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Vinod Janardhanan
Independent researcher on global migration, vinodjanardanan@hotmail.com

Mary Crawford. ***Sex Trafficking in South Asia: Telling Maya's Story.*** **London and New York: Routledge. 2010**

Mary Crawford's *Sex Trafficking in South Asia: Telling Maya's Story* employs a feministperspective to examine sex trafficking from Nepal to India. Crawford prefers a local, situated, and culturally specific analysis over global generalizations about sex trafficking. She explores the intermixing of social and cultural meanings attached to gender and other systems of hierarchy into a study on sex trafficking. The author argues that terms such as "global sex trade" overlook the nuances in the causes and modes of trafficking and the characteristics of victims and perpetrators. Mass media-dominated attempts to create a universalizing discourse on "global sex slavery" are misguided, she says. Case studies from countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Thailand have shown the different conditions under which girls migrate for sex work. In some cases, educated girls migrate for sex work voluntarily, while in others, girls are forced into prostitution due to abject poverty. Those behind the trafficking industry differ from country to country, ranging from crime syndicates in Colombia and Japan to loosely organized networks of men and women who traffic girls from countries like Nepal. Desperate economic need and increasing demand for the girls often fuel sex trafficking.

From the premise that the phenomenon is linked to local conditions and systems of understanding, Crawford draws attention to the sociopolitical context of sex trafficking from Nepal to India and shows how it is understood from within Nepal. She finds that the social construction of sex trafficking in Nepal does not capture the complexity and ambiguity of women's migration, sexual choices, or social locations; instead it focuses only on the narratives of third world sex slaves, whose stories generate empathy and funding for anti-trafficking efforts.

The author's findings are a result of extensive field research with ABC/Nepal, an NGO involved in the rescue and rehabilitation of sex trafficking victims during some of the most turbulent years in the country's political history. Crawford draws attention to factors that affect sex trafficking in Nepal: the enormous inequalities based on caste, gender, ethnicity and class; a decade-long Maoist insurgency; political corruption; lack of effective governance; and a flourishing international aid "development industry."

Sex trafficking in Nepal, one of the poorest nations in the world, is fundamentally linked to social inequity, says Crawford. Nepal's 27 million people, with their religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity, are not united despite having lived together for over 200 years. The power in Nepal has always laid with the urban and high caste Hindu elite, which constitutes 30% of the population and controls 70% of positions of power, while 70% of the lower castes, the *adibasi janajati* and *madhesis*, and 80% of Dalits live below the poverty line. Poverty and caste and gender-based discrimination create often insurmountable burdens for women, leading to a female life expectancy of 60 years, the lowest in South Asia, and one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. It is this poverty that pushes many women and girls—or their families—to seek work in the sex trade, says Crawford.

The numbers of Nepali women and girls participating in sex trade can also be partly attributed, says Crawford, to the Maoist insurgency, which has had deep cultural and social consequences in addition to its 13000+ casualties. Approximately two million Nepalese fled to India as a result of the insurgency, and those who stayed in Nepal were caught in a quagmire of forced recruitment by Maoists and arbitrary arrests by security forces over suspected sympathizing with insurgents. Crawford explains that by ostensibly addressing the greivances of

rural women, Maoists were able to recruit them in large numbers, leading to 35% female participation in the insurgency. When men fled Maoist occupied areas, women were left alone to fend for themselves. Sex trafficking may have increased during the Maoist insurgency as a result of such vulnerabilities.

During her field work, Crawford finds that despite the variety of conditions under which women enter the sex trade, the accounts of the survivors of sex trafficking and the summaries of such stories often produced by anti-trafficking NGO publications seem to highlight the involuntary sex slave experience. One woman with such an experience is Maya, the name in the book's sub-title, a distraught woman in her late 40s whom the author met at ABC/Nepal. Maya had been sexually abused since her teen years. She then married a man who already had another wife and two children and ended up in a Mumbai brothel, where she was raped for months and had to take up to 35 clients a day. She contracted ailments including tuberculosis and tested positive for HIV. Crawford goes on to critically examine Maya's story, which she finds to be a composite of case studies of trafficked Nepali women, compiled by NGOs and governmental agencies. Crawford reveals that the same overarching narrative runs through most such cases: that of the "perfect victim," in which a rural or minority family in a dire economic situation enters its daughter(s) into debt bondage to traffickers in return for work from the trafficked girl, where the work turns out to be in a brothel either in India or in the Arab countries. According to this narrative, the victims are tricked into leaving home with strangers or acquaintances, often for fraudulent employment or marriage offers.

Though there are indeed women and girls for whom the narrative of the perfect victim reflects their personal experience in the sex trade, Crawford seeks to more specifically place the phenomenon of sex trafficking at the heart of Nepal's historical understanding and presumptions on gender roles. In the social construction of gender in Nepal, proverbs such as "to be born a daughter is a lost destiny" are common, and systematic violence and brutalization of women and gender-based marginalization in civil rights and education are the norm. Gender definitions mutually agreed upon by men and women, in which the female is defined in terms of kinship (i.e. as mother, wife, or daughter), further entrench the low status of women. As such, Crawford's explanation goes beyond the notion that a simple lack of education and poverty lead to trafficking; she argues that the fundamental cause of the phenomenon is the oppression of women. Lowaste women, in particular, says Crawford, face increased risk. Despite the abolition of the caste system in 1963, caste hierarchies have been preserved through Nepal's legal system, the recognition of the country as a Hindu kingdom, the banning of ethnic political parties, and the social ostracism facing individuals who buck the system (i.e. following inter-caste marriage). Caste and class are interlinked in the identities of trafficked women: those belonging to Tibeto-Burman ethnic groups or Hindu Dalit castes were trafficked more often than were Brahmin or Chettri women.

The advent of modernity, with increased western and global media consumption and access to consumer goods, also factors into the equation, according to Crawford. Large sections of Nepal's traditional society seem to be living "in confrontation" with these globalizing influences, as exemplified by the controversies over beauty contests, fashion, and rap music. The idea of "love marriage" as opposed to the customary arranged marriage is gaining currency, often upsetting traditional standards of behavior, Crawford delineates some (often middle class) women's misgivings about their lower class/caste counterparts who end up "selling their bodies" to keep up with the compulsion to be fashionable. She cites previous studies in which prostitution was seen as a fault of lower-class women's desire to "do fashion and makeup". Such

social positioning and anxieties of a society - where women are increasingly growing independent in contravention of patriarchal norms of a tradition-bound country and often taking up jobs outside the confines of their homes upon their own free will - are reflected in the larger discourse about sex trafficking, according to Crawford .

In addition to the very real factors and conditions that contribute to the sex trafficking of women and girls in Nepal and the shared experiences of many such individuals, however, the narrative of the "sex trade victim" is also consciously generated, says Crawford, by members of the "development establishment," which she identifies as the "biggest industry" in Nepal. According to the author, the influx of development aid money and the spending of up to $ 2.5 million in anti-trafficking efforts annually has turned anti-trafficking activism into a lucrative option for leaders of such NGOs, most of which are run by high caste women who refer to trafficked women as "grassroots" or "backward." It behooves the leaders of anti-tracking NGOs to construct "victim identities" of trafficked women like Maya, as such identities and narratives appeal to international donor agencies and the high caste Hindus who control government establishments in Nepal. The use of such a constructed identity to secure further financial contribution has lead NGOs to perpetuate the identity of the sex trade survivor/victim, says Crawford. This construction of the survivor/victim by NGOs often simply reflects the organizations' need to generate funds. The image of the naïve, child-victim who is to eventually be returned to the protection of her native family is a function of the elitist understanding of gender and caste and is useful to the development establishment.

Critically examining the efficacy of various anti-trafficking interventions, the author finds a lack of outcome measurement for the NGOs' awareness creation programs or for rehabilitation and re-integration measures. Crawford problematizes the assumptions (made mainly by NGOs) that women would never choose or consent to sex work by foregrounding the existence of a traditional sex worker caste, the *Badi*, whose members at one point launched campaigns to motivate clients towards safer sex and for a debate on consensual sex work. Crawford goes so far as to point out that efforts to protect girls and women from sex trafficking might ironically end up denying them their human rights, including the right to privacy and the freedom to choose consensual sex work. The limits put on women's mobility by border control on suspicion of being trafficked, "awareness" campaigns regarding the horrors of trafficking that seek to scare women into staying at home, and gender-specific legislation that prevent women from migrating to Gulf countries are cases in point, says Crawford. She argues that the perception of the sex-trade as uniformly heinous boils down to a notion that any work that a woman does outside her home, without her family's permission, is illegitimate and dangerous.

The author also finds that women and girls who are rescued from the sex trade are often re-educated (or "rehabilitated") into the traditional gender roles that precipitate sex trafficking in the first place. The subtext within such rehabilitation and reintegration efforts is a moral education intended to "reform" the trafficking victim into a compliant daughter who returns to her house. There is also coercion and control within the rehabilitation centers, asserts Crawford. Compounding the problem, she says, is the focus on the victim of sex trafficking to the exclusion of the perpetrators behind it: brokers, pimps, brothel owners, clients, and corrupt officials, who are portrayed as faceless villains. The discourse on sex trafficking often focuses on girls' family members acting as traffickers, a discourse that is mired in Orientalist stereotypes, says Crawford, (i.e. that the Nepalese are primitive people intent on selling their girl children). Crawford calls for more light to be shed on other players in sex trafficking. She asserts that in order to unpack the trafficking of girls and women for sex, other operators must more clearly be understood. At

this time, she asserts, there are few such understandings. Indeed, details of the operations of brothel owners are sketchy, while information on clients is even harder to compile as research, as well as legislation and educational interventions rarely investigate men who purchase sex. Corrupt police and border officials in Nepal and India are part of the larger socio-cultural context in which trafficking operates. The role of public officials and perpetrators are, however, omitted by media, though cases of politicians protecting pimps have been reported.

Finally, Crawford examines the forces within Nepali culture that contribute to the creation of the identity of the "deserving victim" (i.e. the trafficked woman who deserves her fate—as opposed to the "perfect victim," who is innocent and often duped into sex "slavery"), which may stem from a general fear of women's autonomy. In other words, she claims, the discourse on sex trafficking serves as cautionary tale to women that the consequences of their desired independence may be dire. The "deserving victim" rhetoric subjects "good" women to patriarchal protection while punishing "bad" women. Migration by women is seen as a foolish, naïve, and irresponsible act that will result in enslavement and degradation. The "innocent girl" is constructed as having legitimate human rights claims, whereas a "bad woman" who chooses sex work is not. In this way, the anti-trafficking rhetoric criminalizes sex work and subordinates sex workers. In place of this rhetoric, Crawford advocates evidence-based interventions and outcome evaluations of anti-trafficking NGOs' work beyond the listing of these programs and numbers of participants. She exposes the methodological inaccuracies of prior research and calls for donor agencies to assess the effectiveness of NGO interventions and outcomes for survivor treatment and care instead of concentrating on "success stories." The author's approach in this work is to integrate a researcher's reflexive subjectivity and the wider social context around the sex trade into her thesis. This leads her account to meander through personal observations akin to ethnography, with notes and interviews conducted in the tradition of ethnographic immersion. However, this very narrative method may have also served as a distraction when some descriptions become long-winding. In some parts, personal musings and anecdotes take up much of the text's space, often digressing from the main flow of arguments. In the section describing the contemporary realities of Nepal, for example, the author reproduces verbatim the security alerts issued by the US embassy. While it may be alright for an ethnographic study, it is felt that a bit more of editing could have been in order.

Having said that, Crawford's work remains path-breaking as it foregrounds, problematises and critiques the idea of sex trafficking itself as viewed from within the traditional Nepalese society which is often at odds with modernity, even as it simultaneously seeks to connect with the outside world through consumption of goods, services, ideas and media images of globalization. Her critique is rooted in feminist theory, her analysis often juxtaposed with autobiographical reflections, social commentary, and reproductions of interviews with victims of trafficking and their care givers, providing more authenticity to the text than what a merely theoretical or data-based thesis would have achieved. For these reasons, Crawford's work is recommended reading for anyone seeking to understand the nature of sex trafficking in the larger context of social construction of gender and attitudes towards women's migration in the South Asian subcontinent.

Vinod Janardhanan, PhD
Independent researcher on global migration
vinodjanardanan@hotmail.com