



Prerana's Anti-Trafficking Center



When Families facilitate Exploitation

A Case of Intergenerational Trafficking



Certain communities from several villages on the confluence of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh are notorious for the rampant practice of trafficking the young women and girls in their families into the sex trade. These communities come from a range of tribes across India like *Deredar, Gandharva, Bancharas, Nat, Rajnat, Bedia, Kanjar*, to name a few where intergenerational prostitution is seen as an established tradition. Minor girls are groomed and pushed into the sex trade by their families. The men pursue no other occupation other than trafficking and pimping the girls in their family. In 2019, Prerana received the referral of a case where the victim belonged to one such community. Ishita (*name changed*), a native of Uttar Pradesh had been pushed into the sex trade by her family.

Dance Bars as Sites of Exploitation

Ishita's case was referred to Prerana in January 2019. A social worker at Prerana received a call from another organisation, seeking Prerana's assistance in the case. Prerana agreed and a social worker from the team accompanied the representative of the organisation to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) where the child was going to be presented. The child had previously run from home, claiming that her family had pushed her into the sex trade. After the child's presentation, the CWC declared her to be *a child in need of care and protection* under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. She was also placed in a Children's Home for protective custody until the inquiry period, and Prerana was appointed as the Support Person in the case (as per rules of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012).

After the referral, a social worker from Prerana met with the child. During the interaction, she shared that she was a native of Agra, Uttar Pradesh. At the age of three, her parents had sent her to Mumbai to live with her paternal aunt to access better education. She had been living in Mumbai ever since, except for two years in between, when she had moved back to Agra.

However, after coming back to Mumbai for the second time, she discontinued her education. Ishita shared that she was then gradually groomed for induction into the sex

trade. Her aunt began sending her to dance bars as the practice is common in their community. Dance bars are sites of shadow entertainment that serve liquor and present suggestive dances by young girls who eventually get picked up by the patronizing customers for commercial sex. In Prerana's experience of working with victims rescued from dance bars, the girls are put on 'display' first by making them dance in such bars and then eventually sold for sexual activity to the highest bidder.

In Ishita's case, not many people would approach her initially as she looked visibly young but that soon changed. At the dance bar, the customers would approach the manager to reach out to her for sexual services. The first time someone approached her for sex, she shared the same with her family. Her family, however, told her that it was 'normal' and groomed her for joining the sex trade. Her family was not involved in scouting for customers but they were aware of the child being in the sex trade. Over time, she started soliciting independently in exchange for money. After working at the dance bar for a few months, she moved out of her aunt's home along with her siblings, and also asked her parents to move to Mumbai. It is also through frequenting dance bars that she met Rajesh (*name changed*), the man she claimed to be her 'boyfriend' at the time of the initial interactions with the social worker.

Ishita shared that her parents were not comfortable with her relationship with Rajesh as he was quite older to her (he was nearly thirty years old), resulting in frequent quarrels at home. When the situation at home became beyond endurance, she ran away from home and moved to a friend's place. She had shared her discomfort in moving back home with Rajesh who introduced Ishita to his friend, a lawyer. The lawyer contacted a civil society organisation, and a representative from the organisation accompanied the child to file a report against her parents for pushing her into the sex trade. The police however, did not cooperate with the child and instead, scared her into believing that she, along with her parents and Rajesh, might get arrested if she filed a report. They further asked her not to share the actual reason for her having run away from home with anyone. This experience was intimidating for the child and she returned home soon after. After the child came back home, her parents took her back to Agra for a month. When she returned, her parents got a call from the organisation that had

accompanied her earlier, asking them to bring the child to the Child Welfare Committee, which is when the child was declared to be in need of care and protection and placed in a Children's Home.

Family's Involvement in the Sex Trade

After interacting with the child, the social workers went to visit the child's family at their residence in Mumbai for the Social Investigation as required under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015. Her parents were quite hostile to the social workers as they were not happy with Ishita having been placed in a shelter facility. They were also suspicious of Prerana's role in the situation, and made the social workers speak to a few people on call, including a lawyer. The callers were also hostile to the social workers and blamed them for 'taking the child away'. The social workers informed them, and the parents, about the Juvenile Justice system but to no avail. The parents were not willing to share much information about the child, and further claimed that they were unaware of the child's involvement in the sex trade. They insisted that the social workers come with them to the local police station for any further queries.

When the social workers met the police with the parents, the police were unaware about the Juvenile Justice system, and the role of a Support Person, which was duly explained to them by the social workers multiple times. However, despite that, they also were quite suspicious and hostile to the social workers. The police informed the social workers about a report having been filed by Ishita's parents about their child being forcibly taken away. When the social workers requested to see a copy of the report but the police refused to share the same. At the police station, the social workers also observed a tone of familiarity between the parents and the police.

Previously, two social workers had visited the same police station to give the Summons, issued by the CWC for taking the child's statement and conducting her medical examination, in the presence of a social worker from Prerana. The social workers had also explained the role of the Support Person in the matter to the Police Inspector. They

also refused to comply with the CWC Order of Prerana being allowed to be present during the recording of the statement of the child and her medical examination.¹

After conducting the Home Visit, the Social Investigation Report was submitted to the CWC. The CWC also gave a letter to the social workers, addressed to the police, citing that social workers from Prerana needed to be present for the aforementioned procedures. The social workers managed to accompany the child but the behaviour of the police with the child was far from child-friendly. They said hurtful things to the child, and blamed her for the situation she was in, to an extent where the child broke down. The social worker tried to explain to the police that their behaviour was harmful to the child, but they paid no heed.

Working to Rehabilitate the Child

While the child was placed at the Children's Home, the social workers continued their interventions. They tried to make the child understand about the various options that she could opt for in terms of her education or vocational training. The child was not keen on getting an education and preferred to seek vocational training in makeup artistry. The social workers suggested that she could consider completing her education through distance learning, so that her future is more secure. The child agreed to the suggestion and with assistance from the social worker, she enrolled in distance learning to complete her school education.

Ishita entered the Juvenile Justice system at 17 years and completed 18 years of age in May 2019. Through consistent interventions, the social workers had shared various vocational opportunities with the child. Ishita was interested in make-up artistry and wanted to pursue a career in the field.

After she turned 18, it was still not safe for Ishita to be sent back home due to her family's involvement in the sex trade. Meanwhile, the police had found evidence of monetary transactions between Ishita's father and Rajesh, indicating commercial sexual exploitation of the child. It was revealed that Rajesh had also been a customer of Ishita

¹ Sec 2(f) of POCSOA states that "Support person" means a person assigned by a Child Welfare Committee, in accordance with sub-rule (8) of rule 4, to render assistance to the child through the process of investigation and trial, or any other person assisting the child in the pre-trial or trial process in respect of an offence under the Act;

and had also exploited her. She was suggested to move to an Aftercare facility where she could also get access to vocational training and continue her rehabilitation. The social worker made an Individual Care Plan for the child, based on her interests and suggested Aftercare Homes based on the same. She was also given an orientation of three such facilities. The social worker invited a representative from the facility which the child was most keen to join, to inform her about the programmes.

Subsequently, Ishita was transferred to Aftercare in May 2019 where she has been progressing extensively. She was even awarded for being the 'Best Girl of the Year' at the facility. She is appearing for her standard 10th exams this year and hopes to make a career in the beauty industry.

Internalising the Exploitation

In many communities in India, prostitution is an accepted tradition and with time the girls also internalise this exploitation. With Ishita also, it was difficult initially to make her understand that her rights were being violated when her parents decided to send her to dance bars or customers. The child did not hold her parents accountable for what had happened to her. Her idea of justice did not involve her parents being arrested so when her father was arrested by the police, the social worker was apprehensive of the disclosure negatively impacting Ishita's progress. The counsellor from Prerana took a session with Ishita before the social worker made the disclosure. They ensured that the child had access to psycho-social support to process the news. However, the child had gradually understood that her family had been wrong to put her into the sex trade, hence she handled the news relatively calmly. However, it was not easy to make her family understand that they had actively facilitated the sexual exploitation of the child through social customs. Her aunts (who have been in the sex trade as well) still hold her responsible for 'breaking the family'.

In this case, Ishita also had two younger sisters, Kangana and Tara (*names changed*) and she was quite concerned about their safety and wellbeing. Given how the family had pushed Ishita into commercial sexual exploitation, the social workers also felt that they were vulnerable to the same situation and were potential victims, making it important to keep a check on their safety and well being. Ishita is now actively trying to secure her

future and no longer wishes to be in contact with her family, except her younger siblings.

A social worker through the course of their work with a child has to inadvertently work with the police. It is important for the police to be aware about Juvenile Justice systems, if not completely informed. In this case, the police had refused to file a report when the child had visited them the first time. When the social workers had met them, they were not willing to understand or accept the legality of the Order passed by the Child Welfare Committee regarding the appointment of Prerana as the Support Person. Apart from this, their behaviour with the child would often cause more harm than good. There is a need for greater awareness among the police and child-friendly behaviour needs to be emphasized. They must also be made aware of how a family can be involved in a child's exploitation to ensure that cases are taken seriously. Very often, the understanding of child friendly behaviour is limited to painting the walls of a facility which is frequented by children or used by children with bright colours. Child friendly² behaviour has to also be reflected in the approach of the authorities.

² As per Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) 2015, Sec 2(15) "child friendly" means any behaviour, conduct, practice, process, attitude, environment or treatment that is humane, considerate and in the best interest of the child

P.S. We are sure that most of you must be doing such data gathering and analyzing exercises at your end too. If you are, please do share the same with us. We shall be more than happy to share it on our website

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