

Violence, unfreedoms, marginalization and gaps in anti-trafficking governance in India

“I see them [the anti-traffickers] as worse than dalals [pimps]”

Abstract

This dissertation critically examines existing anti-trafficking governance and practices in India. Contrary to current policy in India, it prioritises the position, experiences, demands, and agency of marginalized individuals and communities who are targeted by anti-trafficking interventions. Much focus of public and scholarly debate around anti-trafficking governance is on sex work. In contrast, participants in this study work in the sex and construction industries. This addresses research gaps, enables a comparative analysis, and ultimately seeks to contribute to greater epistemic, and social justice for people and communities who are overwhelmed or marginalised in the course of anti-trafficking interventions.

This dissertation looks into the role of intersecting social, political and economic power relations- in anti-trafficking governance in India. It employs a feminist research methodology to study the following research questions:

- i. How have historical, social, political and economic factors shaped anti-trafficking governance in India?
- ii. How do urban subalterns in India experience, understand, and respond to contemporary anti-trafficking governance?

Different dimensions of these guiding questions are critically examined in the analytical chapters of this dissertation. Through a literature review, chapter 3 looks into the past and analyses how anti-trafficking policies in colonial India were historically shaped, how it is influenced by the social hierarchies such as caste and patriarchy, what were and what are the interests and implications of the anti-trafficking reforms and governance, in the past and as well as in the present. Focusing on the intertwined relationship between brahmanical patriarchy, colonial patriarchy and dalit patriarchy, the chapter analyses the impact of multiple patriarchies on the policies surrounding and lives of marginalized individuals such as sex workers, minorities and migrants. Chapter 4 also addresses the first research question by looking into how the social, political, economic factors determine constraints and restrictions that marginalised populations face in urban India, and how they result in unfree and dismal working and living conditions within the context of anti-trafficking governance.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on aspects aligned with this dissertation’s second research question. Chapter 5 examines the practices of anti-trafficking governance at the local level. It underscores how the affected communities and individuals experience and respond to these practices. This way, Chapter 5 delves deep into the formation of ‘street level governance’ arrangements and understands how a range of governing actors influence, and shape policies and practices of anti-trafficking governance at the local level. Through the narratives of research participants, the chapter explores the ways in which local actors, including the sex worker community, govern and respond to human trafficking in urban sex work neighbourhoods and the outcomes this produces. Chapter 6 looks into how the individuals

navigate the personal struggles and situations that arise from a complicated social, political, and economic nexus of anti-trafficking governance and the marginalisations it creates. Benefiting from Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of mestiza consciousness, the chapter examines how participants construe their consciousness, what thoughts prevail in their innermost consciousness, and how they cope with obstacles and marginalization in their own (limited yet liberating) ways. This way, it looks for answers to the second main question of this dissertation. This dissertation contends that anti-trafficking governance policies and practices in India failed to deliver epistemic and social justice to the targeted individuals. Instead, it results in further marginalization in a way that locates such individuals at the susceptible margin of the society. The research participants' experiences and perspectives reflect shifts from one situation to another or being placed in two – contradictory - contexts simultaneously: They live the life of a victim (of patriarchies/socio-structural repressions) and parallelly exert agency by living something else: a challenging hybrid identity. Therefore, it is inadequate to read the identity of participants, such as migrant sex workers, through the binary lens of victim versus non-victim. In the concluding chapter, this dissertation recommends amendments to current anti-trafficking policies in a way that deliver epistemic and social justice, based on a prioritisation of the perspective of targeted individuals.