

# Impact of Cultural and Religious Practices of Prostitution on the Trafficking of Women in India

## Prácticas culturales y religiosas de la prostitución y su impacto en el tráfico de mujeres en la India

### ABSTRACT

Trafficking women is a result of poverty, unemployment and other social conventions. But, in this study, I have found that, among other factors, the main reasons for the trafficking of women in India are the cultural and religious practices of prostitution. Evidence shows that, every year, some 20,000 women are trafficked within India, with nearly 50 per cent originating from states where the cultural and religious practice of prostitution is observed. During the past few decades, India has made great progress in terms of economic growth. However, there persist practices, attitudes and behaviors that continue to subordinate and oppress women. Perhaps the most telling evidence is the cultural and religious practice of prostitution in some Indian communities. In the present study, an attempt has been made to show how traditional and religious practices in India provoke the problem of trafficking women in present-day society.

*Key words:* cultural and religious practices, prostitution, devadasi, trafficking of women, India.

### RESUMEN

El tráfico de mujeres es un fenómeno resultado de la pobreza, desempleo y otros factores sociales. Sin embargo, en este estudio apunto que, entre otros factores, la razón principal del tráfico de mujeres en la India son las prácticas culturales y religiosas de la prostitución. La evidencia muestra que cada año cerca de 20 000 mujeres son traficadas dentro de este país, casi 50 por ciento corresponden a aquellos estados donde se da la práctica cultural y religiosa de la prostitución. Aun cuando durante las últimas décadas India ha logrado un gran avance en términos de crecimiento económico, la persistencia de prácticas, actitudes y comportamientos sigue subordinando y oprimiendo a las mujeres. Quizás la evidencia más contundente es la práctica cultural y religiosa de la prostitución en algunos estados y en algunas comunidades indígenas. Por lo tanto, en el presente estudio se ha tratado de investigar cómo las prácticas tradicionales y religiosas de la India originan el problema de tráfico de mujeres en la sociedad actual.

*Palabras clave:* prácticas culturales y religiosas, prostitución, devadasi, tráfico de mujeres, India

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## INTRODUCTION

Prostitution and civilizations have gone hand in hand all over the world. Historically, religious beliefs and social customs prevalent in society from time to time provide the earliest accounts of its origin. It is rather difficult to enumerate or identify all the factors conducive to prostitution because it has often been argued that prostitution has its roots deep in the fabric of society (Giri, 1999). India is no exception in spite of its spiritual aura. Therefore, it is important to trace the history of prostitution and sale of women to see how far practices in the past account for the position of women in present day society and reinforce toleration of assaults on the dignity of women by sexual violence and forced prostitution (Chakraborty, 2000). The recorded Indian history indicates that prostitution was an accepted profession to which certain prerogatives, rights and duties were attached.

In the sacred books of Hindu religion, including the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, there are frequent references to prostitution. In this age, when the king returned to their kingdom from war and journey were received by an escort of honor consisting of armies and Ganikas<sup>1</sup> and also in this time marriage with a prostitute was not looked down upon. The dancing girls were part of the king's court and were called as Raja Veshya (Royal Prostitute) (Chakraborty, 2000).

96 The great epics, besides giving an account of the high status and privileges that Ganikas and courtesans enjoyed at that time also relate that degenerations had set in. The fact that prostitutes accompanied kings and his army to the battlefield implies women prostitutes could take whatever the soldiers wanted them for, being sexual pleasure or even exposition to the dangers of wars. But, according to the ages, the form of prostitution has changed in India. For example, during the Buddhist period in spite of the adverse public opinion and punishments, courtesans existed and commanded a certain amount of respect. They were accommodated in royal palaces, were highly paid and occupied a recognized position in the social scale. Although Jainism looked down prostitution, no special stigma seems to have been attached to it. According to Jain sources, prostitution was so rampant in the country that Jain nuns were cautioned against it.

<sup>1</sup> Ganikas; old name of prostitution in India.

In the Mughal period (1526-1787 AD) prostitution was a recognized institution, but among Muslims prostitution was the antithesis to the institution of family life and while the singing and dancing girls who practiced it became rich and even powerful they were never treated as part of society, as they had been in earlier times. Emperor Akbar (1556-1605 AD) made some regulations so that the services of the prostitutes might not be available very easily to the public. Prostitutes were confined to a palace outside the capital city, which was known as *Shaitanpura* or place of devil's quarters. A register was maintained outside the *Shaitanpura* for clients, where they were bound to sign their name and address. On the next morning, the register was presented to the Emperor. But during the period of Emperor Shahjahan (1627-1657AD) this activity was reviewed once again and when Aurangzeb became the ruler, most of his rules were directed towards prohibition of prostitutes. In spite of many regulations imposed by the Mughal emperors like Akbar and Aurangzeb, prostitution received great encouragement from the rich and middle class people (Giri, 1999).

When the European came to power (during the 15<sup>th</sup> century) in India, especially the British played an important role in bringing about the downfall of the Mughal Empire on the one hand and on the other hand efforts were made to cater to the sexual needs of the soldiers based in India, although being a practice against the British norms in their own country. British army authorities maintained special brothels called '*Chaklas*' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although they discouraged the sati system, caste, child marriage and purdha system, nevertheless female education and remarriage of widows were encouraged and the law dealing with immoral traffic were enacted (Shankar, 1990).

However in many provinces, official police registers were kept for the convenience of the police to keep an eye on the anti-social activities who usually frequented the brothels. Though practice of prostitution is an anti-social activity, it has a deep root from the period of ancient India. Not only this, but also during the religious ceremony likes '*Dasera*' (festival of Goddess Durga), the soil to make the idol of Durga was brought from the brothel, because in the Hindu society it is believe that the soil of the brothel is pure. So in India, the profession of prostitution has been treated as part of the culture and religion, and there are many parts of the country where this practice still continues. Although during the last few decades India has achieved a great progress in terms of economic growth, the persistence of practices, attitudes and be-

havior continue to subordinate and oppress the women. Perhaps the most telling evidence is the cultural and religious practice of prostitution in some Indian communities. In the present study an attempt has been made to see how the traditional and religious practices in India provoke the problem of women trafficking in the present society.

## **STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY**

In ancient India, vedic people established a social system in which father, instead of mother became the head of the family. Throughout ancient history, women were obliged to abide by the laws made by men. However, it is also true that vedic society had a number of women in key positions and that certain austerities could not be performed without their wives even in the early ritualistic period. In fact according to legends Lord Brahma was forced to take up a girl named Savitri as his consort for a special worship, in the absence of his wife Saraswati. The ritualistic vedic culture was indeed male dominated. Women folk only helped in the preparation of things for the rituals and fire sacrifices and did not conduct rituals themselves. Intellectual revolution followed as the fire sacrifices of the vedic culture was challenged by thinkers including women, who speculated on the nature of religion (Mazumdar, 2004).

98 This Indian idea of appropriate female behaviour can be traced to Manu in 200 BC: “by a young girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independent, even in her own house”. India is a multi-faceted society where no generalization could apply to the nation’s various regional, religious, social and economic groups. Nevertheless certain broad circumstances in which Indian women live affect the way they participate in the economy. A common denominator in their lives is that they are generally confined to home, with restricted mobility, and in seclusion. Other, unwritten, hierarchical practices place further constraints on women. Throughout history, women have generally been restricted to the role of a home-maker; that of a mother and wife (Sharma, 2002, Mazumdar, 2004).

Despite major changes that have occurred in the status of women in some parts of the world in recent decades, norms that restrict women to the home are still powerful in India, defining activities that are deemed appropriate for women. They are, by and large, excluded from political life, which by its very nature takes place in a public forum. In spite of India’s reputation for respect-

ing women, including treating her as a Goddess, history tells us that women were also ill-treated. There was no equality between men and women. This is true of ancient, medieval and early modern times barring some revolutionary movements such as that of Basaweshwara, the 12<sup>th</sup> century philosopher in Karnataka, who advocated equality, casteless society, status for women, and betterment of the downtrodden. Reform movements in the 19th and 20th centuries led by great social reformers provided boost to women's legal status in India (Mahajan, 2010, Mazumdar, 2004, Nair, 1996).

Independence of India heralded the introduction of laws relating to women. The Constitution provided equality to men and women and also gave special protection to women to realize their interests effectively. Special laws were enacted to prevent indecent representation of women in the media and sexual harassment in workplaces (Nair, 1996). The law also gives women equal rights in the matter of adoption, maternity benefits, equal pay, good working conditions etc. At the international level, the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) sought to guarantee better legal status to women. However, certain contentious issues like the Jammu and Kashmir Permanent Resident (Disqualification) Bill 2004 (which deprived a woman of the status of permanent residency of the State if she married an outsider) and the Supreme Court judgment in Christian Community Welfare Council of India (in an appeal over the Judgment of the High Court, Mumbai). The latter has permitted, under certain circumstances, the arrest of a woman even in the absence of lady police and at any time in the day or night. These instances have once again brought to the forefront the traditional male domination (Mazumdar, 2004).

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The theoretical foundations of development discourse have experienced many changes over the decades. The role of men and women in the development process has received much attention in the last few decades. Although the principle of equality of men and women was recognized as early as in 1945 in the UN Charter and the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, researchers have pointed out that development planners worked on the assumption that what would benefit one section of society (especially men) would trickle down to the other (women). The new theory argues that a person's role was specified under a patriarchal framework where the scope of gender -masculine or feminine- was limited within the biological understanding of sex (male and female).

On the other hand, irrespective of national affluence or level of development, women are still vulnerable to exploitation, oppression and all other types of explicit violence from men in Indian societies, where cultural norms, tradition and legal system sanction women's subordination to men. In India, an important mechanism of male dominance is the propagation of gender ideology through sanctions of religious practices and their gender-selective interpretation by the community leaders. Moreover, increasing exposure to violence through popular reading, theaters, film and TV shows, satellite culture, etc. directly or indirectly encourage men to commit offences like rape. Theoretically Government of India regards man and women as equal. However, the states concern to preserve the existing patriarchal social order is clear from the ways laws operate in respect to violence against women.

### **DIFFERENT FORMS OF PROSTITUTION PRACTICES IN INDIA**

In ancient time the names of prostitution varied and as per duties given to them. For example prostitutes who served nobility were called Ganikas, and were well versed in the arts, Ganika adheksha was superintendent of prostitutes, Pratiganika was substitute employed for a short term period during absence of Ganika, Punschal was low grade prostitute, Kritavardha and Avarudha were professional prostitutes who lived as mistress and under the protection of one master (Sinha and Basu, 1992). The profession of prostitution was state managed and the prostitutes besides providing sexual services to the citizens and nobility also acted as spies to keep a watch on the enemies, thieves and other anti-state activities.

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Other authors were classified prostitutes into 'Ganikas' at the top, 'Kulata' the married woman involved with other men, 'Paricharika' a mistress in the house of nobles and 'Kumbhadasi' as the lowest category of prostitutes. During 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century 'Nautch girls' or the dancing girls became very popular in providing recreation and sensual pleasures to rich and resourceful people in India, especially in Bengal province. Jordar (1984) had mention three types of prostitutes in his study in Calcutta city, namely:

1. *Chukli*; lower category of prostitutes, who provides food and shelter in lieu of her services,
2. *Adia*; a prostitute who gets half of her income. In both the cases Mashi or female brothel keeper takes charge of the income, and

3. *Self-employed or independent prostitute*; where she is the owner of brothel who is famous in the name of Mashi (Sinha and Basu, 1992).

This shows that the sexual practices is a long rooted social problem in India, to keep control over this problem, the British government introduced the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act (SITA) in 1923 in the Calcutta, Madras and Bombay Presidencies. But after independence, more systematic attention has been given to this problem. Both preventive and curative aspects of the problem have been taken up for the policy formulation and implementation. An Advisory Committee on Social and moral Hygiene was set up by the Central Social and Welfare Board in 1954 to review the existence of this profession all over India. The Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act (SITA) was passed by Parliament in 1956 and amended in 1986 as the Prevention of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls ACT (ITPA).

Some researcher studies suggested the factor to be conducive to prostitution as destitution, desertion, neglect, ill treatment, strained relation, deception, bad influences, illegitimate pregnancy, illicit sexual relations, ignorance, sex curiosity, sexual urge, desire for easy life, desire for revenge, industrialization, urbanization, tradition, heredity, prohibiting of widow remarriage and adopting double standard for men and women whereby men allowed considerable sexual freedom and women ostracized on the score of chastity. The studies on prostitution shows that most of the women and girls in this profession have not taken up this work by their own choice, rather they have been pushed into it involuntarily. From this account it is clear that in most cases prostitution is not a moral problem. First of all, an economic problem, a social dilemma, it is a psychological predicament. Moreover, the present Indian society and for that matter any society reflects a sick male society which is obsessed with male chauvinism and perversion, and this has resulted in increasing the problem of prostitution. Similarly, Bullough and Bullough (1987) have observed that; "Hinduism had started with a higher status for women than of any other world religion, but because of conquest by foreigners, the growing rigidity of the caste system, and because of the increasing emphasis on marriage for women, women became more and more subordinated to the male. Prostitution was one of the few outlets that a woman had and many women entered willingly.

As it is stated earlier that the association of prostitution with religion has been an age old phenomenon, so in many parts of the country we can find the

female dancers and singers attached to temples are generally referred to by the term '*Devadasi*'. Devadasi, which literally means: 'female slaves of the deity'. Their dedication to temple services is considered as constituting a marriage with the deity. The cult of dedicating girls to the temple is prevailing all over India in different forms and names, such as Devadasi in Karnataka state, Maharis in Kerala state, Natis in Assam state, Murlis in Maharashtra state, Jogins and Basavis in Andhra Pradesh state, Thevardiyar in Tamil Nadu state and Bhavins in Goa state. These servants of deities were said to be experts in music and dance in the medieval period. As centuries passed, their services shifted from gods to earthly gods and lords. The women dedicated to the deity as Devadasi, usually lead a life of prostitute with religious sanction. This type of organized system has different rural manifestations, as mentioned above, but all systems demand initiation into prostitution by puberty at the least. Also, rural child prostitution is rooted in the continued exploitation of the scheduled castes and the position of girls is the most oppressed within these historically oppressed groups (Shankar, 1990).

Many times young girls of low caste,<sup>2</sup> even before the onset of puberty are singled out by the rich or powerful people of the community or by the parents themselves. The person who is the highest bidder, finances the dedication ceremony with much fanfare. The whole community is invited to take part in this ceremony and the little girl is marked as Devadasi or Jogin or Bhavin etc. on attainment of puberty the person who had financed the dedication ceremony 'deflowers' the girls. The girl is attached to this person till the times he wishes to keep her. Once the man curtails the relation she is attached to another person by the priest or family head. These women are not supposed to accept or demand any money from the man. They are also forbidden to marry any mortal man. Thus these women are constantly under threat of exploitation and lead a life of sexual slavery (Giri, 1999).

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### *Devadasi system*

This system exists in the states like Maharashtra and Karnataka of India. The sites of most intense Devadasi activity are located in a belt on either side of the Karnataka or Maharashtra border districts like Belgaum, Bijapur, Kolhapur, Solapur, where women are dedicated themselves in the service of Goddess

<sup>2</sup> The Hindu society has been divided into four castes, the higher caste is known as Brahman, the second caste is Kshatriya, the third is Vaisya and the fourth and lower caste is Sudra.

*Yellamma* and are called as Devadasi. Girls are dedicated to Yellamma goddess on full moon day of *Chitra* month (March-April) or *Magha* month (December-January), where every year 1 000 to 5 000 young girls are brought to the Devadasi profession.

Most of the girls belonging to Devadasi group are from lower caste. Their families trapped by poverty often depend upon the income supplied by their daughters and money being funneled down to them from higher caste, wealthier men who can pay for the services of a prostitute. Girls who dedicate to the Devadasi profession not because of poverty only, there are other causes like lack of son in the family, too many daughters in the family, mother being in the profession, elder sister or any other member of the family being a Devadasi. Most of the times the dedication ceremony is financed by a wealthy man, and after attainment of puberty this man has the right to the girl's virginity. At the time of 'deflowering' the man pays a large sum of money to the girl's family, hence the financial returns to the family of a girl are immediate, and they profit from her earning as long as she continues to work. A Devadasi family also receives regular gifts of presents and cash on those specific days dedicated to the goddess Yellamma from Hindus who worship this goddess (Chakraborty, 2000).

#### *Basavi system*

This system is less organized than the Devadasi system both religiously and financially. This is made possible by the social realities of poverty and gender discrimination. This system is practiced in Andhra Pradesh state of India. Basavi means 'female bull', which ostensibly connotes the bull's freedom to wander. Historically, Basavi were forbidden to marry and spent their lives performing religious duties for *God Hanuman* (Monkey God). Like Devadasi system, Basavi also come from the lower caste families both poor and uneducated and believe that religion will fulfill their economic needs. They too feel that scarification of a daughter can bring them a son and also god will relief them from all types of financial problem (Nandi, 1973).

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#### *Jogin system*

This is another form of religious rural prostitution practiced in Andhra Pradesh state of India. In this system the girls are married to a god before puberty and

enter to the prostitution when they reach puberty. The girls from the lower castes group dedicated themselves to this profession in a wish to improve their financial position. In this system, a wealthy person will select a young girl from the lower caste and request her family to marry the village deity. The person finances all the expenditure and this ceremony will occur before attaining the puberty. But when the girl attain the puberty, her family perform another ceremony and after that the person who financed the ceremony he has right to sleep with the girls first. After that the girl has to live in the temple and work as prostitute and generate the money for her family (Moti, 1973).

#### *Bhavins system*

Bhavins system practices in the Goa state of India, where the girls engaged in the service of God Ganesh. In this profession, the family of a girl dedicated her to the temple during her infancy, where the girls work Bhavins, where she pours the oil in the god's lamp. On attaining the puberty the girl is formally married and thereafter she worked as prostitute in that region (Naik, 1928).

### **PROSTITUTION IN TRIBAL SOCIETIES OF INDIA**

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In India, there are some tribes such as Banchara, Bedia tribe of Madhya Pradesh state, Domare tribe of Andhra Pradesh state, Santal tribe of Orissa state and Bihar state, Rajnat tribe of Rajasthan state practices traditional form of prostitution because of economic and social marginalization. Like most forms of religious prostitution the tribal system automatically fall under the category of prostitution, since they mandate that their girls be initiated by puberty at the latest.

#### *Bedia tribe*

Since the childhood, the women in the Bedia tribe engage in singing, dancing and in prostitution. This tribe, who traditionally served the prince armies of their region, turned to criminal activity, when the advent of British rule dispersed; the tribal people started robbing for their livelihood. During this time very often, the British imprisoned the tribal men for long periods of time with or without any actual justification and to earn a livelihood the women folk turned to prostitution. The men only showed resistance initially but over time

accepted it for the easy money and gradually, the only means of survival developed into the rigid tradition of social organization. The women became the principal earners of the family whereas the males either solicit clients for their daughters, sisters, or mothers. In this system, the mother of any girl has to declare during her childhood in the presence of the village deity 'Narsima' whether she will introduce her daughter into prostitution or give her in marriage. The initiation of daughter into prostitution is an occasion for celebration. It is a mandatory caste rule that at least one daughter in each family be reserved for prostitution. A married woman is fully debarred from the profession of prostitution. On the other hand, the prostitute is debarred from having sexual relations with anyone of the community. All these caste rules believed to have divine sanction and their contravention invites penalties and social boycott.

#### *Banchara tribe*

The same like Bedia tribe, the Banchara tribe of Madhya Pradesh state also dedicate to the village deity and practice the prostitution in the community. In this community the marriage is a difficult one because of high bride prices. So in the shortage of brides in the community the young girls married to the god and practice the prostitution in the community.

#### *The Rajnat tribe*

The Rajnat tribe of Rajasthan state practice the traditional form of prostitution in their community, where each daughter born into family is expected to contribute by carrying on the traditional profession as soon as she reach the puberty, and no girl is able to raise her head against this tradition. The only difference between the Bancharas and Bedias tribe is that in Rajnat tribe the girls are not dedicate to the village deity before entering to this profession. During the earlier period this tribe has always been consigned to the role of prostitutes by the upper castes. The only difference between the past and now is economic condition. Earlier these tribes serve as prostitute to Rajput<sup>3</sup> royalty, where Rajputs were given money and land as payment. When the royalty could no longer exist, the profession of this tribe declined, and now they are

<sup>3</sup> *Rajput*; are part of the second caste of India, where they were worked in military and they were basically the royal family.

functioning on the major roadside of the Rajasthan state. The most interesting thing is that, one social organization existed in the Rajnat villages, where one female is head and she controls all the activities, which is known as '*Kukus house*'<sup>4</sup>. Once a girl has been initiated she reports to the kuku of her village, who makes sure that the prostitutes are regularly placing themselves along the roadside to attract the desired number of 15 clients a day per girls.

As the above discussion shows, the practice of prostitution is not a new problem in the Indian society; it has been treated as a part of the culture and religion. For many families it is a sole economic source, but according to the time the demand of these kinds of practices has declined in India, especially in the rural and tribal areas. But, as it is a part of the cultural and religious practices, still we can find that many families are dedicating to this kind of profession. Though their income is very less and at present these activities make it easier to the traffickers. Many times the traffickers travel to these areas during the time of ceremony and offer good jobs to the women and traffic them to the different cities for the purpose of prostitution. Many studies conducted by the different organizations in India, show that majority of women are trafficked from those states where these kinds of traditional practices persist. Taking into consideration the above discussion, the following section explained the problem of women trafficking in India and its link with the traditional practices.

## 106 **TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN IN INDIA**

Trafficking of women has become a global problem, which affects a complex matrix of origin, transit and destination countries, their international relations, the security and their economies. A number of axioms have emerged which provide a generally accepted framework for the evolution of trafficking, although many details have yet to be empirically verified (Salt and Stein, 1997). Trafficking is derived from the word 'to traffic', which in its legal sense means to carry on trade, to trade, to buy and sell, to have commercial dealings with any one, to bargain or deal for a commodity. The Oxford English Dictionary identifies the disparaging sense of dealing considered improper and figuratively to have dealing of an illicit or secret character. Thus, in this context of irregular migration, trafficking may be regarded as the practice of trading

<sup>4</sup> *Kukus house*, the organization existed in the Rajnat village of Rajasthan state of India.

‘illegally’ in the movement of people, sometimes described as ‘alien smuggling’ (Salt and Stein, 1997).

According to United Nations Children Emergency Fund (1997), trafficking of women and person is the illicit and clandestine movement of persons across the national and international borders, largely from developing countries and some countries with economic in transition, with the end goal of forcing women and girls into sexually or economically oppressive and exploitative situations for the profit of recruiters, traffickers and crime syndicates, as well as other illegal activities related to trafficking, such as forced domestic labor, false marriages, clandestine and false adoption.

From the above definition it is reflects that, trafficking of women is a type of activity where women are subjected towards the different kind of exploitation. Because of since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the problem of trafficking has become an issue for the feminist, the best example can be found when Josephine Butler<sup>5</sup> fought against the ‘*white slave trade*’<sup>6</sup>. It is seen from the literature that feminist are always recognized that women and girls have been the majority of all victims of trafficking. It is only recently that the magnitude and complexity of trafficking has increased its importance on the international agenda. This process has been assisted by a widening of focus to encompass trafficking for bonded labor in sweatshops, domestic work, adoption, and marriage, in addition for prostitution (Carolina, 2002).

Trafficking affects virtually all countries over the world, where about 1 to 2 million people are trafficked each year worldwide and the largest number of victims comes from Asia, with over 225 000 victims each year from South East Asia and over 150 000 from South Asia. The former Soviet Union is now believed to be the largest new sources of trafficking for prostitution and the sex industry, with over 100 000 trafficked each year from this region. An additional 75 000 or more are trafficked from Eastern Europe. Over 100 000

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<sup>5</sup> Josephine Butler (1828-1906) a strong religious convictions and the nineteenth-century feminist, who withstand the on-slaught of abuse that she received from those both inside and outside of the woman’s movement. Other women’s rights activists felt she was far too radical and her efforts would harm their attempts at extending educational and employment opportunities and fighting for legal and political rights for women Her opponents viewed her as a threat to the moral foundations of society itself.

<sup>6</sup> *White slavery* is a 19<sup>th</sup> century term for a form of slavery involving the sexual abuse of women held as captives and forced into prostitution. Although this form of abuse did occur in reality, the name “white slavery” is usually used to refer to the original use of the term in a moral panic in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century America, where there was a perception that this form of abuse was a danger to every young woman. In this moral panic, the selected scapegoats were Chinese immigrants, who were stereotyped and demonized as white slavers (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

come from Latin America and the Caribbean and over 50 000 victims are from Africa (Miko and Park, 2000). The political in-stabilization and globalization with the economic crises and disparities between countries fuel supply, while demand for cheap labor attracts desperate migrants. Economic liberalization relaxes controls and opens borders between countries, which make easy human mobility, the communal conflicts, transnational crime, and political transitions are also contributing factors (ILO, 2000).

This shows that trafficking occurs both within domestic borders, and across countries, regions, and continents. Countries of origin, transit, and destination are intertwined and overlap, where a single country may export women and girls to abroad, and also act as the destination country for others. In South and South East Asia, trafficked women originate mainly from Thailand, China, Philippines, Burma/Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Nepal and India, where Thailand, Malaysia, Japan, India and Pakistan are act as transit and destination countries for other South and South East Asian countries (Skeldon, 2000).

The main purpose of trafficking is to sell the women in sex industry as sex workers, while they are also trafficked for domestic work and other forms of bonded labor. Some studies reflect that the trafficking of women is a result of massive poverty and unemployment, which lured the women towards these kinds of exploitation. Apart from these in the South Asian countries it is observed that to escape from the burden of daughter dowry, some parents sell their daughter in the hand of traffickers expecting to improve the family's economic situation. In the case of India, these problems aside, the other factor, which accelerates this problem, is the cultural and religious practice of prostitution in some communities (O'Neil, 1999).

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Thus, the historical ostracism suffered by the different communities has resulted in the durability of the tradition, which stretches back hundreds of years. It carries on, however, partially because the cruel nature of the tradition has destroyed the prostitution's powers of resistance. Some communities have vested their interest in maintaining it as it is benefited from the system. So to continue this profession, the young girls from these communities are migrating to the urban areas in an organized traffic network. According to Menon (1998) the states like Karnataka, Maharastra and Andhra Pradesh act as the *Mandi*<sup>7</sup> and these states are known as the *Devadasi belt* of India, be-

<sup>7</sup> *Mandi*, is the wholesale market.

cause these are the three states where the traditional practice of prostitution is wide spread compared to other states of the country. She stated that during the time of ceremony the traffickers are arrived to the different communities of these states and try to promise the women different kind of jobs including proper ones. They also promise that they will marry them and once they ceremony over they take them to the city and sell them in the brothel (Orchard, 2007).

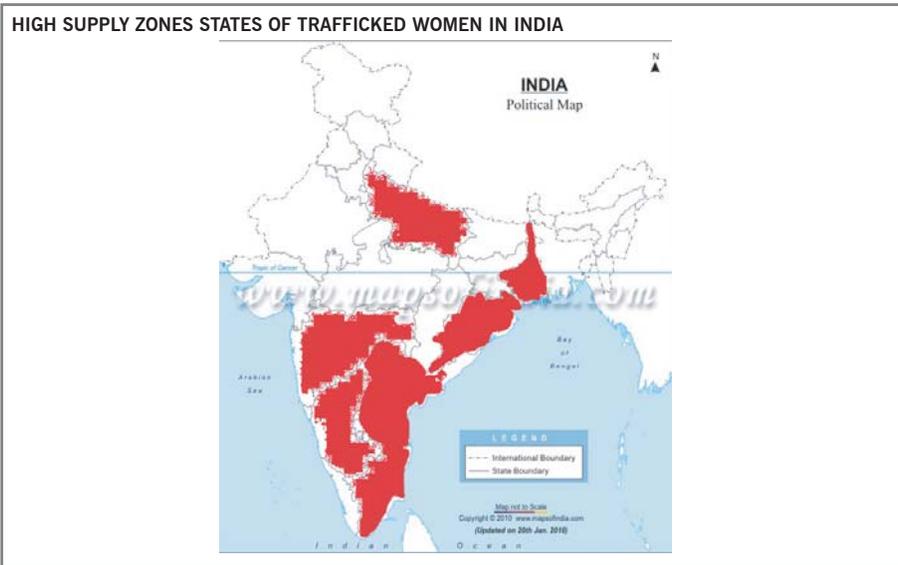
Apart from these, many traffickers have good connections with temple priest of these communities, where the priest send the prior information on ceremony to the traffickers and the traffickers come to the communities during the ceremony and provide the financial support to the family where the girl is to be dedicate to the religious prostitution and after the ceremony the trafficker take the girl to city and put her in the brothel. The evidence shows that, these three states every year supply around 7 000 women to the Indian's sex market (Menon, 1998).

Not only these states, but also some other states of India like Jharkhand from where the tribal women are trafficked for the purpose of prostitution. According to the National Commission of Women (NCW) of India, each year 500 to 1000 young tribal women and girls from this state are being trafficked lured by promises of employment and marriage to Mumbai, Delhi and Calcutta for the purpose of prostitution (NCW, 1996). The chairperson of NCW highlights that the main causes behind the trafficking of these tribal women are poverty, illiteracy and the traditional practices of prostitution. Apart from these as the tribal women are hard laborer, the young tribal women and girls from the state of Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Assam are trafficked to the tea plantation, while many tribal women from the state of Manipur, Orissa, Nagaland are migrated in an organized trafficking network to the metropolitan cities of India, where they worked as construction worker, and as they are paid a little amount in the construction site, in the night they practice the prostitution to uplift their economic status and livelihood (NDTV, 2004).

In other, the India's growing industrialization and urbanization has been a major catalyst in the movement of people from the rural to urban areas. Some studies highlight that the large scale of rural-urban migration is the prime cause for trafficking of women in India. The evidence showing that both intra-country and inter-country trafficking in the country is alarming. Nearly 20 000 women are trafficked every year to metropolitan cities of India like,

Mumbai, Delhi, Calcutta, Lucknow, Agra, Chennai, from the different states of India such as Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharastra, Tamil Nadu, Orissa, West Bengal and Utter Pradesh. These states are known as “*high supply zone*” for women in prostitution (see map below). Bijapur, Belgaum and Kolhapur are some districts of Karnataka and Maharastra states, where women migrate to big cities as a part of the organized trafficking network (Menon, 1998).

**MAP 1**



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Source: <http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/india/india-political-map.htm>

Some statistics shows that at present, in India approximately 10 million women are in prostitution, where 15 percent of them are below age of 15 and another 25 percent are below the age of 20 years (Mondal, 1996). Out of the total 10 million prostitutes, approximately 100 000 are in the Mumbai city, which is Asia’s largest sex industry center and about 20 percent of Mumbai’s prostitute are under 18 years old (Friedman, 1996). So, in this context, Mumbai act as a transit point for this illicit trade, where women are brought from different parts of the country and sold as a sex worker and as slaves.

Every day, about 200 women are coming for prostitution to Mumbai, where 80 percent are against their will. They are sold at a price of \$100 to \$1 000 and some times the price goes up to \$2 000 depending upon their age, physi-

cal appearance (CEDPA & PRIDE, 1997). According to some calculation every year the red light district of Mumbai generates at least \$400 million a year in revenue, with 100 000 prostitutes servicing men 365 days a year, averaging 6 customers a day at \$2 each (Friedman, 1996). This shows that woman trafficking is one of the most lucrative businesses after arms and drugs. The fact is that women are now placed in the same category as arms and drugs in evidence of their co-modification.

The problem of trafficking of women has cuts across social and economic situations and is deeply embedded in the culture of India, where thousand of women consider it as a way of life. As it seen from the earlier discussion, acute poverty among the population in general and in women particularly is the primary factor for this phenomenon. Added to poverty, massive illiteracy, the lack of access to economic opportunities and low status of women, are some of the major causes of dependency on men, which also makes them easy target of violence. This grim environment leads to the target, as men are the perpetrators of this exploitation (Shina, 1999). There are incidents, where husbands sell their wife and fathers trade away their daughters in the vain hope of improving their quality of life. Trafficking is seen as the worst most inhuman aspect of genderization. The bright lights of the city act as a mirage for the downtrodden and in the hope of better life, where they become easy prey for the agents and recruiters who are working for international gang involved in the flesh trade.

## **CONCLUSION**

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The cultural and religious practices in India give the Indian women a low position in the society, where the male dominates them. Though, during the last few decades many reforms have been taken place to improve the women status in the society but still the Indian women are standing behind the male. Every year, thousands of young girls offer to God by their parents to escape from the poverty across the India and later on these young girls serve as prostitute in their village and community. Though this practices existed in rural India, as the demand of prostitutes (in their community) has declined over the year, which is affecting to their family income, so to get the high income the parents are selling their daughter with the permission of the temple priest to the traffickers and afterwards these women brought to big cities and forced to work as prostitutes. Information stated that every year thousands of

women are entering to the prostitution and subjected towards the exploitation. Though, gender-based violence and sexual exploitations, in various forms including rape, domestic violence, honor of killings and trafficking in women leading to a heavy toll on mental and physical health. This increasing gender-based violence and sexual exploitations are recognized as a major public health concern and a serious violation of basic human rights.

In the last few decades a lot has been done in legal aspects to improve the women status in Indian society but still Indian women has no independency. Every day at least 12 women are dying because of violence and nearly thousand of Indian women are exploited by this patriarchal society through various ways, where flesh trade is one of them (UNICEF, 1997). Apart from this the constitution of India proclaims the equality between men and women, but in reality still Indian women are remain a sub-ordinate position in this patriarchal society, where they are treated as subjects to serve men's desire. This whole process is now an issue of global dimensions but it requires an urgent and concerted response. The gravity of the situation has sent shocks waves in Indian societies due to the AIDS pandemic. A comprehensive approach is essential to address the economic, social, political aspect of women trafficking. It is necessary to deal with the perpetrators, as well as assist the victim of trafficking. To combat of women trafficking the following aspects are most essential to achieve:

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- Prevention in terms of addressing the issues of poverty, access to education, employment opportunities, programs for sustainable livelihood and poverty alleviation.
- Special attention for education of the tribal people and financial upliftment through agriculture.
- Abolish of the cultural practices like Devadasi, Basavi, Jogin, and Bhavin and the social milieu like dowry, and widow from the Indian society.
- Promoting gender equality.
- Mobilizing the concerned business communities against commercial sexual exploitation.
- Migrant women in search of employment, who are run away or driven away from their homes or, those who are lost are in danger of falling prey to commercial sexual exploitation. Contact centers will be establish in major cities at near the railway station and bus station to give guidance and information to women in need of temporary shelter about

address of short stay homes, reception centers, shelter homes, etc.

- Awareness rising and advocacy through intensive awareness campaigns at local, national and regional level to mobilize people at grassroots to policy makers, police, worker's organization, government and non-government agencies at all levels, strategic use of the media.
- It is necessary to provide the education and employment opportunities to women in their own socio-economic setting.
- Encourage to co-ordinate social movements against the trafficking of women and prostitution.

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