
GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN DARJEELING DISTRICT

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Abstract: This article talks how human trafficking is gendered, with special reference to Darjeeling district. Gender discrimination denies basic life choices to many of the world's women and girls. Lack of legal, social and economic situation, that women are so vulnerable to trafficking and other forms of exploitation. The majority of trafficked persons being female, trafficking is usually considered to be the result of discrimination on the basis of sex.

Keywords: Darjeeling, Gender, Patriarchy, Trafficking.

Introduction: Some conceptualize gender differences as the same as sex differences, because in everyday usage gender denotes the biological sex of individuals. Gender would not only mean the differences based on sex i.e. male or female, but socially constructed, based on the differentiation between masculinity and femininity. As defined by the United Nations, gender differences are the socially constructed roles played by women and men that are ascribed to them on the basis of their sex (Skjelsbaek, and Smith, 2001: 8).

Apparently the discriminatory feeling against women begins right from the womb of mother itself. When the woman gets conceived, all the relatives including parents think off or plan for the birth of baby boy, and thus biasness towards female child begins. We witness that till today in few sections of the society, the process of female infanticide does exist, since it means that the parents are denying themselves for giving birth to baby girl. After the child gets born the constant discrimination is made between the boy and girl child from clothes to toys to education. The preferable child would be a baby boy rather than a girl. If any fight happens to occur between the boy and a girl child, it is the girl who is said to be settling the issue and the boy are always excused. The sex differences are further taken forward into the form of gender differences, as for instance, the differences in the power relations between male and female results into differences between masculinity and femininity. Since several years' male members of the family has been dominating the female and children by showing their power. The tool which they used to subordinate women is the ideology of patriarchy. How one learns and interacts with gender as a young child directly influences how the person view world at present.

Trafficking of human is an extreme form of human rights violation as it restrains the fundamental rights of mobility, freedom and dignity of the victims. It not only deprives women and girls from their freedom and human rights but also increases global health risks; hence it fuels up the growth of organized crime. The women face physical, mental and emotional suffering such as abuse, rape, threats against self and family, and even death. It also undermines the health, safety, and security of all the countries it touches.

The human trafficking for sexual exploitation is most acute in Asia. According to one estimate, Asian countries contribute some 250,000 cases a year,

compared to 175,000 from Central and Eastern Europe and 100,000 from the former Soviet Union (Watts & Zimmerman 2002 in Crawford, 2010: 6, 7).

According to the Alison Phinney, trafficking takes place due to factors such as demand, supply and impunity, which she also refers as 'trafficking triangle'. She further adds, "sex trafficking is driven by a demand for women's and children bodies in the sex industry, fuelled by a supply of women denied equal rights and opportunities for education and economic advancement and perpetuated by traffickers who are able to exploit human misfortune with near impunity" (Phinney, 2001). Every country in the world is affected by trafficking, whether it is the country of destination, transit or the country of origin. With an ever widening gap between the rich and the poor, declining socio-economic status of women in the countries of origin, increasing profits for traffickers, lack of government action, there has been increase in the trafficking in women (Demir, Jenna S., 2003:11).

The trafficking takes place in two different ways, (i) inter and (ii) intra state. The inter state trafficking are the major priority, and intra-state trafficking or the trafficking from rural to urban areas and importantly to metropolitan cities are always sidelined by the researchers. The same is in the case of Darjeeling district. The geographical location of Darjeeling has its emphasis on Indo Nepal, Indo- Bangladesh and Indo-Bhutan border, it has become a corridor for migration where trafficking is very prevalent. People usually get trafficked from the least developed countries to the developed countries and from rural to the urban areas (Haq, 2000).

According to the report from SANLAAP, Siliguri in Darjeeling district is the most vulnerable place of trafficking after Kolkata within Bengal (SANLAAP, 2011). Trafficking being not only the problem in the border areas itself, it has engulfed in the region of Darjeeling itself. The rooted problem that lies underneath is due to lack of socio, economic and political condition that prevail in the area. The main source of income in this area has been tea plantation and still is an economic incentive for the local people of this area. One of the chief facets of migration is development and growth of industry, as people tend to migrate from the neighbouring countries as the workers to the industrialised areas. Simultaneously with the growth of industry communication system too started

straightening up due to building up of roads and railways and there was the growth of employment due to the urbanisation through the establishment of a sanatorium (Dewan, 1991 in Sundas, 2011). But gradually the employment on the tea gardens started declining, it became as a seasonal employment and people started migrating to cities in search of job but all ends did not resulted into happiness because some end up being doing filthy jobs and some are trafficked and end up being sex workers.

For a long time Darjeeling has been witnessing political unrest resulting into political separation from the main stream West Bengal. This has at the end brought about social and economic crisis in the district and particularly in the hilly region (Sundas, 2011: 12). The geographical location makes more vulnerable to trafficking. Darjeeling districts along with Jalpaiguri, North 24 Paragans and South 24 Paragans in West Bengal all face significant trafficking problems. Darjeeling has been facing the problems of unsafe out-migration to Kolkata or other metro cities in search of livelihood opportunities. Trafficking of girls and women from the tea estates in this district is prevalent. It also has an influx of children from neighbouring countries and neighbouring Indian states, largely as the result of poverty, gender discrimination and domestic violence (IDLO, 2010:4).

Due to Nepali girls having Mongoloid feature are much fairer, so they are highly demandable. According to Chhetri, the demand for Nepali girls in the sex market is due to the following reason:- (a) beauty, fair complexion and youthful appearance even when they grow old; (b) honesty, politeness and cleanliness habit; (c) fair business practices and (d) they did not act like prostitute (Chhetri, 2009:290). According to the further survey done by Chhetri, Nepali sex-worker in Kolkata fetched approximately Rs. 60,000 to Rs. 70,000 while in Mumbai she would fetch above Rs. 1 lakh for the trafficker. The brothel owner from this girl makes Rs. 24,000 per month (ibid.).

There have been 'missing' reports of many girls in the Darjeeling district. Sometimes such are trafficking cases but are ignored by many including parents of the victim itself. Lack of unemployment in the district and especially insecure life of women and girls regarding holding economy tend them to migrate to the cities, which led them to be targeted by the traffickers. According to Anuradha Koirala of Maiti Nepal, lack of employment opportunities in the Darjeeling district has often led to young boys and girls seeking employment in Kathmandu and other Indian cities (Chhetri, 2009:291). Lack of education among female members and the zeal for the earning to run the livelihood make them to do any filthy jobs such as nannies and housemaids in far of lands. According to the Chhetri, "the so called companies or the personnel operating in Darjeeling district promise young girls with house jobs in the Middle East and Singapore and land up in wrong hands" (Chhetri, 2009:291-292).

There has been much reason for fostering trafficking in Darjeeling district. Firstly, due to proximity to Nepal with the bordering town of Pashupati and its easy accessible roads has made the district transit point for the traffickers to bring the victims from the Nepal side. As traffickers passes by they follow same technique to lure the women and girls as they did in the other side of the border. It is the due to similar looks and languages they use. Secondly, there has been lack of employment opportunities in the Darjeeling, mostly in hilly areas and tea gardens. The people are mostly dependent upon few governmental jobs, that also in lower status, tea and tourism. Before plantation of tea has been the source of income to those residing in the tea gardens areas, but due to placement of humans made by machines has decreased in the demand of human labour, and has only been the seasonal employment for them, and to run household and large amount of mouth to feed, the parents themselves sell their children so that they can feed the other members, and sometimes that child end of being trafficked. Thirdly, recent scenario of misuse of mobile phones and internet, resulting into false promises made by the lovers, sometimes end of being trafficked. Almost all the people in today's world are addicted to mobile phones; same is in the case of Darjeeling. Mostly teenager love to chat in phones and create a bond without knowing about the other person. In such situation girls tend to get lure in the name of love and false marriage. Elopement marriage is common in the traditional Nepali society. Sometimes girls get end up in wrong hands. Fourthly, tourism has been the major source of income in Darjeeling, and with fortunes come the evils. Due to growth of tourism, there has been highly demand of sex workers to satisfy the customers. For instance income many women and under aged girls have adopted the profession, resulting into increase of flying sex workers. Fifthly the belief by many that having sex with virgin girl will get rid of sex related diseases. Sixthly due to the political disturbance or due to terrain there has no or less investment by the private sector in to this area, and due to increase number of population and to lead the better life and lack of opportunity in this area has forced many unemployed youths to migrate to the cities and abroad too, and sometimes get trafficked and end up in brothels. Finally due to establishment of brothel in Siliguri, the hub centre of the Darjeeling district, encourages the traffickers and also helps in building nexus with other traffickers of other cities.

Poverty is often blamed as the root cause of trafficking, it is the fact that poverty is experienced unequally through ongoing social and gender based discrimination that creates vulnerability to trafficking for women and children. Women who are in economic distress due to lack of means of livelihood, widowhood, separation of husbands, abandonment by family etc are much against their choice, forced to become the victim of commercial sexual exploitation (Chhetri, 2009:294).

The Darjeeling has also been the major area of concern regarding human trafficking. There has also been much

reason why the process has been fostering in this area, to minimise the process of trafficking the proper education should be provided mostly to the women and girls. It has been rightly said as, "Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change... Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic returns, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving development and economic

growth that is both sustained and sustainable" (Beijing Platform for Action).

"All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (Article 26, ICCPR).

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