

Dalit Freedom Network

The following articles were taken from the Dalit Freedom Network website and can be found at www.dalitnetwork.org.

Childhood Lost

Child trafficking is the recruitment, transport, transfer or receipt of a child for exploitation. The International Labour Organization estimates that globally, 1.2 million children are trafficked each year. The US State Department ranks countries by how they adhere to anti-human trafficking laws. They are categorised as Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 2 watchlist, Tier 3 and Special Case, with Tier 1 as the best ranking. India falls in Tier 2, which means it does not completely adhere to the minimum standards but is making significant efforts to change the situation.

The main reason for child trafficking is poverty. With industrialization, the loss of traditional means of livelihood in rural areas forced people to migrate to cities for work. This leads to exploitation of children for commercial sex and cheap labour.

The belts of exploitation

India is a source, route of transit and destination for trafficked women and girls. Interstate trafficking accounts for 89 per cent of trafficking in India. Bihar, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh procure the largest number of minor girls. The biggest buyers of minors are West Bengal and Maharashtra. Punjab and Haryana are popular for 'arranged' marriages.

Pre-pubertal girls from scheduled castes are dedicated to different deities for religious prostitution. After living a few years with priests, they are sold to traffickers. Their market value falls after puberty. This is mostly practised in Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

Sex tourism is the exploitation of young boys and girls, especially street children, by international and Indian tourists. It is prevalent in the Agra-Delhi-Jaipur belt, as well as south and south-west India—Goa, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Orissa. Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan are emerging as destinations. Sex tourism is facilitated by travel agencies, tour operators and hotels. Reports indicate that young boys are brought from Gulf countries to south India for prostitution.

- Dalit freedom groups claim most of those trafficked for sex are Dalits.
- About 10 per cent of the trafficked children come from neighbouring countries, including Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan.
- Nepalese insurgents are reportedly trafficking girls to Indian brothels.
- A recent study by California-based NGO Not For Sale says that up to 95 per cent of female victims in rehabilitation programmes in New Delhi are not given education, life skills or job training, forcing many into their original state of vulnerability.
- About 15 per cent of commercial sex workers in India are below 15 and 25 per cent are between 15 and 18.
- Delhi-based NGO Shakti Vahini says that every year thousands of girls in north India are sold for involuntary marriage.
- Anti-poverty agency ActionAid says victims of the Uttarakhand floods last year are especially vulnerable to trafficking because of mass displacement and loss of livelihood.
- About \$19 billion is generated worldwide through child trafficking annually.

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