

BREAKING THE CHAINS: TRANSFORMING THE LIVES OF INDIA'S PERNA CASTE

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ABSTRACT

The article delves into the issues confronting India's Perna caste, with a focus on intergenerational prostitution within the marginalized community. Perna women, who were historically labeled criminals under the British-era Criminal Tribes Act, continue to face prejudice and violence, perpetuating an exploitation cycle. This issue, which is rooted in societal stigma and economic deprivation, necessitates a multifaceted approach to transformation. Economic constraints, historical stigma, gender-based violence, and many more, all impede social integration in the Perna community. Organizations such as Apne Aap work to break this cycle by providing alternative livelihoods and education. The National Commission for the Protection of Children's Rights promotes child protection, education, and rehabilitation measures. To address intergenerational prostitution, tailored policies, awareness programs, legal safeguards, and collaborative efforts at the governmental and societal levels are required. To uplift Perna women and break the cycle of exploitation, recommendations include education, vocational training, legal empowerment, and societal integration initiatives. A multifaceted approach is required to break the cycle of intergenerational prostitution in marginalised communities.

INTRODUCTION

In the everyday world women, particularly those in immoral professions, suffer from difficulties and exclusion from socially recognised knowledge. Historically, Women have faced marginalisation and lack of recognition due to power inequalities and gender dynamics. Their voices and experiences are frequently excluded, resulting in a suppressed personal identity and a limited social status [1].

Prostitution, frequently referred to be the world's oldest job, is one profession that symbolises the monetization of female sexuality in capitalist societies. However, it is still stigmatised and misunderstood. Prostitution is lawful in different countries, with some societies legalising it and others prohibiting it. However, the profession remains a very controversial and complex topic, interconnected with structural marginalisation and socioeconomic injustices suffered by women throughout history.

Prostitutes are one group that suffers the brunt of societal prejudice around the world, with women and girls frequently serving as the principal participants. There are communities in India that have been actively involved in commercial sex work, and children born into these communities are frequently drawn into the trade. The intergenerational cycle of prostitution in marginalised communities, such as Delhi's Perna community, illustrates a deeply rooted issue that necessitates comprehensive remedies. Women in these communities confront numerous layers of discrimination, economic deprivation, and social stigma, which leads to exploitation and limited access to basic rights and opportunities. To address these issues, it is critical to comprehend the particulars of intergenerational prostitution and put specific strategies in place that empower women and stop the cycle.

During the British administration, the Perna community, which was part of the Denotified Tribes (DNTs) in India, was historically labelled as criminal under the Criminal Tribes Act. Despite the fact that the law was repealed in 1952, the community still faces prejudice and violence as a result of their presumed criminal record, limiting their access to education, work, and safety [2,3]. The women of the Perna community, who live in the Premnagar and Dharmshala neighbourhoods of Najafgarh in Delhi, continue to be forced prostitutes. Najafgarh which is one of South West Delhi's sub-districts, is located on the outskirts of Delhi's south-western fringes, borders the state of Haryana, and is near Gurgaon and the International Airport [4]. This Denotified Tribes group adheres to a tradition that forces women into the flesh trade, which their in-laws regard as an approved practice. Girls in this group are socialised from a young age to feel that being prostituted by their spouses or in-laws is normal. They are, unfortunately, referred to as "husband's prostitutes" [5].

Women in this culture engage in sex work, which is seen as a normal progression following marriage and childbirth. They solicit sex on the highways that border Delhi, while the men spend their time playing cards and participating in communal activities.

The women usually operate through the night, leaving their neighborhood in groups around midnight, looking for customers at bus stops and auto stands away from their neighborhood and the police's prying eyes. They run the possibility of being approached by the police, who frequently demand free sex and steal their money. The women earn between one hundred and three hundred rupees every session, with a good day bringing them a maximum of one thousand rupees [2]. They return home in the morning after a night's work, do household tasks, and take a little nap. Despite the difficult circumstances, some Perna mothers are working to provide a better future for their daughters. They are battling to prevent their daughters from being forced into prostitution by their in-laws and to guarantee that their girls acquire a proper education so that they can leave Dharampura. Many people in the community, however, feel trapped and are unaware of their rights, necessitating government action and specific social assistance programs to alleviate their condition.

Therefore, it is important to throw light on intergenerational prostitution in marginalized populations like India's Perna caste. Multiple layers of prejudice, economic hardship, and social shame exist in many areas, creating a cycle of exploitation and limiting access to basic rights and opportunities [6].

Perna Women Face Considerable Challenges: The Perna group, a denotified and nomadic tribe of India, faces considerable challenges:

The Perna community is confronted with several issues that have an impact on their life and well-being. First of all, Perna women have few options for making a living because of their marginalised social and economic status, prompting many to turn to prostitution as their sole option, continuing their enslavement. Second, the community has a historical stigma, having been labelled as a criminal tribe under the British Colonial Criminal Tribes Act. This stigma continues to obstruct their access to welfare programmes and possibilities for social advancement. Furthermore, Perna women are especially vulnerable to gender-based violence within their community, with those who refuse prostitution frequently subjected to physical assault from their in-laws. Additionally, the Perna community's lack of information about their rights and privileges exacerbates the difficulties they encounter [7]. Traditional sex work communities suffer an extensive number of obstacles that impede their social integration and overall well-being. To begin with, these societies tend to live in isolation, in different villages or towns with little interaction with the wider public. This isolation contributes to their marginalisation and limits their social integration prospects. Children from these neighbourhoods frequently lack parental support in terms of schooling and future goals. Parents' lack of excitement and goals might have an impact on their child's educational path and limit their child's prospects for personal growth. Furthermore, these youngsters are subjected to discrimination and abuse both inside and outside of their communities, with insulting remarks and harsh treatment. This worsens their social marginalisation and lowers their self-esteem. The children experience discrimination, inadequate engagement with other communities, a lack of parental support for schooling, and abusive treatment by educators and peers. Despite these difficulties, they have the potential to succeed if given the chance [8].

Organisations such as Apne Aap have made efforts to address the Perna community's vulnerabilities and concerns. These organisations attempt to stop the cycle of intergenerational prostitution by giving alternative livelihood possibilities and educational support to the younger generation [9]. However, bringing about substantial change and integrating the Perna community into mainstream society is a difficult undertaking. Because of their deeply ingrained stigma, lack of awareness of their rights, and historical difficulties, they find it difficult to access government programmes and escape their marginalised status. Although progress is modest, initiatives such as education scholarships and vocational training provide optimism for the Perna community's future. It is critical for the government and society to recognise the unique needs and challenges faced by denotified tribes such as the Perna group and to devise tailored policies to help these neglected people.

The National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) has made many significant suggestions to alleviate the issues encountered by children from traditional sex worker communities and encourage their rehabilitation. To begin, measures should be in place to identify and rescue children involved in traditional sex labour, as well as hold abusers accountable for forcing or driving minors into this trade. Second, there should be a focus on investing in education by establishing residential educational facilities to ensure that children from these areas receive an education. The establishment of residential schools can serve to protect children from the influence of their traditional practices. Collaboration with the Ministry of Skill Development is essential for enrolling children in skill-building programmes and facilitating job placement, with an emphasis on non-hazardous areas that provide prospects for economic independence. Furthermore, there should be a convergence of services from multiple government departments and programmes to fulfil the development requirements of these areas fully. Combining HIV prevention measures with education, nutrition, health, child development, and skill-building programmes is one example. It is also critical to establish aftercare programmes to support children once they reach the age of 18, as well as to provide additional education, training, and job placement aid during this transitional period. Furthermore, monitoring methods must be put in place to check attendance, prevent child trafficking, and safeguard children from exploitation during traditional dance performances [8].

Other recommendations include developing proper avenues for these children's education, rehabilitation, repatriation, and reintegration. By providing residential facilities and investing in education for an entire generation of children, strategies should focus on preventing children from entering the industry. The convergence of HIV interventions with other programmes such as education, nutrition, health, and skill training is critical. It is also critical to educate officials and outreach workers about child protection laws, perform correct investigations,

and implement particular programmes for these communities. Children should be taught life skills and vocational training, and collaboration between schools and vocational training centres should be encouraged. Other initiatives include raising awareness about gender equality and violence against women, bolstering cybercrime units, and encouraging community policing in low-income neighbourhoods.

Finally, specific schemes customised to meet the unique issues encountered by communities involved in traditional sex work are required, as existing programmes may not properly respond to their specific needs. To effectively prevent human trafficking and develop safe spaces for vulnerable women and children, significant collaborations between the government and civil society, as well as cooperation among different agencies, are required [10].

Addressing the issues of intergenerational prostitution and uplifting marginalised communities necessitates a multifaceted and comprehensive strategy. The following ideas aim to strengthen marginalised communities, provide support and empowerment for persons involved in sex work, and prevent intergenerational prostitution from continuing.

It is critical to implement awareness programmes to educate Perna women about their rights, available options, and alternative livelihoods. Promoting literacy and ensuring Perna girls' access to education can provide them with knowledge and skills, opening doors to a larger range of opportunities. Comprehensive rehabilitation programmes adapted to the special needs of Perna women should be devised. These programmes should include vocational training, job placement aid, and entrepreneurship support, allowing individuals to transition out of poverty.

It is also necessary to strengthen legal processes in order to safeguard Perna women from exploitation and violence. This involves imposing harsh sanctions on perpetrators and creating safe locations where women can disclose abuse without fear of retaliation. They must guarantee that the legal system provides marginalised communities with essential protection and support.

Fostering social integration through confronting prejudices and discrimination against the Perna community is also one of the issues to be addressed. Collaboration between government institutions, non-governmental organisations, and local communities can help to develop inclusive environments that support Perna women's empowerment. It is feasible to break down barriers and establish a more inclusive and tolerant society by working together. Providing Perna women with access to healthcare services, especially reproductive health and counselling, is critical to their well-being. Addressing community substance misuse concerns and offering mental health services can improve their general well-being and support them on their path to empowerment. It is important to develop skill-building initiatives and income-generation programmes that are customised to the needs and goals of Perna women. Offering loans and resources for self-employment initiatives can help people break out from the prostitution cycle and pursue long-term economic alternatives.

To combat human trafficking and exploitation, law enforcement and monitoring at railway entrance locations must be strengthened. Regular training programmes for law enforcement, railway personnel, and other relevant stakeholders are required to improve their abilities to detect and combat human trafficking. Raising awareness and implementing Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) within the railway system can help to protect the safety of children who come into touch with trains. Adequate financing, resources, and infrastructure assistance from the Ministry of Home Affairs is critical for strengthening Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs) and allowing them to treat human trafficking cases more efficiently [10].

Collaboration between the labour department, Childline, the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), and the police can assist eliminate child labour and properly regulate placement agencies. In today's digital landscape, it is also critical to strengthen cybercrime cells and empower them to combat cybercrimes related to human trafficking. Establishing a solid cooperation between the state and civil society actors, as well as many ministries and departments is critical for thoroughly combatting human trafficking. Promoting community policing efforts in low-income neighbourhoods can improve crime reporting and create safe spaces for vulnerable women and children [10].

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

To break the cycle of prostitution, a thorough and coordinated effort to address the core causes and give support to individuals impacted is required. It's important to focus on the multilevel and multisectoral approach to end intergenerational prostitution.

Government Level: A coordinated effort at the government level is required to address the issue of prostitution in perna community and provide help to them. Policymakers and law enforcement must be educated on the rights of the women of perna community and endeavour to create an atmosphere that respects their dignity and human rights. The Central and State governments' legal service agencies should take the effort to educate the women of perna community on their legal rights regarding sex work. This gives them the ability to navigate the legal system and seek justice when necessary. Formal education must be made available to those who are still in school, to provide them with the knowledge and skills they need to foresee a life other than prostitution. Non-formal education alternatives like Anganwadis should also be made available providing them with other paths out of the cycle.

Collaboration among the labour department, Child line, the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), and the police can aid in the elimination of this practice. Children and Women's helplines should be made available and they should be given information about them.

At the Societal and Local level: Education and involvement of all the groups of the perna community about the consent, and the negative consequences of traditional prostitution standards. Encourage positive attitudes towards women and fight society's objectification of women.

Addressing ancient practices necessitates consideration of cultural norms and beliefs. Collaborate with cultural leaders and influencers to challenge harmful customs.

Nukkad nataks (street plays), films, and other kinds of media to educate the about their rights and the practice that they are forcefully being involved.

Medical Interventions: In addition to the recommendations made above, medical interventions are required to promote the physical and reproductive health of sex workers and vulnerable groups. Providing free condoms and organising monthly sexual health screening camps can empower people to protect themselves from STIs and undesired pregnancies.

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