

Role of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Combating Women Trafficking in Darjeeling Hills

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Abstract

Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) perform a variety of humanitarian services. Different NGOs cater solutions to different kinds of social issues and their focuses are on a wide range scale ranging from human rights to improving health, providing education to the underprivileged, spreading awareness on environment, upliftment of women and children, combating human trafficking and so on. Several NGOs in Darjeeling Hills are working to combat women and girl trafficking. The existing article aims to analyze empirically the roles play by these NGOs to prevent and control the trafficking of women.

Keywords: *gender, sexuality, bondage, Shakti Vahini, prostitution.*

Human Trafficking: A Brief Introduction

Human Trafficking is a grievous crime in human society. It is the inhuman act where the main aim is to make profit at the cost of trading humans mostly for the purpose of sexual slavery, forced labour, begging, drug peddling, forced marriages, pornography or commercial sexual exploitation along with extraction and trade of organs, forced surrogacy and some are also used as combatants by some terrorist and insurgent groups, a grave violation of human rights. Trafficking can occur anywhere,

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in an urban or rural area, within a country or outside country where there is illegal migration. Both men and women may be victims of trafficking but the primary victims worldwide are mostly women and girls who are trafficked for sexual exploitation. Article 3, Paragraph (a) of the United Nation's Trafficking Protocol is related to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. The Protocol declares "Trafficking in Persons" as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of 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. *The Global Alliance against Trafficking* defines 'women Trafficking' as: All acts involved in the recruitment and/or transportation of a woman within and across national border for work or services by means of violence or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominant position , debt bondage, deception or other forms of coercion. Every minute of a day, the most vulnerable women and children are raped for profit and pushed into the flesh trade. According to the *SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution, 2002*, 'trafficking' means moving, selling or buying women and children for Prostitution within and outside a country for monetary or other considerations with or without the consent of the person subjected to trafficking (Nair, P.M. 2011: 11).

Trafficking in human beings takes place for the purpose of exploitation which is general and could be categorized as (a) Sex based and (b) non sex based. The former category includes trafficking for prostitution, commercial sexual abuse, pedophilia, pornography, cyber sex, and different types of disguised sexual exploitation that takes place in some of the massage parlours, beauty parlors, bars and other

manifestations like call girls racket, friends clubs etc. Non sex based trafficking could be for different types of servitude, like domestic labour, industrial labour, adoption, organ transplant, camel racing, marriage related rackets etc (Roy, Rekha 2010: 2). But the growing trafficking in women is principally for the purpose of prostitution, an international problem found in developing as well as in industrialized nations.

Trafficking in Women: Theoretical Discussion

Theories provide a concrete basis to a particular subject of discussion. For the existing study which deals with women trafficking, the "Theory of Gender and Sexuality" is being incorporated in view of the fact that it has been used since the early 1970s to indicate culturally constructed femininity and masculinity as opposed to biological sex differences. The 'female sex' is generally considered subordinated in comparison to the 'male sex'. Theories of gender oppression portrays women's position as the outcome of a direct power relationship between men and women in which men have primary and material interest in controlling and dominating women as they are the weaker sex and this leads to their exploitation. Trafficking in women is such a social and power relation issue among men and women wherein men dominate on females' body and mind.

Trafficking in women is local issue but it is obviously a global issue. It unlocks the national and international boundaries. The 'Theory of Globalization' is specifically relevant to throw light on the gloomy issue of women trafficking in our society. Since there is an extensive awareness which is expanded beyond our conventional boundaries, the 'Global Consciousness' - a consciousness that not only drives our life but also, at an empirical or practical level, is a source of socio-cultural change in societies throughout the world. As well as globalization refers to those practices

which tend to build and strengthen a unified world economy. The process of globalization as a discourse as well as an economic program has been laid down in India since the 1990s. Throughout the decade and subsequently the agenda of liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG) was set into action by India. Globalization as a process encourages even insists migration of people from one region to other regions within a country or one country to other countries. Globalization gives way to migration of women and children from one country to other countries which can also make them the drudges/slaves of globalization where they befall as easy targets as victims for the traffickers.

Objectives of the Study

The existing research work primarily is based on these theories which provide necessary direction to the work to obtain an empirical base. Considering the factors or the causes which have led to the uprising of trafficking of women in Darjeeling hills, it has been observed that several NGOs are working to combat this social evil out from the society. Those NGOs have taken up a well spirited team effort to organize outreach programmes, creating and spreading awareness in rural areas as well as in schools and colleges. Street plays are organized so that each and every age category of individuals become conscious as to preventing them from falling prey in the hands of traffickers. There are several NGOs in Darjeeling hills which play important roles to combat trafficking of women. The present paper mainly focuses on this aspect of NGOs like MARG, (Mankind in Action for Rural Growth), Hill Social Welfare Society, Cross Roads, Bal Suraksha Abhiyan, CINI, Tiny Hands, Kanchanjunga Udhar Kendra Welfare Society, and Mary Hill Ward Society which provide their every effort for preventing and controlling women trafficking in and around Darjeeling Hills. Following are the objectives of this study:

- (i) To study the nature of women trafficking in Darjeeling Hills
- (ii) To know the roles played by the NGOs to combat women trafficking
- (iii) To understand the ways and methods applied for preventing women trafficking

Research Methodology

The whole study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data have been collected by direct interviewing the NGO members. Purposing sampling technique has been applied to select the NGO members as informants from whom relevant information have been collected. Pilot survey was done before framing a semi-structured interview schedule used for collection of primary data. Primary data collected from different NGO members have been presented as case studies. Secondary data have been collected through books, newspapers and internet.

Women Trafficking in Darjeeling Hills: Some Aspects

Shri Rishi Kant, the Director of *Shakti Vahini*, an NGO working against trafficking stated in a National Seminar on “Trafficking in Person: Prevention, Control and Rehabilitation on 26th and 27th of November 2016, organized by the Law Department of N.B.U., stated that many girls from Darjeeling Hills were trafficked to Kashmir, North India and many other places. He also mentioned that North Bengal particularly Darjeeling Hills has been a very easy target for trafficking in women as it shares porous boundaries with other nations. It also has a prolonged history of movement of people, goods and commodities.

Darjeeling district is the northern part of West Bengal which shares its boundaries with Nepal to the west, Sikkim to the north, and Bhutan to the east. Irrespective of having potentialities for a better development, it still has low pace of development and economic growth paving the way for youngsters to seek employment opportunities elsewhere in other towns, cities and other countries. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, closed tea gardens and many other factors have given advantage to the traffickers to lay their firm grip on the innocence and simple minded people from Darjeeling hills. We can also say that this porous nature of the area allows and gives ample opportunity to the traffickers, who are also known by the term 'Dallas' or 'Dalalis' who could be either neighbours, relatives, lovers, people who have been trafficked before, or sometimes even the parents. The recruiters pick the victims from bus stops, railway stations, airports, streets, beauty parlours or even from their homes. The 'Dallas' or 'Dalalis' move to the potential sites for victims especially poverty stricken areas where there has been no proper rehabilitation. The traffickers are very calculative as to from where and when they can pick up their victims. They have a very large scale networking, spreading all across, and are using modern methods to track their victims. Regions which have been hit by earthquakes, floods, cyclones, drought or any natural calamity can be their softer targets. Poverty and hunger makes women and children belonging to the poorer sections of the society highly vulnerable to human trafficking. As per our observation in the region besides the factors like poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, natural disaster etc one unique feature exists there that even if the girls go missing hardly there is any missing complaint filed in the police station by the family members due to the fear of social disgrace. They also do not file complaint as they are with the hope that the girl would return after three days. This unique cultural practice in the hills is term as "*Chor ko Shor*" when family members assume that the girl has eloped and would come home

after tying the knot with the boy but within that period of time *i.e.* three days they are either taken to different cities or flown abroad. Over the years many women and children went missing but there was no initiative to trace their abductors or to realize the cause of their abduction. These incidents became a sensation only for the moment and soon forgotten.

Role of the NGOs

The Darjeeling Hills facilitate many Non Governmental Organizations or NGOs to work actively to combat women and children trafficking. They have been spreading awareness among people consequently people are also becoming active to prevent trafficking of women and children. Officials from some of the NGOs were interviewed in the course of the study. These NGOs are the Mankind in Action for Rural Growth (MARG), Hill Social Welfare Society (HSWS), CROSSROADS, Bal Suraksha Abhiyan, Tiny Hands, Mary Hill Ward Society, IMPULSE etc. The following table shows the activities of some of the selected NGOs which they acknowledged during their face-to-face interview with the researcher:

Table No 3: Activities of the NGOs

Questions	MARG	HSWS	TINY HANDS	CROSSROADS
1. What are the causes of Human Trafficking?	Unemployment, alcoholism, fake marriage, Socio-cultural practice of “ <i>chor ko shor</i> ”	Unsafe Migration, easy money, unemployment, fake marriage, School dropouts.	Lack of job opportunities, intra country migration, deception by lover or spouse	Poverty, politics, family problems, sex abuses, no proper implementations of legislation
2. How do you	Police is	Asking the	Regular	Organization

act, if girls /women are being trafficked?	mobilized immediately & information gathered about the victim.	parents & relatives to file a missing complain & then organization takes up the case.	monitoring are done along with inquiry	directs people to child line in case of minor & assists people to report the case.
3. How do you get information of the victims?	From parents, police, & Sansthas (Committees)	Parents, relatives, friends	Staffs & SSB (Seema, Sashtra Bal)	It is through awareness programmes people come & share
4. What are the difficulties faced during rescuing?	Victims consider NGOs & police as outsiders	Non-cooperation from the police, as without the of assistance of the police they cannot functions	Victims at time do not accept that they are being trafficked as they are brain washed & hence they retaliate with the staffs.	Organization does not rescue but assists people to report cases, do not face much difficulty
5. After rescuing where are the girls/women kept?	Shelter homes / protection homes in Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar	Kept in shelter homes or reintegrated with their families	Minors are kept at CINI, majors are reintegrated with their families	Organization refers to other organization/s which work in the nearby areas
6. Are the victims accepted by the society or	Not easily accepted by the society	Not easily accepted	Pre-trafficked rescuing leads to easy acceptance by	Not easily accepted but more awareness programmes in

not?			the society.	this regard are required
7. What type of counseling is given to the victim and by whom?	Professional counselors	Since professional counselors are not there, so seniors of the organization do the counseling	All the staffs counsel the victims & handover them to the shelter homes	Organization does not have trained counselors so senior members counsel the victims
8. If not, how do you provide relief to the rescued victims?	Organization does not provide relief, it only rescues	Organization does not provide relief, but provide training courses & encourages them	Organization does not provide relief, but ensures home safety	Organization does not provide relief, but assists in reporting the cases
9. Women/girls are mostly trafficked from which ethnic group?	From all categories - General / ST / SC / Others	Mostly scheduled tribes as compared to others	Nepalese from Nepal in big groups and in most of the time Adivasi (ST) girls in small groups or as individual	All categories are vulnerable to trafficking but ST and Nepalis are more vulnerable
10. From which subdivision / district / country you have rescued the most?	All Sub divisions	Kalimpong	Nepal, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling	Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Doars

11. Any help from NGOs / Religious communities or any Union / Samajs?	Yes, DAT (Drivers Against Trafficking) clubs are formed who provide help	Yes, the organization has received help from the Panchayats, Sansthas & also from GDNS (Gorkha Dukh Niwarak Samelan)	Yes, other organizations, churches, taxi drivers, travel agencies provide help	Yes, the organization has received help from the locals and Panchayats
12. How often do you organize outreach programmes and where?	Awareness programmes are held in every month in schools, colleges, hotels, samajs etc	Once in two months especially in rural areas	Once in a month with Christian communities in Malbazar, Panitanki along with distribution of pamphlets	Regularly, sometimes 6 to 8 times in a month on drug addiction, domestic violence, trafficking issues etc
13. How willing are the police to join hands at the time of rescue?	Police forces are very cooperative	Police forces is much required at the time of rescue ,though the cases are not taken seriously	Police are casual, they stop the traffickers only when order comes from higher authority	Very cooperative and help to prevent trafficking
14. Is there any financial aid given by the Government	Yes, but it is a very long process	No financial aid is provided but funds are collected through	There is no fund at present as the organization has to prove	No fund but organization is supported by providing donations

while rescuing?		donations and membership fees	itself independent at least for a year	
15. Is there any political pressure in the functioning of the organization?	No	Yes	No	No
16. What are your future plans?	More focus on prevention of trafficking	Control and prevention of trafficking	Organization is willing to work more for the society	By listening and welcoming new ways and strategies

Case Studies of Some Well-Known NGOs in Darjeeling Hills

1. **MARG:** It was established in Darjeeling on 8th September 2006. It focuses on issues relating to women and children. It provides basic education to the underprivileged women, children, marginalized sections and rescued trafficked victims. The General Secretary of MARG, Nirnay John Chettri stated that flesh trade is on the rise in Darjeeling hills mainly due to unemployment resulting from political unrest, and porous borders in Darjeeling Hills. He also informed that 420 girls were found missing in 2010 which rose to 923 in 2012 as per the survey conducted by the NGO in the district. MARG has been organizing outreach programmes regularly, conducting awareness programmes in schools and colleges. They have formed clubs in schools /colleges and presently there are 7 numbers of clubs in Darjeeling and 4 numbers of clubs in Kalimpong. They also held awareness camps among the Local Samaj, Drivers Samaj, and also with the

Police forces. The NGO has rescued 43 victims since 2011-2012 from various age groups. 5 traffickers were convicted for 2 to 4 years of imprisonment. 150 victims have been recovered and they were kept in the Coochbehar Rehabilitation Centre as they lack a home to keep the rescued victims. Most of the victims were minors.

2. Kanchanjunga Uddhar Kendra Welfare Society (KUK) is a very old NGO of Siliguri which was established on 15th December 2004. It focuses on prevention of trafficking, child protection, issues related with any type of violence against women. Its focused areas are Siliguri, Darjeeling hills and Dooars. It has built a good rapport with Police administration, schools, and other organizations which inform them about missing cases. They have been rescuing women and girls from trafficking as they receive help from “*DECOIR CUSTOMER*” meaning to say some known staff acts as a customer and make their search for missing individual. Just after information of the missing person, they immediately report the police. They have been playing a big role in providing training to the members like teachers, advocates etc coming from the nearby villages. They have formed the *Village Protection Committees* which alert people in the villages regarding trafficking. They have staffs for counseling the trafficked victims. Shri Prabhat Pathak, a member of the organization stated that trafficking has two types: CSW (Commercial Sex Worker) - when girls, women are trafficked for commercial sexual purpose and the other one is LRW (Labour Related Work) - when children especially boys are trafficked for labour purposes for camel jockeying and other uses. Awareness campaigns like workshops are held. Many Christian missionaries and institutions have come forward to help the organization. They also get information from travel

agencies which also help them in their endeavors in combating trafficking. He stated that the main reason behind trafficking in North Bengal is due to the limitation of jobs in the region. Being a tea garden belt where thousands of labourers were employed few years ago are now unemployed particularly due to the use of machines in tea factories. Consequently, requirement of labour power is less, so supply of jobs goes down and people are forced to migrate out of the region. In 2016, three batches of girls were taken to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar for organizing orchestra songs where Bollywood item songs were played and the abducted girls were forced to dance. And later, these girls were sold one by one to the people who attended the orchestra event. Eight girls were rescued in Raxaul (Bihar) out of which 5 girls were trafficked from Nepal, 2 girls from Dooars and 1 girl was abducted from Assam. During the period 2004-2008, approximately more than hundred cases of trafficking mostly girls from Nepal who were running away to escape the Maoist threat and fear were handled and solved. Five numbers of traffickers were convicted in 2013.

- 3. Hill Social Welfare Society, Kalimpong:** The NGO was established on 23rd November, 2000. It mainly focuses on the upliftment of women, children and other marginalized groups. They organize health checkups, monitor nutrition intake and provide training to the youths. It also focuses on agriculture (multi-crop farming, square feet farming, and animal husbandry). They also have started the Self Help Group or Neel Kamal Group scheme to empower rural women. They watch over areas like Kalimpong, Algarah, Gorubathan, Rangli-Rangliot blocks and the tea gardens found in these regions. The main role of HSWS is to provide a platform for training to young girls and women as beauticians, handloom and weaving workers. They

are trained in cutting and tailoring. They make khadas, shawls, incense sticks etc. Horticulture is also practiced like mushroom cultivation so that they can sustain their livelihood. HSWS also conducts awareness programmes in rural areas, tea gardens to educate them so to prevent forced migration. They have rescued 42 victims since 2011-2016 who belonged to the age group of 21-35 years. Some of the rescued were sent to missionary homes, one victim who was trafficked from Nepal sent to Maiti in Nepal. Others also were reintegrated. Shri Govind Pradhan stated that those who were rescued from brothels were not accepted by their respective society whereas those victims who were rescued before pushing to the brothels were accepted by their society.

4. **Tiny Hands, Siliguri:** This NGO is one of the recently established NGOs set up on 1st June 2016, but has taken a major role in transit monitoring, preventing of trafficking by conducting awareness programmes at bus stops, junctions, railway stations etc. They have also conducted many awareness camps with the stakeholders, rickshaw pullers, auto drivers and travel agencies. They also have established Monitoring Cell in Panitanki situated in the Indo-Nepal border. The Organization has handled 52 cases in Siliguri, New Jalpaiguri Railway Station, Siliguri Junction, and bus stations etc where two traffickers were caught out of which one trafficker was convicted and sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment as per appropriate the law of Nepal. In India, the punishment is only for 5 to 7 years and occasionally it is of 10 years. Three cases were found from Malbazaar, Jalpaiguri in which no traffickers were arrested as the victims failed to give their statements. Most of the girls are tribals from the tea garden areas of Terai and Dooars (sub-Himalayan regions).

5. **Mary Ward Social Centre, Siliguri:** This NGO was established in 2016 in Champasari situated in the outskirts of Siliguri. It is run by the Loreto Sisters. The main role played by the NGO is to monitoring the nearby tea gardens like Mohargaon, Gulmarg, Sukna, New Chumta, Putin Bari, Nischaritapur tea garden so that trafficking cases should not happened. Margret Horo is an active member who has been organizing special awareness camps in these tea gardens. She herself rescued three minor girls from Bagdogra. She said that the rescued minor girls are handed over to CINI, and the rescued adult girls/women are reintegrated with their families. She has been keeping a strict vigilance on the tea gardens as the tribals are very much vulnerable for trafficking.
6. **Bal Suraksha Abhiyan (BSA), Kalimpong:** It has been looking after children and rescuing them from being trafficked. At the present they have 96 children who were rescued from different districts of West Bengal. Sister Subeshna says that children used to elope and generally they are falling in the wrong hands. She handled a case when two minors were being taken to Haryana but with the help of Child Line in Delhi they could bring them back home in Kalimpong.
7. **CROSSROADS, Kalimpong:** it is an another organization which has been helping to prevent trafficking by registering cases of missing girls and children as most of the time cases go unregistered as parents are hesitant and out of fear they do not file cases. Sometimes, the traffickers are residents in the same village who keep pressurizing the parents that their children would be back and not to file a complaint. CROSSROADS helps the parents to register complaints and hands it over to other organizations working on it. It

also holds awareness camps on domestic violence, drug addiction and on trafficking. The organization has rescued three girls from Darjeeling, and two girls from Sikkim.

Observations and Opinions

Observations have been made here taking into consideration the roles played by the NGOs. Above mentioned NGOs in Darjeeling Hills (District) are actively working and rescuing victims of trafficking of women but the problems which are being observed by them are many which are as follows:

- ***Lack of Shelter Homes for Rescued Victims:*** There is an organization named 'CINI' which keeps only minor girls and boys even after rescuing the major girls are let off who are again re-trafficked. There is one shelter home named 'KORAK' in Jalpaiguri, so girls from Siliguri and Darjeeling Hills have to be kept either in Jalpaiguri or in Coochbehar. It would be better if a home is set up by the Government either in Siliguri or in Darjeeling.
- ***Fewer Co-operations from the Police:*** On occasions, the NGOs do not get sufficient as well as timely co-operation from the Police administration and the delay in their arrival creates a lot of instability which provides chance to the traffickers to escape never to be traced again.
- ***Change in the Statement by the Victims:*** Sometimes, victims do not accept that they are being trafficked and they tend to change their statement due to the fear of threat and prolonged court hearings. NGOs have to be very vigilant and need to counsel them appropriately.

- ***Lack of Good Professional Counselors:*** Majority of the NGOs lack good professional counselors especially to motivate parents to lodge FIRs against the trafficker/s. According to a member of 'Hariyo Kharka' meaning 'Green Pasture' a Christian Organization in Kalimpong which provides counseling to the youths and empowers women by organizing awareness programmes. Ms. Saru Koirala stated that even after the rescuing, the girls are kept in shelter homes provided by the Government in inhuman conditions. These shelter homes are crowded resulting in several inmates fleeing back to the brothels.
- ***Organization of Additional Awareness Campaigns:*** More awareness campaigns through awareness programmes, skits, distribution of pamphlets and sensitization on the grass roots of different sections of people like in different clubs, hotels, drivers, teachers, students, and shopkeepers could help prevent trafficking from rural and urban areas.
- NGOs are trying their level best to do the follow ups for the rescued victims so that they do not return to the same profession and also providing them some opportunities like trainings in beauty parlour, sewing and other types of skill development related trainings which can help them to sustain on their livelihood.

Though, in Darjeeling hills, NGOs are working individually. According to Ms. Hasina Kharbhih, Managing Director of IMPULSE, an NGO working against trafficking stated that NGOs have to form a nexus in order to work against trafficking. Since North Bengal specifically Darjeeling district is the corridor to the North East. Therefore, the focus of IMPULSE is to make all NGOs pro active for combating trafficking and facilitating chain of robust undergone umbrella so that they could function more properly and effectively.

Concluding Remarks

Women Trafficking in Darjeeling hills can be controlled and prevented only when people from different walks of life irrespective of their differences, join hands together to fight for uplifting women in society and helping them to acquire a position of respect, also teaching the young ones the revival of values which has now been disappearing from our society. Then only can our society be a better place for humankind – free from all kind of domination and bondage. NGOs are playing a significant role in this respect in Darjeeling hills.

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