Conflict with Law and Children in Need of Care Protection. Being equipped with all the provisions for facing the challenges of human trafficking, this act seemed to be very comprehensive and updated to rehabilitate the trafficked children but the challenges will remain in its implementation.

To save humanity from trafficking it is urgently needed to address the ‘root causes’ of human trafficking with an in-depth and holistic perspective. It is also needed to shed light on the ‘demand’ side of trafficking, particularly on those social, political and economic forces that develop and sustain a market for human trafficking. Positive societal perceptions towards the victims and their families would definitely help in breaking the cycle of human trafficking. Anti-trafficking policies have been formulated without considering particular cultural factors of the society. While formulating the policies cultural factors must be taken into consideration, because the trafficking problem varies differently in different cultures. It is also important to give attention to the culture of trafficked people in understanding the human trafficking problem as well as combating this immoral global problem.

The most important issue is, being a human; a person has to be treated by another as ‘human’, not as ‘commodity’, and with this it is essential to set up a strong anti-trafficking network to combat this phenomenon and rescue the innocence of childhood.

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