

Child Trafficking and India

With Special Reference to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC)

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***Abstract**-In today's world trafficking of children has become a matter of serious concern for all. Every year a large number of children are trafficked throughout the world for a range of purposes such as commercial sexual exploitation, child labour, child marriage, begging, illegal adoption, and so on. In India too the problem of child trafficking is assuming a very serious form day by day. "India for long has been considered the source, destination and transit country for women and children for forced labour and sex-trafficking" (HAQ, 2016, P. 10). In the light of this, the present study is an attempt to discuss about the issues of child trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) in the context of India. Besides focusing on various causes and magnitude of the problem, the paper also discusses about the impact of human trafficking on children. In conclusion the paper suggests that for effective prevention it is imperative to understand the root causes of the problem as well as to find out solutions so that the risk can be minimised. Careful and in-depth research is required to know about the connection between child trafficking and other child protection issues. Further, ensuring children's active participation and paying attention to their experiences and recommendations to combat trafficking at all levels of decision-making is also very crucial.*

***Keywords:** Children, Trafficking, Vulnerability, Sexual Exploitation, Impact, India*

INTRODUCTION

"Human trafficking is widely referred to as "the slavery of our times" or "modern-day slavery" (Weiss, 2015, p. 1). "It is estimated that after drugs and arms trafficking, human trafficking is the third largest illegal business in the world" (Chopra, 2015, 187). Today, in many parts of the world the buying and selling of persons for various purposes has become common. However, studies revealed that "most of the victims of this crime are women and children" (Kumar, 2019, p. 113). To be specific, millions of children around the world are the victims of this illegal trade. Trafficking of children may take place for a wide variety of purposes such as commercial sexual exploitation, child labour, child marriage, removal of organ, begging, and so on. "Whether sold or kidnapped or duped or lured, the end result of child trafficking is exploitation" (HAQ, 2007, p. 11).

"Child trafficking is about mafias and nexuses" (Chopra, 2015, 186). Besides organized criminal networks child trafficking is also committed by the friends, relatives and even parents of the children. Like many other parts of the world in India too child trafficking is a very serious problem. According to Chopra (2015),

children are at risk of being abducted/trafficked no matter where they are. However, some groups of children are more vulnerable to trafficking than the others. These are as mentioned under (p. 185):

- Children of poor parents,
- Children of unemployed unskilled parents,
- Children who have been affected by disaster or a natural calamity,
- Children from strife and civil unrest prone areas,
- Children living in communities where religious and cultural norms force parents to give children for prostitution,
- Children affected by transitory poverty in families,
- Children of bonded labourers,
- Migrant children and
- Children of prostitutes.

Child Trafficking and India

Child trafficking is one of the major problems in India. “Every day men, women and children are trafficked across India and throughout South Asia” (Chopra, 2015, 185). “the Global Slavery Index has ranked India fourth in the countries having highest number of trafficking victims” (Khan, 2014, p. 570).

Geeta Chopra in her book “Child Rights in India: Challenges and Social Action” has mentioned about the major causes of child trafficking. Some of these are as under (Chopra, 2015, p. 191-193):

- Poverty is cited as the major reason for child trafficking. Due to poor financial condition parents cannot afford the basic necessities of life which forces them to sell their children for small amount of money.
- Due to loss of traditional sources of livelihood families suffer from hunger and starvation which ultimately forces them to sell children and women.
- Traffickers cannot be caught due to inadequate legislation and poor implementation of laws.
- Women and children in large numbers from neighboring countries migrate to India illegally. Traffickers often take advantage of such situations to traffic women and children into exploitative situations.
- Some castes and regional groups are more vulnerable to trafficking.
- Children and women become highly vulnerable to trafficking during the time of natural disasters.
- There is increasing demand for children as they are cheap labour. Again, traffickers can manipulate them easily.
- Further, demand for trafficking of young girls and boys also comes from the Sex-tourism industry. Victims are used for sexual activity, pornography, and entertainment of ‘paedophiles’.

It is practically impossible to obtain the exact number of children trafficked for various purposes (CRY, 2018). According to Kumar (2019), “many cases of missing children may be linked to child trafficking” (Kumar, 2019, p. 113). He is of the view that children belonging to marginalised communities who are not adequately aware are more vulnerable to trafficking. Traffickers takes advantage of the poor socio-economic condition of parents and lured them as a result of which they send or sell their children for better living opportunities (Kumar, 2019).

“According to the NHRC of India, over 40, 000 children are missing every year of which over 11, 000 remain untraced” (Bajpai, 2017, p. 443). According to Bajpai, “Evidence of trafficking for forced begging, marriage and labour in informal work ghettos are on the rise within the Indian context” (Bajpai, 2017, p. 441). As per National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, 1,06,958 number of crimes against children were reported in 2016. In 2015 the total number of crimes recorded against children was 94,172. Kidnapping and abduction of children were the highest category of crimes registered against children in 2016 (MOSPI, 2018). In India there is an increase in the intra-state trafficking due to rapid urbanisation, increased mobility of people and growth in industries. Today traffickers send women and children to about 18 countries for various purposes (HAQ, 2016).

Child Trafficking, Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) and India

“Trafficking is a major gateway to Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children” (CSEC) (ECPAT International, 2016, p. 17). In India trafficking of children for the purpose of sexual exploitation has always been a major challenge for the society. 40 per cent of the estimated 3 million (approximately) sex workers in India are children (Shivmangal, 2017). Nearly 15% of them become professional sex workers before attaining 15 years of age and 25% between 15 and 18 years (Shivmangal, 2017). According to Chopra (2015), commercial child prostitution in India is increasing at the rate of 8-10 per cent annually (Chopra, 2015).

“India for long has been considered the source, destination and transit country for women and children for forced labour and sex-trafficking” (HAQ, 2016, p. 10). A large number of children are trafficked from India to Middle East, Europe and other parts of the world for which India is known as the source country. India is also a transit country as a large number of children are trafficked from Nepal and Bangladesh to the Middle East and other parts of the world through India. Further, India is also a destination point for a significant number of traffic victim children of Nepal and Bangladesh (Khan, 2016). In India, Kolkata is a major transit point and destination for girls and women trafficked from Nepal and Bangladesh. Traffickers also use India as a transit point for sending young boys to Dubai and other Middle East countries for camel racing. These young boys, very often, suffer from sexual exploitation. They are also kept as bonded labourers (Bajpai, 2017).

The US Government’s 2014 Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP Report) disclosed that over ninety per cent of the problem of trafficking of men, women and children in India is internal (Bajpai, 2017). Besides traditional red-light districts women and children in India are suffering from sex trafficking in small hotels, vehicles, huts, and private residences. In India the problem of trafficking is assuming a very serious form in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Although both boys and girls are victims of trafficking but girls are more vulnerable in the context of trafficking for sexual purposes (Chopra, 2015). Shivmangal (2017), is of the view that those women, girls and children who do not have any means for survival easily becomes the target of traffickers. For them it becomes very difficult to escape once they enter into the sex trafficking industry (Shivmangal, 2017). According to Bajpai (2017), “Though there are no comprehensive and absolutely reliable statistics to that effect, it is a known and acknowledged fact that trafficking of women and girls for labour and commercial sexual exploitation is on rise in India” (Bajpai, 2017, p. 438).

“India is the most popular hub for child sex tourism in South Asia” (ECPAT International, 2014, p. 35). Due to the growth and expansion of travel and tourism industry, “India is quickly emerging as a main destination for the sexual exploitation of children” (ECPAT International, 2016, p. 27). Several recent studies have brought into light the fact that both foreigners and nationals abuse children sexually in various parts of India (including Mumbai, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, West Bengal and Rajasthan), including at pilgrimage sites (ECPAT International, 2014). The US Government’s 2014 Trafficking in Persons report (TIP Report) disclosed that from Nepal, Afghanistan and Bangladesh a large number of female children were trafficked to India for sexual exploitation. The majority of these children were between 9 and 14 years of age (ECPAT International, 2016).

It may be noted that across India tourist destinations are the places where sexual exploitation is prevalent. Although much attention has been paid on the popular destinations like Goa and Kerala but other areas are also increasingly emerging as destinations of sexual exploitation. A report published by UNDOC found that the demand coming from the tourism industry has contributed (either directly or indirectly) towards the growth of human trafficking business for Goa. The majority of the victims trafficked to Goa, as per the report, were from the other states of India. A large number of children, however, were also trafficked from neighbouring countries like Nepal and Bangladesh (ECPAT International, 2016). Another report found that from the states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, a large number of children have been trafficked to the Goa’s sex business. Further, Orissa, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and Kashmir are some other states from which many children have also been trafficked to Goa (ECPAT International, 2014). Further, due to rising demand for labour many children migrate to Goa and other tourist destinations. These children mostly engage themselves in informal and unregulated sectors as workers. These children are vulnerable to sexual abuse and commercial sexual exploitation. Besides Goa, Kerala is the another newly emerging tourist destination for sexual exploitation of children. Hotels, houseboats, bars and nightclubs are used by the criminals and mediators to exploit children who are vulnerable. In addition, an Indian NGO Sanlaap has brought into light the incidences of sexual exploitation of children (mainly by domestic offenders) in travel and tourism industry in West Bengal. Victim children are accessed and abused by the child sex offenders with the help of rickshaw drivers and local guesthouse owners who play the role as mediators (ECPAT International, 2016).

The act of trafficking is not straightforward. It involves several steps. When a person is trafficked, he is treated like a commodity and passed through multiple hands. “In most cases, abuse takes place during the journey itself, both as a method of preparing the person for future life and often, as form of payment for the services rendered” (CRY, 2018, p. 108). This process seems to be more common when a person is trafficked for sexual exploitation. Thus, serious violation and exploitation takes place in the path even before the person reaches the final destination.

According to Chopra (2015), “Trafficking is an organized crime”. “The nexus between traffickers, law enforcement officials and politicians allow very little scope for protecting children from being trafficked” (Chopra, 2015, p. 191). It is seen that in maximum number of the cases of child trafficking only low-level operators are caught with the victims. Investigative insight, determination and scrupulous work is required to bust the entire racket (Kumar, 2019).

Impact of Human Trafficking on Children

When a child is trafficked various forms of crimes may be committed against him before the child reaches the final destination. The negative impacts of trafficking mostly affect the trafficked children and their families. It also affects their communities and the nation as a whole (ILO, 2009).

According to Koirala (2014), psychological manipulation and coercive methods are used by the traffickers to control their victims. Physical, sexual and psychological violence; isolation; controlled access to food and water etc. are some of the methods used by the traffickers. Traffickers, employers, pimps, brothel owners and customers beat and abuse the victim children on regular basis. “The emotional and physical trauma, and unrelenting abuse and fear present grave risks to physical, psychological, spiritual and socio-emotional development” (Koirala, 2014, p. 230). According to ILO (2015), “it is common for children exposed to sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation to suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and this may be characterized by such symptoms as anxiety, depression, insomnia, irritability, flashbacks, emotional numbing, and hyper-alertness” (ILO, 2015, p. 15).

Concluding Remarks

Child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children have always been a matter of grave concern for modern day civilization. In India too these are very serious issues. The Indian Government has been facing many challenges in tackling these issues. According to Chopra (2015), “the rate of conviction of trafficking in India is slow” (Chopra, 2015, p. 195). Although the number of cases filed against the traffickers is increasing but due to slow legal action traffickers are getting a chance to escape trial and conviction (Chopra, 2015). Again, “in India there is no special legislation, which may cover the entire gamut of child trafficking or human trafficking and the provision is found scattered across various Acts” (Kumar, 2019, 113). Further, India has not yet achieved the desired success in tackling issues of commercial sexual exploitation. Media has been focussing more on tackling the issue of foreign ‘paedophiles’. Much attention has not yet been paid on the important cases of crimes committed by the local and regional offenders (ECPAT International, 2016).

According to ILO (2015), “The most cost-effective way to fight child trafficking is to stop it before it happens” (ILO, 2015, p. 36). It is, therefore, imperative to understand the root causes of the problem as well as to find out solutions so that the risk can be minimised. Local communities at source and destination places should be empowered and alternative but suitable methods of income generation should be created for families whose children are at risk of being trafficked. The Indian government and several other agencies have been working on it. Careful and in-depth research, however, is required to know about the connection between child trafficking and other child protection issues. In this direction what is more required is the collective effort of different groups, organisations as well as the government. Furthermore, ensuring children’s active participation and paying attention to their experiences and recommendations to combat trafficking at all levels of decision-making is also very crucial.

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