IJCRT.ORG

ISSN : 2320-2882

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

"Caged Realities: A Sociological And Historical Angle On Slavery Alias Human Trafficking In India"

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Abstract

This paper discovers the interrelation linking historical slavery and modern-day Human trafficking in India from a sociological point of view. By examining the existence of unfair practices and the socioeconomic circumstances that complete them, this study tries to places of interest the firmness and variations of this phenomenon. The study also includes the historical milieu of slavery in India, the current state of human trafficking, and the combined factors that assist their fortitude.

Keywords: Slavery, Human Trafficking, Ancient, Medieval, British Colonial, Poverty, Caste, Exploitation, structural Violence.

Introduction

As per the definition in the Cambridge dictionary, Slavery is the condition of being owned by another person legally and being compelled to work for them or follow their commands.[1] This system, where individuals are possessed by others, has its roots in the historical oppression and exploitation of people, and while it has changed over time, it has not completely vanished. Contemporary human trafficking, commonly referred to as modern slavery, mirrors similar patterns of exploitation. In India, both customs carry significant sociological

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[1] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/slavery

implications, influenced by economic, historical, and cultural backgrounds.[2] This paper aims to explore the connection or similarity between slavery and human trafficking in India and worldwide, taking into account their societal scope.

Historical Context of Slavery in India

"The Cambridge World History of Slavery" in the 11th chapter, discusses the complex and multifaceted nature of ancient India's slavery. The chapter discussed different kinds of bondage, such as caste-based slavery debt bondage, and forced labor, which were widespread in Indian society. It highlights how slavery and these forms were deeply tangled with economic, social, and religious structures, reflecting the rigid hierarchies of the time. It also explores the alteration and determination of these practices through different historical periods, including the impact of the British colonial period, which institutionalized certain unequal labor practices, and further inequalities. Despite the abolition of legal slavery post-independence, leftovers of these practices lingered, especially in rural and marginalized communities(Cambridge).[3]

During the Vedic period, there are references to slavery and different forms of servitude are found in ancient texts. The first Vedic literature Rig Veda mentions terms such as "dasa" and "dasi," which have been interpreted as male and female slaves, respectively. This period considered slavery as a result of warfare or debt, where individuals, incapable of paying back their debts, would become slaves or bonded laborers[4]. Romila Thapar provides insights into different societies of Ancient India, including the institution of slavery. She looked at how slavery was integrated into the socio-economic structure of ancient India, discussing its prevalence, origins, and the different roles of slaves within domestic service agriculture and as gifts or honors. Romila Thapar explores the situations under which someone became a slave, including capture in warfare, debt bondage, and inheritance passed from generation to generation. Overall Thapars work contextualizes the atrocious practice called slavery within the broader historical and cultural backdrop of ancient Indian History, flaking light on its implication as a socio-economic institution during that period.

During subsequent periods, particularly the Mauryan and Gupta empires, slavery continued to be present, although in different forms. Kautilya's Arthashastra, and its ancient Indian treatise on statecraft, law, and detailed regulations regarding slaves were there. It emphasized the ethical treatment of slaves, who were seen as valuable laborers rather than mere property. They could earn their freedom and were protected under

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[2] https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/faqs.html

[3] Richardson, D. (2017)

[4] Thapar, R(2002)

various laws that prevented their mistreatment (Singh, 2008). This comes close to highlighting a more planned and arguably humane system compared to contemporary practices elsewhere.

By the time of early medieval India, slavery had been included in the economic and social fabric, influenced a lot by the draconian caste system. In "Caste and the Dynamics of Bonded Labor" (2000), S. Jaiswal examines the deep-rooted relationship between the caste system and bonded labor in India, demonstrating how historical and socio-economic factors have enabled this form of mistreatment or exploitation. These groups were often subjected to bonded labor, a practice that continued in various forms through the ages. The caste-based divisions created systemic inequalities that would continue well into the colonial and post-colonial periods (Jaiswal, 2000). The intricacy of ancient Indian slavery, shaped by social, economic, and legal frameworks, underlines the toned nature of slavery in this historical context.

Slavery during the Medieval Indian Period under Muslim Rulers

Slavery in medieval India experienced noteworthy changes during the period of Muslim rule, beginning with the Delhi Sultanate in the 13th century and continuing through the Mughal Empire. Muslim rulers, including sultans and later Mughal emperors, incorporated and extended existing practices of slavery while also introducing new extent shaped by Islamic law and the socio-political perspective of the time. Enslaved individuals were regularly prisoners of war, brought from various regions through invasion, or procured through the escalating trade networks straddling Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. These slaves served in a variety of capacities, from domestic servitude to laborers to administrators and soldiers. The military slaves, known as "mamluks" or "ghulams," often held important power and influence, sometimes even rising to high-ranking positions within the government administration. The presence of military slaves was particularly noted for their twin roles as elite warriors and influential figures within the Sultanate. Overall, Chandra's analysis underscores the persistent power of slavery in shaping medieval Indian society and culture, reflecting its important function in state-building during that era.[5]

In the Mughal period, particularly under emperors like Akbar, saw a comparatively more structured approach to slavery, in his reign some slaves could gain assured privileges or rise through the ranks based on their loyalty and skills.[6] However, the overall system still perpetuated major exploitation. Despite the regulations, the reality of slavery during this period remained harsh, with the ingrained systems of servitude reflecting the

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[5] Chandra, S. (2004)

[6] Bano, S. (2006-2007). 350-352.

broader socio-economic inequalities of medieval Indian society.[7] The heritage of these practices continued to affect the social fabric of India, even as the colonial period introduced new layers of complexity to the institution of slavery[8].

Colonial Control and Post-Colonial Legacies

The influx of British colonial rule brought about important changes in the establishment of slavery in India. The British officiated and sometimes worsened existing exploitative labor practices through major economic policies that favored colonial interests. Sundar (2004) argues that while colonialism ended legal slavery properly, it affected socioeconomic disparities that continued in marginalized and vulnerable communities, mainly in rural areas. Although the British eliminated legal slavery in India in the mid-19th century, many forms of bonded labor persisted, particularly in rural areas where customary social hierarchies remained sturdy.[9]

In conclusion, historically slavery in India is described by its deep embarrassment with the caste system, socio-economic structures, and legal frameworks. The change and persistence of these practices through diverse historical periods historically, including the colonial period, highlights the lasting nature of slavery in Indian society.

Human Trafficking

Human Trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of people through force, fraud, or deception, to exploit them for profit. Men, women, and children of all ages and from all backgrounds can become victims of this crime, which occurs in every region of the world[10].

Human trafficking in India presents a complicated and disturbing reality around a variety of forms of exploitation. Commercial sexual work trafficking remains persistent, with women and girls normally deceived and forced into sex work under allurement, and false promises of jobs or marriage. Bonded Labour and Forced labor is another widespread issue, affecting men, women, and children who are forced to do rigorous work in hazardous conditions across industries like agriculture, Bangles, carpets, brick kilns, and domestic service. This form of exploitation regularly involves debt bondage, restricted liberty, and physical abuse. Moreover, child trafficking persists as a grave concern, with children trafficked for labor in sectors like

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[7] Ibid,355-57

[9] Sundar, N. (2004). & Ghosh, D

[10] https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-Trafficking/Human-Trafficking.html

agriculture and construction, subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, or trafficked for illegal adoption.[11] Regardless of legislative efforts to fight this violence, enforcement of anti-trafficking laws in India faces imperative challenges due to corruption, deficient resources, and a lack of inclusive victim security measures. Addressing these issues requires rigorous efforts from law enforcement, government agencies, international partnerships, and civil society to efficiently defend helpless populations and dismantle the trafficking circle[12].

Sociological aspects Facilitating Human Trafficking

One of the most important aspects is Poverty which plays a crucial role in enabling human trafficking in India. Economic issues compel helpless ones and their families to look for better opportunities, making them the easiest available targets for traffickers promising profitable and rewarding jobs or marriage prospects abroad. The fear of fleeing poverty often leads people into situations where they become victims of human trafficking[13].

Another important aspect is Gender inequality worsens the vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking. Patriarchal societal norms and attitudes that underrate women's contributions and agency create situations where females are highly prone to exploitation.[14] This inequity limits their opportunities for education and economic independence, leaving them additionally susceptible to being trafficked for forced labor or commercial sexual exploitation and other forms of Human Trafficking.[15]

Discrimination by caste continues to marginalize lower caste categorized communities in India, contributing to their defenselessness to the exploitation of different types. Systemic discrimination and social exclusion or segregating them based on castes confine access to employment, education, and legal protections, affecting cycles of poverty and overall vulnerability. Traffickers exploit these marginalized communities by promising economic opportunities or marriage prospects, further rooting their exploitation.[16]

Corruption within law enforcement and government institutions undermines efforts to combat human trafficking effectively in India. Bribery and participation among officials enable traffickers to work with

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[11] Kaur, N. and Gulati, S.(2022)

[12] Ghosh, B. (2009).

[13] Sarkar, S. (2014).

[14] https://stopthetraffik.org/why-are-women-and-girls-so-disproportionately-affected-by-exploitation/

[15] https://icat.un.org/sites/g/files/tmzbdl461/files/publications/icat-ib-04-v.1.pdf

[16] https://www.hrw.org/reports/pdfs/g/general/caste0801.pdf

impunity, assisting the trafficking of individuals across borders or within the country. This systemic corruption not only obstructs enforcement of anti-trafficking laws but also spoils public trust in authorities responsible for defending vulnerable populations.[17]

The lack of education among deprived communities aggravates their susceptibility to trafficking through defensive awareness and opportunities for individuals to recognize and resist exploitation. Without having access to basic education, people from these communities may lack knowledge about their rights, safe migration practices, and the tactics used by traffickers. This unawareness continues their vulnerability to misleading recruitment tactics and false promises of better livelihoods, entrapping them in cycles of exploitation and abuse.[18]

These sociological factors jointly contribute to the persistent challenge of human trafficking in India, highlighting the need for wide-ranging strategies that deal with economic disparities, gender-based discrimination, corruption, caste-based differences, and educational disparities to successfully fight this modern-day scourge of Human Trafficking in India.

Understanding the Root of Violence through Structural Violence Theory

Structural violence, a term coined by Johan Galtung, pertains to the damage generated by societal systems that establish and maintain unfairness. It appears in structural problems such as poverty, discrimination, and restricted resource access, impacting marginalized groups more and hindering them from fulfilling their fundamental requirements. Structural violence, in contrast to direct violence, is ingrained in the societal framework of social, political, and economic aspects, resulting in enduring suffering and disparity.19

The chapter "Human Trafficking and Structural Violence" in the book "Human Trafficking and Exploitation" by Belachew Gebrewold looks into how human trafficking and structural violence are intertwined. Gabrewold, B. suggests that structural violence, which consists of systematic disparities and injustices ingrained in social, economic, and political structures, fosters conditions that enable human trafficking to grow. The section analyzes individuals' susceptibility to trafficking, exploring how poverty, limited education,

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[17] Uddin, B. (February 2014).

[18] https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/04/22/they-say-were-dirty/denying-education-indias-marginalized

[19] Farmer, P. (2004).

gender bias, and corrupt leadership play a role. It also emphasizes the importance of using thorough and diverse methods to tackle these underlying issues to effectively fight against human trafficking.20

By using Structural Violence Theory, we can comprehend the continued presence and development of slavery and human trafficking in India. This theory explains how harmful social structures and organizations block individuals from fulfilling their basic requirements, resulting in constant inequality and neglect. In India, the caste system, gender-based inequality, and prevalent poverty all showcase the presence of structural violence. These types of violence lead to conditions where marginalized communities become more prone to vulnerability to trafficking. The strong Colonial economic policies and the cruel caste system have led to long-lasting inequalities, contributing to the prevalence of human trafficking due to structural violence. It is crucial to tackle these ingrained problems to effectively fight against trafficking.21

Transformation and Continuity of Abusive Practices

The shifts from historical slavery to modern human trafficking display a blend of **Transformation and Continuity** in the exploitation of defenseless populations. Continuity is obvious in how both practices perpetuate systemic inequalities and social hierarchies, preying on individuals from marginalized communities who are deficient in access to economic opportunities and legal support and protection. This continuity underscores the constant vulnerabilities that traffickers utilize to control and exploit their target victims.

However, there has also been a major transformation in the methods and forms of extreme exploitation employed by traffickers. Contrasting historical slavery, modern trafficking often involves refined tactics such as fake employment agencies, deceitful recruitment promises, and the use of digital media platforms to ease recruitment and exploitation. These recent technological advancements have enabled traffickers to function across borders more easily and dodge detection, exemplifying the adaptive nature of exploitation in the present day. Thus, while the fundamental injustice of exploiting weak individuals remains regular, the mechanisms and approaches used to perpetuate exploitation have evolved with the changing comprehensive landscape.

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20 Ali,A(2020)

21 Gabrewold,B (2017)

Efforts to Combat Human Trafficking

Legal frameworks sketch a fundamental pillar in the fight against human trafficking. Legislation such as the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1956 (ITPA)[22] and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2016[23] provide authorized legal avenues for prosecuting traffickers and defending victims. These laws aim to frighten trafficking activities and ensure justice for victims through strict penalties and rehabilitation measures.[24]

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a pivotal role in addressing human trafficking in India. These organizations are at the front of rescue operations, providing instant assistance, medical care, and shelter, to the trafficking victims. NGOs and CBOs also engage in advocacy efforts, raising awareness about trafficking issues and advocating for policy reforms to support protections for helpless populations.

Government programs are important to the comprehensive response against human trafficking. Schemes like the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) and Ujjawala focus on the prevention, rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration of trafficking victims. These programs provide support services such as vocational training, shelter homes, and legal support to empower survivors and facilitate their recovery and socio-economic reintegration[25].

These efforts by legal frameworks, NGOs, CBOs, and government programs underscore a collaborative approach to combating human trafficking in India. By addressing the immediate needs of victims and the complete challenges that enable trafficking, these initiatives endeavor to create a more secure and safer environment for vulnerable individuals and communities.

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has looked into the complex interaction between historical slavery and modern-day human trafficking in India from a sociological perspective. By analyzing the persistence of exploitative practices deep-rooted in historical economic and cultural contexts, this study has highlighted both the transformation and continuity of these phenomena over time. The historical background of slavery in India, spanning from ancient times throughout medieval periods under diverse rulers together with the Muslim empires and British colonialism, has shaped the socio-economic composition that continues to persuade

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[22] https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/15100/1/immoral_traffic_prevention_act_%28itpa%29_1956.pdf

[23] https://cara.wcd.gov.in/PDF/JJ%20act%202015.pdf

[24] https://ebooks.inflibnet.ac.in/hrdp05/chapter/national-legislative-framework-human-trafficking/

[25] https://wcd.nic.in/schemes/ujjawala-comprehensive-scheme-prevention-trafficking-and-rescue-rehabilitation-and-re

modern trafficking patterns. Despite legislative efforts and initiatives by NGOs, CBOs, and government programs to combat human trafficking, challenges such as poverty, corruption, caste discrimination, gender inequality, and lack of basic education persistently contribute to the vulnerability of target populations to trafficking.

Moving forward, addressing these fundamental sociological factors is central to effectively combating human trafficking in India. Intensification of legal frameworks, enhancing law enforcement capabilities, promoting education and economic opportunities, and promoting societal change towards social inclusion and gender equality are essential steps. Furthermore, joint efforts between stakeholders including government agencies, NGOs, international organizations, and local communities are crucial to creating a comprehensive response that defends vulnerable populations and dismantles brutal trafficking networks. By handling these organized issues, India can endeavor towards a future where every individual is safe, secure, and empowered to live free from the danger of exploitation and slavery which is now a day's Human Trafficking.

"I am only one,
But still I am one.
I cannot do everything,
But still I can do something;
And because I cannot do everything,
I will not refuse to do the something that I can do"26.

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26 Helen Keller

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