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## **Human Trafficking and the Security of Women: A Brief Review of Indian Scenario with Special Reference to the Condition of West Bengal**

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### **Abstract:**

*Human security is a people centered concept and human trafficking is posing a serious threat to human security because human trafficking especially trafficking of children, adolescent girls and women is a great obstacle to the security, liberty and development of human beings. Therefore, human trafficking is, no doubt, a crime against humanity and human security. The United Nations has accepted that human trafficking is a global crime that trades in people and exploits them for profit which is totally against human rights all over the world. It has been found that the sufferers of trafficking are from the people of any age group, any gender and from anywhere in the world. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) 2020 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, which is based on the official figures collected from more than 148 countries, shows that women are clearly the primary targets of the traffickers. But Human security will be partial without gender equality and security of women and children. There will be no development without gender equality. Human trafficking poses one of the serious challenges to gender equality. Therefore, this research paper tries to analyse the history and status of human trafficking particularly trafficking of women and children with special reference to the scenario of India as India is the source, transit area and destination point of trafficking in persons. Within India, the highest number of trafficking takes place in West Bengal. Therefore, this research paper gives special emphasis on the scenario of West Bengal especially after COVID-19 lockdown and Amphan.*

***Purpose of The Present Study:*** *This research paper has the following purposes:*

- 1. To examine the history of human trafficking especially women trafficking with special reference to West Bengal, India*
- 2. To analyse the status of human trafficking in India*
- 3. To examine the reasons of increased rate of human trafficking in West Bengal in the aftermath of Amphan and during COVID-19*
- 4. To suggest preventive measures against human trafficking in India*

***Research Methodology:*** *This research paper relies primarily upon qualitative research methods to examine the research problem. This paper is based chiefly on secondary data.*

*Data published by different departments of government, International Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations and other official records like National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) will constitute the secondary data in this research. Objectives under study have been analysed with the support of secondary data. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques have been applied in this research paper for data analysis.*

**Key Words: Anti-trafficking initiatives, Empowerment, Human Security, Slave-Trade, Trafficking.**

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“Human trafficking is the intentional forcing of another into slavery.”

— Asa Don Brown<sup>i</sup>

**Introduction:** In today’s world the concept of Human Security has become very important for international community. This concept gives special emphasis on the protection, security, development and capacity building of individuals. It was the handiwork of a group of development economists. One of those scholars was late Pakistani economist Mahabub ul Haq, who conceptualised the United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Report. Therefore, it can be said that the origin of the concept called human security can be traced back to the Human Development Report of 1994 which was published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 1994)<sup>ii</sup>.

It is undeniable that human security is incomplete without gender equality and human trafficking poses the most serious threat to gender equality and justice. Therefore, human trafficking is one of the biggest obstacles to human security.

No doubt, human trafficking is one of the most heinous crimes against human beings and, therefore, it causes serious human rights violation. It negates the sufferers’ right over their own persons, their freedom and liberty, and extorts their labour by force. Actually human trafficking has become a global problem affecting people from all ages especially women and children.

**Definition of Human Trafficking:** Human trafficking is not only very difficult to define but it is also difficult to estimate the magnitude of this phenomenon. The international community has not yet adopted a uniform definition of it which would be acceptable to all. Because this trade of human trafficking is very secretive in nature, the victims are most of the times repressed and muted by the traffickers and it has cross-border network of operation. But there is no doubt that human trafficking is accepted by all as a flourishing international phenomenon. The term “human trafficking” was conceived more than a century ago but its present-day legal definition is relatively new.

In 2000 the United Nations adopted The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (Trafficking Protocol) which came into force in December 2003. This Protocol defined trafficking at the global level. According to it, Trafficking in persons “shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of

abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”(Article 3, paragraph (a) of the United Nations Trafficking in Persons Protocol)<sup>iii</sup>

According to The United Nations (UN), human trafficking can be divided into three categories—sex trafficking, labour trafficking, and also organ trafficking. Trafficking may take place within a particular country or it may involve movement across borders.

Women constitute almost half of the world’s population but discrimination and violence against women are ingrained in almost all the societies of the world including India and the problem of trafficking offences against women, adolescent girls and children has come out as one of the key international issues in recent times. UNODC’s 2020 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (Human Trafficking FAQs) reveals that in 2018 46 percent of detected victims globally were women and 19 percent were girls.<sup>iv</sup> The data shows that although this heinous crime affects both men and women, irrespective of their sex, the main focus of most of the traffickers remains on women and children as they are regarded as the most vulnerable sections of the society exposed to any crime including trafficking.

**Origin and History of Human Trafficking:** If we think of human trafficking as slavery its origins can be traced back to the days of ancient Greeks and Romans. Slavery was very much a feature of societal hierarchies throughout the ancient world history. It has been found by historians that ancient Greek, Roman and Egyptian governments and armies not only made slavery a prize of warfare but also used it as a key component for the development of their countries. Although slavery has a long history and it existed in ancient societies and has lasted throughout the history of the mankind as a universal institution, but, the discussion on human trafficking especially women trafficking is comparatively of recent origin. According to many scholars, the practices of slavery have been in existence throughout human civilisation and continue to exist. Only the modern day slavery has taken a new name, that is, “Human Trafficking”.

The earliest known global trafficking started with the African slave trade. The people from the continents of America and Europe were involved in this trade as buyers and the people from various African countries were both items of trade and middlemen. That is why this African slave trade is regarded by many scholars as the first known international flow of human trafficking.<sup>v</sup> The world only began to head towards anti -slavery legislation only from the early 1800s. First law against slavery was passed in Britain in 1807. This Act was popularly known as Slave Trade Act and officially as Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade.<sup>vi</sup> This Act was passed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom prohibiting the slave trade in the British Empire. Many thought that this Act would lead to the abolition of slave trade but it did not. Unfortunately, before passing the Law this trade was both legal and government-tolerated. Just after the passing of the British Act, The United States of

America adopted its Act prohibiting importation of slaves on 2 March 1807. During that time, there were no international organizations that could force the nations to ban this type of heinous crime.

Many historians say that the concept called ‘Human Trafficking’ was first introduced in the context of white slavery. But it is not very easy to define it as there are lot of debates and discussions regarding the proper meaning and definition of the term called ‘white slavery’. The 1904 International Agreement for the Suppression of White Slave Traffic and the 1910 Convention on White Slave Traffic both applied this term “trafficking” to indicate the cross-border movement of white women and adolescent girls and children by force, deceit or drugs for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation (Doezema, 1999).

Comprehensive actions against international human trafficking or modern day slavery actually started from 19<sup>th</sup> century. The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS) were founded by Quaker Joseph Sturge and Lord Henry Brougham in 1838<sup>vii</sup>. From 20<sup>th</sup> century international community became very active to combat this organised global crime. In June 1921 an international conference was held in Geneva hosted by the League of Nations. The result of this convention was signing of Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children which concluded for the first time that white slave traffic should be replaced by traffic in women and children. The Report of the League of Nations in 1927 described global traffic as: the direct or indirect procurement and transportation for gain to a foreign country of women and girls for the sexual pleasure of one or more other persons. Later in 1949 The United Nations adopted the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others which came into force in 1951 (Kangaspunta, 2008).<sup>viii</sup> Another important international landmark to tackle trafficking is Palermo Protocol, 2000. The United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT) was set up in March 2007 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). It is managed jointly by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In spite of so many efforts even today slavery exists but in the name of human trafficking. The 2016 Global Slavery Index shows that 45.8 million people are living in some form of modern slavery globally. (Bonilla & Mo, 2018, para. 1).<sup>ix</sup>

**Overview of Human Trafficking in India:** Trafficking in India is totally illegal. In spite of that, according to the reports published by several national and international agencies, India has become the root, destination and passage for human trafficking.<sup>x</sup> India has borders with many countries. India has 15,106.7 kilo meters of land border with other countries and a coastline of 7,516.6 kilo meters including island territories<sup>xi</sup> and the illegal movement of persons from Nepal and Bangladesh into India is not very difficult because these countries have with India very long and penetrable borders. The data of Ministry of Home Affairs of India shows that there are about 20 international check posts across the length of Bangladeshi border which is 4,096.7 kilo meters long. On the other hand, India–Nepal

border is an open international border, without any fences, which is 1,751 kilo meters long.<sup>xii</sup> India has an open border policy with Nepal and, therefore, cross border movements are very easy which makes trafficking very difficult to identify. Though Bangladesh does not have similar access like Nepal, crossing the border between India and Bangladesh is not a very inconvenient process.

Therefore, it has been found that in India every year many people go missing due to socio-economic and geo-political reasons. The National Crime Records Bureau (henceforth, “NCRB”) brings out the data disclosing crimes registered under the Indian Penal Code and the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act. During the three years from 2016 to 2018 a total of 2,90,439, 3,05,267 and 3,47,542 people have been reported as missing. But the most alarming part of the data published by National Crime Records Bureau is that the number of missing women is always much higher than their male counterparts. The Report on Missing Women and Children in India, 2019 shows that among the states of India, Maharashtra, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh have reported maximum number of missing women. The number of missing children are maximum in the states of West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi and Bihar. It has been found that normally a large number of people who go missing are the victims of serious offences and when the missing person is a woman or a child, it is a matter of urgent concern for the society as well as the state. Because a sizable number of missing women and children are the victims of human trafficking (National Crime Records Bureau. 2019).<sup>xiii</sup>

No doubt that human trafficking, especially trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation, have become a really serious concern for India. Indian government is also giving so much importance on abolishing this heinous crime that from 2015, the NCRB has been putting together a separate chapter on Human Trafficking. Unfortunately, in 2016, India got the fourth place in a global survey that listed 167 countries where modern slavery was prevalent<sup>xiv</sup>.

The victims of human trafficking may be both male and female adults and children. But it has been found that poor rural women and children are at highest risk of trafficking. According to the data published by the National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs in 2019, a total of 6,616 victims were trafficked across India. Among them, the number of children was 2,914 and adults 3,702 (National Crime Records Bureau. 2019). The data published by Save the Children's analysis of 2018 NCRB shows that West Bengal reported the second-highest number of children being trafficked at 8205.<sup>xv</sup>

**Trafficking Scenario in West Bengal:** Human Trafficking especially trafficking of women, adolescent girls and children in India in general and West Bengal in particular, have appeared as one of the gravest and most disturbing social issues in recent times. The location of West Bengal has made it a nerve centre of trafficking. West Bengal shares international borders with Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal and within the country it shares borders with many states like Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, Sikkim, and Assam. The

geographical scenario of West Bengal and also the socio-economic factors prevalent in this state help to make it a hub of human trafficking.

According to the data published by various governmental and non-governmental organisations, the cases of human trafficking are very high in West Bengal. Among various reasons behind it, one is the state's long and porous borders with Nepal and Bangladesh and also this state's well connection with other states of India. A 2013 report by the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC) entitled 'Anti Human Trafficking , 2013' unveiled the fact that in West Bengal more than 19,000 women, adolescent girls and children were recorded missing out of which only 6000 were tracked down.<sup>xvi</sup>

There may be guesses about the number of people who are being trafficked but the accurate information is seemingly impossible to detect from the available data. Not only that, it is also very difficult to assess the degree of the problem based on the official data. Even the data is based on police records, which is not independently verified or confirmed. The data itself is based only on the number of First Information Reports (henceforth, FIRs) registered. But in reality all missing or trafficking cases are not registered in the police stations or sometimes, it has been argued by the relatives and friends of the victims that the police try to avoid registering FIR of missing cases to dodge the responsibility of investigation.<sup>xvii</sup> Thus, it is believed that all known cases of trafficking result in an FIR remain partially faulty. Therefore, it becomes very clear that unregistered cases of missing people and human trafficking make the situation more complicated and it becomes a herculean task to handle. Therefore, it is clear that both unregistered and registered cases of trafficking are on the rise in India and in West Bengal the situation is gloomier. Joint statement given by the Crime Investigation Department of West Bengal Police and the Union Home Ministry, Government of India shows that over the last few decades, there has been a sharp rise in the number of missing reports of minor children as well as women.

Now the world is facing an unprecedented situation because of COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has actually accelerated the already existing economic and social inequalities in the society. Various reports are also showing that there is a sharp escalation in human trafficking incidents in India because of this pandemic called COVID-19. West Bengal is no exception here. COVID -19 and its associated lockdown have been adversely affecting the economic condition of the whole nation including West Bengal. But the condition of West Bengal is further complicated by a Super Cyclone called Amphan which hit south Bengal in May, 2020 and caused massive destruction ravaging both the lives and ecosystems of some districts of West Bengal<sup>xviii</sup>. Among the worst hit areas the condition of Sundarbans, which falls under both North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas, is very critical. According to the reports of UNICEF, Amphan adversely affected the lives of approximately 40 million children in South Bengal itself (Sadhu et al., 2020).<sup>xix</sup> Growing trend of reverse migration, loss of income and livelihood are the consequences of Lockdown and Amphan. And these socio-economic and ecological conditions have given rise in numbers of people especially children, adolescent girls and women being trafficked.

**Causes of Human Trafficking in India and Particularly in West Bengal:** The issue of human trafficking is deep-seated, complicated and diverse. A number of factors influence human trafficking. There are several push and pull factors behind human trafficking in India. According to the Cambridge dictionary, a push factor is “something that makes people want to leave a place or escape from a particular situation” (Jacques, 2021).<sup>xx</sup> Because of these factors people desperately try to leave or run away from their current condition or location and they become prey in the hands of the traffickers. Poverty, economic hardships, lack of education, low status of women, gender inequality, lack of employment opportunities, domestic violence, conflict, war, natural disasters are normally considered as push factors behind migration and human trafficking.<sup>xxi</sup>

It has been found that there are certain pull factors also which are responsible for migration and human trafficking. A pull factor is normally described as “something that attracts people to a place or an activity (Jacques, 2021).”<sup>xxii</sup> Traffickers use the pull factors to attract the people towards them with false promises. Better employment opportunities, economic stability and improved living conditions are considered as the pull factors which attract the people towards trafficking destinations.

In West Bengal during the lockdown period because of COVID-19 pandemic and in the aftermath of the super cyclone Amphan, in May, 2020 there has been a sharp increase in the number of human trafficking incidences and the data published by various governmental agencies like NCRB are showing only the small portion of a deep rooted problem. This present condition of West Bengal clearly hints to the fact that the situation can be very serious. Socio- political and economic factors have changed a lot in the aftermath of lockdown and Amphan. Already people of West Bengal were facing economic hardships like other states of India due to COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to that, super cyclone Amphan has made the lives of the people of South Bengal especially Sundarbans miserable. As a result of weak economic conditions, the families are either engaging their children, especially girls, in labour works which are very often exploitative in nature or the poor families are selling off their adolescent girls in the façade of marriages. Even the members of administration like the police are busy responding to the pandemic. Educational institutions like schools, Anganwadi Centres are closed because of this pandemic. Because of this Children and adolescent boys and girls are out of school. They are not getting mid-day meals also. Consequently they are exposed to various exploitative work offers. Many families are trying to relieve their financial burden by marrying their girl children and there is a close connection between child marriage and human trafficking. Child marriage is regarded by the traffickers as one of the easiest modes to move the girl children from one place to other. Normally, under the veil of fake marriages abduction or kidnapping of a girl takes place and later she is sold and resold to the operators of sex trade.

**Measures to Prevent and Abolish Human Trafficking:** The practice of human trafficking particularly trafficking of women and children is not at all a new phenomenon. Trafficking is a serious crime against women and girl children. But combined efforts specifically to

abolish or at least reduce human trafficking did not emerge until the mid-90s of the last century.

To stop trafficking, Indian government has taken various constitutional and legal steps but in spite of so many efforts on the part of the government, trafficking still remains a threat to human rights in India.

Many of the current policies regarding human trafficking in India carry colonial legacy. In the book called 'Slavery, Abolitionism and Empire in India, 1772-1843', Andrea Major (2012) analysed the fact that the officials of British East India Company opposed slave-trafficking because it not only undermined the control of the Company over subject populations of their colonies but also threatened to remove the inhabitants from their territories and disrupt peasant society. The author has found that the British East India Company always disapproved chattel slavery as practised in the West Indies, but interfered in its own territories only when enslavement threatened their colonial stability.<sup>xxiii</sup> But, according to many scholars, the shocking part of India's colonial past is that during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, various European trading companies and private entrepreneurs acquired, owned, and trafficked Indian slaves. This slave trafficking actually played a very important role in the development of British colonial societies in the various part of the world particularly in the Indian Ocean region. One group of historians argues that the British East India Company was an early exponent of abolitionism in the Indian sub-continent. But their argument was vehemently challenged by revisionist scholars such as Indrani Chatterjee. Their main argument supporting their stand was that the East India Company actually did nothing to abolish Indian slavery. They even claim that the Company resisted attempts to implement measures against it.

The act of human trafficking was described by colonial regimes as the act of abduction and transport of girl children, adolescent girls and women for prostitution (Irwin, 1996).<sup>xxiv</sup> But the problem with this definition is that it actually had mistaken human trafficking as prostitution.

The main focus of human trafficking interventions by the colonial rulers in India was on criminalisation of sex work. And their perspective also got support from Indian nationalists, who later favoured laws reflecting similar views through the introduction of various legislations such as the Madras Hindu Religious Endowments (Amendment) Act of 1929 (Sreenivas, 2011)<sup>xxv</sup> and The Suppression of Immoral Traffic Acts (SITA) during the 1920s and 1930s (Legg, 2014).<sup>xxvi</sup> Even Gandhiji had the view that sex workers had no place in the society. Indian Contagious Disease Act of 1868 made it compulsory for the sex workers to register themselves. Not only that, sex workers were asked to stop their work for an indefinite period in the name of prevention of contagious disease failing which they were punished. Unfortunately, in India during the colonial period neither the government nor the nationalists tried to solve the problems of the victims of sex trafficking, they were only interested to make the lives of trafficking victims more miserable by introducing several



measures against their profession. But there was no initiative to combat slave trafficking and no one was interested for the rehabilitation of the trafficking victims.

Since independence Indian state has been taking various positive steps to prevent human trafficking. Trafficking is totally illegal in India. There are some Articles in the Indian Constitution which directly or indirectly deal with trafficking. Article 23 of Part III of Indian Constitution clearly prohibits trafficking in human beings and forced labour. On the other hand, Articles 39 (e) and 39 (f) indirectly disapprove trafficking in persons. Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act was passed in 1956 to stop immoral trafficking and prostitution in India and it extends to the whole of India. This Act punishes the people involved in trafficking of women, adolescent girls and children for commercial sexual exploitation.

The Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018 was passed in the Lok Sabha, but lapsed as it could not be introduced in the Rajya Sabha before the 2019 union elections. The Bill tried to introduce time-bound trials of trafficking cases, deportation of survivors and execution of those who promote or try to help trafficking. It also aims to make the identity of the survivors, witnesses and complainants confidential. What is required from any Act on human trafficking is that it must establish a strong legal, economic and social environment against human trafficking which will help in adopting a survivor-centric approach.

In the recent past, the Ministry of Women and Child Development issued a draft anti-trafficking Bill. This Bill is popularly called the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2021. After the final settlement, the bill will need the cabinet acceptance and assent from both the houses of Parliament to ultimately become a Law.

Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code (henceforth, IPC) makes trafficking offenses illegal. According to IPC, trafficking involves any type of exploitation that includes any act of physical exploitation or any form of sexual exploitation, slavery or practices similar to slavery, and servitude. But this law did not specifically address the issue of labor trafficking.<sup>xxvii</sup> The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 which is popularly known as Nirbhaya Act has come into force and as a result of it Article 370 of IPC has been replaced by Article 370A which comes up with all-inclusive measures to combat the problem of trafficking.

Apart from it, Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976, Child labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, Juvenile Justice Act, 2000, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 directly or indirectly deal with the problem of human trafficking.

Keeping in mind the popularity of online platforms, government launched a website on anti- human trafficking in February, 2014. This is required for sharing information among all the parties concerned in cases of human trafficking.<sup>xxviii</sup>

In India government is also implementing Ujjawala scheme. The objective of this scheme is to prohibit trafficking. At the same time this scheme is trying to rescue, rehabilitate and reintegrate the victims of the trafficking cases.

According to the '2021 Trafficking in Persons Report', considering the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on its anti-trafficking measures, Indian government has increased its anti-trafficking endeavour to a great extent.<sup>xxix</sup>

For strengthening the law enforcement response against human trafficking Women Safety Division of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs issued an advisory on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2020 to give advice to all states and Union Territories (UTs) for the urgent establishment of new Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs), and upgrade infrastructure in existing ones. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, AHTUs are integrated task forces to prohibit and fight human trafficking. These forces comprise of a group of trained police personnel who must be sensitive also. The members of Women and Child Welfare Department and other relevant departments must also be included in this project. Not only that, government is releasing funds to the states and union territories for that purpose. Government has also taken a decision to set up AHTUs in all districts of the country. Indian government has also decided to set up AHTUs under the border guarding forces such as Border Security Force in border areas to control and stop cross-border trafficking especially across the borders of eastern India. To establish new AHTUs and to improve the old ones, rupees hundred crore were allocated from the Nirbhaya Fund to all the states and union territories.<sup>xxx</sup>

Apart from establishing Anti Human Trafficking Units, Government has also taken many other important steps. To prevent abduction and trafficking what is primarily needed is an effective coordination among the parties concerned. That is why central government has given necessary directions to the states to evolve a coordination mechanism among the government departments which deal with the trafficking cases. Central government has also advised the states that this kind of coordination mechanism should be monitored and supervised at the highest level of the state administration.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Indian government has been taking various steps to combat trafficking in persons. But it is not possible for the government alone to stop human trafficking. Every corner of the society has to be active and alert. People from all walks of the society should be involved in the anti-trafficking activities. That is why government thinks that generation of awareness at all levels should be encouraged. Only alert and active citizenry can become a very helpful weapon against human trafficking especially exploitation of women and children. Therefore, it is the advice of the central government that district administration of all the states must spread awareness at all levels of the society. This is the age of digitalisation. Therefore, it is very much advisable that all the states and Union Territories of India must generate awareness among people by all means of communication and digital mediums should be used for this purpose.<sup>xxxii</sup> Public and safety awareness campaigns must be organised on a regular basis especially in the vulnerable areas jointly with administration and civil society. Voluntary groups and non- governmental organisations must also be

involved in this task. Local governments, both rural and urban, can play an important role here. Local governments are grass root level organisations and they can be very effective to generate awareness among local communities and help local law enforcement agencies in the identification, tracing, recovery and rehabilitation of missing people and victims of trafficking.<sup>xxxiii</sup> It has been advised by the government that local governments such as panchayats and municipalities can maintain a registrar of complete information of the people living and moving in their localities.

The Ministry of Home Affairs set up Anti-Trafficking Nodal Cell in 2006. This Cell was built up to function as a centre point for communicating various decisions and follow up the actions which are being taken by the State Governments to combat human trafficking.

Human trafficking particularly trafficking of women and children is a big challenge to the empowerment of women. On the other hand, empowerment of women can definitely lessen the possibility of trafficking because self-reliant and empowered women naturally have more control over their choices and more options for their future. Keeping this aspect in mind Indian governments have been taking many steps to empower this marginalised section of the society. In the area of women's empowerment the Ministry of Women and Child Development has been carrying out many policies and programmes to build up the capacity of roughly half of the population, i.e., the women. The initiative on the part of the state starts from early childhood of the girl. It comprises nutrition, health, adolescent girls' schemes, human resource development etc.

There are many programmes initiated by the Government of India and the State Governments. One such Programme was Adolescent Girls Scheme introduced during 1991-92 as a special intervention in the Integrated Child Development Services scheme. In the year 1999 Government revised and renamed this Scheme as Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY). Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls was launched by the Planning Commission in 2002-03. Under this Project Adolescent Girls (age group 11-19 years) were the beneficiaries irrespective of their financial status. Another programme is known as SWAWLAMBAN. Originally the vocational training named NORAD (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) was launched during 1982-83 with the assistance from the Norwegian Agency for international development. The main target of the scheme was to provide vocational training to the poor and needy women so that they can become self-reliant. But from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006 Government of India withdrew this scheme. However, in the state of West Bengal government is continuing this scheme. All the training projects are being implemented in joint collaboration with the reputed Non-Governmental Organisations. After the training is over, the trainees are given assistance for employment or self-employment. SWAYAMSIDHA was another integrated women empowerment programme, aimed at empowering the under privileged women of the rural areas by forming Self-Help Groups (SGHs). But now Government has withdrawn this scheme.

Another centrally sponsored scheme under the Ministry of Women and Child Development is SABLA. The literal meaning of 'SABLA' is strong woman and through this scheme government wants to make adolescent girls strong and empowered. The objective of this Scheme is the total development of girls in the age group of 11-18 years by making them self-reliant and empowered through various interventions such as nutrition, health, education, vocational training etc.

Government of West Bengal has started an exclusive empowerment programme for the adolescent girls called Kanyashree. The purpose of this state sponsored programme is to stop child marriage and to encourage education of the girl children. This is a conditional cash transfer scheme the aim of which is the boosting of the status and well-being of the girl child in West Bengal and delaying the age of marriage. Child marriage is very much prevalent in West Bengal which is a very complex issue. On the one hand, child marriage is certainly a big obstacle to women's empowerment as it directly negates gender and child rights. On the other hand, child marriage is one of the simplest ways used by the traffickers to move the girl children or the adolescent girls from one place to another. Therefore, to stop girl child trafficking in West Bengal child marriage should be prevented and keeping this objective in mind West Bengal government has introduced a state sponsored Programme in the name and style of 'Kanyashree' where support is provided to the adolescent girls in the form of cash. In West Bengal SABLA and Kanyashree Prakalpa are state's flagship schemes for adolescent girls. These two schemes are working hand in hand—while out-of-school girls are motivated to go back to school and are assisted through the Kanyashree benefits, girls already in education and receiving the benefits of Kanyashree scheme are brought under the SABLA scheme.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

But government cannot combat trafficking in persons single handedly. Everybody associated with this issue has to remember the fact that trafficking is not only an issue of law enforcement but also of the society as a whole and civil society needs to take it much more seriously.

**Findings:** Human trafficking particularly trafficking of women and children has really become a problem all over the world because of its cross-border nature. India and her neighbours are no exception in this regard. India has actually become a hub of human trafficking and sex trade and West Bengal is one of the worst sufferer-states of India mostly because of geo-political reasons. Trafficking of women and children can be curbed if the state takes special measures to combat this heinous crime on the one hand and empower the vulnerable sections of the society on the other hand.

**Limitations:** In spite of various efforts by states, voluntary organisations and international communities, human trafficking is still an obstacle to human security. More efforts are needed in this regard from every corner of the society including international cooperation.

**Conclusion:** In spite of so many steps taken by the Indian governments, anti-trafficking efforts, especially against bonded labor and sexual trade, remained insufficient in India. It has been found that anti-trafficking preventative measures vary from state to state. Some

state governments are efficiently trying to combat trafficking by effectively implementing anti trafficking Acts, conducting awareness programmes and undertaking several empowerment programmes. But, even today the efforts of some states are not very impressive. India has anti-trafficking Acts but reintroduction of a survivor-friendly anti-human trafficking Act is the need of the hour. A report of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons recommends that in this pandemic situation India must increase investigations, prosecutions and convictions of all forms of trafficking, including bonded labour.<sup>xxxv</sup> According to many reports, the government carried out very few convictions of the traffickers and the acquittal rate for traffickers remained high at 73 percent.<sup>xxxvi</sup> We have to consider the fact that trafficking is a cross- border global organised crime for which it becomes difficult on the part of one state to convict and arrest the traffickers. Therefore, international cooperation is very much needed to combat human trafficking and to rehabilitate the victims. The rights and freedom of the trafficked persons are always breached. Therefore, without combatting this crime, human security cannot be established. Then global cooperation is needed to make the world free from this horrific crime. On the one hand the individuals should be made aware of human trafficking and the media, local bodies, voluntary organisations, experts and Self- Help Groups should be effectively involved in the awareness campaign. The democratic processes and structures must also tirelessly work in favour of a trafficking free society. Finally it can be said that fighting trafficking related crimes require not only state intervention but an all- embracing and ceaseless effort on the part of all concerned.

**Footnote:**

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/human-trafficking>

<sup>ii</sup> Dr. Mahbub ul Haq first drew global attention to the concept of human security in the United Nations Development Programme's 1994 Human Development Report and sought to influence the UN's 1995 World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen.

<sup>iii</sup> UNODC. Annex II: The definition of trafficking in persons and the mandate for the Global Report [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/Annex\\_II\\_-\\_Definition\\_and\\_mandate.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/Annex_II_-_Definition_and_mandate.pdf).

<sup>iv</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Human Trafficking FAQs.

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<sup>vi</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slave\\_Trade\\_Act\\_1807](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slave_Trade_Act_1807)

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<sup>xi</sup> <https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/BMIntro-1011.pdf>

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