

An Anthropological Study on New Lifestyle of Trafficked Females: The Case of Bangladesh

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Abstract

Human Trafficking includes the transportation of persons for the aim of labor or services (or matrimony) for different forceful activities, a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. Women and children - especially female children - are most vulnerable; as are rural-urban migrants and indigenous people. Different causes lay at the source of this high-profit, low penalty business. Trafficking occurs not only internally in Bangladesh but also foreign destinations like India, Pakistan, Europe, America, and other parts of the planet. No exact figures are available thanks to the variability and therefore the nature of this criminal business. Although both the Bangladeshi government and other national and international organizations try to combat this inhuman business, the progress rate is nearly insignificant. At present, the Rohingya people also are affected. Like other social scientists, anthropologists try to specialize in the trafficking phenomena through in-depth and holistic perspectives wherein particular the cultural factors of trafficked persons are studied. An effort has been made in this article to explain the new lifestyle of trafficked females in/from Bangladesh. The paper follows an anthropological perspective and, although a spread of things is taken under consideration, it's perhaps not as comprehensive as it should be.

Keywords: Human trafficking, lifestyle, human rights, slavery

Introduction

Human trafficking is connected with the global village and particularly the flesh trade in the world. Trafficking may be a phenomenon affecting mankind from the earliest civilizations (Ali S. et al 2001). Human trafficking may be a growing business in South Asia generally and Bangladesh especially. Bangladesh is a crucial source and transit point for human trafficking, where women and children are the worst victims and the most vulnerable (News Report 2017). An alarming trend has been found in

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the trafficking of indigenous and Rohingya women and children particularly have been spotted in Bangladesh (Hoque 2017). Men, women, and child trafficking occur internally and externally within Bangladesh and to India, Pakistan, Malaysia, and many Arab countries respectively. Such heinous activity is increasing day by day (Hoque 2010) – a consequence of social and economic vulnerabilities among Bangladesh's citizenry (Hoque 2017). Trafficking became a critical social problem that increases social insecurity. Each year several hundred children, male and feminine are trafficked from Bangladesh. Victims of human trafficking are forcefully coping with a different lifestyle, which is not similar to their previous lifestyle. A new lifestyle with a different personality is found among the victims of human trafficking. Indeed, an effort has been made in this article to explain the new lifestyle of trafficked females in/from Bangladesh.

Theoretical issue and Methodology

The author emphasized the collection and analysis of field data rather than theoretical analysis in this article where different other secondary sources were also been used. Unstructured interviewing was conducted of a few rescued female victims of human trafficking in Dhaka and three case studies were analyzed here based on anthropological and qualitative research insights to explain the new lifestyle of trafficked females. Previous references to the author's published research work on human trafficking have also been utilized in this text.

Human trafficking and its trend: Bangladesh scenario

Human trafficking, in general, is not equally important to most people, in comparison to rape, murder or any other criminal activity in Bangladesh. Sometimes NGOs, media and government agencies focus on this criminal activity. In the context of Bangladesh, the BNWLA (Bangladesh National Woman Lawyers Association) adopted the definition of the Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women, so that it could be applied to situations involving both women and children. According to the BNWLA,

Trafficking includes all acts concerned with the transport of a girl (or child) inside countries and across national borders for work or services (or marriage) by suggestion or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominant position, debt bondage, deception or other forms of coercion (The Lawyers and Jurists 2013).

According to Shamim (2001)'trafficking' could also be defined as

‘All acts involved in kidnapping, abduction, capture, acquisition, recruitment, and transportation of women, girls, and children within and across national borders with the intent to sell, exchange or use of any illegal purpose such as commercial sex work, servitude in the guise of marriage, cheap or bonded labor or sale of human organs using the threat of violence.’

Anthropologically speaking, human trafficking is everywhere in every culture and no state is free from the effects of it (Rahman et al 2004). Bangladesh is one of the easily accessed countries for human traffickers where land, sea, sky all routes are used for human trafficking internally and externally. The history of human trafficking from Bangladesh goes back to the early 50s since the camel race and "jockey" were popular within the Middle East (Rahman et al 2004). Bangladeshi men, women and children are being trafficked to Asia, Europe and Africa for different exploitative and abusive purposes. It is not easy to understand the real picture of human trafficking. There are no exact statistics on internal and external cases of human trafficking in Bangladesh. The following Table no. 1 reveals that a total of 5,315 males, 1,638 females, and 835 children were trafficking victims from 2013 up to June 2018 in Bangladesh. Moreover, a total of 6106 persons were arrested and 21 were convicted during the same period.

Table 1: Number of Persons trafficked, arrested & convicted

Period	Male	Female	Child	No of Persons Arrested	No of Persons Convicted
2013	916	319	118	233	
2014	2316	354	236	807	13
2015	1218	327	188	1540	4
2016	365	283	122	1361	3
2017	382	259	129	1594	1
2018 (Up to June)	118	96	42	571	
Total	5315	1638	835	6106	21

Table 1(Mahmud T. et al: 2018)

The table shows that there is an unstable control over trafficking issues – a hint as to why it flourishes so well in the country.

Bangladesh is one of the important hubs for human traffickers connecting South Asia to the Gulf and Europe (Amin 2019). Prevention and

Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (PSHTA) 2012 were introduced by the government of Bangladesh, which was reformulated in 2017 but the tribunal has not been established yet (Amin 2019). Since the introduction of the PSHTA, 4152 trafficking cases have been lodged (Mahmud et al: 2018), which indicates the low conviction rate of trafficking cases in Bangladesh. According to media analysis of police knowledge, 0.4 percent was the government's conviction rate for trafficking crimes underneath the PSHTA from 2013-2019. According to the US trafficking in persons Report 2019, Bangladesh has received a low ranking (Tier 2 watch list) for the last three consecutive years (United States Department of State Publication: 2019).

It is important to mention that no exact data was found on missing children in police stations. These missing children who are not rescued may have been trafficked. Recently 37 Rohingyas were subjected to trafficking internally in Bangladesh. Some traffickers were arrested to exploit Rohingya refugees, although the government did not report the specific numbers of arrested traffickers (United States Department of State: 2018).

Case Study 1

Roksana (pseudo name), a 19 years old girl lived in a small village situated in Rangpur. There was hardly such a beautiful girl like her in the village. She studied up to class five in her village school but failed to continue study due to poverty. Her father was a hawker and was unable to feed her family members properly. Once she made her mind to make a dress from her village tailor. She went to the tailor and ordered a dress. When the tailor took her figure measurement to make the dress, he found her very attractive. The tailor worked as an informer of traffickers in Roksana's village and found her a perfect girl to trap for trafficking. He sent all the descriptions of Roksana to the main trafficker and they planned to make a trap for her. Generally, the tailoring cost of making the dress was around 700 takas in the village but the tailor gave her a 400-taka discount, which made Roksana very happy. But she didn't think critically and failed to realize the bad intention behind the discount.

The trafficker was very interested when he heard about the economic condition of the girl is not that good and she looks very pretty. He sent a young and handsome boy to the village to impress Roksana. The boy was introduced by the tailor with Roksana. The boy Md Selim (pseudo name) was very decent to her. He used to send gifts to Roksana which made her happy and made her more attracted to Selim. At one stage of the

relationship, Selim proposed to Roksana for marriage, and she was unable to reject Selim as she already had started to like him. She introduced him before her family members. After someday, the boy married Roksana and left the village for Dhaka. They stayed a few days in Dhaka and then Selim took Roksana to Kolkata, India in the name of honeymoon, where he started to treat her badly. One day Selim left her alone in the hotel room. Actually, he sold Roksana to a human trafficker, who was the owner of a brothel. He started to use her in prostitution. When Roksana denied doing this, she got brutally beaten and was forced to do sex works. By not finding any other way, she had to accept the situation. She tried to escape from the place several times but did not get success. But somehow one day of three months staying, she succeeded to escape from the brothel with the help of a Bangladeshi woman, who was also involved in the flesh trade in Kolkata. That woman told Roksana to call her 'didi' (elder sister) and assured her to send her back to her village. Didi took Roksana to her place for three weeks where she also used Roksana several times for sex work for earning a good amount of money. The woman gave Roksana a colorful band to wear in the left hand which was mainly for identification.

Roksana started to live better than her previous days with Didi. She used to visit clients' flats as a Hindu. Muslim woman and dressed herself according to the client's religion. She was served good clothes, food and allowed to watch television during her staying of three weeks. She did not take any money from Didi for her services to the clients. Didi arranged everything to cross the border after three weeks according to her words but Roksana was caught and rescued by the Border Guards of Bangladesh and handed over to an NGO (non-governmental organization).

Case Study 2

Sharmila Thakur (anonym), 20 years girl from Tangail, was the sole hope for the family where her two younger sisters and mother were dependent on her. Her father died when she was twelve years old. She completed a diploma from a Nursing Institute in Dhaka and did work as a nurse. Besides, she did tuition and her mother worked as a seamstress for living assistance. She was looking good, taller, and beautiful. One of her male relatives Mr. Monog has long persuaded her and her family to send her abroad as a health worker. Although they disagreed initially, later decided to send the girl abroad for economic reasons. The relative made a passport for Sharmila at his own expense and made a paper for her as a fake foreign health worker. Monog bears five lakh takas to complete the entire process with the condition that Sharmila will refund the amount after getting her

salary and will send her to Delhi, India first and said she would fly Dubai from Delhi with other Indian health workers.

After being taken to Delhi, Sharmila told her mother on the first day that she was fine. Sharmila met several other girls in Delhi and after eight to ten days, she was started treated differently by Monog and one day afternoon was forced to have sex with a male guest in the house. When she disagreed, they beat her and forced her to drink wine and cigarettes. Monog sent a bloody picture to Sharmila's mother and told her over the mobile phone that her daughter would be killed if she did not send 5 lakh takas. Mother then sold her one-pieces of land and sent four lakh takas to one of the acquainted of Monog. But Monog did not release Sharmila and shifted her from the previous house to another in Delhi. He engaged her in a massage parlor where she was escorted daily by the people of Monog. Sharmila became frustrated and habituated to taking alcohol and drugs and without any other options, she adopted to have sex with clients when she saw that it helps her earn money. She started living a miserable life, and the use of alcohol, costly cosmetics for face makeup led to a new lifestyle that became an integral part of her life. Eventually, she became an active member of the traffickers. She started to find beautiful, helpless girls from Bangladesh and follow the same mode of procurements for girl trafficking as Monog. She was arrested by the police for human trafficking in Bangladesh after seven years of her trafficked life.

Case Study 3

Rini (pseudo name), a 16 years old girl, was born and raised in a poor family in a village in Narayanganj near Dhaka. Her father used to work in a factory in the town of Narayanganj. Some time ago, he had an accident and his right hand was cut off in a machine at that factory. From that day on he was unemployed at home. Although some money was paid for his treatment by the owner it was not enough. Her mother used to work in 4 houses in the vicinity to support the family. However, Rini started to find a job so that her family can be helped and she can continue her studies. Rini had good results, but the money she had to carry for higher education was not possible for her. Almost everyone knew about the financial hardships of Rini's family. One day Sohel (pseudo name), brother of Rimi (pseudo name), a good friend of Rini, came to Rini's house and asked her for scholarships and jobs. Through Sohel, Rini learned that if she could go abroad, her fortunes would change. It may be possible to get a job and study together. Within a month, Rini came closer to Sohel and started to trust her as a life partner. Sohel managed Rini to fly to Dubai after a few

days of their relationship. Rini was just told that Sohel's friend would help her to emigrate abroad. Whatever, Rini came to an unknown place with an unknown person. She was first taken to a house, given food, and then given some luxurious clothes. And she was told that she had to stand in a line. She did not agree and began to force. During this time, she was severely beaten and forcibly intoxicated. Eventually, Rini was forced to stand in a line. After a while, a man came and took Rini to a room where she was severely tortured. In this state of intoxication, Rini had to stand in a line and had sex with new people every day. Even she had to serve drinks. One day Rini decided that she would not be stuck in this way. She had to get rid of them somehow. That day she did not drug and started acting like an addict. After someday, she met a Bangladeshi girl who was very friendly to her and that girl suggested Rini accept this life. She also had no other way and started to adapt to the new life as she used to get enough money from this profession. At one stage, she started to contact her family in Bangladesh and sent money to her family members. Her family members became very happy to receive money each month. However, Rini became a popular and trustworthy name in this business. She asked her boss to visit her family and they also allowed her to go. Returning home, everyone was very happy in her family. But after someday, somehow the villagers got informed about her profession. Everybody got shocked and started to address her '*nosta*' (polluted/used). Her family members stop talking with her. Villagers behave rudely with her brothers. Even people denied praying together with her brother in the same Mosque. When she went to the police station for help, a police officer approached her negatively and asked for sexual favors and bribes. She started to feel helpless. By not finding any other way, she decided to go back to Dubai to her old profession but was caught by airport police and handed over to a Dhaka based NGO (non-governmental organization) on the way to returning to Dubai.

Discussion: New lifestyle of trafficked females

Victims of human trafficking do not want to disclose the trafficked life and also do not want to return home. That is why it is tough to perceive the emerging new lifestyle of trafficked persons. An attempt has been made to understand the new lifestyle of trafficked females in the following section.

Trafficked females are identified by new names at the beginning of this criminal activity. They begin to live in exotic distant sites with foreign inheritances and language inability. They assume said new languages and gradually disregard their motherly language. They forcefully get training by

the traffickers on the way to act within the new context and start life without understanding much (Hoque 2010).

It is evident from the case studies that the trafficked females are abused both physically and sexually at the first stage of their new life. Traffickers use this technique to make the trafficked females more loyal and ensure their submission before the traffickers. Trafficked persons are for selling and buying like commodities. Trafficked females who are engaged in forceful prostitution and also the children are treated as personal property and sex objects or display items respectively.

Age, beauty and perceived desirability of the victims are the criteria for fixing rates of trafficked females. The rate starts from 5000 takas up to 1 lac taka for a day. The traffickers arrange to auction of the trafficked females in a secure place. They contact the procurers over the mobile phone through using different sims. They have a pre-understanding before the auction starts. The pimps of the traffickers show the faces of the trafficked females before the procurers one after another and say they are physically fit, can walk and work, able to make the buyers sexual satisfaction. The pimps show the females' faces from different angles and use obscene language and pinch the flesh during the auction (Shamim 2001). On the other hand, the traffickers separate some selected trafficked girls for the wealthy buyers, who are given the chance to examine the women individually. Those girls go to hotels, apartments according to the will of wealthy buyers with the escort of traffickers. Traffickers also keep some trafficked girls for permanent sale to some buyers who are looking for wife-cum-slaves.

The trafficked females are used as sex workers, domestic servants, actresses, models, bar attendants under the supervision of the leaders of human traffickers who are addressed as 'boss', '*sarder*' (male leader), '*sarderni*' (women leader), '*didi*'/ '*apa*' (sister), '*masi*' (Aunt), '*madam*'. They are also forced to work in café, hotels, and massage parlors. Trafficked women are often used for organ trading and begging. The leaders of trafficked females change frequently. Trafficked females are forced to wear *burka* (purda) and short clothes, to have different hairstyles and to use cosmetics for beautification depending on working engagement. They became alcoholics and were also forced to use a special band or *tabiz* (talisman) around their necks or on their arms for easy identification. Trafficked victims have no 'choice' in their trafficked life and unsafe labor division is found among them (Hoque 2010).

Trafficked females are not bothered about religion. They change and prepare themselves according to the new culture, custom and traffickers will. The environment compels them to forget their original culture, values and lifestyles. The trafficked females recall their kins sometimes but do not get interested to contact with them. They make new relationships and kins within their trafficked circle, with whom they share pains and sorrows. They receive a new place to live in though most of the time it is dirty and unhygienic. Traffickers change the living places of the trafficked females frequently for their safety. Human traffickers provide food, clothes and shelter to the trafficked females to keep alive them for earn money.

According to Hoque (2010), trafficked females are treated as a money-maker by the traffickers. Traffickers are often mixed drugs with food to feel the victims dozy. A victim who works as a commercial sex worker likes to eat pickles which keep them free from vomiting and keeps them healthy. When trafficked females adapt to the traffickers and start to earn well, they are treated as more valuable to the traffickers than the primary days of the trafficked life. This adaptation changes their status in their new life and gives them bargaining power. But it is also found that they are oftentimes beaten and the reality is their luck depends on the buyer what if they will well behave or not.

Trafficked females generally sleep during the day, except for females who work in the sex industry. Watching movies and TV series is usually a free activity. Denying the thrill of childhood spends most of the time silently crying. The use of various vulgar words is a very common practice among trafficked females. There is a symbolic interaction among the close of the trafficked females. In their everyday life, constant threats, fraud, deception, or coercion are common.

Traffickers insist that female children and women marry unknown persons several times. Trafficked victims get so-called husbands through contract marriages, who are the buyers or pimps of human traffickers.

The traffickers do not provide profit to the trafficked females at the beginning. It happens when an understanding starts to exist between the traffickers and the trafficked females. Some of the trafficked females become happy to receive three meals each day, shelter and clothes although they are forced to work against their will. The income of trafficked females provides profit to the owners and also to them. When some of the trafficked females achieve the traffickers trust, then they receive permission to contact family members and also to send money to the families. The

trafficked females who used to start contacting family and send money, never disclose the pains of their trafficked life to the families.

Trafficked females have no social, economic security. They have no access to education and health services. They have restrictions on free movements. The trafficked females cannot lodge complaints; moreover, they have experiences of physical and sexual torture in law enforcement custody. They are asked for bribes and sexual favor, too. The trafficked females go through such humiliation and brutality in their trafficked life. Traffickers make passports for the trafficked females to cross the border but never hand over the passports to the trafficked females. The victims cannot prove their nationality for not having any legal documents which makes them criminals in the eyes of law enforcement agencies and fall into unsafe custody (Shamim 2001).

Fear of physical punishment for the trafficked females or their families, owing money to the trafficker, distrust of law enforcement officers, or feeling that they have no other options makes obstacles to escape from human traffickers. Traffickers torture severely if they find any attempt to escape from the traffickers. Traffickers never leave hope to return a trafficked female who managed to flee from their escort.

When the human traffickers exploit women, the females lose the possibility of returning to their families as well as have to adjust to a new life. This patriarchal society treated the exploited females as *nosta* (polluted). Society, a family does not accept and listen to them although some of them try to return to their previous normal life and also to warn the other vulnerable women. But such approaches from family and society make hindrances for them, which makes them more vulnerable and fear, shame altogether compels them to be muted in the case of sharing the experiences and untold stories of trafficked life (Rahman et al 2004).

From the above-mentioned evidence of the new lifestyle of trafficked females, it can be concluded that victims of human trafficking fall under an existential crisis and begin thinking that their lives bear no coherent values. Traffickers' purposive exploitation makes victims' life miserable, they lost faith in everything and the exploitation put them in a new chain of relationship which compels them to become exploiters, too. Needless to say, the cruelty of ancient slavery is found in the lifestyle of trafficked females, which can be termed as modern-day slavery (The Daily Star 2006).

Conclusion

Poverty and hunger, the patriarchal orientation in Bangladesh society, subordination of women, stigmatized societal culture, misinterpretation of religion, the sexual harassment of women, urbanization, the culture of capitalism, multiple and complex family functions, the ambitious mentality of family members, climate change, corruption of different professionals, lack of housing and proper education, tourism industry and sex trade and many other issues create vulnerability of people especially the females of Bangladesh and causes human trafficking, which is increasing day by day. The high demand for trafficked people is one of the important causes for the existence of trafficking within Bangladesh and the present world. The Bangladeshi government alongside other national and international organizations tries to eliminate this inhuman activity but anthropologically speaking, this organized, profitable human trafficking is mainly increasing thanks to the culture of capitalism wherein people are treated as 'Commodities' instead of 'Humans'. The new lifestyle of trafficked females indicates that it is almost like the brutal culture of slavery. It is often stated that the prevailing culture of human trafficking is crueler than ancient slavery practices.

Like many other social scientists, anthropologists are now concerned about the matter of human trafficking which varies across cultures and countries. It is urgently needed to focus on the root causes of this problem wherein the 'demand' side of trafficking should be analyzed through in-depth and holistic mechanisms. Cooperation between large and small states so on provides support for improving the standard of human lives and saving humanity from this brutal human trafficking is not sufficient. The actual cultural factors of the lifestyle of trafficked females should be considered when combating this heinous challenge.

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