



A STUDY ON DESTINIES AND SUFFERINGS OF THE TRAFFICKED GIRLS FROM GANGASAGAR, SUNDERBAN

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Abstract

The present study was conducted at Gangasagar block, Sunderban, South (24) Paraganas; with the objective of understanding the reasons behind the occurrence of trafficking of girls and to measure their sufferings. The investigators adopted 'Participatory Research Method' in their present research work as an appropriate method for gathering information from the poor rural folk within a short span of time. Participatory research method helped them to cross-check relevant information through the interaction of the participants. The present exploratory research revealed that, most of the trafficked girls were economically poor and belonged to the age-group of (15-20) years, who were sent to flesh trade, domestic labour jobs etc, where their sufferings included physical, sexual and psychological tortures. The girls mostly trafficked during the festival, "Gangasagar Mela". At the end the researchers perceived that, trafficking of girls occurred due to poverty, lack of awareness and un-availability of proper protection and support of such girls. Strong intervention on behalf of NGOs, CBOs, is required along with effective implementation of existing laws and order for minimizing such problem.

Nation Wise Estimates of Trafficking

In India, the stigma attached to prostitution and the clandestine of operations make it doubly difficult to arrive at authentic numbers (Gupta 2003). The no. of women in sex work in India is started to be between 70,000 and 1 million. Of these, 30% are below 20 years of age. Nearly 15% began sex work when they were below 15, and 25% entered between 15 and 18 years of age (Mukherjee and Das 1996).

According to **National Crime Records Bureau's data, 1999** there were 9,368 cases of trafficked women in India. The incidence of trafficking has shown a steady increase since 1997, increasing by 7.7% in 1998.

According to an estimate, 90% of India's sex trafficking is internal. Trafficking from neighbouring countries accounts for 10% of the coerced migration in India with approximately 2.17% from Bangladesh and 2.6% being from Nepal. (Expresses India Sun, 5 June 2011).

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Trafficking In West Bengal

West Bengal has international borders with Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan, and state borders with Sikkim, Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand and Assam. Kolkata, the capital city of W. B is the trade and cultural hub of eastern India and of the north eastern part of the country. Migration from Bangladesh to India, especially to W.B, has been going for long. On the northern side districts like Darjeeling, North and South Dinajpur, Cooch Behar and Malda having international borders with Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan are identified as trafficking prone. The districts of North and South 24 Parganas are other vulnerable areas prone to trafficking on the southern side.

The **UNICEF data for 2011** is equally shocking. In many districts every second girl is married off before they reach 18, with Murshidabad (61.04 per cent), Birbhum (58.03 per cent), Malda (56.07 per cent) and Purulia (54.03 per cent) being the worst off districts. West Bengal is among the worst five states in the country when it comes to child marriage. According to another survey, the total number of underage married girls — who also became mothers before the age of 15 — in Bengal, between 2007 and 2008 was 27,082 — the second highest in the country.

A study by **Biswajit Ghosh & Ananda Mohan Kar, (Socialist Perspective, Vol 36, Trafficking in women and children in West Bengal, 2008)** has identified the following trafficking routes and trafficking prone areas in the districts of South West Bengal, The industrial belt of Burdwan District, namely Durgapur and Asansol including the inter-state border areas like Kulti serve both as destination as well as out flow centre of trafficking. In West Midnapur, girls from villages in and around Kharagpur are transported to Delhi and Ahmedabad via Howrah, Ranchi or Orissa. Similarly dhabas in and around Kolaghat are destinations of many victims of sexual exploitation. There is also a trafficking chain from East Midnapur to Kolkata via Haldia and South 24 Parganas. In Birbhum, the traffickers from adjacent Murshidabad district use some of the areas under Muraroi police station to procure girls from poor Muslim families.

Girls from certain areas of Hoogli District like Pandua are trafficked to Mumbai via Bandel and Howrah.



Trafficking In South 24 Parganas

South 24 Parganas has the highest reportage of crimes with 938 crimes reported in 1999 (NCRB 1999). Crime against women like Dowry death, Domestic violence etc found to be increasing day by day especially in the rural areas, instances of trafficking are highly under reported compared with the actual situation.

The South 24 Parganas is known to be the resource rich and poor income region, which offers to be a breeding ground for hawk eyed traffickers who are reported to be on the prowl. Even the parents from this area are reported to willing to let their children be taken away for a meagre sums with the hope that they will be in a position to receive better quality of life in terms of two square meals and clothes, **Sunderban Social Development Centre (SSDC)** operating in 40 villages under 15 Panchayats in 6 Blocks of South 24 Paraganas has been reportedly operating with the support of **CRY**.

Rationale of the Study

During a field visit at Sagar Island Sunderban , the investigators came to know about some of the social problems; through a PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) session. One of the major problems identified was the “TRAFFICKING OF VILLAGE GIRLS”,Gangasagar being a renowned pilgrim spot for Hindus where a lot of pilgrims used to come for their purifications and incidentally a lot of young girls were trafficked every year, especially during festive periods behind the crowd of the pilgrims by some of the vested interest group of people.

The present researchers were interested to unfold the truth behind such evil practice.

Objectives of the Study

- **Specific Objectives**
 - To trace out the reasons behind the occurrence of trafficking of girls
 - To know about the sufferings of the girls after trafficking
 - To locate the route and identify the present channels of trafficking in South 24 Paraganas
- **Broader Objective**
 - To eradicate and control the incident of trafficking

Review of Literature

A. Nature of the Problem

The traffickers merely exacerbate the vulnerability of marginalized and disadvantaged groups and render them increasingly more amenable to a variety of harm (Sanghera, 2000).

Traffickers approach women and girls in groups as it helps them to win their trust (Sangroula, 2001). The recruiters can be neighbours, family friends, relatives of friends, acquaintances returning from abroad, women who have migrated or been trafficked, husband, father, boyfriend or lovers. Some recruiters can be gay men who were trusted by women because of their sexual orientation (Raymond, 2002).

It is found that a majority of the trafficked girls are between 14 and 16 years, whose parents could not afford to pay for their dowry (Ghosh, 2007).

The Vulnerability factors relates to socio-economic and political context of the people that are interlinked and can be divided into personal circumstances and socio-structural forces results in trafficking. (Raymond et.al; DePaul University, 2000) Besides being stigmatized as outcasts & facing moral & legal isolation, trafficked people are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infections, drug addiction, high risk of abortion & teenage pregnancies ; may affect their reproductive health (Giri, 1999).The multiplicity of attributes and variables involved in the trafficking process and the different perspectives on the subject is another reason for the wide variation in the suggested forms of trafficking. Some suggested forms are defined on the basis of differences at the place of origin; others focus on difference arising based on the destinations; some make the methods adopted by traffickers as the basis; and others use the criteria of purpose. (DWCD 1996; Friedman 2001: 4; HAQ Centre 2001; IDS 2003; ILO 2001: 18; Marshall 2001; Mattar 2002).

There are reports of children being kidnapped from hospitals, streets, and homes, for the specific purpose of sale to an orphanage and/or profit from an adoptive placement (Asha Krishnakumar, *Behind the Facade*, 22 Front Line, 2005) Women are often in debt bondage because money is withheld from the victims as payback for the purchase price. (Bales, 1999: 18) refers to this as ‘contract’ slavery, which is extremely profitable.



The traffickers exploited the trust they could easily gain from families of a similar background. They spoke the same language as their recruits. In the trafficking of girls Bengalis exploited Bengalis, females exploited females, neighbours and relatives exploited their own people (**Blanchet, 2005: 329**).

The no. of women in sex work in India is started to be between 70,000 and 1 million. Of these, 30% are below 20 years of age (**Mukherjee & Das, 1996**).

B. Legal Framework

Legal Framework to address Trafficking in India, Article 23 of the Constitution Guarantees right against exploitation; prohibits traffic in human beings and forced labour and makes their practice punishable under law.

Article 24 of the Constitution prohibits employment of children below 14 years of age in factories, mines or other hazardous employment.

Indian Penal Code, 1860 There are 25 provisions relevant to trafficking; significant among them are:

- Section 366A – procreation of a minor girl (below 18 years of age) from one part of the country to another is punishable.
- Section 366B – importation of a girl (below 21 years of age) is punishable.
- Section 374 – provides punishment for compelling any person to labour against his will.
- Section 363A - Kidnapping or maiming a minor for purposes of begging
- Section 370 - Buying or disposing of any person as slave,
- Section 370A - Exploitation of a trafficked person
- Section 372 - selling minors for the purpose of prostitution is punishable
- Section 373 - buying minors for the purpose of prostitution is punishable

Acts to Support

- Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
- Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986
- Information Technology Act, 2000
- Karnataka Devadasi (Prohibition of Dedication) Act, 1982
- Andhra Pradesh Devadasi (Prohibiting Dedication) Act, 1989
- Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000
- Goa Children's Act, 2003
- POCSO Act, 2012

Methodology

Participatory Research

Participatory action research (PAR) is an approach to research in communities that emphasizes participation and action. It seeks to understand the world by trying to change it, collaboratively and following reflection. PAR emphasizes collective inquiry and experimentation grounded in experience and social history. The process helps in spot cross-checking of the collected data in front of the people participating and responding to the researcher.

Sampling Method

Purposive Sampling has been adopted to conduct the study. It is based on the presumption that with good judgment one can select the sample units that are satisfactory in relation to one's requirements. As the researcher is dealing with a sensitive issue, hence to support her study and fulfil the objectives purposive sampling method has been adopted where

General Description of the Study Area

Ganga Sagar is an island in the Ganges delta, lying on the continental shelf of Bay of Bengal about 100 km (54 nautical miles) south of Kolkata.

The island is large — with an area of 224.3 km², lying between 21°36' to 21°56' north latitude and 88°2' to 88° 11' east latitude.

Sample Size (60)

- 20 girls who were the victims of trafficking
- 20 parents and neighbours of the victims (both rescued and missing)



- 10 formal leaders (Police Personnel , CWC member, BDO and Panchayat staffs)
- 6 non-formal leaders (Village opinion leaders , Headman of local Salishi sabha, Leaders of SHGs)
- 4 NGO personnel (SANLAAP, SRDTC,VIB, Safe the children)

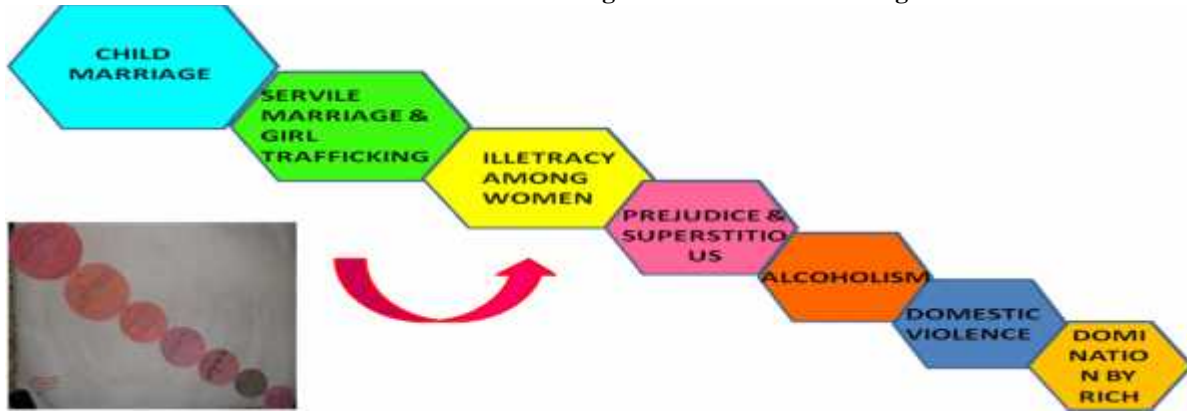
Methods Adopted

Participatory methods were mainly followed for collection of reliable qualitative information. Focus Group Discussion, Participatory Rural Appraisal other conventional methods were used like In-depth interview & Observation.

Findings and Discussion

The findings are discussed and arranged according to objectives of the study.

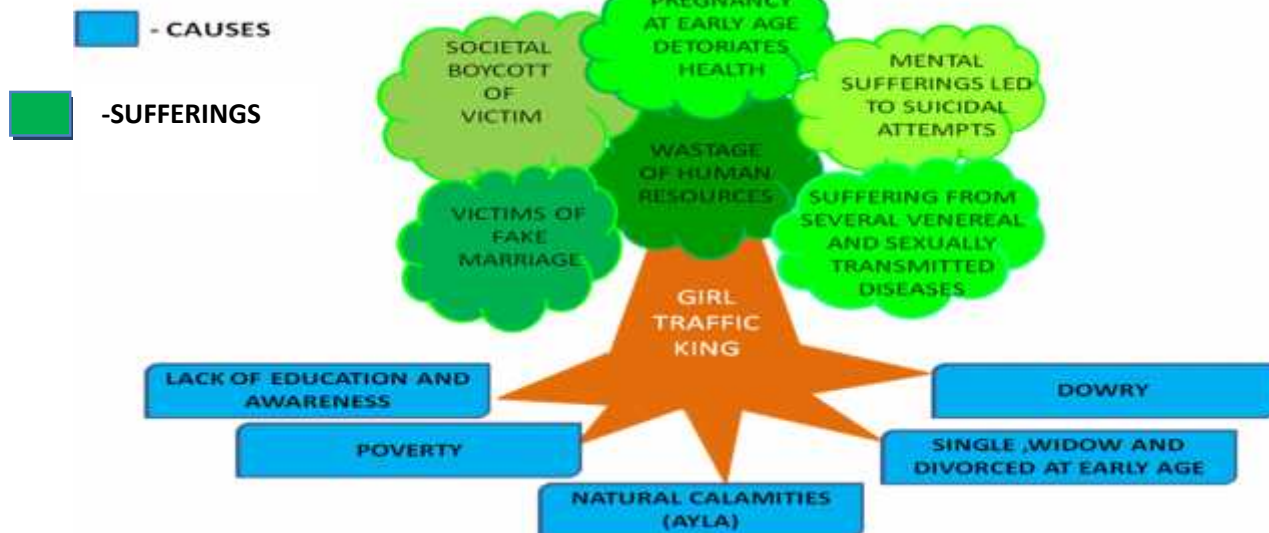
Tail Method – The Prevailing Social Problems in Village



A problem tail was carried out where the village people were asked to prioritize the social problems prevailing in the village by providing ranks and order the problems from major to minor one to form a tail of prevailing problems.

This method was carried out to verify the existence of trafficking of girls in the village, and the village people highlighted the problem of trafficking by placing it on second position.

Problem Tree (Causal – Effect Diagram)



A problem tree was depicted by the village people during the PRA session for identifying the possible causes and mode of sufferings of the trafficked victims.

The identified causes for trafficking were,

- **Lack of education and awareness** among the village people about the consequences, types and modes of trafficking.

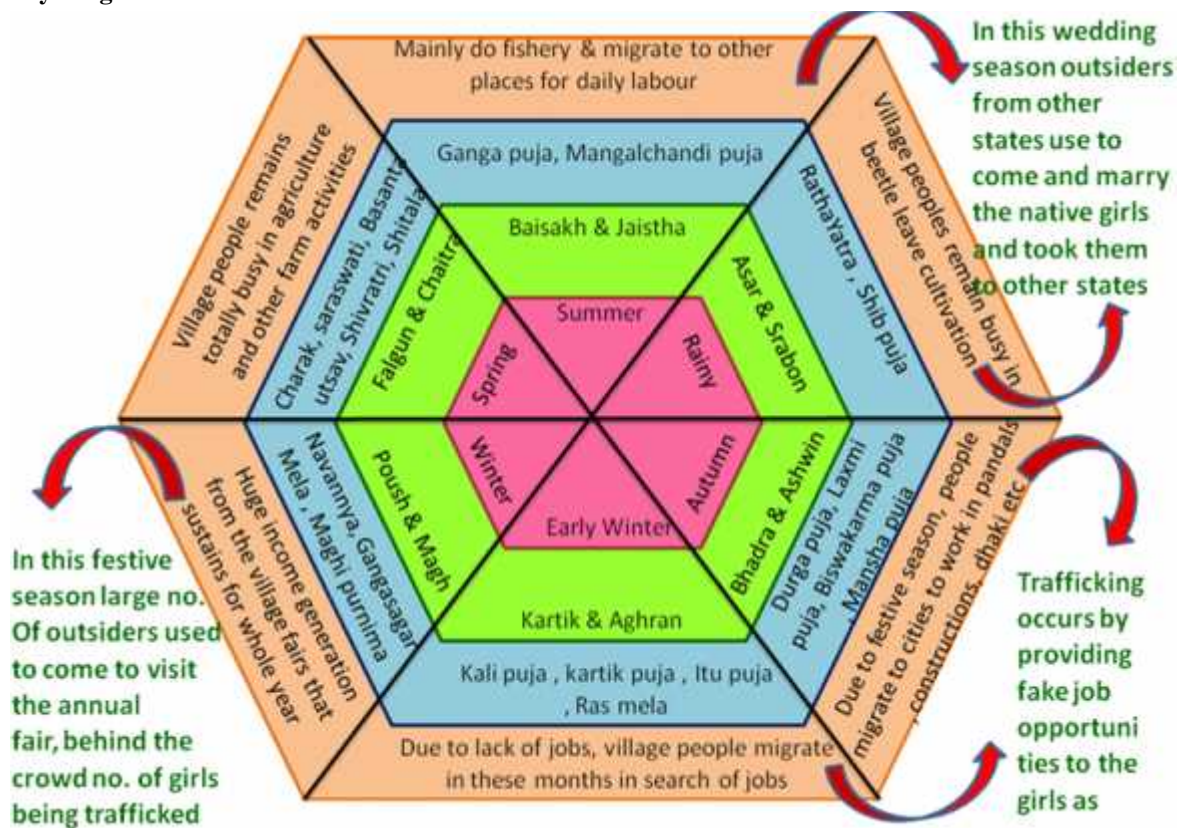


- **Poverty** that came out as the root cause of all social problems, due to poverty the village girls were sold to the pimps by the close kin members, neighbors etc.
- **Dowry**; for which the village girls were forced to marry outsiders who came from other states like UP, Bihar, Rajasthan etc, these girls were exchanged in-terms of money (Bride Price) and were subjected to servile marriage.
- **“Ayla” (natural calamity)**, According to villagers the rate of missing and trafficking of village girls was increased after Ayla.
- Lastly, **social stigma** which was associated with the single women like, young widow, divorced or disserted women, who had no livelihood opportunities and become easy prey for trafficking.

Mode of sufferings of the trafficked victims

- Victims were traumatized, depressed.
- Suicidal attempts among victims.
- Social boycott and isolation of the victims and their families,
- Early pregnancy, occurrence of venereal and sexually transmitted infections.

Seasonality Diagram



A seasonality diagram was drawn by the villagers for understanding the seasons, months, celebration of festivals and the occupations of the villagers round the year and to trace out the time of trafficking.

- The summer and monsoon season (Bengali months - Baisakh, Jaistha, Ashar Srabon) were the wedding months and the village girls were subjected for forced or servile marriage with the outsiders during this time.
- Autumn and early winter (Bengali months Bhadra, Ashwin, Kartik , Agrayayan) was the festive period when Durga puja, Kali puja etc, were celebrated in Bengal and at this time seasonal migration was very common in the studied villages and behind the crowd the village girls were trapped and trafficked to different metropolitan cities.
- In winter season(Bengali months Poush and Magh), two famous fair ‘Gangasagar Mela’ and ‘Maghi Purnima Mela’ generally celebrated in the studied area when thousands of tourists used to come and visit the pilgrim spot for taking bath in the holy water of Gangasagar and for visiting Kapil muni Ashrama. Behind this huge crowd, young village girls were trafficked by the bus drivers, car drivers, sanyashinis.

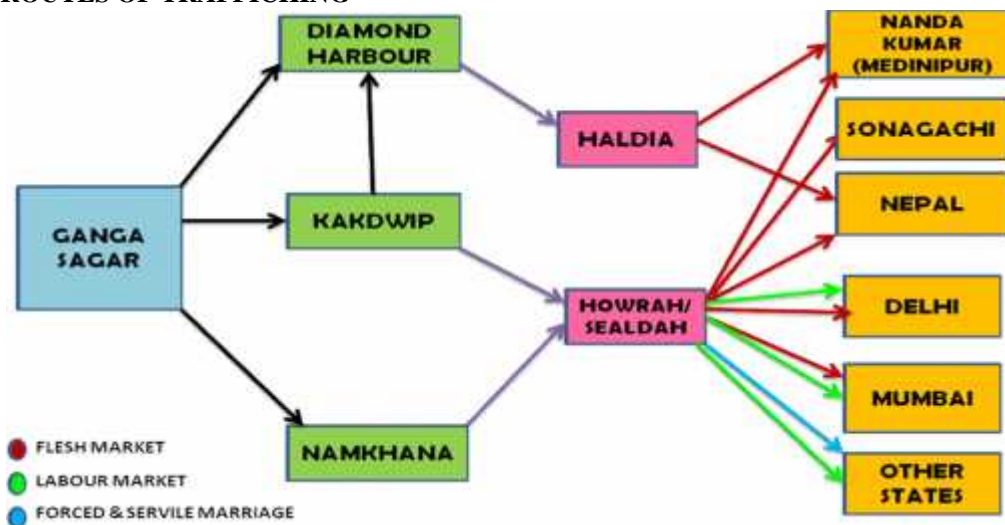


Time Line for Analyzing the Trend of Trafficking

| Time | Trend | Reason | Destination |
|------------|--|---|--|
| 1960 | Trafficking used to take place very little, where; women were trafficked and sold to flesh market by providing fake job opportunities | Extreme poverty | Nandakumar (Midnapur) |
| 1961-1970 | The rate of trafficking of village girls got increased, the girls were trafficked for both flesh and labour market | Greed due to poverty | Out of states like Delhi, Jharkhand |
| 1971-1980 | Due to famine of 70s , trafficking occurred behind the migration of crowd | Source of income for some vested interest group | Other states like Kerala, AP, Gujrat |
| 1981-1990 | Men from outside the states used to come and marry the village girls (Servile marriage started) | To avoid the burden of Dowry | Rajasthan , UP, Bihar |
| 1991-2000 | The rate of exploitation has increased where the close kin members , relatives are involved | Greed | Mumbai , Delhi, Nepal |
| Above 2000 | Rate of migration and elopement of the young girls has increased where the girls are recruited by their lovers, husbands and sold to labour and flesh market | Easy access to the outsiders , technical up gradation , Urbanisation | Metropolitans as well as nearby countries |

The time line method was used to trace out the trend of trafficking of village girls in ten years of intervals in relation to the changing scenario of the problem, reasons behind the occurrence of trafficking and the changing of destinations of the trafficked victims.

DIFFERENT ROUTES OF TRAFFICKING



From Gangasagar; the victims were taken to either Diamond harbor or Kakdwip and Namkhana. From Diamond harbor the victims are transferred to Haldia via ship route (water way) where as from Kakdwip or Namkhana the victims were transported to Howrah or Sealdah Station and from there the girls are finally destined to different states, metropolitans, other districts of West Bengal etc.

Findings From Focus Group Discussion With Village People

During the discussion some unknown facts came in front like;

- In cases where the girls were trafficked for the purpose of flesh trade; mainly the close kin members and the neighbours were found to be involved



- The girls who were good looking and young were mainly trafficked for the purpose of flesh trade
- Servile marriage of young girls was common problem in the village and the girls who were not so good looking, having darker complexion were more subjected for servile marriage with outsiders.
- The families having more than 2-3 daughters were more involved in the servile marriage especially to avoid the burden of dowry, the girls were forced to marry the outsiders coming from other states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.
- The girls trafficked for the purpose of servile marriage were found to work as domestic labour in husband's house where they had to suffer from severe domestic violence, physical torture, sexual abuse etc.
- Some married girls were forced to satisfy the physical needs of their brother in laws in the absence of their husbands.
- The rescued girls from the brothels were found to be brutally tortured (sexually, physically and psychologically).

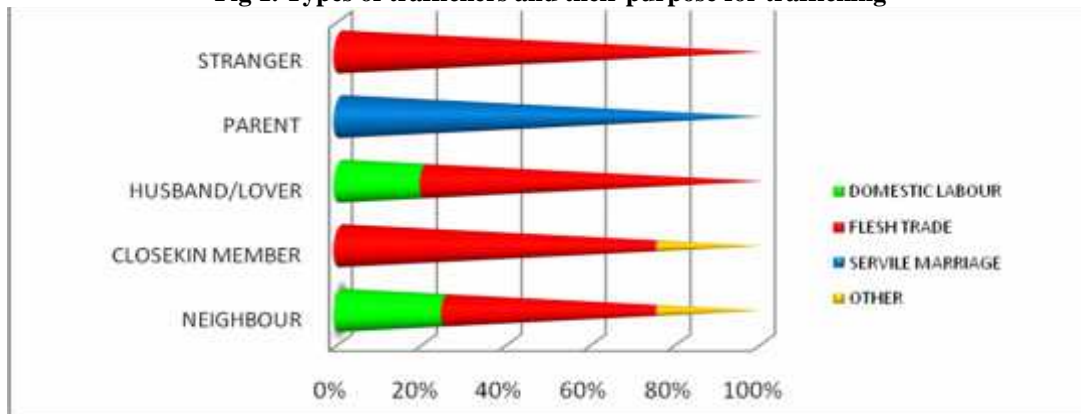
Findings from the Interview with the Key Respondent (Non Formal leaders)

- The interior most villages like; Beguakhali, Mahisamari, Chandipur, Chakfuldubi, Muriganga I & II and Dashpara I & II are more prone to trafficking.
- The traffickers target the vulnerable women of those families facing socio-economic stress.
- The traffickers lure the village women by making fake promises of offering jobs to the metropolitans to secure better livelihood.
- Village girls were married with the outsiders from UP, Rajasthan & Bihar where the girls were bartered in terms of money, to avoid the burden of dowry parents of the poor girls belonged to poor socio-economic background forced their daughters in such marriages.
- Trafficking of village girls occurred mostly in the time of Ganga sagar mela where the outsiders like bus drivers, car drivers, pilgrims, sages and even the old sanyashinis (female saints) were involved in the process of trafficking.
- The rate of trafficking had increased after the AYLA in south 24 Paraganas as the devastation caused by this natural calamity led to the impoverishment of the village people who were already facing socio-economic stress from the beginning. This calamity had enhanced the vulnerability of the village people for which trafficking of girls had increased.

Findings from Formal Leaders

- Fake placement agency within the studied area was involved in trafficking of young and married girls.
- Rate of unsafe migration was increased. The village youth, both men and women seasonally migrated to southern states of India.
- The single woman like the widow at early age, divorced, isolated or deserted were mainly trafficked where their neighbors, close kin members and even the husbands or lovers were found to be involved.
- The existence of servile marriage was very common at all the studied villages of Gangasagar where the girls were forced to marry the outsiders who used to come from different states of India (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan) during the festival. The guardians of the girls were compelled to indulge such marriages as they wanted to avoid the burden of dowry.
- Some of the village girls were forcefully employed in hotels and lodges for satisfying the sexual desire of the tourists who came to visit Gangasagar during the festive periods.

Fig 1. Types of traffickers and their purpose for trafficking





The figure conveyed that in case of domestic labour both the neighbours , husbands or lovers were found to be involved in the process of trafficking where the girls were fraudulently trapped and sold to the labour market by those persons only who were in close association with the victims for a long time, Whereas in case of servile marriage only the parents were found to be involved in the process of trafficking as due to the extreme poverty they were unable to provide dowry and were compelled to agree for servile marriage of their daughters with the outsiders.

In case of sending the girls to flesh trade the neighbours, close kin members and the husbands or lovers were involved in the process of trafficking as greed ,jealousy or revenge taking mentalities of the traffickers motivated them to conduct such crimes.

The figure ultimately unfolded the realities that when the parents were the traffickers they involved with the process only for the marriages of their daughters ,other types of traffickers were sent the girls to brothels, domestic labour market or anywhere else without considering the sentiments , emotions and destinies of the girls.

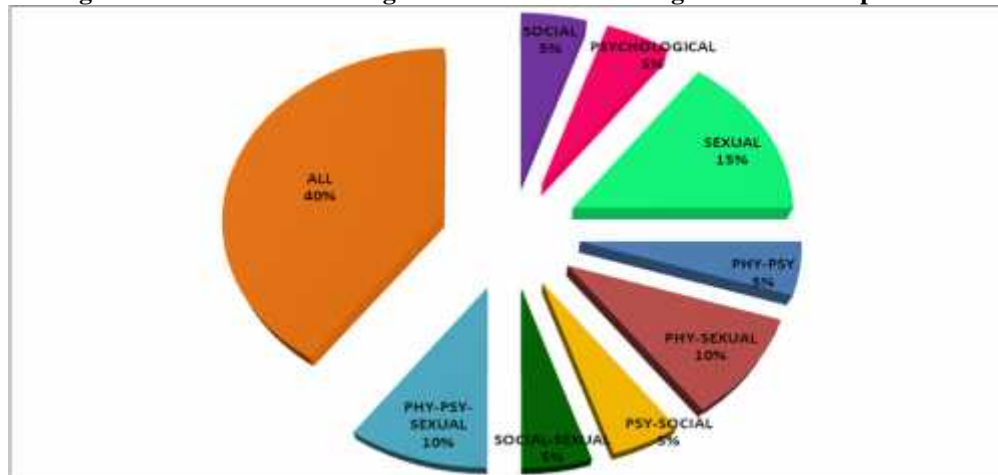
Fig 2.Perceptions of the different categories of respondent regarding the purpose of the trafficking of the girls on the basis of their looks



(According to multiple respondents)

The figure conveyed that 50% of the trafficked girls who looked good were trafficked for flesh trade as there was a high demand of good looking young girls in the sex-industry. 30% of the trafficked girls were the victims of servile marriage, who were not so good looking. Due to their unpleasant look the girls were not married at their right age, moreover, due to their looks the amount of dowry was increased, the poor parents were unable to provide the amount and the girls were sold to the outsiders in terms of marriage. 20% of the victims were found to be trafficked for bonded labours, where the look did not matter.

Fig 3.Distribution of sufferings of the victims according to different respondents



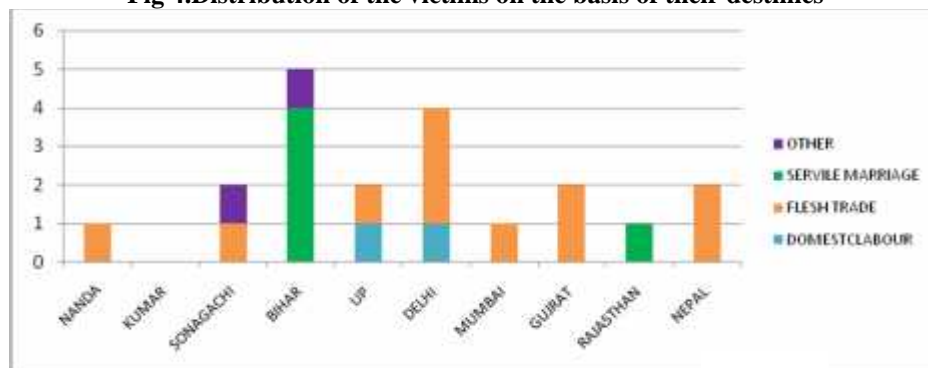
(According to multiple respondents)

The figure conveyed different type of sufferings of the trafficked girls, as narrated by different categories of respondents is as followed; the victims were suffered physically, psychologically, socially and sexually. However the maximum no. of respondent said that the about 40% of the victims were experienced with almost all types of sufferings. Then the next 15% of the victims who suffered from sexual harassment and extreme sexual exploitations, then a significant no. of respondent said that 10% of the victims suffered from extreme physical torture, as well as socially rejected by their neighbours, close kin



members, friends etc. Lastly, another 10% of the victims suffered physically-psychologically-sexually and the rest suffered from socially, psychologically, socially-sexually and psycho-socially.

Fig 4. Distribution of the victims on the basis of their destinies



The figure conveyed that most of the victims of servile marriage were found to be transported to Bihar and Rajasthan. Prolonged practicing of female infanticide created a disparity between the male and female sex-ratio in these states and that was why the outsiders from these states used to come to poor villages of West Bengal (Studied area) and married poor girls by offering money to the parents of the victims as a bride price. The girls trafficked for flesh trade were transported to different brothels in Delhi, Mumbai, Gujrat, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal (Nandakumar and Sonagachi) and even in Nepal, as in the metropolitan cities, there was a high demand of young girls in sex industry. The victims of domestic labour were found to be transported to Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Bihar as in these states there was a continuous demand of women in the labour market, as domestic labour in the homes of middle class and higher class people.

SPECIFIC CASES

CASE 1

Name of the victim: Ashima (Name changed)

Religion: Muslim

Current age: 20

Village: Chakfuldubi

Ashima is the 2nd daughter of the Sheikh family lived with her father, mother & two sisters. She was trafficked in the year of 2010 at the age of 17.

Ashima was befriended by her friend and was taken by her friend and her friend's sister's husband to Kakdwip, she was made unconscious by providing intoxicated food and was taken to Howrah Station. Finally from Howrah via train she was destined to Delhi by Noor Jamal (Pimp). Ashima was kept in a hotel and after a week she was transferred to a brothel. Ashima was forced into prostitution, she was asked to wear short dresses combined with loud make-up and on refusal she was brutally tortured, abused verbally by the Malkin of the brothel. Ashima stayed for a month in Delhi but she was fortunate enough as she rescued herself on the 40th day of her stay. Ashima managed to escape and met with a Bangladeshi boy who was a tea vendor with whom Ashima reached to the nearby railway station and reached Kolkata.

Note: The above case unfolded the truth that because of the **greed**, the **neighbour** and friend of the girl who was very close to her fraudulently brought the girl by gaining her trust and emotions and ultimately sold her to a pimp for engaging the girl into flesh trade.

CASE 2

Name of the respondent: Suchitra (Name changed)

Religion: Hindu

Current age of the victim: 20

Village: Chakfuldubi

Marital status: Married

Suchitra was the 2nd daughter of the Maity family and got married in 2012 at the age of 17 to a businessman of Rajasthan, who came as a tourist to Ganga sagar during the festive period of "Makar shankranti" for a month. Suchitra's uncle brought the marriage proposal for her and Suchitra's father arranged the marriage with the business man from Rajasthan. Suchitra was forced into servile marriage by her parents only. The girl was exchanged in terms of a bride price which was about Rs.40,000 given by the bride-groom to Suchitra's father. According to Suchitra, she had to establish sexual relation not only with her husband but also with other male in laws of her family and this type of marriages was very common in Rajasthan.



Note: From the above case, it was found that due to **severe economic crisis** the **victim's father** was unable to manage a lump-sum dowry for her daughter's marriage and for **avoiding the burden of dowry** the parents arranged for servile marriage of their daughter with an outsider.

Conclusion

At the end of the study, the researcher perceived that trafficking was one of the major social evil, practiced against the vulnerable girls belonged to poor socio-economical background.

The exploitation girls took place not only before trafficking but also during and after trafficking where gender discrimination indulged the process of trafficking. In spite of sincere efforts of police and administration, the village girls were very much unprotected who were not at all aware about the mode, type and the hazardous consequences of trafficking.

Recommendations

Preventive Phase

- More extensive research work should be encouraged.
- Strong vigilance should be conducted by deploying more no. of police in festive seasons of Gangasagar like *Gangasagar mela* and *Maghi purnima mela*.
- Continuous awareness generation programme on anti-Trafficking should be organised throughout by local police, Panchayet, NGOs, VOs. This issue should be discussed in SHGs and local *shalishi sabhas*

Curative Phase

- Proper implementation of the Government schemes like **Swadhar**, **Ujjawala** and **Short Stay Home** will be appreciated.
- Other scheme like **Kishori Shakti Yojna** for adolescent girls, **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh** for generating micro-credit and other facilities, **Swayamsidha** for providing vocational training/ income generation /skill development of the women should be started.
- The victims should be provided legal support through NGOs, Voluntary Organisations, **Child Welfare Committee (Juvenile Justice Care and Protection of Children Act, 2000)**.
- There should be effective implementation of Law and order like **Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act**, **Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act**, **Child Marriage Restraint Act**, **POCSO Act** etc. should be encouraged

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