

Humanitarian Trafficking

Violence of Rescue and (Mis)calculation of Rehabilitation

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Why would women “rescued” from the sex trade riot against their rescuers? Sex workers in Hyderabad often experience rescue as a form of humanitarian violence befitting the United Nation’s definition of trafficking. Anti-trafficking laws in India reinforce kinship structures that precipitate the need to participate in sex work. Moreover, without restructuring the wider political economy of female labour, rehabilitation efforts fail to address sex workers’ economic needs. Those rescued almost inevitably choose to return to sex work. Anti-trafficking programmes do violence to sex workers while failing to offer them adequate alternatives.

In 2011, deep in Hyderabad’s Old City, a riot broke out inside a shelter for victims of human trafficking. Around 30 women housed there revolted against the shelter’s staff. They beat the guards, took over the locked building, and broke the furniture. It took days of intense negotiation by the staff from the main office to wrest back control of the home. Three years later, women in another shelter outside the city also rioted (Krishnan 2014). Out of the approximately 300 women housed there, 137 fought against the shelter staff. They caused over ₹5 lakh of damage to the property and injured four staff members before the police arrived to quell the revolt.

News outlets in various parts of the nation have reported that women labelled as victims of trafficking have fled from the rescue shelters housing them (compare with Ramachandran 2014). Gretchen Soderlund (2005) chronicles an almost identical dynamic in Thailand. In one instance reported by the *Times of India* (2013), 25 women escaped from a government-run shelter in Hyderabad and were later tracked by the police; the article refers throughout to the escapees as “victims” who previously had been “rescued.”

Why would victims of trafficking turn against their rescuers? When human trafficking has been deemed a “plague on humanity” by Pope Francis (*Vatican Radio* 2015) and “a debasement of our common humanity” by Barack Obama (2012), why would those rescued from its grip turn to violence or flee from the homes sheltering them?

Critics have long pointed out problems endemic to many anti-trafficking initiatives. As early as 1981, feminists brought a petition against the state of Uttar Pradesh demanding an inquiry into the “appalling conditions” in which women retained for rehabilitation from prostitution were kept (Pearson 1999). Mandeep Dhaliwal (1997) notes that women sent to shelters lose all personal privacy. A K Jayasree (2004: 63) writes of “scarcity of space and lack of cleanliness, not enough food or health care” within some shelters. Even where material conditions are adequate or even exceptional, anti-trafficking initiatives subvert women’s agency by denying them the right to self-determination and mobility (Bandyopadhyay 2008; Jana et al 2002; Jayasree 2004). Aziza Ahmed and Meena Seshu (2012) report that in addition to the physical violence police mete out to sex workers when they remove them from their places of work, the subsequent period of rehabilitation greatly disrupts their lives. Vibhuti Ramachandran (2015) notes that, once retained, some women may be kept in shelters almost indefinitely while their “freedom becomes a casualty of the entwined projects of protectionism and reform.”

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Ultimately, it is the assault against women's self-determination that leads them to riot, escape, and even attempt suicide (Jana et al 2002) in protest against anti-trafficking programmes.

News of the detrimental impacts of anti-trafficking programmes in India and elsewhere appears not to have reached donors who continue to fund these modes of humanitarian aid. In Hyderabad, for example, where I conducted my research, the United States consulate is the latest in a long line of powerful international and transnational entities to provide direct support to local anti-trafficking organisations (Hindu 2016).

Echoing the findings of Barnali Das in this issue, Hyderabad sex workers who have been the targets of these programmes charge (ironically) that they amount to another form of trafficking, what I term here "humanitarian trafficking." Elizabeth Bernstein (2012) has similarly analysed anti-trafficking efforts as a mode of "carceral feminism." Paul Amar (2013) further suggests that transnational anti-trafficking initiatives resonate with the broader trend of "militarised humanitarianism" that has increasingly come to characterise contemporary biopolitics.

While chronicling the violence of anti-trafficking efforts in Hyderabad, I make two larger arguments. First, I suggest that anti-trafficking programmes act to reinforce existing class structures. Rather than freeing women from what the movement calls "modern-day slavery," rehabilitation programmes in Hyderabad instead return women to the very labour relations that initially make sex work financially exigent.

Second, I argue that anti-trafficking legislation and programmes in India seek to reinscribe patriarchal relations by treating women as legitimately subject to kin. Anti-trafficking efforts are designed to reincorporate "wayward women" (Wardlow 2006) within the same structures of gendered kinship that initially left them vulnerable to entering the sex trade. For, as Gowri Vijayakumar (2015: 9) notes, "sex work becomes a necessary extension of marriage" as capitalist patriarchy fails to provide the "means for basic survival." By reinforcing these kin relations, rehabilitation programmes in practice return women to commercial sex, but only after damaging their reputations among their relatives and communities.

Thus, to the extent that rescue and rehabilitation programmes succeed, they do violence to women's economic and social prospects while dressed in a discourse of human rights and the war against "modern-day slavery."

Research Methods

Anti-trafficking organisations in Hyderabad continue to circulate statements such as "in India alone, over 200,000 women and children are inducted into the flesh trade every year" and "one of every four victims rescued from prostitution is a child" without providing sources for these alarming claims (Prajwala nd). Yet, in 2005, Kamala Kempadoo wrote that there was "scant evidence or substantiation about trafficking practices" (2005a: vii). Since then, Kay Warren (2010), Ronald Weitzer (2011, 2014), Sheldon X Zhang (2009), and Zhang, Rodrigo Pacheco-Mcevoy and Roxanna Campos (2012) have all noted that no methodologically rigorous studies from any country have yet shown large numbers of trafficked women and children. The ease with which

unexplained numbers are generated and propagated as objective facts (what Denise Brennan [2014] calls "zombie data") underscores the value of rich qualitative data drawing from the lives of women who have experienced anti-trafficking measures.

I began conducting ethnographic fieldwork among women sex workers in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh in 2009. I collected the majority of the data presented here in 2012–13 in Hyderabad through semi-structured interviews in Telugu with over 123 female sex workers. Participants were selected randomly from the membership rolls of the largest sex worker organisation in the city, Chaithanya Mahila Mandali (CMM). At the time, 10 of these women had experienced rescue and rehabilitation efforts. I also conducted semi-structured interviews in English with over 30 employees of organisations established to intervene among sex workers. Both sets of interviews were conducted in the offices of NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs). During 2012–13, I also recorded field notes as a participant observer among sex workers from CMM and four other CBOs in a variety of settings, both public and private. In July 2016, I conducted a focus group at CMM with women on whom anti-trafficking programmes, which have continued to expand in the city, have had an impact. Thus, these findings are the result of a mixed methods approach drawing from seven years of research.

Definitions and Debates

The member states of the United Nations met in Palermo, Italy in December 2000 to sign three protocols related to transnational organised crime. The first of these was the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. The definition it offers for trafficking has become the standard:

"Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. (United Nations 2000: Article 3, paragraph a)

The Palermo protocol's definition has been famously troublesome for its use in analysing patterns of labour and migration, because the term "exploitation" is vague and malleable (Brennan 2014; Kotiswaran 2011; Parreñas 2011; Martinez 2014; Shah 2014). "Forced labour" can be as expansive and slippery a term as "exploitation," given the state of labour relations and the global distribution of wealth under late capitalism, where so few people in the world are free to make unfettered decisions about their means of earning money. But, the protocol specifies that exploitation is, at a minimum, prostitution, forced labour or services, slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs. Because prostitution is listed as one of the basic forms of exploitation, the Palermo protocol has contributed to the blurring of distinctions between sex work (the exchange of sexual services for money) and trafficking (forcible transport and control of another person for gain). It marks any arrangement (however consensual) involving both the movement of bodies and transactional sex as "trafficking" and, thereby, reinvigorates a much older discourse of prostitution as slavery (see Geraldine Forbes in this issue).

Jo Doezeema (2005) notes that the Palermo protocol's failure to definitively differentiate sex work from trafficking stemmed from the successful lobbying of a group of feminists (often called neo-abolitionists) who believe that consent is meaningless in the context of commercial sex and that, therefore, all prostitution by definition constitutes sexual exploitation. The Palermo protocol subtly forwards the neo-abolitionist position within the long-standing dispute between feminists on the status of commercial sex without explicitly demanding the criminalisation of all paid sex.¹

Sex Work, Caste and Class

One facet of the feminist divide over the status of commercial sex that is specific to Indian discussions is the question of the relationship of sex work to caste. Sujata Gothoskar and Apoorva Kaiwar report that "Dalit and Bahujan feminists in India look at sex work as oppression of lower caste women by upper caste men, and feel that by supporting sex work, feminists are supporting the perpetuation of caste oppressions" (2014: 59; compare with Vijayakumar et al [2015]). Such a formulation seemingly reifies a singular "Dalit position," implying that Dalit feminists and other Dalit activists cannot or do not hold multiple, contrasting views of sex work. Lucinda Ramberg (2014) combats the notion of a monolithic Dalit perspective on sex work in a highly nuanced analysis of Dalit devadasi practices.

Empirically, it is unclear whether there is evidence for the claim that Dalit women across India are more likely to engage in sex work than women from other communities. In addition to my own Hyderabad sample, two other studies offer insights. None of the three were drawn from population-based samples, and therefore none can be considered definitively representative.

The first pan-India survey of sex workers found that about 26% of their female respondents came from Dalit backgrounds, which is not markedly divergent from Dalit numbers in the general population (Sahni and Shankar 2011).

By contrast, Rakhi Dandona et al (2006) found Dalit women in 13 districts of Andhra Pradesh engaged in sex work at about twice their rate in the general population.

My smaller sample in Hyderabad rendered a similar picture. Women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were over-represented at 35.63% compared to 23% in the general population in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh (Suri 2002). While this finding may support the claim that Adivasi and Dalit women participate in sex work disproportionately, the relationship between caste and sex work becomes more complicated upon closer analysis. Women from forward castes constituted 36.78% of the sample, but only about 32% of the state's population, while women from backward castes constituted only 20.69% of the sample compared to 35%–40% of the state's population (Suri 2002). If these numbers are representative of the larger population, sex work in Hyderabad does not operate as a straightforward instantiation of upper-caste oppression of lower-caste women, as some have discussed (Gothoskar and Kaiwar 2014; Vijayakumar et al 2015). By the Hyderabad sex workers' own accounts, financial calculations distinct from the effects of caste drove their decisions to begin selling sex. The exceptions were a small fraction of *kalavanthulu* (devadasi) women in the sample who inherited their occupations.

On the one hand, it can be argued that until women across castes are economically equal, sex work will remain a Dalit issue. On the other, caste privilege does not keep women who find themselves in financial need from entering sex work. For this reason, sex work is probably more precisely analysed in terms of gendered class than that of gendered caste.

Shrenika's Story: Rescue as Fraud

As noted above, the Palermo protocol denotes three aspects of trafficking: transportation, force or fraud, and exploitation. Surprisingly, this formulation mirrors stories that Hyderabad sex workers recounted of their "rescue" by the police and their non-governmental organisation (NGO) collaborators.

Shrenika is one such sex worker.² She worked for herself and earned enough to live independently. One night in 2008, when Shrenika was soliciting customers at the Secunderabad train station, staff from an anti-trafficking NGO arrived, forced her and other sex workers into vehicles and drove them to the police station. There, the NGO staff showed them a video explaining commercial sexual exploitation. Shrenika told me:

The film showed how the clients and brokers harass and kill the sex workers, how the police send them to the jail, how the women are being abducted from their families, why the women should not become sex workers, and so on. With all that information, they have indirectly brainwashed me. In fact, by watching that film, automatically our mind will change. We start to think, 'Yes, we do not want this kind of life. Let us go for other options.'

The NGO's video resonated with Shrenika's own ambivalence about sex work. She had entered this work out of financial necessity. The film invited her to imagine herself otherwise: marked for transformation and shielded from the hazards of her daily work and the shame that accompanied her present life. The film's offer of humanitarian intervention provided Shrenika an opportunity to fantasise a new life for herself. The NGO employees promised Shrenika an eventual job with a monthly salary of ₹4,500. She felt that the salary was insufficient to survive, but thought it might allow her some partial stability. The NGO staff assured her that she would be able to leave if she did not like the programme: "They said, 'You better come with us first. You can stay there if you like the place. If not, you can go away.'"

When they took her to the shelter, however, Shrenika began to realise her mistake. Her initial indication came when the NGO staff accompanying her required her to hand over her cell-phone, purse and money, all of her jewellery, and her clothes, in exchange for a uniform. Inside the shelter, more warning signs appeared. Shrenika said, "The atmosphere there was completely chaotic. All shouting and screaming. I thought, 'Why did I come here?'" The two women who had convinced her to accompany them handed her over to a warden and left. "They did not tell me anything else. They just said, 'Stay here. We will come tomorrow morning and talk to you.'"

Inside, Shrenika met a few sex workers she knew. When she told them she had come for a job, they asked incredulously, "A job for you? Here? What job will you do here?" These women told her they had been locked up for months with no immediate prospect of release and with no meaningful job training. When Shrenika mentioned that the NGO staff had promised

her she could leave, the others laughed and said, "Let's see if you can go. Let's bet on it!"

The next day, Shrenika waited to meet the staff who had shown her the video and brought her to the shelter, but they did not appear. She never saw them again. Instead, she was left to interact with the wardens. "There were two wardens working on shifts," she said, "If we asked them anything, they would say, 'We don't know anything. Our responsibility is only to watch you and prevent you from escaping. We don't care why they brought you here or what they told you.'"

The shelter where Shrenika stayed provided its inmates a uniform, toiletries, and large quantities of good food. Yet, until the staff determined that they trusted a given resident, the wardens would not allow her to leave the shelter to go to the NGO's vocational training centres. This "trust building period" usually took three to six months, the wardens informed Shrenika. As the days passed, Shrenika watched the sex workers around her try various means of escaping. A few managed to climb over the walls at night. Others attempted suicide by drinking phenolic disinfectants or cutting themselves with shards of glass bangles. The guards told one suicidal woman, "Carry on. It's no loss to us. If you die, you only reduce our burden." Shrenika said that after a few days in this environment, she felt as if she were sinking in quicksand.

Shrenika eventually escaped from the shelter and returned to her life as an independent sex worker. Her story closely parallels those archetypal stories that regularly circulate in anti-trafficking literature in which traffickers lure women with promises of jobs and hopes for a better life before transporting them and then depriving them of their independence, and exploiting them as a source of income (in this case, anti-trafficking funds).

Preethi's Story: The Violence of Rescue

Like Shrenika, some NGO staff approached Preethi at the train station one night in 2011 while she was waiting for clients. She said that when she refused to go with them, "They took me after beating me severely. I also cut my arm, because they would not let me go."

Two years prior, in 2009, Preethi had been abducted from the station by thugs and violently trafficked into commercial sex. She had eventually negotiated her freedom and began working as an independent sex worker. After being forcibly locked up by NGO employees, she fell into depression at again finding herself in the total control of others and unable to contact her family and friends. While in the shelter, Preethi attempted suicide twice. When her attempts failed, she refused to eat the food the shelter provided for five days. The wardens taunted her saying, "Do you want to die? No problem, you can. If you die, we will bury you near this home," meaning that her death would be kept a secret. Preethi told them, "The jail is better than this. There are individual rooms in the jail, some open place, and also we get some respect in jail."

She fought regularly with the wardens over small details: the lack of sunlight, their insistence that she eat when they told her, their attempts to get the sex workers to learn needlework and knitting as a form of vocational training, and their insistence that she wear a uniform that was laughably undersized. But, the accusation that Preethi most consistently hurled at the

shelter staff was that they resembled her former traffickers. She told one warden scornfully, "Here we are being treated the same as we are treated by the traffickers. How can we be changed if you keep on asking us to change by locking us in a room? No matter how hard you try, our minds will fly right back there." And, indeed, once Preethi managed to leave the shelter, she immediately flew back to her nest in Hyderabad's sex trade.

Intersectionality and Anti-trafficking Targets

In recent years, the anti-trafficking industry has grown into a global powerhouse. Popular anti-trafficking NGOs in Cambodia, India, and Nepal, among others, have garnered many millions of dollars for their work. The humanitarian authority of the transnational anti-trafficking movement renders women who sell sex in places like Hyderabad helpless by contrast. Shweta Basu Prasad (the actor who was sent to the NGO Prajwala's shelter after being caught selling sex in Hyderabad) is the exception that proves this rule. High-end escorts and call girls are rarely targeted to fill the rolls of trafficking shelters. Sex workers like Shrenika and Preethi become easy targets because, in addition to their stigmatised labour, their gender, class, and education mark them as unlikely to be able to resist. As the Palermo protocol notes, it is vulnerability that is key to trafficking. In the case of humanitarian trafficking, low-end sex workers' intersectional vulnerability enables police and NGOs to force them into rescue shelters and hold them against their will.

Economics of Female Labour in Hyderabad

During my fieldwork, I routinely questioned women about their finances (compare with Walters [2016]). Compiling women's own estimates, I arrived at an approximate amount an individual must earn in order to live a minimally comfortable life alone in Hyderabad in 2013. I calculated this to be about ₹9,000. This sum would provide a woman with a single room, cooking gas, electricity for light and fans, running water, sufficient food, a few household necessities, a TV connection, transportation to get around the city by bus and shared autorickshaw, a prepaid cell number, and basic healthcare. A woman could suffice with a salary of ₹5,579 (the legally mandated minimum wage in 2013–14) if she had a child or a partner who contributed around the same amount to the household budget. But, a woman who was forced to support children or other family members without help needed to earn well over ₹10,000 to live a basic life in Hyderabad in 2013.

Women without education and social capital were limited to underpaid jobs in service, retail, manufacturing, and construction—none of which paid ₹10,000 a month. Not even entry-level call centre jobs paid this much. But, from three paid sexual encounters a day, a woman in Hyderabad could earn around ₹18,000 a month, even taking a five-day break for her period. Monthly earnings from sex work varied according to a woman's ability to command a good price based on her education, looks, and age. The amount also varied depending on the number of hours she worked, her location, and whether or not a woman needed to pay for space and introductions to clients.

Sex workers at large railway stations, where client traffic is high, earned significantly more than workers elsewhere. One

tall, gray-haired sex worker in her mid-50s with a dignified bearing told me that while some sex workers were “greedy” and worked all night, she was content to earn ₹1,000 per day at the train station. Another woman in her late 40s told me, “Some women earn a thousand, two thousand, and even three thousand a day. A woman like me would be happy with five hundred [a day]. Wandering the streets is a job that doesn’t allow you to predict [your earnings], you know? [*Road meeda thiragadam anchana leni pani, kada?*]”

Some sex workers at Secunderabad train station made as much as ₹45,000 a month, a solid middle-class salary. By going “on contract” (agreeing to work full-time for a broker in a different city for a stipulated number of days and a fixed rate), a woman could earn ₹30,000 to ₹45,000 in just 15 days, depending on her looks. By contrast, many female teachers in private, middle-class schools were earning only ₹6,000 to ₹10,000 a month during the period of my research. Thus, some sex workers with little to no education were earning more than three times the wages of educated teachers. Sex work became a means of class mobility for them (Walters 2016).

It is not surprising then that most women’s explanations of how they had entered sex work seemed straightforward enough to them: they encountered financial problems (sometimes severe, sometimes not, but often due to a husband’s death or inability to support them), and a friend or acquaintance recommended sex work as the best means of getting by or even flourishing. This entry narrative accounted for about 75% of the sex workers I interviewed. Women often used a tone of “well, of course” as they explained that having reached a disjuncture in their lives, sex work seemed the best option forward—as if the necessity of the option was self-evident. Women who chose sex work because other work “did not pay” seldom paused to explain or comment further. The seeming inevitability of sex work was, thus, a subtle but consistent theme in many women’s self-narrations, and a few women estimated that as many as 50%–75% of women in their *basthis* (poor neighbourhoods) had secretly participated in sex work at some point in their lives.

Payal’s Story: (Mis)calculation of Rehabilitation

Given the economics of survival in Hyderabad, anti-trafficking programmes ultimately prove ineffective even for those women who cooperate in rehabilitation. Payal was such a case. Her parents had died and she had been raised by her uncle whose wife regularly beat her. She was around 15 years old when she ran away (in about 2008). While she was sitting in a railway station near her village, a man and a woman offered her a job as a live-in servant in their home. She agreed, but instead of taking her to their house, the couple sold her to a tiny brothel in a town about three hours outside Hyderabad. The brothel was run by a mother and daughter who entrapped another girl in addition to Payal. They barely fed these girls and made them provide sex to as many as five or six men a day. The girls received no earnings and were severely beaten when they tried to escape. After three years of this situation, Payal escaped with the help of a customer one night when the brothel owner overdrank. He dropped her at the station, and Payal took a train to

Hyderabad. The police found her sleeping in a bus stop five days later and handed her over to an anti-trafficking NGO.

In contrast to the abusive brothel, Payal greatly enjoyed the NGO’s shelter. She appreciated the plentiful food as well as the opportunity to rest. With no parents or husband to legally claim her, she stayed on in the shelter for rehabilitation. The staff tried to teach her tailoring, but she failed to learn it. Next, they sent her to work in a book binding facility where she was paid ₹500 a month for her work in addition to her room and board.

After a year, the NGO told Payal that her time was up, and she would need to leave. Payal took the money she had saved while working for them, and with the help of the NGO staff she rented a small room. The NGO had arranged a job for her as an assistant in a clothing shop. Yet, just days after she left the shelter, Payal went to the Imlibun bus stand in Hyderabad and began soliciting customers for paid sex. When I asked her why she had independently begun selling sex after an NGO had trained her in book binding and provided her a job in a clothing shop, she said simply, “It is only for the money.”

With this terse reply, Payal summed up a world of structural reality. As noted above, the search for sufficient earnings pushes women from diverse situations to the clandestine market for sexual services where the pay is substantially higher than it is for other forms of female labour. This unaltered economic calculus again greets women after they complete rehabilitation programmes. By providing women low-paying jobs, these programmes attempt to return women to the conditions of poverty that many of them have already eschewed in favour of sex work and the possibility for upward class mobility. Even for women like Payal who had never benefited from sex work previously, the economic choice remained straightforward.

Reinscribing Patriarchal Control of Women

In India, the concern over dislodging women from the control of brokers has instead served to reinscribe the moral legitimacy of adult women’s control by their kin. As mandated by the Immoral Traffick (Prevention) Act (ITPA) of 1956 and amended in 1986, India has long had shelters designated to house women whom the state deemed “in need of correction,” but these shelters and protective homes were both few and small.³ The transnational panic over trafficking in the new millennium, however, has breathed new life into the ITPA and fuelled the rapid expansion of additional anti-trafficking NGOs, shelters, and initiatives. In Hyderabad, for example, Prajwala recently constructed facilities that can house 500 women.

The ITPA states that victims of trafficking must be rescued and officially housed in shelter homes until they are claimed by their “parents, guardians, or husbands” who have been deemed “suitable” by a magistrate of the court. Ramachandran (2015) notes that “legal activists have long questioned the constitutionality of this provision vis-à-vis the fundamental rights to life and liberty guaranteed by the Indian Constitution.” Although the Indian Constitution guarantees women’s equal treatment as full agents before the law, anti-trafficking legislation effectively treats adult sex workers as lost property needing to be returned to its rightful owner.

Kairavi's Story: 'Take Her if You Want To'

Several sex workers told me that in seeking to return them to the control of their kin, anti-trafficking staff greatly damaged their reputations. One woman reported that her husband left her after being informed by an NGO that she was involved in sex work. Several others reported that they were unable to return to their villages because NGO staff informed their village heads of their occupations. Kairavi's story illustrates how the attempt to return women to their kin harms their relationships.

Kairavi had provided the staff at the NGO with her family's contact information after weeks of unsuccessfully watching for an opportunity to escape. Once the NGO phoned them, it took Kairavi's father and brother five days to arrange money and make the trip to the main office in Hyderabad. The staff kept Kairavi from seeing them while they interviewed them. Kairavi said, "They should have sent for me when my family came to take me. But, two of the staff told my father and brother, 'Your daughter and your sister has been selling herself in the Secunderabad area. Take her if you want to.'" Kairavi's brother was aware of her occupation, but her father was not. He was unprepared to have what he considered humiliating news told to him in a public space by strangers who trumped him in class and education. Kairavi said, "My father's mind—you know how it is in villages. Can he take his daughter if he gets such information? No! My father left, saying, 'My daughter is dead to me. I do not want her.'" When Kairavi's brother implored his father to bring his sister back to the village, suggesting she could stay at home and work in the fields, their father beat him out of the NGO office and on to the street. They left the city without her and returned to their village.

Kairavi told me, "I had a slight hope of reuniting with my family through my brother. But it vanished because [the NGO staff] talked like that to my father. I do not know whether I will ever meet my family again in my life. I doubt whether they would accept my dead body in the future."

Marriage as Rehabilitation

Sex workers at shelters in Hyderabad who came from distant states were far less likely to have their relatives make the journey to claim them. These women, if they failed to escape the shelter, were submitted to months of "trust building" that preceded active vocational training. But, the shelters found jobs for only a minority after vocational training.

Christina, a former employee at an anti-trafficking NGO in Hyderabad, explained that the shelter where she worked once placed seven rescued women as *ayammas* (helpers) in a hospital. This job entailed mopping floors, changing bed pans, cleaning up vomit, running errands, and other difficult work for a salary of ₹5,000 a month.

After six months of working as *ayammas*, while continuing to live in housing arranged by the NGO, two of the girls disappeared. Because no one had yet claimed them, they were still legally under the court's jurisdiction and the NGO was liable to the court for their whereabouts. Although these women had completed a long residence at the shelter, having worked regular (if underpaid) jobs for six months, and achieved the legal age

of majority, they were still not permitted to act as autonomous agents with a right to determine their own lives.

Only those women who accepted marriages brokered by the NGO during this time were considered free to quit their jobs, move, or otherwise do as they pleased. Christina explained to me that unless "suitable" relatives came to claim them or until the NGO created "suitable" relatives by performing marriages, women might have remained under the NGO's jurisdiction indefinitely.

More than a quarter (27%) of sex workers I interviewed mentioned the death or mistreatment of a husband as the primary motivation for their entry into sex work (compare with Dandona et al 2006). Using marriage as an end of rehabilitation submits women to the same gendered dependencies that initially led many of them to sex work. Anti-trafficking efforts, thus, act as the completion of a circle, rather than as a break or intervention. Jean D'Cunha (2002) attributes the ultimate causes of sex trafficking to the inequalities of gendered socialisation and the feminisation of poverty. By extension, I suggest that the state-sponsored humanitarian trafficking of sex workers is begotten of a patriarchal understanding of women as the property of kin and dependents of husbands rather than as independent, agentive citizens.

Conclusions: The Dog's Tail

After economic liberalisation in India and the rapid spread of multinational companies, the cost of living in Hyderabad is no longer in sync with wages for many people. Thus, rehabilitating sex workers into "legitimate" jobs is a troubled prospect. One CBO worker said to me: "We cannot do anything if [sex workers] do not change in spite of so much counselling. As long as we tie a stone to a dog's tail, it stays straight, but it coils back as soon as we remove the stone." This outreach worker attributed the difficulty in instigating change among sex workers to their own recalcitrant natures. However, the humanitarian desire to free women from "modern-day slavery" by providing them with training and jobs leaves the larger market for female labour in India unaltered. By this measure, the dog's tail is not sex workers themselves but rather the gendered political economy in which they make their lives. The offer of "freedom from modern-day slavery" amounts to little more than an offer for poor women in South India to acquiesce to perpetual poverty. B Jayamma, CMM's president, reiterated the ineffectiveness of rehabilitation initiatives: "The truth is that rehabilitation doesn't work. You can give us tailoring classes and soap making classes for years, but no one ever really ends up leaving sex work. No one."

James Ferguson (1994: 274) has pointed out that highly visible narratives about the aims of development schemes serve to mask silent processes unfolding on the ground. Anti-trafficking initiatives are no exception. At present, our public imagination has become saturated with narratives of sex trafficking—what Johan Lindquist (2010) has called the "aesthetic of trafficking." Our social media feeds are now peppered with memes urging us to fight against "modern-day slavery." Political and religious leaders across the globe have emphasised the goal of "ending slavery" as a rhetorical means of bolstering the tactics of the anti-trafficking movement. Perhaps, a more complex portrayal of sex work would

undermine the business of selling the role of the vicarious saviour to potential donors. But, the discourse of "ending slavery" masks the movement's effects on the lives of real women.

No one can argue with the abstract proposition that we must "free the slaves." But, by failing to ask who it is that considers themselves enslaved, anti-trafficking programmes in India extend and deepen the mistreatment of women who sell sex. Transnational donors have converged on South and South East Asia in the attempt to return trafficking victims to "legitimate" labour, but this has amounted to the reinforcement of the labour of relations that pays women too little to support themselves or their families.

My research indicates that anti-trafficking programmes do violence to the bodies and lives of sex workers in Hyderabad. Ultimately, the transnational anti-trafficking movement attempts (perhaps unwittingly) to reinsert women into the very kin and labour relations that make it likely for them to enter sex work in the first place. Although the humanitarian violence enacted through anti-trafficking efforts assumes new discursive guises in the language of "modern-day slavery," its effect is the damaging of lives and delegitimation of a potential remedy to abject poverty, while failing to offer adequate alternatives.

NOTES

- 1 See George et al (2010) for a comprehensive overview of these well-worn debates.
- 2 In this article, all sex workers are referred to by pseudonyms.
- 3 The earliest shelters go back to the Vigilance Society in World War I. More arose in the 1930s when various states passed laws to suppress "immoral traffic" and closed brothels (Forbes 1996: 184).

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Criminalising the Trafficked

Blaming the Victim

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People-smuggling and trafficking in humans are generally viewed as two distinct offences. In general, smuggling involves delivering persons into the countries they wish to enter illegally and then leaving them to their own devices. Trafficking for sex and/or labour is defined as coercive in international discourses. In reality, the difference is largely semantic. Women smuggled into another country often fall prey to traffickers, and efforts to punish those who perpetrate the evil end up victimising the victims. Trafficking is not only an abuse of human rights, it is also a process that contributes to statelessness; a status that denies citizenship rights to the victims of trafficking and casts them in a permanent state of non-belonging, devoid of rights.

In 2004, a Shillong newspaper drew attention to India's place "among the seven Asian nations put by the United States of America (us) on its 'watch list' of countries involved in human trafficking" (*Shillong Times* 2004a). This was not an isolated report; newspapers published in India and the West continue to report that India is plagued by human trafficking. The *New York Times* reporter and crusader Nicholas Kristof wrote, "India probably has more modern slaves than any country in the world" (2011). The *Shillong Times* claimed that in addition to facing a problem of domestic trafficking, India "has become a transit point for prostitution from nearby countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal" (2004a).

Additionally, India is now a destination for sex tourists from Europe and the us. Although the evidence indicates that trafficking can take many forms—for example, trafficking in organs is a thriving trade—human trafficking and sex trafficking have become synonymous, with the near exclusion of all other forms. While women seeking employment pose much less of a threat than organ harvesters, the state hardly ever makes such nuanced differentiation.

In this paper, I argue that the association of trafficking with prostitution and the marking of trafficking as a completely exploitative phenomenon has disastrous effects for women who cross borders for jobs. The persistent notion that victims of trafficking are always women involved in sex work is equally harmful. These women are discursively victimised but, in reality, are criminalised. In this age, when the dominant template of international affairs is terrorism, any cross-border movement—be it migration, trafficking or smuggling—is considered threatening by the state. With states erecting barriers and fences, at least in the context of South Asia, unassisted migration is becoming a rare occurrence. People depend more and more on traffickers to take them to their destinations. En route, many face abuse, which they accept, because the states have made unassisted passage across borders almost impossible.

Whether people cross borders by themselves or are trafficked across borders, the act of crossing is viewed as a criminal act by the state security structure. When they are apprehended, the traffickers usually disappear. Even when the traffickers are present, trafficked victims do not hand them over to security personnel. In the process, it is the trafficked persons who are criminalised. With further criminalisation of trafficked persons, their movements across borders

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