

CHAPTER -5

**MAJOR FINDINGS, CONCLUDING
REMARKS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

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Human trafficking is a growing complex problem at the global level that entails a comprehensive cross-sector response. Involving the exploitation of people and the basic breach of human rights, human trafficking has drawn the attention of the concerned authorities in recent times who are driven to take adequate measures for addressing the issue. Research holds sufficient potential to exert a profound impact on the fight to bring an end to human trafficking. It is thus essential that the methodology behind data collection is reliable and sound so that the implications for practice drawn from the research findings are apt. The present research has been a sociological study of the trafficking of women in Darjeeling Hills which is located in the Indian state of West Bengal. In 2016, the maximum number of women missing was from West Bengal. In comparison to other states, West Bengal topped the charts for having the highest reported cases of women and children trafficking, as per the article of 'The Telegraph', dated March 10, 2017.

5.1 Major Findings

Women's trafficking is a major sociological concern in the Darjeeling hills. Adequate attention has been given by the present study to find out the causes behind the occurrence of a large number of cases of women trafficking there. There are several factors leading to women trafficking from Darjeeling Hills. The present research study has found out that alcoholism and unsafe migration are important factors that have resulted in the trafficking of women from Darjeeling Hills. Drinking alcohol is a cultural trait that is freely practiced among the people in the hills. It is socially accepted and encouraged. This cultural trait has created a lot of irresponsibility among the members leading to conflicts and violence in families. Such factors

have driven women to leave their homes in search of better opportunities and a peaceful environment. They encounter agents who lure them for better job opportunities, some travelling abroad are sent without proper work permits and then exploited and threatened with dire consequences. Further, illiteracy was the main drawback of a large majority of the victims as they were illiterates. They were neither aware of their rights nor in a position to fight back against the traffickers. In addition, unemployment was a very serious cause of trafficking as the majority of the victims were unemployed and in search of better jobs, good facilities, and a better lifestyle. They were forced to leave their hometowns and move to the bigger towns and cities as well as overseas for better opportunities. But in turn they were victims of trafficking. Broken families are another very vital cause of human trafficking. Many of the victims either belong to broken families or live with single parents. Families are the backbone for a child's growth and development but when the family tears apart a major impact is exerted on the child's well-being which becomes negative in nature.

A deeper analysis shows that early marriages are quite common affairs in the hills as love marriages are more common practices rather than arranged ones. Young women and girls easily trust these fraudsters who exploit them with lies and subsequently traffic them to the cities and sell them in the brothels. One of the major findings of the present research study is the most unique practice of '*Chor ko shor*' meaning owing up to the crime of stealing. It is a very traditional practice when a girl elopes with her lover. After the third day, the groom's parents send a delegation of elder members mostly males to the bride's house to inform her parents that she has eloped with their ward. The team of elders seeks forgiveness for the boy's imprudence and at the same time speaks of the girls' love for their son. Some poetic lines are cited conveying the love and romance between a boy and a girl. Gifts consisting of rice, meat, liquor, sweets, and

clothes are offered to the bride's family along with money as a part of the ritual. This practice also prevents families to file a missing complaint of their daughters as they feel that their daughters will return along with their grooms who are actually trafficked to unknown destinations. Lodging a missing report or visiting a police station is not encouraged in the hill society as it could bring social disgrace to the family and this also leads to trafficking of women and girls.

Social media has been a platform for people to easily connect with one another. It has also given easy access across a wide range of mediums or Apps like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram through which victims get acquainted with new people. New love affairs seem to blossom between young women and girls and the fraudsters, with the former falling easy prey to traffickers. Along with social media, the use of mobile phones has been the cause of trafficking where mere missed calls have led to a love relationship, and furthermore, the victims being trafficked easily.

One of the other key reasons behind human trafficking is negligence on the part of the parents. Parents in the hills are not used to accompanying their grown-up children, neither keeping a track of their whereabouts nor wishing to find out the backgrounds of their friends. Some parents are usually satisfied with their parenting by giving children some money and letting them do as they wish. Money given as payments make them feel that their liabilities have decreased. The Non-Governmental Organizations also felt that parents are easily convinced by the traffickers who silently hand over their children to known or unknown people. The traffickers always make a convincing promise, and they never tell the parents that they are going to sell their daughters in the brothels instead. False promises and hopes assure the parents that their children will be provided with good education, good jobs, and handsome salaries. Modernization has led to the

penetration of new trends into society. The youngsters have totally been unwilling to accept the age-old profession as agriculture, which their fathers and grandfathers practiced. They are eager to move out of their hometowns and go to cities in search of jobs that are much more appealing to them. It is also found in this study that the younger women below the age of 20 years from broken families, single parent families, and poor socio-economic backgrounds are more vulnerable to trafficking as they are driven into fake love marriages that ultimately throw them into the big brothels. Though women of all ages are trafficked, teenagers and adolescents below 20 years are the targeted ones as the demand for minor girls is high in the sex industry.

The primary implication of women trafficking is poverty as most of them are from the poor economic background. Women who are uneducated often face compelling social consequences. Starting from torture to physical abuse, the hardships endured by them are severe. Emotional and psychological trauma that they are exposed to leave behind far-reaching impacts. The impact on individuals and the society at large is clearly unacceptable since the same is destructive. Poor socio-economic conditions led to women trafficking as women were forced to move out in search of employment. Though poverty as a cause of trafficking is important due to the poor economic background, poor level of education is also a concern. Families could not provide education to them and as a result they had to move out from their localities in search of better jobs. Due to their ignorance of the outside world, they were easily fooled in love relationships and also fake marriages and driven into the sex trade.

Gender bias or discrimination exists amongst children of the same families, and in particular the treatment of the elderly towards a male and a female is different. The victims do not want to reveal this situation, but while being interviewed the victims spoke about the boys of the house being encouraged to go to school while the girls being discouraged about the same and married

off early. Women belonging to different caste categories were trafficked, as per the study. It has been understood from the case studies that the highest number of trafficked victims belonged to the schedule caste category followed by the scheduled tribes. Schedule caste groups were more targeted in comparison to the schedule tribes and others as they are the most deprived social category.

One of those major factors is the smartness of the traffickers who implement the latest methods and techniques for trafficking. They experiment by using different channels. The main traffickers (kingpins) always keep their identities hidden. They use many middle agents to carry on with their illegal activities and their own identity is never disclosed. Traffickers are very advanced, and they use the mode of Information Communication Technology (ICT) through which they become faceless characters. They use fake accounts and fake photos so that their identity lies protected. The main trafficker monitors everything over the smartphone. The middlemen usually carry out the orders of the main traffickers. The use of Google Earth has made it easy for the traffickers to locate and find out the information about their victims/targets, it gives them the minute details of each and every aspect sought by the traffickers. This is a significant finding by the present research study as to how acquainted are the traffickers with the modern advanced technologies in trafficking the victims.

About the Victims

The victims of women trafficking were from all age groups though the minors below the age of 20 were in majority who had been trafficked at a very tender age. The traffickers target the minors as they are vulnerable and can be easily tricked and exploited. From the research study the majority of the victims belonged to the Schedule caste category. Majority of the victims

belonged to the Nepali community. Majority of the victims were Hindus. Majority of the victims were illiterates and were unaware of their rights. They were easily lured and exploited by the traffickers.

Post trafficking

After being trafficked, the victims are forced to surrender themselves into the flesh trade, a phase known as the 'Breaking Period' where the women and girls are forced into prostitution and their denial leads to their rape by the '*dalals*', gang rapes, and violence on an extreme level with physical and mental torture injected with drugs and even starved for several days without food. The victims are made to feel unwanted and finally gives in to the work. Once the victims arrive at the brothels, the majors i.e., above 18 years old are registered where they are given different names by the madams and pimps. They become registered sex workers, so it becomes very easy for the madams and pimps, as during raids the police authorities usually let go of a sex worker who is a registered one. Their names are changed once they enter the brothel, but minors are usually hidden underground by the pimps. They are not given the full amount paid for them by their clients. The pimps and the madams take their entire share and only a little amount is given to some, whereas others do not get any earnings.

NGOs have been working tirelessly to rescue women and girls being trafficked as well as those on the verge of being trafficked. Some NGOs have been positioned at railway stations, bus stops and border areas for monitoring purposes. Others have been organizing awareness programs and workshops among different categories of people in society on the prevention of trafficking. They have been rescuing women and girls from different cities within India as well as from abroad.

After the victims are rescued and brought back they have to be counseled and kept in shelter homes.

The law enforcement agencies have been assisting the NGOs in the rescuing mission. They have tied up with the NGOs and have hosted a number of awareness programs on Anti human trafficking in the rural areas and tea gardens. They have been going to educational institutions along with the NGOs in order to spread the word about trafficking. Whenever they are approached by the NGOs they have always rendered their service with dedication. But unfortunately, there are no shelter homes in Darjeeling Hills where the women/girls can be kept after rescuing. This has paved a lot of difficulties for the functioning of the Non-Governmental Organizations. The absence of shelter homes in the hills and also lack of professional counselors compels the NGOs to send the rescued women and girls to the government-run shelter homes in other districts like Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar. Since the shelter homes run by the government are not in a good state, many of the rescued victims run away from these homes and some go back to the brothels as the traffickers wait for this opportunity to take them back to the brothels. Many land up as being Flying Sex Workers or FSW, where they move from one place to another according to the availability and demand of their clients. Sometimes, they also move to the cities as per the demand and the money that is transacted or offered by their clients.

The inability of NGOs to provide adequate interventions pertaining to women trafficking in Darjeeling is related to the absence of coordination among the different organizations. Competition between the different NGOs leads to the decrease in a stringent standard of providing resources to victims of trafficking. The values of preferences of the organizations in relation to the support to be provided to victims differ extensively from each other. It is difficult to find organizations that are quality-driven and engage themselves in being updated with the

latest information regarding how the problem of human trafficking particularly women trafficking can be addressed.

The attitude of society towards the victims of human trafficking has been time and again condemned. After being rescued the attitude of the society towards the victims was not very welcoming as they do not want the rescued women and girls to be brought back to the village or neighborhood. Victims are not easily accepted by society, those rescued from the trafficker's hand before they land up in the brothels are accepted in the society but those victims rescued from the red lights or brothels are not accepted by society. Now, the awareness programs which are being conducted by the Non-Governmental Organizations in the villages have helped people understand and also welcome the women and girls to their homes. It becomes critical to provide essential rehabilitation to the rescued victims of trafficking. The rehabilitation process starts immediately after the person is rescued. So, regarding the rehabilitation, there are no rehabilitation centers for the trafficked victims from the Hills, once rescued from the brothels they are handed over to the shelter homes in other districts.

5.2 Some Observed Facts during the Existing Research Study

5.2.1 The Role of Political Parties

The GNLF (Gorkha National Liberation Front) is a political party in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. It was formed in 1980 but this political party did not take up the cause of women and girls trafficking as a serious concern or as an agenda to be focussed during their time. After the downfall of the GNLF party, another party Gorkha Janmukti Morcha was formed in 2007. This political party too did not take up women and girls trafficking as a matter of

seriousness and neither did they stand to fight for women's rights nor protect them from trafficking. None of the political parties tried looking into this serious issue. Besides the Non-Governmental Organizations there was no role of social leaders neither were they seen raising the issue on women and girls trafficking.

5.2.2 Role of Tourism

Darjeeling is famous for tea, timber, and tourism. Darjeeling's tourism has indeed climbed a milestone in achieving a status. It was observed during the study that tourism does not have any negative impact on women trafficking. Though homestays and resorts have come up over time but there has been no link with women trafficking.

5.2.3 Role of Gram Panchayats

The researcher visited Kalimpong B.D.O. Office to inquire about the missing cases that were reported in the Gram Panchayats. Kalimpong district has 18 Gram Panchayats which have not reported on any missing cases of women and girls from the villages. The only reporting updates which they get from the Panchayats are the schemes on health, pension and others.

The researcher then spoke to some members from the related Gram Panchayats as well. Mr. Ashish Rai, Gram Panchayat (Karmee) of Bhalukhop, stated that till date there has been no report on missing cases. He also specified that they have various schemes which they look after like the energy scheme, disaster management scheme, old age pension, widow pensions and on health schemes. He said in case if there had been any missing case the villagers would have directly taken the matter to the police and lodged an F.I.R. along with the NGOs but Gram Panchayats are not given any information.

Mr. Bijay Kumar Lama, Executive Assistant from Bong Gram Panchayat also stated that so far no missing cases have been reported to the gram panchayat. They take care of schemes given by the central government and state government, benefits are given to the village people. In case of missing cases, people might have reported to the police but the panchayat has not been informed on any missing case from the village.

Mrs. Sashi Rai, executive assistant, Dr. Graham's Gram Panchayat said that there has been no missing case from their gram panchayat instead they do meetings on every 4th Saturday with ICDS regarding children's nutrition but they do not get any information regarding missing women and girls.

The researcher also spoke to Mr. Gajendra Chettri from Dungra Gram Panchayat who too stated that there has been no missing case report reported to the Gram Panchayat. Bal Suraksha Abhiyan an NGO has been playing a very active role in conducting awareness programmes.

Mr. B.B. Rasaily, Executive Assistant from Pudung Gram Panchayat; Mr. Heman Dorjay Tamang, Executive Assistant of Samthar Gram Panchayat; Mr. Amar Singh Rai, Karmee from Upper Echhey Gram Panchayat; Mr. Gopal Sarkee, Job Assistant of Sindebong Gram Panchayat; Mr. Tika Subba, Karmee from Kalimpong Gram Panchayat also said that there has been no missing case reported to their respective gram panchayats.

5.3 Experiences and Opinions

The present research undertaken on human trafficking in Darjeeling Hills proved to be a meaningful study for the researcher, enabling her to have a rich experience. She takes this opportunity to share her viewpoints as a research scholar as the study was indeed a great learning

experience for her. The present research study is on the trafficking of women in Darjeeling Hills which has not been specifically dealt in the past though some writings are there on this issue in West Bengal. The research work has been chosen as it was felt by the researcher to be challenging and at the same very sensitive to explore about it. It was not very easy to extract information from the respondents regarding this topic as there were many things which were latent and to bring it out the same was a big challenge for the researcher who tried level best to explore in-depth the case studies and tried maintaining the ethical principles pertaining to primary research.

As the research work was started, the initial days were marked with enthusiasm and the dedication for the researcher towards collection of reliable information continued throughout the course of the study. The researcher started with a pilot survey and explored the area of the study. The researcher had the privilege to travel back and forth to Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts and its sub divisions within the state of West Bengal. At the beginning of research work, the researcher began to outline the framework of the thesis and accordingly structured three types of questionnaires for different categories of target groups such as the Non-Governmental Organizations, the Police and the victims of trafficking.

In total, 14 NGOs officials were interviewed who provided pertinent information for the research study. It is good to highlight here some important aspects pertaining to the information derived from the NGOs. What drew attention the most was the lack of shelter homes for victims of human trafficking. Lack of shelter homes became a major factor as after the rescue, girls could not be brought back from the destination places. So, a shelter home is very much needed near the hometowns. Sometimes, there were changes in the statement of the victims out of fear or threat and prolonged court hearings. This was very difficult for the NGOs to encourage the victims and

their families to speak up. It has also been found that majority of the NGOs lack professional counselors. Counseling is so important not only for the victims but also for their families and also their respective communities. NGOs have been carrying out awareness campaigns but more serious type of awareness programmes are needed so to stop trafficking from the rural and urban areas of Darjeeling Hills and adjoining areas. To reintegrate the victims back to their families and societies have been a major challenge for the organizations as well. During the study the offices of the organizations were frequented as some information was not given easily or in the first instance. The NGO officials were kept in touch over the phone and sought their permission and availability as to meet them in their offices.

The second group of respondents was the police officials who were interviewed, though, in some of the police stations/offices the researcher had to wait for a long time in order to meet the officer. There were a lot of interruptions during the interview as many people kept coming inside the office with many queries and knowing the fact that police officials are very busy. The researcher managed to get the information and is thankful to them for providing useful information. But on the other side it was not possible to get the exact figure of trafficking cases as not much had been looked into nor recorded the cases concerning with trafficking.

Finally, the last group of respondents for the present study was the victims of human trafficking. It was very challenging for the researcher as it was a sensitive issue for discussion, and some did not want to recall back those past incidents of torture and exploitation. Some were in tears when they narrated the incidents to the researcher. Some could not even recall properly as they had tried forgetting about their past. The researcher has jotted everything in the field diary about their incidents and how they were trafficked. The researcher also made it a point not to push them too much and has kept their identity as anonymous.

5.4 Concluding Remarks

The present research study that takes up a significant social problem within the domain of sociological study finds that trafficking of women is an alarming social issue in the Darjeeling Hills of West Bengal. It is a very sensitive subject for doing research where research ethics should have been maintained on the highest level, and that has been kept up with utmost sincerity in the present study which has drawn in a line to protect the identity of the trafficked victims. Pseudo names have been used even while writing the case studies of the victims. Neither photographs nor videography was taken in the research study of the victims. It has been found that women and girls are trafficked to various destinations within the country and abroad. Trafficked victims suffer a lot of psychological, physical, and mental trauma. The victims after being rescued by the NGOs are sent for counseling sessions. Some of them are reunited with their families, some start with new family life. Some start new business ventures, others try to fit in the larger society and some are not accepted by their family members and neither the society so they go back to the same profession. NGOs and the police administration help them in adjusting to the larger society to a considerable extent. NGOs have been holding awareness programs among the people in the rural areas, among tea garden labourers, in educational schools and colleges by organizing seminars, workshops and drawing awareness even among the driver unions, hotel owners and forming different clubs at different levels to fight against trafficking.

Reflecting on the present research study it can be concluded that conducting the study gave an opportunity to have rich and valuable knowledge on human trafficking as a horrendous crime done against humanity and it poses a serious threat to human security and health. It can be understood as a form of modern-day slavery. Women trafficking in Darjeeling Hills has a multi-

faceted dimension despite the immense efforts of the NGOs and the Police Department to check on it. It affects mostly those who are socially and economically vulnerable. It is expected to think critically about how social injustice, poverty, substance abuse, homelessness, and family breakdown function as the primary push factors for the women and girls who become victims eventually. The simple nature of the people also makes them easy prey to traffickers. They are deceived and are easily ensnared into the stronger grip of the illegal sex world from where it becomes very difficult for them to break out. Some of the victims trafficked abroad had desires of going to a foreign land and working there, earning big amount since people going abroad would be looked highly in their localities. Dreaming big had landed them into being traded from one household to another and sold from one agent to another. They were trafficked.

It can also be deduced that the findings of the research study on women trafficking in the Darjeeling Hills hold the potential to inform and guide human trafficking prevention strategies and approaches in the near future. While deciding on the topic prior to the research study it was in mind that a productive research study has the power to bring a social change and thus it can address a pressing concern in the contemporary era. The motivation and encouragement received in the due course of this research study from different sources have been noteworthy. It was believed that research information on the concerned topic has the capacity of enacting change, and it can be believed that this research study would be useful for articulating women trafficking prevention strategies. Throughout the process of conducting the research and reporting the findings, it has been kept in mind that it is crucial to present the collected data on women trafficking accurately since the social impact of the study hopefully is going to be profound in relevant policy formation and implementation on combating trafficking of women. It was therefore pivotal for the existing study to adhere to reliable and sound research methodology to

fulfill its basic objective of how to fight women trafficking as well as to assure a long-lasting impact on the lives of those women who fall victims to human trafficking.

There were certain challenges while conducting the research. The Covid-19 pandemic had brought about unprecedented situations across the globe, impacting social and economic settings across India including West Bengal, heavily. The restrictions on the movement of people and closures of enterprises for the safety of all had brought a fast-moving life to a standstill. The chaos and confusion pertaining to the pandemic delayed the research work to a considerable extent. The unintentional postponement in the study was a significant factor influencing the completion of the research. However, the dedication and sincerity of the researcher aided in overcoming the challenges.

5.5 Recommendations

It is obvious from the above discussion that research studies carry out in the near future on the topic of human trafficking, and precisely on women trafficking promise to bring positive changes in society by curbing the prevalence of such practices. Over the past decades, women trafficking happened globally and regionally has led to a tremendous amount of public attention. Darjeeling Hills of West Bengal in India is not an exception to the fact. The media has covered the topic from time to time, and the involvement of the NGOs has also increased considerably. The need of creating new policies and enforcement mechanisms for tackling the problem is also felt. Nevertheless, a considerable part of the discourse, enforcement, and policymaking might be lacking an evidence base. This is due to the inadequacy of relevant and quality research studies on the issue. New directions in research on women trafficking are therefore critically needed. Women trafficking's seriousness, trends, and magnitude, all are to be addressed by serious

research work in these days. An argument is to be made for carefully conducted research on trafficking at the micro-level. It is suggested that such research would be beneficial for identifying the magnitude of trafficking within a proper context, as well as for formulating contextually fit enforcement and policy response.

Reflecting on the findings of the present study it can be recommended that self-help groups (SHGs) are made available for the rescued victims of trafficking so that they can remain independent and self-reliant to earn their livelihood. Government-aided shelter homes too should be established in Darjeeling Hills as it has been found that the rescued women and girls are kept at shelter homes in the adjoining districts of Coochbehar and Jalpaiguri where it has become very difficult for the victims to interact as well as to adapt in these shelter homes there due to different socio-cultural setups as well as mismanagement in those shelter homes. Consequently, many of them run away from these shelter homes due to these difficulties and then again return to the brothels.

The law enforcement agencies have to be more aware of the issue of women trafficking. Very little of the needful record or no record was kept in regard to the trafficking of women and girls. The police department was not able to provide the exact information when they were asked about the number of trafficking cases during the year and during the past five years. Some of them mentioned that it was very difficult for them to determine whether the missing cases were of trafficking or not. They further added that most of the cases also do not reach the police station, as it goes unreported. So the enforcement agencies particularly the police should be more sensitized on the issue of the brutality of women trafficking.

All the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working to combat women trafficking should work together and not compete with one another. If a chain of actions is created then it becomes easy to prevent women trafficking. Likewise, recently the NGOs have formed an ATN (Anti Trafficking Network) to collectively work in preventing trafficking. Professional and trained counselors are needed for the counseling of the victims. The members of the organizations have been counseling the victims but trained counselors would be much preferable. As most of them need psychological guidance and counseling to overcome the trauma. One of the major findings of this research study shows that there is a lack of professional counselors for counseling the trafficked victims. As most of the NGOs lack professional counselors the Government should provide good counselors or conduct some training programs for counselor-ships which could be attended by the members of the NGOs who could give professional counseling to the needy. Good professional counselors could motivate the parents to lodge FIR against the traffickers. Frequent workshops and seminars should be organized by the NGOs where they could discuss, share and exchange their views on ways and measures to combat trafficking. More innovative programs should be encouraged for women's empowerment so that they become independent and aware of their own rights and their duties for society. Formation of Self-help Groups could be encouraged in the rural areas as well as some skill development training/vocational training could be conducted for school dropouts so that they get engaged in some work and earn their rations. This would prevent them from travelling to other places in search of a job and getting employed in their hometown itself.

It is further recommended that collaborative efforts are enabled by the concerned agencies for the accomplishment of set goals to improve the situation of women trafficking in Darjeeling Hills and other surrounding areas. Building trustworthy and strong relationships with organizations

and allies and developing collaborative strategies within the community people on the village level, block level, district level as well as broader regional level is indispensable for the improvement of services for meeting the needs of vulnerable people and trafficked survivors. The government must come forward to sponsor technical assistance and training to the varied champion organizations who seek to work in a collaborative manner for effectively responding to women trafficking in the respective communities. The interactive opportunities would be bringing professionals together to advance best practices in the course of preventing trafficking and ensuring self-determination and wellness for survivors. It can be hoped that with collaborative efforts from the different spheres of society the burden of women trafficking can be reduced substantially within a short span of time.