

THE UNNOTICED ISSUE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN ASSAM, A SOCIO ECONOMIC STUDY

SABRIN ARIFA

Abstract: Human Trafficking is probably one of the most complex criminal issues commercializing human being as commodities. The most unacceptable violation of human rights occurs when not only women but even little children are not spared from its ghastly tremors. Perhaps many crimes are not as atrocious as trading in human misery more so ever when it involves the most vulnerable community. Trafficking is viewed as an anti social and morally degrading act. Exploitation, profit and illegality are all central to the idea of trafficking in children. Certain insights to analyze this problem include socio economic approach, legal approach, political factors, security threat involving illegal migration or it may be feminist approach. The state of ASSAM- connected to the rest of India through the thin area called chicken neck makes the part geographically more prone to slow development. The reason for which people move out from this region to capitally richer places with hopes and aspirations for a better living and livelihood, sometimes in lure of false promises given by agents, middle men, traffickers. Further the government's failure to reach-out to downtrodden communities of the State, like the Tea-tribes, communities living in riverside areas, women and children suffering from ethnic and linguistic conflicts, displaced flood affected communities make fertile places for traffickers to target children and sell them very cheap in big cities. Various national flagship programmes launched by Govt. for protection of children and women, houses for families, food security fail to reach the pivot target groups who have limited or no access to the benefits of these schemes.

Keywords: Assam, Government, Human Trafficking, Vulnerable Communities.

Introduction: Human Trafficking is probably one of the most complex criminal issues since it deals with the purchase and sale of human being as commodities. The most unacceptable violation of human rights occurs when women and even little children are not spared from its ghastly tremors. Perhaps many crimes are not as atrocious as trading in human misery more so ever when it involves the most vulnerable community. Trafficking is viewed as an anti social and morally degrading act. Exploitation, profit and illegality are all central to the idea of trafficking in persons. A trafficked person is exposed to harmful situations and end up in slave like conditions. There are many insights to analyze this problem of trafficking. This may include socio economic approach, legal approach, political factors, security threat involving illegal migration or it may be feminist approach also. Modern day slavery or Human Trafficking in India has existed throughout history in all forms and shapes be it on the basis of religion, caste, class or sex. Victims of trafficking are transported, transferred, harboured by means of threat, or by force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, position of vulnerability, receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. These victims end up in prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

Migration is very closely related to trafficking since they share the common element of movement or mobility. It is just the presence or absence of coercion, exploitation, abuse and loss of control on life options could be considered as determining factors which differentiates whether a person's movement is migration or trafficking. Although both trafficking in persons and migration share the same migratory space as both involves movement but they have different reasons and outcomes. Migration is widely considered as a process that could enhance social progress in both the origin and destination countries, if managed properly, it could also be an empowering process for migrants. Same is not the condition for trafficked victims.

Background of the study: Human Trafficking, it surely cannot be an issue in our society. That's how our state of mind has developed. We often think we can't be victims of this crime, can we? Unfortunately the answer to this is YES. ASSAM- connected to the rest of India through the thin area called 'chicken neck' makes the part geographically more prone to slow development. The reason for which people move out from this region to capitally richer places with hopes and aspirations for a better living and livelihood, sometimes in lure of false promises given by agents, middle men, traffickers gets cheated and ends up in exploitative situations.

Further the government's failure to reach-out to downtrodden communities of the State, like the Tea-tribes, communities living in riverine areas, communities suffering from ethnic and linguistic

conflicts, displaced communities affected by recurrent floods becomes fertile places for traffickers who has been making easy targets to thousands of men, women or children and selling them very cheap for various purposes giving false promises and showing glory pictures of big cities.

Various national flagship programmes are launched by the Government which envisions providing employment to families, protection to children and women, houses for families, food security to families, family strengthening programmes and so on. But the pivot target groups, for whom these schemes are meant, hardly have limited or no access to the benefits associated to these flagship programmes.

This research work cannot bring to an end of the overall system of human trafficking among vulnerable communities of Assam but it will try to establish a definite linkage on the inaccessibility of schemes and services to these communities, which can thereafter be used as an advocacy tool with the state government to take up this matter with high priority. Further this work will attempt to identify the present state of services available from various flagship programmes for these communities and the present structures available to curb this menace and the rehabilitative measures for victims of trafficking. Books or articles on trafficking are very general in their approach. It undoubtedly reflects the problems and consequences of the issue of trafficking, but fails to give out any concrete solution to the problem. Therefore it is essential to approach the problem of human trafficking with a deeper perspective as to what is the root cause why this crime is soaring high in the recent times. The causes and consequences are not yet been discussed in detail in the earlier studies. Even the linkage between, the issue of trafficking and how is it connected with the Government and what is the outlook of the Government of Assam towards this issue is missing.

My research work modestly attempts to study the phenomenon of human trafficking which is not much noticeable issue in Assam although it is an ongoing process which is in constant increase.

Objective:The main objectives may be summarized as follows:

1. To know the Socio Economic background of the victims of trafficking.
2. To study the post victimization stage of the rescued victims of trafficking.
3. To study the psychological condition of the victims of trafficking.

The study focuses on the growing trend of unsafe migration leading to trafficking of women and children in few specific communities and the services accessible to these communities as a reflective of the

government's endeavour to curb this problem in certain high risk zones in the state of Assam.

Methodology: For any research work, it is necessary to have proper approach to the problem, tools and techniques for collecting data to find the accurate solutions. The study proposes to collect data on the parameters of methods like Focus Group Discussions, Content Analysis, Case Study and Ethnography. The data collected is based on secondary sources like publications, reports, journals, websites, civil societies, institutions and other records.

Much work has not yet been done on Human Trafficking in the state of Assam so an Exploratory study would help to find new relevant data and analyze on the existing data as well. Information can also be gathered from the police stations, CID, different NGOs, shelter homes and so on.

Data Analysis:

Trafficking in Assam-Content Analysis: According to a report of certain magazines, publications and investigative news site, such as Outlook, The Wire and Cobrapost, the story attacks the BetiBachao scheme under the title of Operation BetiUthao or The Sangh's Stolen Child Crusade by Neha Dixit, describes how 31 tribal girls of Assam are being trafficked all the way to Gujarat and Punjab to Hinduise them by SanghParivar. These girls aged from 3-11 years were made to board the train by two women of RSS and SewaBharati promising of education. These girls were from different districts of Assam like Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Dhubri, Chirang and Bongaigaon. Its been a year they are out of contact from parents. These girls have not been put into proper schools rather they are instilled Hindu values and have embraced patriarchal ideas of honour, Jauhar and sati instead of turning into their own tribal women warrior. They return home indoctrinated and embittered, their teenage rebellion channelized into radical religiosity.

On September 1, 2010 the Supreme Court of India directed that no children below the age of 12 years or pursuing primary education should be allowed to move out of the north-eastern states to persuade education till further orders after the incident when 76 children from Assam and Manipur were taken away to homes run by Christian missionaries in Tamil Nadu. In spite of this order, over 5000 children have gone missing in 2012-15 under the pretext of education and employment and 800 children have disappeared in the year 2015 itself according to CID report, Assam.

As per the report, after the girls taken away no action was taken by police, no report was filed neither any cognisance was taken by National Commission for Protection of Child Rights although the Assam State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights took a strong initiative to look into the matter on a serious

note which not only deteriorated the Apex order of Supreme Court 2010 but also violated the Provision of Juvenile Justice Act 2000 and failed to produce an NOC from the Child Welfare Committee of these districts.

Although the women who took away these girls produced affidavits a month later before CWC which were signed in the presence of notary public and judicial magistrate in Kokrajhar district gives consent of the parents to take away their girls for education but these were in English signed in English and identical while most of the parents of these trafficked girls were illiterate or don't know the language. The fraud affidavits which informs about the damage of their property in January 2014 in ethnic riots were a violation in itself since it was not produced before taking these children away and the riots took place in December 2014.

The motivation behind this pick up got revealed with an interview with an activist of SewaBharati in Gossaingaon village in Kokrajhar district named Kanchai Brahma, 34 year old. At the age of 15 she participated in a KishoriVarg camp which focuses on teaching Sanskaar to young girls and taught culture, language, history, etc. this lady was send off to a hostel in Uttar Pradesh in 2004 for training along with three others from her district. After a year's training she came back in 2005 and canvassed in various districts and managed to send atleast 500 girls for training purpose, some of them returned. She further says Bodo people are being fooled by Christian missionaries who are helping them to convert by luring them or are being killed by Muslims. She was henceforth trained to save their identity and remind them of Hindu origins. The sole intention was to reject western culture or education and implant education of Indian history in line with Hindutva Ideology. They set up schools called EkalVidyalaya Foundation which devise a methodology to provide "education with Sanskaar to the Vanyatries(tribals). Hence this women act as recruiters without directly being involved into trafficking since the purpose is different but means is the same.

The whole situation of transporting, harbouring and separation of these girls from their parents by deceit or fraud has been covered up in a very decorative manner in which all these girls although rescued with the help of Childline India Foundation, Central Zone, Anti Human Trafficking Unit, Crime Branch, RPF at New Delhi Railway station but strangely no action was taken to restore them or send them to their respective hometowns. Instead these girls were taken to their destinations from police station itself in Gujarat, Halvard and Patiala. A day later a Gujarat based local newspaper published how SaraswatiSishuMandir in Halvad adopted 20 girls

who had been affected during recent Assam flood and without any support. Actions were on trial by State Child Protection Society, Assam but got suppressed by political sources.

The reporter checked the life these young girls are living in the SaraswatiSishuMandir, Halvad and saw how these tribal girls are taught the local language and rituals and customs of Hindu religion, bhajan class, sanskaar, honour, to save their honour from Bangladeshis and Missionaries in Assam.

Even the girls in Patiala were kept in a shelter home named Mata GujriKanyaChatravas near Sirhindi Gate and when this was visited by CWC Patiala and Coordinator of Childline India, they were mistreated and sent away. But the condition where these children were kept was pathetic and illegal since there was no legal documents neither proper medical tests were done and they play games of fighting intruders in Kashmir.

In connection to this a letter was propounded by Ms.RunumiGogoi, Chairperson, ASCPCR to the CID, Assam informing about the trafficked children of different districts belonging to the BPL family which was informed by NEDAN Foundation who is working actively to fight against trafficking in the state. The chairperson Ms.Gogoi was pressurised by NCPCR to change her report on the trafficked children.

Finally it can be said that this new technique emerged in the state for trafficking of young children for the sake of religion and politics which is starting to poison the traditional tribal society. This is a report prepared from a lengthy investigation by Neha Dixit in a detailed manner.

The nature of exploitation that these trafficked women and children from Assam are both in the form of labour and sexual exploitation as well as organ trafficking. There are also situations where both are combined and sexual exploitation sometimes happen in the guise of marriage. And as per CID data the number of girls facing sexual exploitation is more than those facing labour Exploitation. This situation certainly merits an in-depth research into the push, pull and facilitating factors driving children and women into activities involving trafficking, income earning activities, types of employers and their motivation, individual agents/ agencies who act as the traffickers for labour.

Below mentioned are some reported cases of trafficking from clippings of print media and other sources. Very few cases are reported in comparison to their occurrences.

o In Eclectic North East, Mr.KailashSatyarthi noted down how Assam flood is aiding to Human Trafficking and hence Assam has now become a peak point of both source and transit state (October 2015)

o Around 1500 Assam kids are missing since 2011-12 and almost 687 men and 1234 women went out

missing from the state, the highest in North East as per record of State Crime Record Bureau (Pankaj Sharma, The Telegraph March 2012)

o A gang leader Mafida Begum arrested confessed to have trafficked at least 15 girls from lower Assam and sold them for Rs. 30,000 each to other trafficking networks. Kingpin of this racket had connections with some larger trafficking networks at international level.

In the Voice of Greater Assam is mentioned the details of 2015 stats released NCRB which reveals Assam to be hub of trafficking in India. The state leads to the top in child trafficking accounting 38% of India's Figure. The reported figure is disturbing as per unreported cases is even worse. Few cases of successful restoration are mentioned below:

- 12 year old minor was liberated by Delhi Police from the capital after her grandmother took her and sold her into sex trade.
- Minor girl was trafficked to Saudi Arabia from the most disturbed militancy area, Kokrajhar via Nepal with forged documents, but was rescued after eight traumatic years in 2013 and sent back home.

These girls were lucky enough to reunite with family but thousands of minors and adults have gone missing and living miserably with inhuman tortures.

Conclusion:For the study of human trafficking as a concept has been defined by the Palermo Protocol: any case of the child or a woman being taken away

from home for commercial purposes, working in an exploitative situation- sexual or otherwise- has been treated as a case of trafficking. This implies that cases of children employed as child labour away from home are included, even when they have been sent to work by their parents/family members or if they themselves run away from home and get employed. This is a deliberate departure from the national law/s on trafficking in India towards a wider understanding as reflected in international conventions and discourse.

In the most recent records of the CID Branch Assam during the period of January 2011- March 2013, a total of 31 months, only 20 cases were rescued and restored from outside Assam, it is important to note that they have been found to be trafficked in places as far as Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Haryana, Delhi, Maharashtra and Kerala.

Trafficking of women and children is a reality, which if captured in concrete numbers through the analysis of composite datasets would help out a lot in resolving this issue to certain extend. This happens both within and outside the state, with Assam primarily as source area.

The records, reports, articles, journals or whatever secondary data analysis is available may be treated as a pilot which needs to be followed up by in-depth primary research into certain areas in order to develop a comprehensive, need specific preventive measure against human trafficking in the state.

References:

1. Thomas, S. E.(2011). Responses to Human Trafficking in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka', Review by UNODC – Regional Office for South Asia under the UN.GIFT. UNODC Publications, New Delhi.
2. Abraham, Shailaja(2001). Going Nowhere: Trafficking of women and children in international sex trade. Dominant Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi.
3. Agarwal, Indrani, (2008). Combating Child Trafficking. Adhyayan Publishers and Distributors.
4. Bhagat, S.K, (2009). Child Trafficking An Uncensored Phenomenon. M.D.PublicationsPvt. Ltd.
5. Singh, Awadesh Kumar, (2012). Trafficking in Women and Children in India Emerging Perspective, Issues and Strategies. Serials Publications.
6. Kinnu, Gunjan, (2006). From bondage to freedom, India, National Human Rights Commission, New Delhi.Articles and News items:
7. Voice of Greater Assam, September 7, 2016.
8. The Assam Tribune: Human Trafficking cases on the rise in lower Assam, 17 September, Guwahati.
9. The Sentinal: Women Traffickers nabbed by locals, Chandum Tea Estate, Tuesday, March 19, 2013.
10. The Telegraph: Brainstorming on Trafficking, Wednesday, 21 March, 2012.
11. Asian Centre for Human Rights: India Human Rights Report 2006, Assam.
12. Dutta, Tarun: Changing Livelihood, Disaster and Human Trafficking- A Study of the Disaster Affected Areas of Assam, International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention, August 2013.
13. NEDAN FOUNDATION: Combating Human Trafficking in Assam North East, India.
14. ILO, UNICEF, (2009). To Fight Trafficking in Children for Labour, sexual and other forms of Exploitation.
15. UNICEF, GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM (2014). Report, Secondary Data Analysis on Trafficking of Women and Children in Assam.

-
16. http://www.no-trafficking.org/resources_int_tip_laws.html
 17. <http://www.aaptip.org/2006/artip-tip-cjs/laws-policies.html>
 18. <http://www.aaptip.org/2006/artip-tip-cjs/laws-policies-regional.html>
 19. <http://www.childlineindia.org.in/Immoral-Traffic-Prevention-Act-1986.htm>
 20. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/category/publication-category/key-publications/europol-review>
 21. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/trafficking-human-beings-eu>

Sabrin Arifa
Research Scholar, Sociology, Jamia Millia Islamia
Central University, New Delhi-110025.