

Women & Children Trafficking in Bangladesh : Historical Significance & Current Challenges



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Abstract

In current years, there has been a noteworthy augmentation in trafficking of women and children in Bangladesh. Extremely modest work has been undertaken to appreciate the local dynamics of the crisis importantly. South Asia is one of the most susceptible regions for trafficking for the reason of its big population, extensive rural-urban migration, conditions of constant poverty, and repeated natural catastrophes. Women and children are put up for sale, traded, and exchanged for sexual slavery and prostitution, and bonded labor athwart borders, such as from Bangladesh to India, Pakistan, and the Middle East. The causes and consequences of trafficking in Bangladesh cannot be explicit in isolation from its historio-cultural, geographical and socioeconomic viewpoint, and the present condition of women living there. Bangladesh contains the seventh largest population in the world. It is a developing country in South-Asia. Scarce natural resources, underdeveloped industrialization with natural catastrophes like floods, droughts and cyclones curbed the population mobility and human trafficking is one of the not premeditated consequences thereof. A study conducted early in the year 2000 (UNESCO-sponsored) reveals that over three lakh women were taken from Bangladesh and sold over the last decade. But since many cases go unreported, real figure is most likely higher than official figures. Relocating and prioritizing the human trafficking in women and girl children as a human safety menace so as to offer more effective and systemic exclusion measures can aid to shoot up both governmental and nongovernmental, international movement to fight this brutal practice and to provide the matter more national and international focus.

Keywords: Trafficking, Cross-Border Crime, Bangladesh, The Partition of Bengal, 'Push' Factor, 'Pull' Factor, Prostitution, Social Disgrace, Communicable Diseases, Anti-Trafficking Activities.

Introduction

Trafficking is a basic violation of human rights and is considered as a figure of slavery all over the world. Women and children, predominantly, are in immense requirement in so far as the different locations of trafficking are concerned. Trafficking is a extensively stretched business that not only infringes women and children's human rights but also drive them towards a susceptible state with no security of life. Women and girls are required to accomplish the requirement for a vast range of personalized, reproductive services in the sex-cum entertainment industry, domestic occupation and the marriage marketplace (Sanghera, 1999: 4). Trafficking, which is a human rights distress, creates the circumstances where survivors experience diverse forms of violence and abuse. Every year many men, women and children are trafficked for diverse purposes; women more often than not for prostitution or commercial sex work, and children for the reasons of camel jockeying, domestic labor and so on (Shamim, 2001). The International Labor Organization (ILO) approximates that there are 2.4 billion people in the world at any given time who are engaged in forced labor and are put to exploitation as a consequence of trafficking (ILO, 2008). There has been an extensive debate in last few decades about the definition of trafficking as it comprises a range of issues like prostitution, forced labor, pornography, sex job, and mutilation of human body. Considering those facts, the United Nations Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, adopted in November 2000 (UN, 2000), has provided a definition that is normally accepted by all institutions. It defines trafficking as:

“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, or 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. 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” (p.2).

Trafficking is normally recognized as a cross-border crime, but it also happens within the purview of national boundaries. Then it is termed as internal trafficking (NPA, 2012). Bangladesh faces both the difficulty of internal trafficking as well as a huge amount of cross border trafficking each year. Bangladesh is well thought-out as a source country of trafficking during the last few decades having enormous consequences on survivors' life. The women in Bangladesh are trafficked, generally endure stern physical and psychological violence that obstruct their socio-economic health and destroy their self respect, confidence level and potentiality. After coming back from the oppressed location, stigmatization excludes women from the conventional society and their coming back is not cherished by the community members and families (Shamim and Kabir, 1997). The United States State Department (2006) data has revealed that 6, 00,000 to 8, 20,000 men, women, and children are trafficked transversely international borders every year. Of them, 80 percent are women and 50 percent girls of them are children. United States Trafficking in Persons Report, (2007) states that human trafficking is at present the second largest illegitimate money making endeavor in the world after weapons and drugs trafficking while in 2006, it was ranked as the third largest business of illegitimate money making (United States Department of State, 2008). These are more often than not women and also children of countries that are going through economic transition to market economy (Truong 1999). A comparatively current study of the International Labor Organization demonstrates that 43 percent of all victims are trafficked for sexual utilization, another 32 percent are sufferers of economic exploitation, and the rest remains undecided (ILO, 2005).

Aim of the Study

The article gazes into the matter of human trafficking as it appeared in Bangladesh. It begins with historical debates and theorizations concerning emergence of human trafficking and traces it to the recent times with various socio-economic issues of post-colonial third-world nations. The article also discusses the various factors that act as vehicle in the process of human trafficking. In the last section, the article will study the intensity of these various hard works by national and international organizations so as gauge the levels of their success.

Bangladesh Scenario

Bangladesh is one of the most susceptible countries for trafficking today due to a congregation of factors. These are the huge population of Bangladesh, unceasing poverty among great number of people, continuing natural disasters like cyclones, tornado, river erosion, drought, flood and lack of a shelter in disaster periods. Moreover, rural-urban migration in search of work due to unemployment or natural disasters increase violence against women as well as the risk of being trafficked (Sarker and Panday, 2006). This country has 4,222 kilometers long border with India covering 28 districts of Bangladesh and India as the chief recipient country collect trafficked women through 20 transfer points of Bangladesh Indian border (Shamim, 2001). To understand trafficking in Bangladesh, we have to look at it both from the historical and geographical perspectives. Throughout the colonial period, the inhabitants of eastern and western Bengal have moved in between these two fractions of the province in look for of livelihood, stability or other causes. In 1947 an artificial boundary in a land with shared past upset the natural order of things.

The Partition of Bengal in 1947 separated the British Indian province of Bengal between India and Pakistan. Largely Hindu West Bengal became a region of India, and principally Muslim East Bengal (now Bangladesh) became a province of Pakistan. The partition border pieced through a society that had always been highly itinerant. The movements which were formerly well thought-out as completely normal were criminalized as cross-border activities after the partition. The newly shaped border extended through an area of over 4000 kilometers and cut across everything that was previously the financial means of support for everyone. This incorporated agricultural lands, markets, railways and major roads, inhabited villages as well as ordinary lands. The highly leaky and often indistinguishable Indo-Bangladesh border gave rise to a number of concerns that often desecrated friendly relations between the two neighbors. From that phase, there are many enclaves in border between India and Bangladesh and India and Pakistan. These enclaves are little piece of land belonging to a nation other than that which environs them. There are 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 51 enclaves of Bangladesh in the country of India. Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) in their report shows that these enclaves are used to collect the survivors and they are trafficked through these enclaves easily by the traffickers (Gazi et. al, 2001 and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011). Though the history of women and child trafficking from Bangladesh goes back as early as 50's when camel race and 'jockey' put on momentum in the Middle East countries, in the path of time, this illegal business has taken a disturbing proportion, women and children are being trafficked out of Bangladesh to a variety of countries mainly in India, Pakistan and the Middle Eastern countries. Traffickers make use of routes over land, air and water (BNWLA, 1997). Western border districts of Bangladesh,

particularly Jessore and Khulna are extensively used by traffickers. The major trafficking way is Dhaka-Mumbai-Karachi-Dubai. Many of the victims finish up in Middle East nations (Faruque, 1998). In a report of Probashi (1993), it was claimed that a diminutive number of women are taken directly by air from Bangladesh to Middle East and Europe as in Dhaka Airport crooked officers helped issuing necessary documents. Bangladesh is therefore mostly a source country as far as trafficking is concerned, from which women, men and children are trafficked into diverse locations of employment in the target countries.

In a study of Huda on sex trafficking in South Asia, she mentions that women and children from rural areas are trafficked to urban cities to get them involved in commercial prostitution and domestic work (Huda, 2006). In that study of Huda it is found that at least 20,000 Bangladeshi women and children are trafficked to India and Pakistan and to Middle Eastern countries each year. Bangladesh country report (2007) demonstrated that 50,000 Bangladeshi girls are trafficked to or through India each year as we have border with India. These two data are quite contradictory from each other. Bangladesh National Women's Lawyer Association (BNWLA) estimates approximately 200,000 women have been trafficked to Pakistan over last ten years and the Indian Social Welfare Board estimates that among 500,000 foreign prostitutes in India – one percent is from Bangladesh and 2.7 percent of prostitutes in Calcutta are from Bangladesh (Rosy, 2013). Faruque (1998) in his study mentioned more than 200,000 Bangladeshi women were trafficked from 1990 to 1997, with 6,000 children trafficked, abducted or reported missing during that time. The above mentioned studies depict various numbers of trafficked people which shows the problem of documenting trafficking as an illegal and hidden business. Nevertheless, we get an understanding of the extent of the trafficking quandary in Bangladesh from reading these sources.

Factors

Penttinen (2000) says that globalization is not only mounting the marginalization but also augmenting the likelihood to get involved in international prostitution. The causes influencing trafficking are classified in two groups. One is 'push factor' that comprises the conditions to traffic people from one country to another country. Another group is 'pull factor' and it ropes the demand of trafficked people. Push factors are identified as poverty, low per capita income, lack of employment, lack of education, lack of consciousness, family structure, easy separation, longing for better living, huge family size, over population, insufficient, deficient and corrupted law enforcement authority (BNWLA, UNICEF, 1997: 10). Push factors work sturdily to prompt women to migrate in cities or abroad to change their own condition. The same study portrayed the pull factors like urbanization, industrialization, migration, tourism and expansion of road links. Again, trickery, falsification, abuse, force, oppression are often used as the way for trafficking (Hossain and al Faruque, Bangladesh Country Report, 2007). These factors generate the requirement for women and push factors

help to provide women all over the world for sexual utilization. Das (2001) in his study, "Women Trafficking in South Asia: Legal Responses and Strategies of Selected Countries" explained the scenario of trafficking situation in Bangladesh. He mentioned that the causes that are responsible for trafficking in Bangladesh are poverty, existing socio-cultural and religious attitudes, lack of awareness and rapid globalization of consumer culture etc. He also pointed out that the socio-economic situation of Bangladesh creates the vulnerability of women to exploitation. Due to the poverty, they are lured into trafficking by promise of job or marriage. Gazi et. al. (2001) also points out in the article "Trafficking of Women and Children in Bangladesh: An Overview" an overview that poverty, attitudes towards women and deeply entrenched gender discrimination, unemployment, cultural standard about marriage, ordered national and international networks of traffickers and frail law-enforcing agencies are critical factors relating to trafficking of women and children in Bangladesh. Due to the poverty and lack of opportunities women may fall into the vulnerable state. Gender dimension is an important issue that influences the trafficking in Bangladesh. The women of Bangladesh possess lower status in terms of education, employment, health and nutrition and face violence in family, society or workplaces (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2010). The extent of poverty influence women's lower status and they are considered as a burden in the family. Women's mobility is restricted due to the social norms and lack of security. Moreover, they have very limited power to take decision about their life, marriage, employment or political participation. Early marriage occurs in village areas as parents have to pay less dowry in marriage if girls are 13-15 years old. World Bank report (2007) reveals that the practice of dowry, a lower age at marriage, and poverty all are linked with women's elevated likelihood of experiencing and condoning violence (in UNICEF Bangladesh, 2010). Moreover, natural disasters like cyclone, flood, river erosion, drought and earthquake makes lots of women and children not only homeless but also powerless and moneyless. This factor can influence the trafficking of women and children. Young girls are enticed by false love of traffickers who pretend to be in love with them or make promise to get married (INCIDIN Bangladesh and ILO, 2002; Hossain and al Faruque, 2007).

In this view, Nair (2004) argued that, a dysfunctional home atmosphere, disintegration of the family, marital conflict, physical cruelty, sexual exploitation, drug abuse, family pressures, huge families, families facing uncertain times, children in alternate care, gender discrimination within the family, abandonment by husbands, husbands acquiring a second or a third wife, etc. makes people susceptible to trafficking. (Shamim, 2010: 27). Karmakar (2001) talked about that most trafficked women were unmarried, divorced, separated or widowed. Many women migrate willingly and end up being trafficked but this does not mean that she has been trafficked with her consent (GATTW, 2001). Women and girls are lured with a false promise of well paid jobs or

marriage and are trafficked into prostitution. Shamim (2010) talked about two outlines of trafficking in her study. The first model is called “two step” model that aims the women already occupied in prostitution to be trafficked abroad, for example, sex workers from local brothel or street sex workers. The second model is the quite dangerous “one step” model that targets the women or girls from village homes to be trafficked for prostitution overseas. Girls or women who are mostly virgin or sexually not active are targeted from the villages to be sold in abroad. The one step pattern is more prevalent and popular among the customers as these girls have not been infected by HIV/AIDS. Moreover, one step pattern girls can attract the customers more as customers always look for ‘fresh bodies’ (UNDP, 2002).

Impact

Rescue of the trafficked victims has its limitations and unacceptability, largely due to the attitude and violent behavior of the law-enforcing agencies (Gazi et.al., 2001, Shamim, 2001). Although the police save many women and children, what turns out to them after they have been rescued is mostly not known. The majorities are not capable to return to their home because of a whole sequence of problems, and when they are free, they are again at peril of being picked up by the traffickers. While working as a prostitute, they experience several health consequences like anxiety, insomnia, depression, post traumatic stress disorder that weaken their self confidence and self power to live a normal life. The living state of prostitutes in brothel leads them to get infected with various diseases. Lives in brothels often injure the survivors physically and psychologically and injure their reproductive organs and augment the risk of other communicable diseases (TIP, 2004). Moreover, spread of HIV/AIDS endangers women’s lives and social standing. It works as a chief form of violence against women. Women who are saved and then are in the process of reintegration with society frequently experience social disgrace due to their involvement in prostitution. They are not accepted in society, face financial hardships and it creates the possibility of them to get involved in crime. They are more likely to get involved in smuggling of drug or unlawful prostitution (TIP, 2004). The maltreated survivors face through the reintegration process make difficult their psychological and physical cure or reintegration in family and society at large. The sense of embarrassment they felt actually made them reconsider their self image and it also affected their identity. The survivors often create a self image or self identity as the guilty one in society due to the shame they feel of having been a sex worker. Survivors assume that they have done bad work and they are recognized as prostitute everywhere. While living in shelter home also they feel that their returning will not be appreciated by community members. Rescue processes are often violent, aggressive, and ‘male-dominated’. From time to time the minors are sent to the state-run remand homes or an NGO refuge. Most are not capable to go return to their home because of a whole chain of problems, and when they are set free

they are again at peril of being picked up by the traffickers.

Current Approaches to Address the Trafficking Problem in Bangladesh

Government and NGOs have been operational in fighting trafficking. Their present actions can be clustered as follows: targeted investigation, intensification of anti-trafficking network capacity-building, trial and defense, and anti-trafficking preclusion activities.

Targeted Research

For an improved understanding of what can be done to lessen the difficulty of trafficking, fitting and targeted investigation is required. Methodical research agendums that comprise both qualitative and quantitative methods are compulsory. Also an information system needs to be updated for getting efficient information. Nevertheless, some national NGOs, e.g. UBINIG, CWCS, BNWLA, ACD, Human Rights Journalists Forum of Bangladesh, INCIDIN, and UDDIPAN, embark on research for support on trafficking in women and children by identifying the causes, mechanisms, inclinations, high-risk regions, and paths of trafficking.

Networking

Networks act as a crucial point for information, dissemination, and referrals. NGOs who are working on trafficking in Bangladesh have been arranging national, regional and international networks to distribute information and experience through collaboration and adroitness. These NGOs work as a mutual frontage to save, send back, and reintegrate victims, to lift public consciousness and give confidence to community participation. The Action Against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC) is one of the chief anti-trafficking networks. The ATSEC Bangladesh Chapter is the historical emergence as a league of 12 local NGOs, one international NGO (Save the Children Denmark), and British Council. The ATSEC came into existence after a discussion held between the parts of Red Barnet Partners Coordination Body (RBPCB) and specialists on the subjects of child trafficking and prostitution from both Bangladesh and West Bengal, India. ATSEC Bangladesh Chapter is at the present operational as a subgroup of RBPCB, mainly dealing with trafficking and children sexual exploitation. ATSEC aspires to institute contacts and smooth the progress of networking and linkage among individuals, organizations and agencies, both government and non-government, apprehensive with the issues of trafficking and sexual utilization of children in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal and also aid backing, social mobilization, research, technical aid, and programme support activities at the masses, sub-national, national and regional stages for the avoidance of trafficking of children and women and sexual abuse.

Trial and Defense

Bangladesh has approved a lot of international laws and conventions. For example, Bangladesh has approved the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women with Reservations of Article 2, 13(a) and 16.1

(9c) and 16.1 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In current years, a number of laws have been propagated and different policies and regulations have been accepted to make sure equal rights of women in all areas of life and also to eradicate violence against them. Article 34.1 of the Constitution of Bangladesh advocates that all types of forced labour are forbidden and any flouting of this provision shall be an offense liable to be punished by law. Other existing decrees with straight insinuation to trafficking of women and children are: (1) The Penal Code 1860, (2) The Children (Pledging of Labour) Act 1933, (3) The Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act, 1933, (4) The Children Act 1974, (5) The Cruelty to Women (Deterrent Punishment) Ordinance, 1983, (6) The Women and Children Repression (Special Provision) Act 1995 (Resistance Against Trafficking in Women & Children in South Asia, 1997), and (7) Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000. Nonetheless, it is also broadly approved that no adequate steps have been taken to ensure the effective realization of these laws to guard women and children from trafficking. Consequently, it is central for the policy-makers to make a distinction between elimination of violence against women and also fighting the trafficking of women and children.

Anti-Trafficking Preclusion Activities

Most NGOs which work on anti-trafficking preclusion activities have consciousness raising activities. The chief NGOs operational in these fields are PROSHIKA, BNWLA, Resource Bangladesh, BITA, Theatre Centre for Social Development (TCSD), CWCS, UDDIPAN, and UBINIG. In current years, movements and support programmes with local government agencies, NGOs, police, doctors, lawyers, community leaders, journalists, teachers, guardians, adolescents, and children and predominantly with community people at the masses were embarked on. The core reason of trafficking is poverty and patriarchal ideas. According to them, patriarchal ideology has built the attitude of the people in such a way that women are considered as a 'commodity' that can be put up for sale and purchased.

Conclusions & Recommendations

The trafficking subject is intimately connected with the human rights matter with significant consequences in the region of law-enforcing, health and socioeconomic growth in general. Poverty, outlook toward women and intensely ingrained gender bias, joblessness, cultural standards about marriage, ordered national and international system of traffickers, and feeble law-enforcing agencies are only some serious issues relating to trafficking of women and children in Bangladesh. This criminal action cannot be addressed through tougher laws alone. Quite a few legislations, counting the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000, by now provide punishments for violence against women and children, including trafficking and abducting. Thus far, accomplishment of these legislations remains a frightening challenge. Current studies indicate that encouragement efforts are required to make people conscious of trafficking and

its impacts in high-risk regions. Expansions of monitoring systems are intended at looking into number of trafficking, roads, reasons and destinations. Assessments of NGO interferences are made to avert trafficking and recuperate victims. Strategies are aimed to perk up harmonization among different sectors and to encourage government and NGO partnership, intensification of law-enforcing agencies & so on.

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