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### **Bio**

Dr. Sonia Jayant is working as Assistant Professor in Department of Humanities, CCSIT TMU. She has attained her doctoral degree from Lucknow University. She has eight years of experience in teaching and administration. Her area of research is Queer theory and she strongly supports the rights of Transgenders. She has to her credit, a national webinar, a national symposium, and one national and one international conference.

### **Abstract**

Human trafficking is a problem that has left not even a single nation untouched. Though it is not a new issue, human trafficking was not dealt seriously until the last two decades. Countries around the globe have now started to seriously address the issue with legislation. Like many other social problems, human trafficking has always been subject to a problem framing process. Social problems like human trafficking undergo a problem framing process to encourage specific interpretations of issues.

Raising public awareness is an integral step in addressing any social problem. In that regard, the growth in public knowledge of human trafficking is a positive development. However, important questions persist: now that more people are aware of human trafficking, what do they know about the issue? And where did they learn that information?

Literature is a representation of life and the mirror of the society; the representation of the traffickers' actions in literature is therefore to evoke and reinvigorate its confrontation from people all over the world.

Keywords: Exploitation, Coercion, Labour, Smuggling

### **Human Trafficking: Issue Addressed through Portrayal in films**

Human trafficking is the trade of humans for the purpose of forced labour, sexual slavery, or commercial sexual exploitation for the trafficker or others. It may include providing a spouse for a forced marriage, or the extraction of organs or tissues. It may also include trafficking for surrogacy and ova removal. Human trafficking can occur within a country or trans-nationally. Human trafficking is a crime against the person because it violates the victim's rights of movement through coercion and because of their commercial exploitation. Human trafficking is the trade of people, especially women and children, and does not necessarily involve the movement of the person from one place to another.

People smuggling is a related practice which is characterized by the consent of the person being smuggled. Smuggling situations can descend into human trafficking through coercion and exploitation. Trafficked people are held against their will through acts of coercion, and forced to work for or provide services to the trafficker or others.

Human trafficking, also known as trafficking in persons, is a crime that involves compelling or coercing a person to provide labour or services, or to engage in commercial sex acts. The coercion can be subtle or overt, physical or psychological. Exploitation of a minor for commercial sex is human trafficking, regardless of whether any form of force, fraud, or coercion was used.

There is no single profile of a trafficking victim. Victims of human trafficking can be anyone—regardless of race, colour, national origin, disability, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, education level, or citizenship status. But as is the case in many crimes of exploitation and abuse, human traffickers often prey upon members of marginalized communities and other vulnerable individuals, including children in the child welfare system or children who have been involved in the juvenile justice system; runaway and homeless youth; unaccompanied children; persons who do not have lawful immigration status in the United States; Black people and other people of colour; American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and other indigenous people of North America; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) individuals; migrant labourers; persons with disabilities; and individuals with substance use disorder.

Although there is no defining characteristic that all human trafficking victims share, traffickers around the world frequently prey on individuals whose vulnerabilities, including

poverty, limited English proficiency, or lack of lawful immigration status, are exacerbated by lack of stable, safe housing, and limited economic and educational opportunities. Trafficking victims are deceived by false promises of love, a good job, or a stable life and are lured or forced into situations where they are made to work under deplorable conditions with little or no pay.

Victims can be found in legal and illegal labour industries, including child care, elder care, the drug trade, massage parlours, nail and hair salons, restaurants, hotels, factories, and farms. In some cases, victims are hidden behind doors in domestic servitude in a home. Others are in plain view, interact with people on a daily basis, and are forced to work under extreme circumstances in exotic dance clubs, factories, or restaurants. Victims can be exploited for commercial sex in numerous contexts, including on the street, in illicit massage parlours, cantinas, brothels, or through escort services and online advertising. Just as there is no one type of trafficking victim, perpetrators of this crime also vary. Traffickers can be foreign nationals or, family members, partners, acquaintances, and strangers. They can act alone or as part of an organized criminal enterprise. People often incorrectly assume that all traffickers are males; however, the United States has prosecuted cases against women traffickers. Traffickers can be pimps, gang members, diplomats, business owners, labour brokers, and farm, factory, and company owners.

Over the past fifteen years, human trafficking has emerged as one of the great human rights causes of our time. In that regard, the growth in public knowledge of human trafficking is a positive development. However, important questions persist: now that more people are aware of human trafficking, what do they know about the issue? And where did they learn that information? As with other violent crime, only a fraction of the population has any personal experience with human trafficking—which encompasses specified acts taken to exploit another person through prostitution . . . or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. Few individuals have met and talked with a survivor of human trafficking, at least not knowingly. A moderately bigger group, but still small percentage of the population, has attended conferences or other programs on human trafficking during which a survivor has discussed his or her experiences, but very few individuals have sat with survivors and listened to their perspectives. That is not the only way to learn about human trafficking, of course, but it is also true that not many people take the time to read and analyse existing

scholarly literature and research on human trafficking. Most of the public—including many individuals now working on anti-trafficking initiatives—garners much of what they know about human trafficking from media portrayals of the issue.

This is no different than any other issue, and even the savviest among us believes more from the media than we discard. Given, the influence of popular media its construct of human trafficking merits greater attention and analysis. Such closer examination matters not only to media specialists but also to researchers and advocates who focus on law and policy. Popular portrayals of human trafficking influence the prevailing understanding of human trafficking that, in turn, informs policy choices made to address the problem. If popular portrayals misrepresent the issue or overlook certain types of trafficking, a range of potential problems can result, including under-enforcement in certain areas, failure to identify victims, and insufficient resources to address the issue.

In this essay, I aim to draw attention to these popular portrayals of human trafficking and their potential impact on our responses to the problem. The essay focuses in particular on film, as movies can play a significant role in bringing hidden issues to light and raising public awareness. And human trafficking is becoming a popular subject for the movie industry. In this on-going interplay between law and culture, mass media including television, film, and the Internet collectively represent a powerful form of cultural expression. Films convey ideas about both culture and the law. Nicole Rafter explains that movies “never simply tell a story but, through the choices they make . . . also convey ideological assumptions about what is and what is not important.” However, it is not simply that films reflect ideologies that exist in society. Movies also contribute sometimes at a subconscious level to popular beliefs about criminal activity and other legal issues. With increasing coverage of human trafficking on television and a growing number of movies on human trafficking, media portrayals of this grave violation of human rights inevitably will shape and have shaped popular perceptions and policy debates. As with other criminal activity, the current media construct of human trafficking provides the public with an explanation of the problem what harms occur, who is responsible, and how we should respond. These cinematic and television portrayals of human trafficking help direct concerned citizens to focus on the aspects of the problem that are highlighted, as they are reported. Public pressure then brought to bear on policymakers to address human trafficking is based on these constructs of the problem. In this way, these popular portrayals of human trafficking can and do influence law and policy on the issue.

Given the “feedback loop” that exists between culture and law and the role that cultural imagery, including film, plays in shaping prevailing societal views, it is critical to appreciate how these popular portrayals influence understanding of and responses to human trafficking.

As the issue of human trafficking has garnered increasing attention in recent years, so have depictions of it on the big screen. The narrative of trafficking has the perfect makings of a movie: traffickers make quintessential villains, as they lure and kidnap their victims and trap them into the seedy web of exploitation. Then there are the victims, usually young girls who need rescuing. In comes the hero, to rescue the girl from the clutches of the trafficker and save the day.

Over a century has passed since the beginning of moving images and the world’s love of movies doesn’t cease. Mainstream Hollywood movies dominate the global industry: films are ingrained in our everyday culture and have greatly impacted each generation, influencing the way we view the world around us. Despite a growing body of research about the framing of human trafficking in print media, little is known about whether the portrayal of trafficking is the same or different in other forms of media such as films like *Taken*. The few studies that do examine framing of human trafficking in film are qualitative assessments that concentrate on only one or two select major films. There seems to be a global misconception that cinema is all about masala movies and raunchy item numbers. This fact is far from reality. Indeed, the Hindi film industry routinely produces exceptional films that shed light on many prevalent social issues like human trafficking and prostitution. Films like *B.A. Pass*, *Chameli*, and *Love Sonia* are fine examples of such films. The recent release *Gangubai Kathiawadi*, also highlighted the plight of a young woman trafficked and forced into prostitution.

*Bazaar* is a hindi language drama film that revolves around the tragic lives of young girls who are sold to affluent Indians in the Gulf by their needy parents. It beautifully depicts the hardships they face at such a tender age, that too, at the hands of their own family.

Based on true events, *Lakshmi* is a 13-year-old girl who is kidnapped and forced into prostitution. Despite being repeatedly assaulted and treated inhumanely, she somehow manages to survive with the help of other girls like her. She also shows immense courage against all odds.

*Mardaani* is a fictional Hindi language action thriller that revolves around Shivani Shivaji Roy, Senior Inspector of Mumbai Police. She sets out on a mission to catch hold of the mastermind child trafficking mafia, who has kidnapped and smuggled a teenage girl close to her. A cat and mouse chase ensues between Shivani and the mafia kingpin, leading to her unveiling some sinister truths.

*Love Sonia* is a drama film that exposes the horrors of human trafficking. It follows the moving tale of Sonia, whose debt-ridden father sells her sister for a paltry sum of money. This urges Sonia to set out on a journey to rescue her sister. But her life takes an unfortunate turn when she finds herself trapped in the monstrous world of flesh trade. From the many films that come out of India, there have been few which have had a universal appeal. One such film seems to be '*Love Sonia*' which deals with the dark reality of human trafficking. The film follows the story of two village sister Sonia played by Mrunal Thakur and Preeti played by Riya Sisodiya. Due to some reason, Preeti is sold off by her family into the world of prostitution. Sonia, unable to handle the plight of her sister, sets out on a journey to find her and bring her home. This takes her to Mumbai where she meets people of all kinds- prostitutes, pimps, criminals, social workers and journalists, each trying their best to get something out of her.

Filmmaker Prerana Agarwal delves into serious themes like child labour and child trafficking in her directorial debut, *Sold*. The film, based on real incidents, is disturbing, but allows the core message to come across. *Sold* revolves around Raghu (Deepam Kohli), who is forced to resign from his regular job to join his family's illegal business of child trafficking. His father, Lal Singh (Hanumanthe Gowda), gives him a task to abduct a child, Rashmi (Shivani Ballakuraya), and strike a deal with a Sheikh. Ruchita (Kavya Shetty), an investigative journalist, gets to hear the news and sets out to find the missing child. Ruchita takes the help of Siddharth (Danish Sait), a cop, and her husband with whom she is not on good terms. She pulls all strings to crack down and destroy all those behind the misery of the missing child. With *Sold*, Prerana Agarwal joins the band of filmmakers who highlight sensitive topics in their works. The background score elevates the cat-and-mouse narrative that revolves around the journalist, gangsters, and the child.

While Kavya Shetty has played her part well, Deepam Kohli, also the producer, has showcased the dilemma of a son, who is caught in the clutches of his father and is forced to put his own life at stake. We also have an earnest performance by Shivani Ballakuraya, who holds her own in a film that has noteworthy performances by Siddhtakesarth

Madhyamika, Bhavani Prakash, Hanumanthe Gowda, and Danish Sait. *Sold* is definitely a grim tale but it is a reality that should not, and more importantly, cannot be ignored.

Pakhi is yet another Hindi language crime drama based on actual events. It chronicles the story of Pakhi, a 10-year-old who finds herself in the den of prostitution. What follows is her journey of coming out of the cruel tethers of modern slavery.

These movies hold significance because they bring to light prominent issue of human trafficking. The films highlighted in this paper both reflect and reinforce many of the prevailing understandings of human trafficking. All of these films are part of the feedback loop between law and culture. Films and popular media that present skewed or incomplete conceptions of human trafficking reinforce a particular construct of human trafficking that then serves as the basis for action to address human trafficking. Legislative action occurs when there is a critical mass of support for a response to a social problem. The problems with that process is that if the popular portrayals are wrong, or privilege certain stories over others, then legislative action will fall short of aiding all individuals at risk of or harmed by trafficking. Film and television can be powerful tools for education, but it is important to ensure they are used effectively. Researchers and advocates can utilize human trafficking films to create a more inclusive discourse on the realities of human trafficking and what is needed for a comprehensive response to the problem. Equally important, we must ensure that the attention brought to the issue does not create false impressions about the problem that might prove harmful to the very individuals we aim to assist. Educating the public on the reality of human trafficking and its attendant forms of exploitation and ensuring policymakers are presented with and act upon evidencebased research on the issue is no easy task. But preventing human trafficking is not easy, only essential.

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