

## **GIRL TRAFFICKING FROM NEPAL TO INDIA**

The scale of girl trafficking in this country is alarming. There are several reasons. First, the efforts to check it have been constrained by social taboos. Secondly, the government has done nothing substantial to address the girl trafficking yet, though it has set up a national task force against this malpractice. It is estimated that over 7000 girls, between the ages of 10-16, are trafficked each year from Nepal to India. Thirdly, the rampant poverty, coupled with the low status of women in the patriarchal society and unemployment, has made the illiterate and innocent Nepali girls vulnerable to trafficking.

Girls are considered an additional economic burden to our society. They have limited access to education and health care. They are more susceptible to malnutrition, poverty and illiteracy. Most girls, who have been trafficked, are found to be poor and illiterate.

Prostitution in this country is an illegal affair. Traffickers take innocent and illiterate girls to major Indian cities to work at brothels. After working at the brothels, the majority of girls fall prey to HIV/AIDS. The recent trend shows that the fear of AIDS has increased the demand for young Nepali minors. The younger girls--aged 8-12 years--are being forced into trafficking.

Another factor for the growing demand for younger girls is the prevalent myth: Men believe that younger girls will cure them of sexually transmitted diseases. The problem does not end there. The open border system between Nepal and India is another major problem that makes trafficking an easy game. It is unfortunate that neither India nor Nepal has taken the rising cross-border trafficking seriously.

It is also true that domestic law against trafficking has been weakly enforced. The national task force formed after women activists raised the issue of trafficking has held some talks with India, and nothing beyond. It has not been able to reverse the trend of girl trafficking. The non-governmental organizations have addressed the problem of girl trafficking but they face several constraints when it comes to legal matters.

The police, who should have cooperated with the NGOs, have taken girl trafficking incidents lightly. The courts of law backfired on those who had sought action. However, law alone may not find a permanent solution to this complicated problem that involves the two neighbors. The open border system has helped the girl trafficking business a lot. Nepal alone cannot prevent it unless India joins hands to come up with strong measures against this crime.