

“SWAYANGSIDDHA”

A Measure to Combat Women Trafficking in South Asia

An Initiative of West Bengal Police

By

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Globally, Human Trafficking especially women trafficking has remained a major problem and is considered to be a crime. The main purpose behind women trafficking has conventionally been sex slavery, forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Women trafficking has not only remained confined within a particular nation but has been a transnational problem which has taken the shape of an International crime today. Human Trafficking has been recognized as a violation of human rights under International law. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Human Trafficking is the acquisition of people by improper means such as force, fraud and deceptions in order to exploit them.

Coming on to the problem of human trafficking in South Asia, it is a well-known fact that this regions is prone to such problem apart from other transnational crimes like drug trafficking, illegal arms trade etc. If we look at the borders in South Asia, major portion of the International borders are porous in this region, apart from that there are other factors which make the borders more vulnerable when it comes to the question of human trafficking and most of these factors are socio-economic factors. Apart from India, Bangladesh and Nepal are two other countries which are vulnerable in terms of Human Trafficking, a term that may be used as a synonym of prostitution, especially when we talk about trafficking in South Asia as studies reveal that 90% of the cases of trafficking ultimately results in sex slavery and prostitution.

Taking these basic facts into account, this paper will focus on the problem of women trafficking in the district of South 24 Parganas in West Bengal and will essentially focus on the “Swayangsiddha Initiative” by the South 24 Parganas District Police.

South 24 Parganas is the largest district in West Bengal and the sixth most populous district in India. On one side the district borders itself with the urban metropolitan city of Kolkata and on the other side it divides itself into the islands of the Sunderban Delta. This district of Bengal suffers from some serious socio economic problem. This district has a good number of Muslim population, apart from being economically backward mainly dependent on agriculture and to some extent engaged in fishing, the population cannot afford proper educational facilities for their children. Due to orthodox religious beliefs and lack of education, observations reveal that this Muslim population is unable to adopt a proper family planning. The increasing number of heads in a single family not only creates economic pressures but also results in space problems as a result the couples in the family lacks privacy which ultimately exposes the children to sexual intercourse at a very young age. This is the dark reality in most of the families and especially found in remote villages of the district. After day long work in the field and fishing the only

mode of relaxation and refreshment for the male population is to get sexually intimate with the female counter part. Facing this as the reality of life the children grows up in such environment. Lacking basic education and awareness, the male members of the societies starts to view the females as an instrument to fulfill their sexual needs.

On the contrary the females in the society lacks sex education, in many cases the girl child is not sent to schools and in most cases the only objective of life for the girls is to get married and serve their husband. In the background of ignorance which they face from early childhood, these girls easily build utopian ideas regarding relationships and families as a result it becomes easier for the male members to mold them. These girls being emotionally weak often run away with their so called boyfriends with dreams of having a happy family and then turn up in brothels and pros quarters or else they hold the hands of their husbands who marries them giving false commitments and with high expectations from their husbands these women acts according to the orders of their husbands and finally finds them nowhere as these men in order to get money sells them to the traffickers and brothels. The social backwardness and poverty thereby shows no respect to the women folk and thus the innocent girls becomes the prey of sex slavery and prostitution. Child marriages is also facilitating trafficking. Presenting themselves as eligible bachelors, the traffickers take advantage of marriages to trade girls. Due to socio-economic backwardness the parents often tries to shrug off the responsibility of their daughters who have not yet attained adulthood. After getting married these girls often find themselves into brothels and flesh trade. Not only through marriages and relationships but also through the promises of secured jobs and better futures, the traffickers try to get hold of young girls. Investigations have shown that the traffickers uses some kind of drug to hypnotize the girls, it is found that after consuming this drug the person does not lose his or her consciousness but starts to act according to the trafficker for at least 24 hours and when she gets back her consciousness she finds herself in vulnerable conditions. In most of the cases the traffickers sell these girls in Delhi, Pune, Mumbai and other cities and then later on are trafficked outside India.

In such social circumstances the Additional Superintendent of Police (WEST) South 24 Parganas Shri Chandra Sekhor Bardhan came forward with his eagerness, enthusiasms and responsibility to save the girls and women from the hands of these traffickers. South 24 Parganas being the hub of trafficking business in India is extremely dangerous for the women and female members of the society. Mr. Bardhan decided to take up a comprehensive action when a case was launched in Magrahat police station about a missing girl and in the month of February, 2016 with the help of Delhi Police and a Delhi based NGO, this girl from Magrahat was rescued in a condition where 25 liters of Puss was extracted from her body and was diagnosed with HIV Positive. At this point of time the Mr. Chandra Sekhor Bardhan decided to deal with the problem and there by designed the “Swayangsiddha” initiative. At the very beginning the initiative was fabricated for a small area but in the course of time with its growing magnitude, the entire police network of the district of South 24 Parganas decided to take up this initiative upon their shoulders and work hand in hand to save the women folk of the entire district. Today this initiative taken up by Mr. Bardhan is subjected to appreciation and other districts of Bengal is thinking of taking up this initiative to combat trafficking.

Swayangsiddha is a Sanskrit word that means a woman who is self-reliant and independent and the path finder of the society. Thus Swayangsiddha initiative stands with the visionary circle of acceptance and recognition of freedom of the women folk. This brainchild of Shri Chandra Sekhor Bardhan (Additional Superintendent of Police- South 24 Parganas) is a preventive initiative and thus is an answer to one of the most heinous interstate and transnational organized crime that is Human Trafficking especially sex trade and also a preventive measure against Child marriage. The main objective of this initiative is to aware and alert the women and children of the society about Human Trafficking and also prepare them to defend themselves physically and mentally. The most unique feature is that this initiative has been taken by the police and so through this initiative the police will be able to reach out directly to the public including students. The presence of police will not only open a new dimension of police-public relation but will also create a huge impact as the village folk will feel much more secured in dealing such an issue. The awareness will ultimately enable the society and the community to protect the female members from getting trafficked for sexual purposes and to embrace the survivor with love and grace and to cooperate with her life in reshaping for better future. The police-public contact will thus make possible the smooth exchange of information regarding missing girls, women, children and traffickers which is otherwise not always possible in conservative village societies.

The Swayangsiddha initiative will reach to the following groups simultaneously to spread awareness:

Children

Parents and relatives

Society (including the local governing bodies)

The law implementing agencies

The women and children are recognized as the primary target groups of the traffickers so they are also the primary target groups of Swayangsiddha and there by the battle will be fought at the primary level.

The core concept of this initiative as envisioned by Mr. Bardhan is to create strong fences of knowledge and awareness about traffickers and the ways of trafficking amongst each and every children and women so that the traffickers finds it impossible to penetrate through these fences.

In 2016 up to the month of June a total of 3026 people from this district was missing that includes 152 minor males, 868 adult males, 485 minor females and 1521 adult females. On the contrary a total 2321 people were rescued that includes 90 minor males, 717 adult males, 345 minor females and 1167 adult females. In the year 2015, 4423 people were missing from South 24 Parganas and only 3977 people were rescued and recovered. The data of consecutive two years show that the primary target group of the traffickers is the adult females thus the data in itself shows the need and validity of the Swayangsiddha initiative in order to deal with the problem of trafficking in South 24 Parganas.

As stated by Shi Chandra Sekhor Bardhan the South 24 Parganas District police have selected the schools as the best place to start the campaigning program. They have targeted 1077 schools spread across 310 Gram Panchayets and 162 wards in the district. Apart from schools and the

administrative units the police have also targeted the Railway Stations, Bus Stops etc. The cooperation from Registered Non-Governmental Organizations have also been sought in above units for the task of sensitization.

According to Mr. Bardhan's statement the Swayangsiddha initiative has taken up certain activities in order to spread the awareness about traffickers and the methods of trafficking amongst women, girls as well as amongst the young boys. He said that the campaigners are using short stories and videos to attract the young minds. They are also using coordination mechanism with police stations, head of the educational institutions for smooth and timely exchange of information. Committee of students on anti-human trafficking and child marriage in schools and colleges are being encouraged. The schools have been asked to introduce the practice of delivering Speech by Students on the negative impacts of Trafficking and forced marriages. According to Mr. Bardhan the Swayangsiddha Initiative shall also inculcate sense of accountability among the VLCP (Village Level Child Protection Committees) and the BLCP (Block Level Child Protection Committee). Necessary cooperation shall be sought from Asha workers, Anganwari Workers, CDPOs, SI and DI of schools, BDOs, SDOs etc. The Swayangsiddha initiative have also decided to use audio visual Medias those which are popular in distant villages to spread the messages of Swayangsiddha. Swayangsiddha initiative also includes sensitization of police forces and rehabilitation of the victims of trafficking who have been rescued and also those vulnerable children and women who are the soft targets of the traffickers. Mr. Bardhan also stated that the "Kanyashree Prakalpo" taken up by the present government in West Bengal has proved to one of the finest schemes in regards to female education in Bengal which has encouraged millions of girls to attend school thus The "Swayangsiddha Initiative" can only facilitate the Kanyashree Prakalpo just with a different angle.

Women Trafficking in India has become an issue of serious concern. As I have already discussed that this is a transnational crime, and the rate of this crime in India is increasing surprisingly. When a district of Bengal ranks the highest in India, it seriously draws the attention of the administration and the government. And in such a circumstance when initiatives like "Swayangsiddha" comes from the police which is first of its kind, then such initiatives develops a global reach. The response of this initiative has already drawn the attention of national and global media. Thus it is clear that such an initiative in this part of the world is going to prove itself as a comprehensive and a candid response to the problem of trafficking and in the course of time will be successful in uprooting the problem of trafficking and child marriage by creating a fence of knowledge. The Jadavpur Association of International Relations is planning to deal with the theoretical part of his project.

