

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN NORTH EAST INDIA

By: Dr.NinghorlaZimik T.
Associate Professor,
Pettigrew College, Ukhrul

Abstract

Human trafficking is the trade in humans most commonly for the purpose of sexual, forced labour or commercial sexual exploitation for the traffickers or others for the extraction of organs or tissues including surrogacy and oval removal or for providing a spouse in the context of force marriage. North East India has become a major source of human trafficking to other parts of India and elsewhere. In North East India, the combination of poverty, ethnic conflicts, unemployment, gender inequality, inadequate legislation and law enforcement enables trafficking to thrive. Searching for employment, driven by poverty and insecurity of life has forced many women and girls to move in uncertain destinations with unknown persons. Human trafficking in India's North East which is considered as the hotspot of human trafficking can no longer be ignored. It is the symptoms of social and economic problems. However, lack of knowledge on the issue is a great barrier in preventing with more effective interventions.

Keywords: *Human trafficking, North East trade, crime, human rights violations*

Human trafficking in the present century is one of the worst kind of exploitation and abuse that human being had or even thought of. However trafficking is the trade in humans most commonly for the purpose of sexual slavery, forced labour or commercial sexual exploitation^{[1][2]} for the organs or tissues including surrogacy and ova removal^[3] or for providing a spouse in the context of forced marriage. Human trafficking can occur within a country or trans-nationally. Human trafficking is a crime against the person because of their commercial exploitation. Human trafficking is the trade in people and does not necessarily involve the movement of the person from one place to another^[4]. On the rise of human trafficking, Koffi Annan, former UN General Secretary in 2007 said that "Despite the fact that all human beings are born free and equal in human dignity, everyday, thousands of women and children are sold so that their bodies and their labour can be exploited, despite international labour standard and a UN protocol against human trafficking, millions of victims, particularly children made vulnerable by poverty and exploited by criminals are working in mines, sweet shops, brothel and plantation tapped by debt and violence. In a perverse commercialisations of humanity, they are used like products and then thrown away".^[5] Human trafficking is thought to be one of the fastest growing activities of transnational criminal organisations. It is one of the major concern of twenty first century that has taken a rapid pace with the advent of the free movement and free trade under the shadow of globalisation.

Human trafficking differs from people smuggling which involves a person voluntarily requesting or hiring another individual to covertly transport them across an international border, usually because the

smuggled person would be denied entry into a country by legal channels. Though illegal, there may be no deception or coercion involved. After entry into the country and arrival at their ultimate destination, smuggled person is usually free to find their own way. According to the International centre for migration policy development (ICMPD) people smuggling is a violation of national immigration laws of the destination country and does not require violation of the rights of the smuggled person. Human trafficking on the other hand is a crime against a person because of the violations of the victim's rights through coercion and exploitation. Unlike most cases of people smuggling, victims of human trafficking are not permitted to leave upon arrival at their destination^[6]. While smuggling requires travel, trafficking does not. Trafficked people are held against their will through acts of coercion and forced to work for or provide services to the traffickers or others. The work or services may include anything from bonded or forced labour to commercial sexual exploitation. The arrangement may be structured as a work contract but with no or low payment or on terms which are highly exploitative. Sometimes the arrangement is structured as debt bondage, with the victim not being permitted or able to pay off the debt^{[1][2]}.

In India there are about 1794 identified places from where female victims are being trafficked. The whole chain of this transportation process has involved number of stake holders in this crime of trafficking. In fact, it is a billion dollar business industry and a complete chain of networking and lobbying from powerful to the grass root village/local level trafficker. The extent is that, it has resulted to make this industry as one of the organised crime industry in the world. It is the world's largest crime after drugs and arms trafficking^[7].

In India different strategies have been adopted in order to lure the innocent masses and exploit them further. There are various methods through which the human trafficking is being organised. As per the study of National Human Rights Commission of India, the several methods through which victims are being trapped and human – trafficking is happening includes: offering jobs as domestic servants, promising jobs in the film industry, jobs in factories, offering money, luring them with pleasure trips etc^[7]. It is also found that children have been trafficked by the NGOs from a backward and poverty affected heavy donations from abroad.

Globalisation and the rise of internet technology has also facilitated sex trafficking. Online classified sites and social networks such as Craigslist have been under intense scrutiny for being used by sex work in general. Facebook, twitter and other social networking sites are suspected for similar uses. Studies have identified the internet as the single biggest facilities of commercial sex trade, although it is difficult to ascertain which women advertised are sex trafficking victims^[4]. Traffickers and pimps use the internet to recruit minors, since internet and social networking sites usage have significantly increased especially among children^[8]. While globalisation fostered new technologies that may exacerbate sex trafficking, technology can also be used to assist law enforcement and anti-trafficking^[4].

North East India is a hotspot for human trafficking as the region shares many international borders most of which are open and unmanned. These points provide an easy passage in and out of India for organised human trafficking syndicates to operate undetected. The highway networks in the North East connect many national and international destinations. In the state of Assam, truckers have

used the highway routes to transport drugs and trafficked girls. In North East India, the combination of poverty, ethnic conflicts, unemployment, gender inequality, inadequate legislation and law enforcement enables trafficking in girls to thrive. The poor family send their children to work in the wealthy family in the urban or rural areas. These children generally do not have access to any kind of education. The main destinations of North East for domestic servants are Kolkata, Delhi, Mumbai and to certain extent in Bangalore and Darjeeling. Trafficking of women and children from the North Eastern state and bordering countries in both directions is a serious issue that has not drawn public attention. Pangsa and Dimapur in Nagaland and Moreh in Manipur are the major trade border transit and demand centres. Women and children from Assam and Bangladesh are trafficked to Moreh and are moved out from there to Myanmar and other South-East Asian countries. The long drawn conflicts in the North-Eastern states have made women and children highly vulnerable (*Needan foundation department*).

Ethnic conflicts and internal armed conflict in North East region have cause wide scale trafficking of different kinds. Large numbers of children in conflict areas are recruited as comrade by the rebel forces. It is also revealed by the returnees (surrendered) girls' rebels forces that most of the times they were made to perform sex to their superior/commanders and other leaders of rebel groups visiting the camps. They also informed to the authority that they were made to perform sex for blue films. Such films were made in order to raise fund to run the rival camp in the deep jungles. Most of the films are sold to the foreign countries. It is one of the biggest blue films making network operating in the North East region^[9]. Poverty and lack of employment opportunities in the North East region is also one of the root cause of the problem. Searching for employment, driven by poverty and insecurity of life has forced many women and girls to move in uncertain destinations with unknown persons. In such situation the girls mobility has been trapped by the traffickers as such agents put them into exploitative condition without having any means to return to their respective home towns. Trafficked women and children endures various forms of torture such as cigarette burnings and insertion of chilli into the vagina.

In Manipur a good number of children are trafficked to other states of India. Some are rescued and some are yet to be traced. Manipur being one of the poorest and undeveloped states in terms of its governance and economy has become one of the most vulnerable states to human trafficking in India and particularly in North East India^[10]. In Assam and other North East states, girls from the backward areas have become the target of the human trafficking system.

Regarding the rise of child prostitution in North East India, a Guwahati – based NGO along with the police has revealed that 20 percent involved in prostitution in the region are aged between 11 and 17 years. The study lists poverty and displacement of population behind the increase in the number of children as commercial sex workers in regions. It is mostly the children of poor parents who are forced to take to prostitution to earn money for the family, said the Director of Organisation of Life Development (GOLD). The survey report also state most of the children are victims of acute physical torture. "They are initially raped and flagged almost to death to take up the profession." Almost half of the child prostitutes were from Assam, followed by Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, said Sharma. "There are also reports that the sheikhs from the Middle East are also buying North Eastern girls from these brothels. Also, trafficking gangs from South East Asian countries

are taking a keen interest in the girls because of their Mongoloid features” Sharma said. Experts working in the field believe that prostitution and trafficking are flourishing in the region as these crimes are invisible in nature. “The demand for child sex workers is rising at an alarming rate in the region and we have to do something drastic” said a senior police officer. In Guwahati “Police forces across six states except Sikkim are working in a co-ordinated manner to ameliorate the situation along with various NGO’s to assist them”^[11]. In Manipur, children kidnapped for recruitment into child soldiers is also a serious problem. In Assam about 9,500 went missing between 2007 and June 2014 of which only 3,840 have been recovered from different places in the country either by police or NGOs working for children. Many children belonging to poor families in Assam and Manipur have been rescued from children home in south Indian states such as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala in the past.

Conclusion

Human trafficking in India’s North East which is considered as the hotspot of human trafficking can no longer be ignored. It is the symptoms of social and economic problems. North East is a land of conflicts and one of the most under developed states of India. The region, rich in natural resources is regarded as a hotspot of biodiversity. North East is a miniature of India as it is the abode of many ethnic groups. All these potentials should be tapped, utilised and developed. More industries should be established for getting job avenues and for sustainable development. North East insurgency problems is the longest unsettled conflicts in the whole of Asia running for more than 60 years. The long drawn conflicts have retarded and crippled the growth of development in the region. The Government of India should no longer play delay tactics in solving the multifarious conflicts of the region. To curb human trafficking in the region, all the transit routes should be checked and be given stringent actions to the perpetrators as per law. Every ward or village should keep the records of the inhabitants and report of the missing persons. People should be made aware of the persons who comes in ‘sheep clothing’ luring the innocent people to fall into their trap. Some NGOs in the North East like ‘Impulse network’ recognised that anti trafficking units in India needed a software for systematic documentation of trafficking cases. The software will register information on the victims’ personal details, family background, information on disappearance, suspected traffickers, suspected trafficking route, probe information and others. HasinaKharBhish of impulse NGO network said that “Lack of knowledge on the issue is a great barrier preventing us from moving forward with more effective interventions. Until human trafficking is understood as a mainstream term, the problem will remain an underground and relatively unchanged crime”.

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