

FOCUS: **BOMBAY**

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#breakwithtrafficking

PHOTO: ABEER KHAN



In recent years, the peaceful fight against poverty that Mumbai Smiles drives has increasingly focused on fighting against human trafficking. This is, together with weapons and drug trafficking, one of the three illegal industries that generates the most profits: during the last decade, the three of them managed to move 595 billion euros annually, an amount which is equivalent to 1.5% of the world's total GDP.

Human trafficking can have different objectives: labor exploitation, slavery, forced marriages or organ harvesting. However, the most frequent destination, especially as far as women and girls are concerned is sexual exploitation. Each year, more than half a million people are

trafficked for this purpose, that is, one every 60 seconds.

Trafficking is a modern form of slavery. And it is in the Asian and the Pacific region where the greatest number of victims of different forms of slavery are to be found. We are talking specifically about 73% of the victims of sexual exploitation, 64% of the victims of forced labor exploitation, and 42% of all those who were forced to marry.

Within the region, India, China and Pakistan have the highest absolute number of people living in conditions of slavery, and this number accounts for 60% of the victims in the region.

And within India, the state of Maharashtra, whose capital is Mumbai,

is the second in number of women victims of human trafficking, behind West Bengal (whose capital is Kolkata). In fact, in Mumbai Smiles we have added the latter city to our scope of action in the fight against trafficking.

Mumbai is the city with the highest number of sex workers in all of India, and at least one in seven of these women are estimated to be slaves. In Mumbai we find the largest brothel district of Asia: Kamathipura, a network of alleys in which thousands of girls and women are sexually exploited.

In our daily work, we have identified that many of the victims who are exploited in Mumbai have been trafficked from rural areas in Maharashtra, from other cities in India, and from neighboring countries, especially Nepal and Bangladesh.

usually captured among the most disadvantaged groups, such as those with low educational levels, those belonging to tribal communities or among lower castes. False promises of employment are often used to attract them and eventually force them into sexual or labor exploitation

The Indian state of West Bengal shares long borders with Bangladesh and Nepal, which are countries of great poverty where thousands of girls and women are captured each year to be trafficked and exploited. The many poorly guarded stretches along the borders are used by the mafias to smuggle their victims into Indian territory and take them to Kolkata. Many will end up being exploited in one of the prostitution districts of this city while others will be sold to brothels in other large

India

Trafficking victims captured in India are usually transferred to some of the largest cities within the country. Only a small percentage are trafficked abroad, mainly to the Persian Gulf countries. The victims are



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cities (Mumbai, Delhi, Pune, Goa, etc.).

West Bengal is also where many trafficking cases are originated, with thousands of missing women and girls being reported every year, of which only a third end up being located. In total, it is estimated that one in four cases of human trafficking in India takes place in West Bengal. And a chilling fact, 42% of the victims of trafficking in this state are minors.

The state of Goa, meanwhile, has become a hotspot for human trafficking due to the tourism industry built around it, which has degenerated into sexual tourism that often thrives on trafficking victims. In this state, cases of trafficking used to

be scarce, but in recent years they have significantly increased, and it has been estimated that more than 8 out of 10 victims come from other areas of India.

Nepal

In this country bordering India, approximately 35,000 people are trafficked each year and it is estimated that almost 18,000 girls and women (50 each day) are trafficked annually to India and sold to mafias for sexual exploitation. Some reports indicate that approximately 1.5 million Nepalese living below the poverty threshold are highly vulnerable to

being trafficked and sent to India where they will become victims of sexual and labor exploitation.

There is an open border policy between these two countries, and their nationals do not need a passport to cross it. This makes it really easy for mafias to move girls and women from Nepal to India and turns this route into one of the busiest human trafficking routes in the world. Furthermore, traffickers often opt for smaller and less guarded checkpoints to ensure that they are not detected.

The profile of trafficked Nepalese women and girls tends to correspond to those belonging to a low socioeconomic status who have few economic opportunities and a low educational and cultural level. Furthermore, their vulnerability increases as they participate in marginal and informal jobs, when they are abandoned by their husbands or families, or when they are survivors of abuse or violence. These factors make them very vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation mafias, who find it easy to lure them with promises of work in India, false marriage proposals, or forcing indebted families to hand over their daughter to pay off their debt.

Additionally, an additional vulnerability factor is to be found among Nepalese girls, and that is that

they are highly demanded in India because they are considered more attractive due to their features and their lighter complexion.

Although a high percentage of trafficked Nepalese women and girls are trafficked to India, there are also areas of prostitution in the Kathmandu valley, the capital, where more than 10,000 women are exploited, half of them before turning 18.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a country where 27 million people live in extreme poverty, and this implies great vulnerability among them to trafficking and exploitation mafias. As in Nepal, low socioeconomic and educational statuses are factors that increase the risk of becoming victims





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of trafficking. In fact, this country is both the origin and the transit route for trafficked persons, who in a significant number of cases are heading to neighboring India.

In addition, Bangladesh is a country with limited natural resources and meager industrial development, and it is also frequently hit by natural disasters such as floods, droughts or cyclones. These factors drive the population to move out and seek alternatives, often unintentionally leading them to fall into the hands of human trafficking mafias.

Between 20,000-50,000 Bangladeshi women and girls, victims

of trafficking, are estimated to end up in India each year. Some girls are sold into slavery by their own parents, while others are deceived into promises of employment or marriage and, in some cases, they are physically coerced and condemned into commercial sexual exploitation.

The border between the two countries is very long and packed with spots where crossing illegally is extremely easy, and this offers all types of opportunities to the traffickers.

Mumbai Smiles' response

We are facing a global problem that needs to be dealt with from a global perspective. For this reason, Mumbai Smiles understands that the fight against human trafficking cannot be undertaken from a single geographical space. Since the women and girls who suffer exploitation in Mumbai come from other places, such as those mentioned in this Focus, it is necessary to act in them to tackle the problem from its origin.

In this sense, the Foundation is implementing various preventive actions in some areas of Nepal, in



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the regions bordering Bangladesh and India, and in rural areas on the outskirts of Kolkata and of Mumbai itself. The objective is to raise awareness among the people who live in those areas, so that they know the risk posed by the trafficking and people exploitation networks, and to alert them so that they do not end up trapped by them.

Many of these people consider emigrating out of necessity, given the lack of employment alternatives they have in their communities of origin. This legitimate desire makes them especially vulnerable, because they are more receptive to supposed promises of work abroad. Therefore, it is essential to act on two fronts: on the one hand, we need to ensure that they know the legal channels to guarantee a legal and risk-free

migration process. On the other hand, we need to make sure that they can have access to work alternatives in their places of origin which allow them to move forward and refrain from emigrating.

With the support and the collaboration of local entities with extensive and diverse experience in those areas, Mumbai Smiles is working in the Nepalese district of Nuwakot (in northern Kathmandu); the districts of Satkhira and Khulna in southwestern Bangladesh (bordering the state of West Bengal in India); and the district of 24 Parganas South, in the southeast of the Indian state of West Bengal. We are also implementing actions of this kind on the outskirts of Bombay, in the Thane district.

These projects, using different approaches according to the reality of each area, have an impact on raising awareness about the risks of human trafficking, as well as on creating resources at the community and local levels so that people can organize and access information on work opportunities in their environment, on the legal requirements to legally emigrate, etc. These projects emphasize the multiplier effect by which the participating people can spread these messages among the people around them, family members, etc.

All these initiatives have been created with a common interest in impacting the youngest groups. On the one hand, work is being done so that they can develop their capacities and improve their opportunities for the future. On the other hand, all the information on the risks and dangers of human trafficking and exploitation networks is transferred to them, so that they can be alert and avoid falling into them. And, of course, in all cases, special attention is paid to supporting survivors of trafficking, so that they can heal their psychological and emotional wounds, and hope for a dignified life. In addition, in



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many cases, these survivors accept to play an active role in alerting the people around them, by sharing their own experiences, and thus helping them to avoid falling into the same situations that they suffered.

These are obviously complex but undoubtedly necessary efforts in order to reduce this unacceptable scourge, and to bring us closer to a society in which no one is exploited for the profit of unscrupulous people.

TESTIMONIALS

In the following pages, we offer the testimonies of four women who have suffered the effects of trafficking or were potential victims due to their vulnerability. They are stories of suffering but also of struggle, of overcoming, and of confidence in a better future. These

stories can help other women in similar situations to find reasons for hope.

In the four cases presented, all the names, both of the survivors and of all the other people involved, have been changed in order to preserve their privacy.

Lalita, fighting to have her daughter with her

Lalita's story is moving for the conviction of her struggle to overcome a life full of blows and adversity and for her resolution to do so with her daughter.

Originally from the state of Kerala, in southwest India, she had an ordinary uneventful childhood. Some years ago, when she was a young woman, during a visit to some relatives in Chembur (a Mumbai suburb), she met Navil, with whom she soon fell in love and who she started to live with in secret, behind the back of her family. However, two years later, she found out that Navil was already married and, together with his wife, they ran a brothel in the city of Indor, in the state of Madhya Pradesh, in central India.

Navil forced Lalita to prostitute herself against her will. This situation lasted for three long years, during which time she got pregnant and gave birth to a baby girl. Motherhood made her think about her situation and rebel against it. But Navil chose to sell her to the owner of a brothel in Kamathipura, in Mumbai, keeping her

daughter with him and caring for her from that moment along with his wife.

After several years in Mumbai, Lalita could finally find shelter in the Udaan family home run by Mumbai Smiles on the outskirts of the city. Nevertheless, her struggle is not over yet since her wish is to get her daughter back, which Navil opposes. We are giving her the necessary support to make her wishes come true, so that she can reunite with her daughter and, with her side by side, she can rebuild her life with dignity and justice.



Farzana, rediscovering herself after living a nightmare thousand of kilometres away

Farzana was born in a village southwest of Bangladesh 32 years ago. She was the third child of six girls and three boys. Maintaining such a large family was not easy, and Farzana had to drop out after her first five years in primary school. At barely sixteen she married a small merchant from a nearby village with whom she had two daughters. However, her husband ended up rejecting and then divorcing her. Farzana and her daughters had to go back to her parents'. Things were not easy there, and she suffered frequent insults and scorn from her male siblings.

Farzana tried different jobs without success. She was desperate to work and provide for her daughters when a friend of the family suggested her to migrate to Saudi Arabia, where she could work as a domestic worker for a local family and earn a good salary. She found the proposal interesting, although the man made her pay

60,000 taka (about 600 euros) for alleged prior procedures, for which she sold jewelry and borrowed money.



Finally, in 2010 she was able to make the trip and was transferred to the farm where she was going to work, a huge place with two houses and a total of 24 rooms. Upon arrival, the owner kept her personal documents, and from the first day she had to face a very different reality from what she had been promised: a tough job, having to clean a large number of rooms and to take care of the daily cooking and washing up. Her room was a pantry where she could barely rest a few hours a day, and she was only allowed to eat once a day.

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Despite her requests, she was only allowed to speak with her family once a month, and just for a few minutes. Despite everything, Farzana endured the situation thinking of her daughters and that in a few years she would have saved enough to provide them with a more promising future.

Four long years passed, during which she suffered more and more abuse, until she decided to run away. As she had not her documents, she was arrested by the police and imprisoned for three months. She could finally be repatriated, after her family sent 70,000 takas (some 700 euros). All that suffering was so unbearable that she ended up with a deep depression which led her to a state of deep sadness and discouragement. However, she needed to get over it and take care of her daughters.

The lack of opportunities in her close environment led her again to emigrate to Saudi Arabia in search of work, leaving her daughters in the care of her siblings. She found a new job, but had to go through the same situation of exploitation and mistreatment, having to take care of a house where a family of 25 lived. To make it even worse, the employer, besides mistreating her and depriving her of adequate care, used

to sexually abuse her.

Farzana endured this situation for five years, in which she could at least send the money she earned to her siblings so that they could take care of her daughters properly. After this time, she decided to return to Bangladesh. However, she found out that her siblings has spent all the money she had been sending. This caused her an important anxiety crisis and she left the house with her daughters. From then on, she lived humbly, staying at other relatives' and accepting poorly paid jobs. The precariousness in which she lived led her to marry her older daughter when she was barely 15 years old.

She currently lives with her young daughter in the home of one of her sisters. When we got to know about her story through our partner in Bangladesh, Agrogothi Sangstha, we started to give her all the necessary support to help with her mental recovery so that she could regain control of her life in a safe environment. Farzana is feeling better, has received training to obtain a better job, and above all she dreams that her young daughter can complete her education and have access to a promising dignified future.

Namrata, the hope of a family

Namrata was born 17 years ago in a rural village in the district of Nuwakot, north of Kathmandu, Nepal. She was the youngest child of nine sisters and two brothers.

Her family belongs to one of the lowest caste of the hindu tradition. Their only income came from her father who cleaned latrines and sewers, and occasionally worked as a musician at some celebrations. Their financial straits caused frequent arguments between her parents, and Namrata witnessed these almost daily demonstrations of violence with sadness and helplessness.

As Namrata grew older, her parents did not allow her to continue her studies unless one of her male brothers accompanied her to school. After some time, her brother got married and moved to another city, which made her interrupt her education, having just completed

the first six years of primary school. This plunged Namrata into deep dismay, since she was aware of her potential and of how much she would have achieved had she continued her studies. Nevertheless, she didn't consider disobeying, and following her parents' wishes, she began to



take small informal jobs with which to contribute to the family income. But her sadness never disappeared, and she sometimes had suicidal thoughts.

Some months ago, Namrata knew about the project we are promoting in that area through Chhori, a partner of Mumbai Smiles in Nepal, to provide young girls access to a residential program in which they get training in hairdressing and tailoring, while being

informed and sensitized about the risks of human trafficking. Namrata was accepted in the program and she completed the three-month cycle. Now she feels that she is a new person, much more self-confident, capable of expressing her problems and also she has learnt to use computers and has improved her reading and maths skills.

Namrata is clear about the future: she wants to set up a clothing manufacturing business to earn a decent living and to be able to help her sisters and parents. She also wants to share with her friends what she has learnt about human trafficking so that they can be vigilant and avoid falling into that hell.

Sahina, overcoming trauma and becoming a leader of the community

Sahina is a 13-year-old girl who lived in the state of West Bengal, southeast of Kolkata. Sahina enjoyed spending time with her uncle, ten years older than her, for whom she began to have deeper feelings. One day, he

suggested that they moved together to the nearby town of Barrackpore. Sahina agreed and left her home to be with him. However, they never got there. Instead he took her to Ghutirayi Sharif railway station (in Kolkata's suburban transport network) and locked her in a room. Sahina realized too late that her uncle's plans were completely different to what he had promised her. She assaulted and abused her for several days. Aware of his true intentions, she managed to escape and return to her home. She had the courage to explain what had happened to her and report it to the local police station. But she suffered a lot of pressure from her family not to go ahead with the case and many people in the community looked at her with rejection, as if she had been the culprit and not the victim of what she had suffered.

Mumbai Smiles, through our partner in West Bengal, Goranbose Gram Bikash Kendra, is giving her support with her mental recovery, and also assisting her in the open legal process against her assailant. Sahina has decided to resume her studies in an Islamic school, and at the same time assume an active role among young people in her community, with whom she has formed a group to share experiences

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and ideas, spread the risks of human trafficking and avoid in as possible that similar cases occur in the future.

Today, the young members of the group of which Sahina takes part are very excited to have a place to express themselves, and continue completing training and empowerment sessions to learn further. In addition, they also motivate other young people in the community. At Mumbai Smiles we are happy to be part of this journey and to continue learning together with these young people that are so full of energy.



Ana Duato, actress

Women trapped in human trafficking
cannot show their face.

If they did, would be exposed
to suffer more abuse and exploitation.

But you can show your face for them.

#breakwithtrafficking



Join the campaign
and sign the manifesto

[mumbaismiles.org/
breakwithtrafficking](http://mumbaismiles.org/breakwithtrafficking)

