



**Towards a Feminist Theology of (In)-Decent Work  
in the Context of Human Trafficking and Migration:  
Journeying with Economic Migrant Women in India in their Struggle for a Life of Dignity**

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**This thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of**

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## Declaration

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Post Graduate Programme in the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

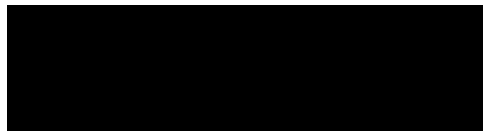
I, Sanjana Das declare that,

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other University.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
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**Sanjana Das  
(Student Name)**

**28<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

**Prof. Gerald O. West**



**(Signature)**

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to all women who in their everyday lives' struggle/d  
to work and live with dignity, including my Mother.

Life in its fullness, is a dream they aspire/d for.

I salute the strength, courage, resilience and dreams of all women whom I have met in my  
life and during this research. By keeping their steadfast faith and hope alive even during  
their darkest times, they have deeply inspired me in my faith, work and my passion for  
justice and solidarity.

I dedicate this dissertation to my Mother, who through her life inspired and challenged me  
to engage with people in margins, and to affirm their dignity.

I am, because of who she was,  
even as she continues to live in me and inspire me in her unique ways.

I commit and re-dedicate myself to continue working towards making a just and equitable  
world for vulnerable children, women and marginalised populations.

## Acknowledgement

Writing a dissertation may be a work done in isolation and solitude that requires personal effort, commitment and hard work, but it certainly is not a solitary experience. This research is a collaborative effort and would not have been possible without the guidance, mentoring, support and active participation I have received from different people.

First, Sudipta Singh for trusting in me that I could do it when I was quite unsure at the beginning. He not only nurtured and sustained me during the entire process with courage, belief and resources but fed me with good food and planned vacations to keep my body, mind and soul nourished. This work would have not been possible without the supporter, cheerleader and critique in him.

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and books with me when I needed most but also for sharing their wisdom and knowledge with me whenever I needed. Their presence and encouragement in this journey are beyond words to describe. The Librarians of UKZN Cecil Renaud (Main) library were extremely cordial and helpful. I am grateful for all of their support to me as an International student, of special mention is Ms. Celeste Johns. My heart is filled with gratitude for my Subject Librarian, Ms. Goitsewang Ncongwane, who provided incredible support to me as I was away from the University. She was just an e-mail away with her prompt responses to my requests, sharing with me soft and scanned copies of whatever I asked her for. I extend my sincere gratitude to Dr. Lalrinawmi Ralte, Professor United Theological College and President Northeast Solidarity Group for her consent to be the gatekeeper for this research project. Her warmth, hospitality and willingness to contribute and engage with me during my stay and work in Bangalore is deeply appreciated.

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This work has been greatly influenced by several feminist and biblical scholars, liberation theologians, social justice scholar-activists and practitioners whose writings and body of work has enabled me to deepen my understanding on Feminist Research, Gender Studies, Liberation Theology, Human Trafficking, Migration, Labour, Dignity and Solidarity.

This research is an academic pursuit for me with a moral-political-ideological commitment for the rights and dignity of women from the Global South who in search of a better life and work could be vulnerable to trafficking and face exploitation as workers in the unorganised informal economy. Yet they find ways to affirm their rights and dignity and work towards improving their quality of lives. These women despite their vulnerabilities do have the benefit of conceiving new identities that come with a freedom for self-exploration.

I will forever be grateful for the participation and collaborations of the 13 women from Manipur, India who live and work as migrant workers in the city of Bangalore, India. I am in

awe of each of their resilience, strength and character, who instilled much faith in me with their dignity and grace. They joined me in creating sacred, safe and empowering spaces to speak and listen to one another. My heart is filled with gratitude towards each one of them for having shared their personal and collective experiences with me and for embracing this research with faith, love and confidence. I feel honoured and humbled to have been embraced by them with trust to share their wisdom, knowledge and lived experiences with me, for sharing a bond of sisterhood with me, for times of reflection as well as fun during the research process, and for letting me in to have Informal Encounters with them at their workplaces. Their dreams have now given me the strength and power to dream many more dreams. I am thankful to all of them for embracing me in this liberative, empowering and transformative journey. Women's trust, active participation and rich contribution to this body of knowledge as research collaborators is at the heart of this dissertation. Women's conflicting subjectivities of freedom and subjugation as was important to explore, has brought in not only their experiences of subjugation but how women conceive new identities and move beyond the fixed definitions of femininity to live and work for a life with dignity. Their contribution to the research process and outcomes is valuable and I hope that their voices and knowledge will be acknowledged and utilised for further work in the academia and by those who represent them such as policymakers, law makers, lobbyist, practitioners, activists and the media. May we all build inclusive communities and be in solidarity with vulnerable, trafficked and migrant women working in the informal economy. May the Church and all faith communities be the Salt and Light and be in solidarity with women in (in)-decent work in the informal economy.

I wish to express my gratitude to my mother, whose love, generosity and commitment towards issues of injustice laid the foundation in shaping the values that I imbibe from her. She may not be here to see my work, but she certainly lives in me to continuously inspire and challenge me to be strong and focussed in my work, despite the many challenges I have faced in my life.

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academic heads of various departments in the Colleges, Universities and Churches in the Global North helped me understand the need to gently yet with affirmation bring forward the voices and knowledge of women from the Global South to the North for just solidarity. Of special mention are the 2024 International Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) meeting in Amsterdam where I was encouraged to publish my dissertation; the engagement with the PCUSAs Westminster Presbyterian Church in Michigan; University of Michigan; Kalamazoo College in 2023; 2024 World Christianity Conference, Ghana; 2024 Claiming Space Conference, Stellenbosch University; 2024 International Annual Conference on Religion Culture and Peace Education, Payap University and CWM's 2023 Discernment and Radical Engagement (DARE) Global Forum in Bangkok.

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So, a work done in solitude would not have been possible without the collaborations and support I have received from different corners of the world. I will always be grateful to all of them, some of whom you would know as you read this dissertation. Be inspired, challenged and join in solidarity with trafficked and migrant working women, who in their daily lives struggle and aspire to live a life of dignity and in abundance.

To all my sojourners and many more to join, may we work towards building a new social order, fighting the causes, systems and structures that violates the rights and dignity of the poor and vulnerable women in traffic and recognising their agency, worth and resourcefulness in the new economic order. May we re-imagine and work together towards transforming the world liberated from social and economic injustice. May we live out a life in true and just solidarity being conscious of the realities of the world, working towards liberation of the other that would in true spirit and in faith mean liberation for all.

## Acronyms

AI	Appreciative Inquiry
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ASI	Anti-Slavery International
CBPR	Community Based Participatory Research
CBR	Community-Based Rehabilitations
CBS	Contextual Bible Study
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease of 2019
CWM	Council for World Mission
DARE	Discernment and Radical Engagement
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
FG	Focus Group
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FI	Feminist Interview
FPAR	Feminist Participatory Action and Research
GAATW	Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICAT	Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Human Trafficking
IE	Informal Encounter
ILO	International Labour Organisation
I/NGO	International Non-Government Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPC	Indian Penal Code
ITPA	Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act 1986
NATB	National Anti-Trafficking Bureau
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OHCHR	UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OXFAM	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
PCUSA	Presbyterian Church of USA
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programs
SBL	Society for Biblical Literature
SRA	Social Research Association
TIP Report	Trafficking in Persons Report
ToP Bill	The Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill
TVPA	Trafficking Victims Protection Act
UN	United Nations
UN.GIFT	United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIAP	United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USD	United States DOLLAR
VAW	Violence against women

## Abstract

The objective of this research is to work towards developing a feminist theology of trafficked dignity and (in)-decent work, trying to seek answers to the main research question, *What are the conceptual components of embodied dignity within contexts of trafficking, female economic migration and indecent work in the informal economy?*

This dissertation analyses ways in which notions of ‘trafficking’ reconfigure notions of ‘dignity’ and ‘indecent work’ for trafficked and migrant working women. It explores how these conceptual components can contribute to a theology of dignity for the trafficked and decent work for female economic migrants. It further explores the theological/religious dimensions of dignity in the embodied experience of women who have been vulnerable to or have experiences of trafficking. This dissertation explores the broader context of neoliberal globalisation and its intersections with human trafficking, labour migration and gender. It asserts women’s rights to decent work and invites the wider community to be in just solidarity with female economic migrants. This research makes five arguments.

First, it argues that an over emphasis on the feminised image of the trafficked with strong anti-prostitution foundations stemming from the abolitionist discourse takes away focus from the structural and systemic inequities that pushes women out from their homelands to migrate in search of work and better life that renders them vulnerable to trafficking and other forms of exploitation.

Second, it argues that an over emphasis on trafficked women as passive victims takes away the focus from recognising her agency for taking informed decisions for herself in the recovery phase. A paternalistic approach in the anti-trafficking paradigm can render women to secondary victimisation and exploitation.

Third, it argues for creating intentional spaces for dialogues between the dominant groups with strong anti-trafficking and anti-migration foundations and groups that promote women’s agency in her choice of work, including sex work. I contend that in the anti-trafficking paradigm, women’s right to decent work, that includes amongst many other concerns, safe working places, ethical practices, fair wages, provision of social security and health care get less attention in the presence of abolitionist and bureaucratic feminism.

Fourth, it argues for the affirmation of dignity and personhood of women as resourceful agents of their empowerment and as economic contributors to their families and governments of the host and home countries. With women sending remittances back home, women's contribution to their homes and home countries must be recognised and their dignity must be affirmed which gets overshadowed in comparison to their male counterparts.

Fifth, this research argues for women's active participation in the knowledge production process. Having women's perspective and insights that comes from their lived experiences, is critical to influence policy, development praxis, sociology, theology and praxis. The recognition of women as the best knowers of their social realities and having them as collaborators in research is emphasized and practiced in this research. The knowledge and agency of women from Global South needs to be recognised and affirmed. Decolonising knowledge systems, I argue is necessary in research and academia, to influence development work. This research has taken a preferential option for women in the margins of the society and academia. It has drawn women's epistemological knowledge and standpoint in the research process within the discipline of liberation biblical hermeneutics. This is process directed research. Much of my emphasis in each chapter is on the research process itself. The research process is as important, perhaps more so, than the research product. At the beginning of each chapter, I reiterate my research process, ensuring that each aspect of my research is understood to be part of an integrated process.

With Feminist Standpoint Theory, Intersectional Feminism and Liberation Theology as the core theoretical and theological foundations, this research engages with the scholarly work of post-colonial feminist scholars, theologians and biblical scholars on human trafficking, migration, labour, neoliberal economic globalisation, body, human dignity and solidarity. The methodological foundations are within the discipline of Qualitative Critical Feminist Research paradigm and has engaged in doing Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Studies.

This dissertation explores the broader context of women from the Global South who in the presence of unjust and unequal systems and structures move out of their homes that could lead to women's mobility in unsafe passages. I explored the micro and macro factors of women's economic migration from critical studies on human trafficking and migration from a post-colonial feminist lens. Women's subjective experiences of their migratory journey

informed this research about women's trafficking and migration experiences. It further informs women's strategies for resistance, liberation and empowerment. I examined their strategies of survival, sustenance and solidarity in host cities to address injustices and exploitation that they face at workplaces and in the community. To create transformative pathways for a just world, I firmly believe that our collective action must be centred towards being in just solidarity with vulnerable and marginalised populations.

Key Words: Human Trafficking, Migration, Decent Work, Dignity, Empowerment, Agency, Solidarity

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter is an introduction to the background, purpose and paradigm of this research. In the introductory section, I begin by presenting an overview of the dissertation with key arguments of this research. The first section comprises of the problem context, rationale, objectives and significance of the research. In the second section, I describe the background and motivation for this research. In the third section, I present the research paradigm, which includes the research questions, the theoretical and theological underpinnings, research design and methodology in brief, location, approach and sampling of the research. The fourth section presents a brief of the thesis outline, followed by conclusion of the chapter.

The notion of ‘trafficking’ is widely understood to be the transportation of women and young girls under coercion or deception for the purpose of sexual slavery. In recent times, the ambit of trafficking in persons has expanded in the global discourse and has brought in the concerns of other forms of trafficking and migration in the context of globalisation. However, the anti-trafficking paradigm continues to focus largely on sex trafficking.

This dissertation analyses ways in which notions of ‘trafficking’ reconfigure notions of ‘dignity’ and ‘indecent work’ for trafficked and migrant working women. It explores how these conceptual components can contribute to a theology of trafficked dignity and decent work. It further explores the theological/religious dimensions of dignity in the embodied experience of women who have been vulnerable to or have experiences of trafficking. In my review of literature, I did not find a fully developed theology in the domain of human trafficking. This dissertation explores the broader context of neoliberal globalisation and its intersections with human trafficking, labour migration and gender. It asserts women’s rights to decent work and invites the wider community to be in just solidarity with female economic migrants. This research makes five arguments.

First, it argues that an over emphasis on the feminised image of the trafficked with strong anti-prostitution foundations stemming from the abolitionist discourse takes away focus from the structural and systemic inequities that pushes women out from their homelands to

migrate in search of work and better life that renders them vulnerable to trafficking and other forms of exploitation.

Second, it argues that an over emphasis on trafficked women as passive victims takes away the focus from recognising her agency for taking informed decisions for herself in the recovery phase. A paternalistic approach in the anti-trafficking paradigm can render women to secondary victimisation and exploitation.

Third, it argues for creating intentional spaces for dialogues between the dominant groups with strong anti-trafficking and anti-migration foundations and groups that promote women's agency in her choice of work, including sex work. I contend that in the anti-trafficking paradigm, women's right to decent work, that includes amongst many other concerns, safe working places, ethical practices, fair wages, provision of social security and health care get less attention in the presence of abolitionist and bureaucratic feminism.

Fourth, in this research I have argued for the affirmation of dignity and personhood of women as resourceful agents of their empowerment and as economic contributors to their families and governments of the host and home countries. With women sending remittances back home, women's contribution to their homes and home countries must be recognised and their dignity must be affirmed which gets overshadowed in comparison to their male counterparts.

Fifth, this research argues for women's active participation in the knowledge production process. Having women's perspective and insights that comes from their lived experiences, is critical to influence policy, development praxis, sociology and theology and praxis. The recognition of women as the best knowers of their social realities and having them as collaborators in research is emphasized and practiced in this research. The knowledge and agency of women from Global South needs to be recognised and affirmed. Decolonising knowledge systems, I argue is necessary in research and academia, to influence development work. This research has taken a preferential option for women in the margins of the society and academia. It has drawn women's epistemological knowledge and standpoint in the research process within the discipline of liberation biblical hermeneutics. This is process directed research. Much of my emphasis in each chapter is on the research process itself. The research process is as important, perhaps more so, than the research product. At the

beginning of each chapter, I reiterate my research process, ensuring that each aspect of my research is understood to be part of an integrated process.

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### **1.1 Problem Context, Rationale, Objectives and Significance of the Research**

For this research, I followed a thematic approach to analyse available literature on human trafficking, migration and labour in the context of neo-liberal economic globalisation. From a post-colonial feminist lens and within the discipline of critical research paradigm and liberation hermeneutics, I planned to explore the subjective experiences and knowledge of women from the Global South to understand the key concepts of this research - agency, empowerment, dignity and solidarity.

My preliminary literature review brought to my knowledge that though trafficking of women is a critical issue yet the dominant discourse on the subject is based much on a set of assumptions, moralistic positions, anecdotal information, unexamined hypothesis and unsystematic research (Sanghera 2005: 5).

Furthermore, Sanghera (2005: 4) notes that,

“... it has been made murkier by the melding together of complicated categories, constructs and players. Issues of migration, trafficking, and sex work are peppered with constructs of sexuality, gender and vulnerability, threaded through with categories of victim and agent, consent and coercion...”.

The anti-trafficking interventions, with specific reference to South Asia and India, focuses on Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-integration/ Repatriation. They often fail to distinguish between the trafficking of children and women (Sanghera 2005: 13). Rescue of trafficked women from brothels needs critical reflection, since it not only can make the operation of

traffickers more clandestine, but housing women under repressive conditions can also make them invisible and inaccessible. Despite their good intentions, these models often curb and deprives women their freedom to exercise their agency. Depriving women to utilise their agency in the rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration models can make them vulnerable to further exploitation. The re-integration of women is the most difficult part, especially for women trafficked into prostitution (Sanghera 2005:18). The sexualised image of trafficked women makes her vulnerable to stigma and shame in her home after return. Studies indicate “secondary victimisation” of returnees (Cojocar 2016:12-38). Most often, those re-integrated return to the very places that were vulnerable to their existence and survival. In addition, they risk living with being re-victimised from having additional burden of bearing shame and stigma for supposedly being sexually violated or having engaged in indecent work (Poudel 2011, Simkhada 2008, Sanghera 2005).

In the Indian context, there is a huge gap in studies of the experiences of women post rescue and rehabilitation, especially after their re-integration. Some studies indicate that women who are rescued do not receive proper rehabilitation services and vocational training skills development. When re-integrated back with their families, most women return to the same conditions that had rendered them vulnerable to trafficking. Without adequate economic opportunities for survival, women return back to the cities looking for work. Many return to the same or similar places from where they were rescued. Others, find their solidarity networks to make their migration safe as informed by women in this research. There is a need to have systematic studies on whether rescue of trafficked women decreases the incidence of trafficking of women into prostitution (Sanghera 2005: 17,18). In my opinion, the approaches to re-integration of rescued and rehabilitated survivors needs critical and collective reflections from a gender sensitive right-based approach. Innovative and alternate community-based approaches need to be explored and promoted extensively alongside building capacities of women for decent work.

In the trafficking discourse specially in the Indian context, agency is a much contentious and neglected term, where decisions for the ‘rescue’, ‘rehabilitation’ or ‘re-integration’ of women are mostly taken by the NGOs or government agencies following the stipulated guidelines without the full participation or informed consent of women in the decision-making process. The police in India under the *Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act*, carry out raid and rescue

operations along with NGOs. The literature review further informs that the notion of a female 'victim' of trafficking in need of 'rescue' and 'return' is a pervasive image that conjures their agency to make informed choices regarding their own lives (Kempadoo 2015, Sleightholme & Sinha 1997). Critics argue that such raids and rescue operations not only lead to arbitrary arrements, detention, confiscation of property and valuables, it leads to forced rehabilitations and deportation of undocumented migrant sex worker, trafficked or not (Wijers 2015: 67). This approach has been critiqued for being insensitive towards women further damaging the social image of returned women. It has been argued that the process of re-integration of returned women excludes their voice, participation and agency in the process of return. In the review of literature, even though I find literature on the trafficking experiences of women, which includes deception, violations, violence, subjugation, exclusion, isolation and living and working in 'slavery' like conditions, there is a gap in the post trafficking narratives of empowerment and of women's own understanding of their identities, subjectivities and agency in the context of trafficking.

The notion of trafficking is deeply rooted in strong anti-prostitution and anti-migration foundations (Kempadoo 2015: 12, 16). Therefore, the conflation between sexual slavery and sex work with abolitionist feminists demanding for an end to prostitution and the rights-based feminist groups demanding rights of women to sex work, safe workplaces and social security like any other workers (Kempadoo 2012: xiii, Kempadoo 2015: 9-12, O'Connell 2002: 84-98). The anti-migration foundation within a protectionist approach, curbs the right of mobility and agency of female economic migrants (Pattanaik 2008). My literature review established that women's agency to work, mobility and resourcefulness gets sidelined in the dominant anti-trafficking discourse. This gender bias is further established by a protectionist and paternalist approach which re-enforces the gender norm that women need constant male and State protection (Pattanaik 2008). In the past few decades, women have been migrating from one place to the other in search of a better life, better opportunities for work to support their families back home or to move out to escape from domestic violence. In a globalized economy, the role of gender is a distinctive pattern in the case of female migration which puts women at high risk of trafficking (Russel 2014 :536). The feminisation of migration has heightened the global attention towards the issue of human trafficking (Russel 2014: 532). However, the systemic and structural causal factors of women's economic migration get less



attention in the presence of sensationalised stories and images of women's oppression in the sex trade. The gendered narratives silences and suppresses the voices of trafficked women with their victim status or as sexualized others (Russel 2014: 532-548). It is, therefore, important to examine and understand how women view themselves and construct their identities, subjectivities and how they negotiate the decision-making process that concerns their lives and dignity. In this research, I explore the challenges that trafficked and migrant women workers face in their journey towards a better life. I explore how they utilise their agency and collective solidarity to liberate themselves from situations of subjugation and exploitation. Further, I examine how they affirm their dignity and rights in their empowerment process as trafficked women and as migrant workers. In my literature review, I identified the structural and systemic gaps to influence policy, praxis, advocacy and theology by making recommendations for further action and studies. I explored women's own understanding of the causal factors that makes them vulnerable and what recommendation they have for the wider community.

The literature review was the basis of a critical analysis of the discourse of trafficking and trafficking representation that informs policy, praxis, academic and theological systems. This dissertation begins with the deconstruction of the 'victim' construct within the anti-prostitution framework and in the modern-day slave rhetoric. This dissertation challenges the stereotypical images of trafficked 'victims' in the trafficking narratives. It highlights the power within and agency of women who despite the constructs of victimhood and their vulnerabilities, utilise their power-within to empower themselves. These transformative trajectories are essential resources to identify women's agency and resourcefulness to contribute to the financial and overall wellbeing of their families and to the economies of the home countries because of the remittances they send to their families (Sassen 2022:225).

The starting point of this research is listening to the lived experiences of women and to have them as research collaborators to contribute to this body of knowledge. It resonates with what James Baldwin describes in his famous essay, "The Devil Finds Work" (1976 cited in Munt 2016: 6,7), "the victim who is able to articulate the situation of the victim has ceased to be a victim; he or she has become a threat." By unpacking the trafficking discourse, I have explored the broader context of trafficking from the perspective of the research participants turned collaborators. With their contribution to this body of knowledge as research collaborators

they inform about their social, economic and political marginalisation, from their everyday life experiences. They challenge the unjust social structures and systems that not only indignify their personhood but pushes them to the margins and prevents them from living a full life. By drawing the epistemic view and knowledge of the research collaborators, this research begins with Standpoint as a method of inquiry that centres around women articulating and speaking from their subjective every day lived experiences. With the emphasis on women's epistemic contribution to knowledge production in this feminist right-based research, this dissertation begins with understanding human trafficking from a rights framework, exploring the broader context of neoliberal globalisation and its intersections with migration, labour and gender.

In India, there is a rich body of work that brings into attention the issue of trafficking in women in sexual slavery specially who are rescued from brothels and rehabilitated in shelters. There are reports of rescue operations of girls and women in forced or duped marriages and from forced labour. What is nearly absent is critical academic discourse in feminist scholarship on the subjective experiences of women vulnerable to and with experiences of trafficking, alongside women's migration trajectory and work in the informal economy. I approach this research by seeking the voices and subjugated knowledge of women from Manipur, a north-eastern State of India, who have migrated to the city of Bangalore in India. I have collaborated with thirteen migrant working women, between the ages of 25-35 working in Massage Parlours and Spas. Some of the participating women were trafficked victims while some have transitioned as entrepreneurs. The fieldwork took place between March to May 2018 in Bangalore and later through debrief virtual meets in early 2020. I have adapted the principles of Feminist Participatory Action Research by establishing collaborative and epistemological relationship with the research participants, who transition as research collaborators. I did in-depth Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study workshop. At the time of the fieldwork, there were few challenging situations, including one of them losing her job without notice. The group decided to wait for her to gather herself and take charge of her life again before we could proceed with the group discussions and Contextual Bible Study. This is an example of how women participated and guided in the research process as collaborators. By grounding my scholar standpoint that women are agents in their post-trafficking and migration trajectories, and their contribution

to this body of knowledge is a collaborative effort and not tokenised information collection mechanism, I facilitated women to take decisions and guide the research process. By viewing women as migrant workers and not constricted within the lens of trafficked victims, this dissertation brings forward the notion that women are active agents in their empowerment process and towards a life of dignity. Therefore, the categorisation of women as trafficked victims is problematised from the perspective of long-term consequences on women. By no means does this work dispute the deception, oppression and exploitation of the trafficked, including those forced into prostitution and other coercive work conditions. However, to examine the larger and complex realities of migration in the globalised world, the notions of trafficking, migration, indecent work and dignity are at the centre of this work.

My review of literature brought to my notice that the subject of trafficking has not been developed into a recognized theological discipline in the academia. Therefore, I was motivated by my Doctoral Supervisor Prof. Gerald O. West, to study and understand the conceptual components of embodied dignity within contexts of trafficking and to develop a theology towards trafficked dignity. His pioneering work on Contextual Bible Study<sup>1</sup> within the discipline of liberation hermeneutics was utilised to examine the theological and religious dimensions of dignity from the perspective of the vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women. I was interested to explore and understand the embodied experiences of vulnerable, trafficked and migrant women in India. This research further explored women's notions of 'dignity' and 'agency' in the midst of oppression and hopelessness. It examined how women utilise their agency and how they affirm their dignity and rights in their contexts. This research explored how marginalised women conceptualize God in times of oppression and despair, especially in the context of trafficking. The research aimed to utilize the epistemological insights of women to explore if and how the Bible and their faith has been a resource of

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<sup>1</sup> Contextual Bible Study is the "praxis of the Ujamaa Centre that emerges primarily from the South African confluence of South African Black Theology and South African Contextual Theology. Through long associations with the Ecumenical Associations of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), these South African theologies engaged Latin American Liberation Theology, which offered another dialogue partner the Ujamaa Centre's praxis. Alongside these liberation theologies feminist, womanist and African women's theologies asserted themselves; these too becoming an early formative of both the Ujamaa Centre's local community-based work and the conceptualization of the work." (West, Zwane and Carlos 2013: 588, 589).

liberation and redemption, or has been interpreted as a site of struggle, condemnation and further exclusion. To work towards developing a theology for the trafficked dignity and (in)-decent work, this research explored the experiences of trafficked and migrant working women by doing Contextual Bible Study workshop while drawing resources generated from other research methods such as Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions. By listening to their embodied experiences and by drawing resources from their subjugated knowledge, this dissertation connects with the key concepts of the study - agency, empowerment, dignity and solidarity. The purpose of this study is to create sociological, feminist and theological resources for further discourse in the trafficking, migration, labour, dignity and solidarity domain. The articulation of women's embodied experiences and their subjective knowledge informed this research with women's embodied theology.

## **1.2 Background and Motivation**

In the year 2000 while working with the Institute of Juvenile Justice in India, I got involved in working and researching on the issue of human trafficking. I studied and analysed the legal frameworks in India to address the issue and identified gaps and challenges therein. Around this time, the issue of human trafficking gained attention globally and in India. A National Stakeholders Consultation was organised by the Institute together with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Government of India and other stakeholders. I was assigned to research on the subject for presentation in the forum, to document the process and to prepare a report of the consultation. This allowed me to gain keen interest on the subject. The notion of trafficking was constricted within the abolitionist framework. The anti-trafficking interventions particularly in South Asia were limited to the rescue of women and girls in brothels, in their rehabilitation and repatriation to their home countries. The NGOs received funding for these activities primarily. The Police worked closely with the NGOs. There were media reports of raids in brothels, mistreatment of women in prostitution in custody or in government run shelter homes. Soon there were discussions in conferences by NGOs working in this domain about the challenges faced by survivors in their repatriation and re-integration. Some studies reported the re-trafficking of women and girls, as they were put back in the very source areas that had made them vulnerable to trafficking. These survivors were now more vulnerable living with the stigma and shame of having engaged in prostitution. Due to lack of funding, most NGOs that kept these women and girls in their

shelter homes providing them with various services such as health care, non-formal education, skill training etc. found themselves inadequate to follow up with the re-integration process of the survivors. I was keen since then to look at alternative forms of community-based approaches of re-integration and rehabilitation of women that enables women and girls to live a life with dignity.

Soon after, during my work with the Church of North India on a HIV/ AIDS program, I travelled with the local pastors and social workers to the Indo-Nepal borders with a quest to understand the cross-border trafficking from Nepal to India. Around this time, there was much focus on cross-border trafficking. We saw the borders were porous and it facilitated people's movement into India, including women and girls. The communities and congregations that lived in those areas had little understanding about what was happening there. After a series of awareness and capacity building programmes for the youth, women, pastors, congregations, community, local media, police etc., on the issues that surrounds the trafficking and migration of children and women, we (the local Diocese, local congregations and community) realised that the prevalence of internal trafficking was in place but not reported. The closure of tea gardens in the States of Assam and in North Bengal together with lack of alternate livelihood options in these areas, were compelling factors for people to migrate. However, people were not aware of the challenges that they would face in the transit or destination points. The dependence on scrupulous placement agents, recruiters and traffickers made things worse. Despite the prevalence of a culture of silence, intense community engagement enabled people to open up and speak about missing children and women. There were cases of dead bodies returning home, where families were compensated to be silent.

There was an urgent need to address internal trafficking and unsafe migration. I took the lead to get the Church (Church of North India Synod and the Dioceses) to take up a mandate to address this issue utilising the existing human resource and capacity building programs of the Church. I worked with the local Dioceses, congregations, youth groups and women groups to understand how trafficking takes place in the source areas. We studied the trends, patterns and routes the traffickers undertake, the violations that take place during transit and at the destination points. This was at a time when internal trafficking was not talked about or addressed within the country, neither was community considered as a resource to prevent

trafficking and to make migration safe for aspirant workers. The collective strength of the community to embrace and heal a duped and violated trafficked person was not explored. The culture of silence around the issue was dominant. Returned women and girls had to go through severe humiliations and shame. The sexualised image of a female victim does more harm than good to women and girls. From a small initiative, the work of the Church with the affected communities gained momentum.

This gained interest among other stakeholders such as the UNIFEM, United State Department, INGOs and NGOs to learn from the community-based initiatives of prevention and re-integration strategies. Along with these groups we worked with the national and local media agencies, print and electronic, English and vernacular, for advocacy and for issue-based, gender-sensitive and rights-based reporting. We worked closely with the local administration and local police for a right based approach to work with affected communities. This process included several meetings at the Diocesan level, orientation and training programs of the Pastors, youth and women's groups and several community meetings in few more Dioceses. After a few years, the activities became a routine in these villages. Pulpits were used to address the vulnerable factors around trafficking and created a space for people of all faiths to work together to ensure safe migration and protection of the trafficked. The church buildings were used for community meetings by people of all faith, women, young people and the community leaders who worked as co-workers to address issues that affects trafficking in persons. Community vigilant cells prevented trafficking by ensuring safe migration. Safe spaces were created to discuss issues concerning stigma of returnees to ensure their smooth re-integration.

This initiative helped in promoting safe migration practices, prevention of trafficking, rescue of trafficked persons and re-integration of survivors. Many survivors of trafficking played a significant role in the prevention, rescue and re-integration of trafficked persons. However, women who were rescued from brothels faced re-victimization back in their own villages and from their own families and communities. While the Church may have been a proactive and preventive resource in terms of the rescue and re-integration of women, undeniably the socio-cultural and religious beliefs regarding women's bodies and sex can impede the re-integration of sex trafficked survivors.

I have since then been interested to learn from the lived experiences of women about their own individual and collective notions on dignity, empowerment and solidarity in the context of trafficking and migration. I was interested to initiate collective reflection and analysis on the current praxis from the perspective of the trafficked and migrant women. My experience and engagement of working on this issue as a development practitioner continued over the years with my work in different international and national NGOs. I believe in the strength of the Church, the Community and other Stakeholders to address the issues surrounding human trafficking by maximising the utilisation of the available resources from within the existing programs and human resource. I believe that community resources are to be explored further to bring about positive and transformative changes. Scaling up this model with a strong theological grounding would not only empower the Church to address issues surrounding human trafficking and women's economic migration but would enable people with embodied experiences of trafficking and migration to contribute to people's theology and therefore influence public theology, as demonstrated in this research.

With this background, I place my personal, academic and theological motivations for this research. This research is an academic pursuit for me guided with a moral-political-ideological commitment for the rights of vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women from the Global South. I worked on the research paradigm and design for this study under the guidance of my Supervisor, Prof. Gerald O. West. I utilise my experience, knowledge and skills to bring forward women's subjugated knowledge from their subjective experiences. I have used my skills of working with women in the research process and in the process of doing theology. Listening to women's lived experiences is essential for any Critical Social and Feminist Research, 'to understand the world in order to change it' (Humphries 1997: 2.6).

This research is not just an academic pursuit, but like Gustavo Gutiérrez (1988: 174) mentions, the purpose of doing Liberation Theology is not for "intellectual self-satisfaction" but to "build a true human fellowship, in our historical initiatives to subvert an order of injustice - with the fullness with which Christ loved us". With this theological foundation, the theological work undertaken for this research has utilised women as a theology-generating agency. By giving epistemic advantage to women to construct a theology for trafficked dignity within the context of migration and work, this research centres women's voice and standpoint as the starting point. This process is hoped to be a path breaking initiative in this area, where

women's knowledge is utilised to inform public theology, public policy and praxis while challenging socio-cultural, economic-political and academic-theological systems and structures that have been failing trafficked and migrant working women by keeping them at the margins.

I situate my work at the border of scholarship and activism for people-centred, gender-sensitive and rights-based approach in producing knowledge to influence academic and theological systems to centre the voices of people in margins and pave way for transformative action and just solidarity. Locating myself within the borders of sociology and theology, I am interested to bring women's voices at the centre of discourse in policy-making, doing theology and in strategic planning for praxis and advocacy for social and economic justice. In trying to do so in this inter-disciplinary study, this work has thought across boundaries to delve deep in identifying sites of knowledge production outside of the academy with women in margins. This crossing over the borders of the work of several sociologists, theologians, feminist, subaltern, post-colonial and transnational scholars has enriched the dissertation.

### **1.3 Research Paradigm**

The objective of the research is to work towards developing a theology of trafficked dignity and indecent work, trying to seek answers to the research questions:

#### *Key Research Question*

What are the conceptual components of embodied dignity within contexts of trafficking, female economic migration and indecent work in the informal economy?

#### *Research Sub-Questions*

1. What are the theological/religious dimensions of dignity in the embodied experience of those who have been or are vulnerable to being trafficked?
2. How can these conceptual components contribute to a theology of indecent work?
3. In what ways do notions of 'trafficking' reconfigure notions of 'dignity' and 'indecent work'?



Therefore, the specific objectives of this research are:

1. To understand the theological/religious dimensions of dignity in the embodied experience of those who have been or are vulnerable to being trafficked.
2. To explore the conceptual components that contribute to a theology of indecent work.
3. To analyse the notions of 'trafficking' that reconfigure notions of 'dignity' and 'indecent work'?

Given the interdisciplinary nature of this research, it is framed within the overarching theory of Feminist Standpoint and Intersectionality and within the discipline of Liberation Theology. This research having taken an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach, engages in dialogue with a wide range of feminist standpoint theorists, post-colonial scholars, biblical scholars, feminist and liberation theologians. The writings of Standpoint theorists Dorothy Smith (1987, 1992, 2005, 2012) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 2000, 2002, 2009) have been grounded in the theoretical framework. Others whose work has influenced in the theoretical and analytical framework include Intersectional and Critical Race Theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989), Yuval Davis (2006, 2008, 2011), Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (2014), political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott (1990). The work of Brazilian Economist and Educationist Paulo Freire's (1970, 2000, 2012) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* on dialogical practice and liberative praxis has influenced the methodological approach designed for this study. The theological underpinning of this research is grounded with the work of biblical scholars, liberation and feminist theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, one of the main founders and proponent of Liberation Theology; Gerald O. West, my Doctoral Supervisor from whose work on Contextual Bible Study I draw theological and methodological resources and feminist theologians such as Marcella Althaus-Reid, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Gemma Tulud Cruz, Beverley Haddad amongst others.

Both feminist liberation theologians and feminist standpoint theorists centre the voice of women in margins of academia and theology. They are based on Marxist ideology that critiques systems and structures that perpetuates poverty and exploits the poor. By challenging unjust and unequal social and economic order, this research explores women's experiences of subjugation, alienation and exploitation as workers who migrate for work with

risks of vulnerability to trafficking and of exploitation during transit and in the host cities. The research analyses women intersectional experiences of utilising their agency, resources, faith, empowerment strategies and solidarity networks that enable them to affirm their dignity. By emphasising to bring the voices and knowledge of women at the centre of planning and research, this research promotes women's active knowledge contribution in academia and theology, that can influence public policy, praxis and public theology.

### *Research Design and Methodology*

This Feminist Research is approached within a critical research paradigm utilising the principles and tools of Qualitative Research methodology. Considering my personal and academic motivations for this research, the research paradigm and design for this research was prepared under the guidance of my Supervisor, Prof. Gerald O. West. With a firm believe that women, despite their everyday struggles to affirm their dignity, have rich resources to contribute to this body of knowledge from their lived experiences of reclaiming their personhood in the midst of marginalisation, exclusion, social, cultural and gendered violations is central to this research. With a deep commitment for social and economic justice for trafficked and migrant working women, the research design was planned to draw subjugated knowledge of women, who as collaborators in this research, articulate their voices in safe, sacred and empowering spaces. The larger goal is to bring women's voices and knowledge into academic and theological knowledge systems where they are marginalised. Thirteen women participated in this research.

Feminist and people centric methods were designed for this research, such as Feminist Interviewing, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study. During the research process, emerged a new method, Informal Encounter that enabled me to spend intimate time with women at their workplaces, in their Salon and on the massage beds. The research process created safe, sacred, enabling, empowering and ethical spaces for women to speak and to be heard.

Feminist interviewing is a widely accepted feminist method to explore women's experiences and the context from where these experiences emerge. It is a creative, powerful and critical feminist work, that embodies feminist values to promote justice for women (DeVault and Gross (2012: 174, 192), DeVault (1999: 30) DeVault & Gross (2012: 175, 176). Open ended

questions were framed for this purpose which can be found in Appendix II. Informal Encounters were done in women's real-life work settings with five women, where women narrated their everyday experiences and perspectives further to what they shared in the feminist personal interviews. Focus Group research, being a powerful method of collecting useful information in a small setting of people (Wilkinson 2004: 177), brought in resources from the Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters and literature review to facilitate three small group discussions with women exploring their response of the research questions. Focus groups done in small groups encourages women to participate and share their perspectives, experiences, ideas, perception, thoughts, notions and opinion in an enabling and safe environment (Krueger & Casey 2000, Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub 1996). In a less threatening environment, as in Participatory Research and action (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub 1996, Peters, 1993), open conversations and dialogues took place in this research. It helped build an environment of trust and solidarity amongst women. The Focus Group Discussions paved way for the Contextual Bible Study (CBS) workshop. At the end of the FGD meetings, I informed them about the process of CBS and encouraged them to read the book of Ruth in advance from their perspective. I met 13 women in 3 small groups in different locations for the Focus Group Discussions.

Contextual Bible Study (CBS) as the name suggests is a resource and practice that brings context to the forefront in a CBS workshop (West 2015: 241). West and Haddad (2016:139) elaborate this,

Within the overall cycle of praxis, Contextual Bible Study (as a particular methodology within liberation hermeneutics) operates within the See-Judge-Act framework. See-Judge-Act is a process formed in the worker-priest movement in Europe in the 1930 – 40s, which was taken up and elaborated in the liberation struggles of South Africa, Latin America, and the Philippines (among other contexts of struggle). The 'See' moment of this process focusses on social analysis, drawing both on the knowledge of the marginalized sector/s concerned and on the social sciences.

This research follows the See-Judge-Act framework. It has engaged in doing Contextual Bible Study, as a methodology and religious resource in this research. Located within the School of Religions, Philosophy and Classics of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Contextual Bible Study is used as a religious resource by the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and

Research. In their recent article, “Contending for Invented Space in African Context and Biblical Text: Intersecting Gender, Sexuality, Ethnicity and Economics” (West, Zwane & Carlos 2023: 589, 590) mention,

Historically, the Ujamaa Centre began with an economic emphasis, having been forged in the struggle against apartheid’s racial capitalism. However, the summons to work within women’s struggle for liberation followed closely. Intersecting economics and gender therefore became a significant trajectory within the Ujamaa Centre’s community-based work. A more difficult trajectory, slower to be articulated as a summons by local communities, was the intersection between economics and sexuality. The irruptive work of Marcella Althaus-Reid has made us aware of the absence of intersectional work on economics and sexuality within Latin American Liberation Theology. We were therefore attentive to community-based initiatives which might summon us to this intersection....Althaus-Reid summoned liberation theologies to engage the “indecent work” of sex work -intersecting sexuality and economics – recognizing that sex workers and “workers”.

The thesis, in a way follows the summons of Althaus-Reid by recognizing the economic systems that in dignifies women’s labor in the informal and shadow economy, sex work or not. Further, it brings voices of women to the center to argue for women’s right to decent work and dignity in labor within the interlocking systems of oppressions of gender and sexuality. The lived realities of women are a critical resource for this research where this method brings together biblical scholars and ordinary readers into a partnership of reading the Bible and reflecting on what God speaks to them through a collaborative reading of social context and biblical text (West & Zondi-Mabizela 2004: 9). Within the discipline of biblical liberation hermeneutics, CBS draws attention towards the systemic and structural dimensions of the reality of people with whom we dialogue (West 2014: 2). It helps analyse the different dimensions of context – socio-economic, religious, cultural, and geo-political. CBS is based on the See-Judge-Act process (West 1995: 188-1893, West 2015: 243) where the interpretative process moves from social analysis (See) to biblical reflection (Judge) to social action (Act). By having a space which gave epistemic privilege to the ordinary readers of the Bible, women contributed to this body of knowledge with their embodied theology. As a researcher, I bring in resources of the contextual realities of vulnerable, trafficked, and migrant working women

from the literature reviews, Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions to the CBS workshop and facilitated the CBS workshop. 13 women participated in the CBS workshop. The CBS questions can be found in Appendix III.

#### *Location, Approach and Sampling of the Research*

The empirical research was done in the city of Bangalore, India with 13 migrant women, with some having had the experiences of trafficking. These women come from the Northeastern Indian State of Manipur. These women identified themselves as Christian migrant workers. The research process being embedded in feminist principles, sampling was done with sensitivity. Women identified for this research provided informed consent and shared their willingness to contribute to this research as women with valuable resources. I used non-probability sampling and applied purposeful and snowball sampling to identify research participants.

#### **1.4 Thesis Outline**

The first chapter is an “Introduction” to this dissertation. It presents the context, background, significance and motivation for this research. It introduces the research purpose and research paradigm. The key arguments of this research are presented in this chapter. The second chapter, titled: “Human Trafficking: A Contested Phenomenon”, brings to attention an overview of the scenario of human trafficking and migration in the context of global capitalism. It situates the debates of this research. The third chapter is titled “The Anti-Trafficking Paradigm” and describes the campaigns, narratives and discourses that shape perspectives, policies and action. It is a continuation of the second chapter. It presents and critiques the widely accepted and practiced anti-trafficking strategies with specific mention of the Indian context. The fourth chapter, titled “Women as Agents of Knowledge: Theoretical Foundations and Theological Underpinnings - an Epistemological Privilege of Subordinate Women in the Margins”, details the theoretical and theological foundations that shape the purpose and argument of this research. The fifth chapter, titled “Transformative Power of Knowledge Production: A Critical Research Paradigm”, highlights the politics and power of knowledge production. This research privileges and gives epistemic advantage to women in the margins of knowledge production. The research design was prepared with great sensitivity, due to the stigma associated with trafficking and migrant women’s work in

Massage Parlours and Spas. This study is approached from a critical research paradigm using a feminist lens to explore women's intersectional experiences of exploitation and empowerment. The sixth chapter titled, "Research Process: The Realities of Doing Critical Feminist Research" describes the research process, which is embedded in feminist values and principles. It adapts ethical, empowering and participatory research process where women transition from being research participants to research collaborators. In this Feminist Qualitative Research, the commitment and emphasis to research process is as much as to the outcome, perhaps even more. From building epistemological relationship with the knowledge contributors and dialogue partners, to finding creative ways of working and engaging with women, conscious efforts were put in to build inclusive and horizontal collaborations by decentralising power during the research. The seventh chapter titled, "Centering and Amplifying the Voices of Women in Margins: Reflecting and Shaping Women's Articulations and Discourses", discusses the research findings, drawing from women's individual and collective articulations. Women's insights, critical reflection and analysis of their embodied experiences and their biblical interpretation of the book of Ruth as it relates with their context are thematically presented in line with the research objectives and questions. The chapter presents a summative report and a cumulative analysis of the women's articulations, standpoint and critical reflection during the Formal Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study. The concluding chapter presents a synopsis of the dissertation. It details the conceptual, theoretical, theological and methodological contribution of this research and presents specific recommendations for further work for scholars, theologians, policy makers and practitioners.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

This dissertation explores the broader context of women from the Global South who in the presence of unjust and unequal systems and structures move out of their homes that could lead to women's mobility in unsafe passages. I explored the micro and macro factors of women's economic migration from critical studies on human trafficking and migration from a post-colonial feminist lens. Women's subjective experiences of their migratory journey informed this research about women's trafficking and migration experiences. It further informs women's strategies for resistance, liberation and empowerment. I examined their strategies of survival, sustenance and solidarity in host cities to address injustices and

exploitation that they face at workplaces and in the community. To create transformative pathways for a just world, I firmly believe that our collective action must be centred towards being in just solidarity with vulnerable and marginalised populations.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Human Trafficking: A Contested Phenomenon**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to lay the ideological and political foundations of the discourse around human trafficking. To understand the issue in depth, I bring insights from the literature on the subject, specifically from the review of scholarly articles, international reports and documents on human trafficking and migration. I explore the abolitionist discourse on prostitution on one side and the rights of economic migrants, including sex workers on the other side in the context of global capitalism and neoliberal economic globalisation. With the purpose to understand the complex realities of human trafficking, in this chapter I highlight contestations within feminist discourses which has strengthened the institutionalisation of the counter-trafficking paradigm. The transformative power of women, I believe gets overshadowed in the strong presence of bureaucratic feminism which includes the State, the religious right and their allies in the neo-liberal capitalist space.

This chapter has four sections. In the first section, I begin with exploring the historical background of the emergence of human trafficking as a global concern for policy, praxis, research and advocacy. In this section, I lay emphasis on the anti-migration and anti-prostitution foundations that shape the discourse on human trafficking and therefore its influence on policy and action.

In the second section, I focus on understanding the issue in depth by delving into the notion of human trafficking, the estimates of the problem and the widely accepted definition as mentioned in the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. After laying the foundations of a global understanding of human trafficking, I present a background of the people who are vulnerable to trafficking. I draw attention on the nature of the process and stages of trafficking, specifying on why, how, when and where trafficking takes place and the violations that take place in each stage.

In the third section, I situate the debates around the issue of human trafficking, which is a highly contested issue. I present the conflicting discourse within feminist circles, scholars and



activists. In the first sub-section, I present the dominant discourse that emphasises abolition of prostitution in the context of trafficking and the counterarguments on sex work within a human rights framework. In the second sub-section, I present the perspectives on human trafficking as a crime against women and an issue of human rights. I conclude this section with my position on the issue.

The fourth section has four sub-sections. In the first two sub-sections, I present the micro and macro factors that contribute to increasing vulnerability of people to human trafficking from a gendered lens. I bring discussions from the literature on the interlinkages of human trafficking with globalisation, global capitalism and its impact on the female labour market and migrants. Thereafter, in the third sub-section, I draw attention to the feminized image of human trafficking, the feminisation of survival in the context of feminisation of poverty and migration and its impact on migrant working women in the globalised world. In the fourth and concluding sub-section, I deconstruct the politics of female victims and how it impacts trafficked and migrant working women. In conclusion, I have elaborated the importance of women's right to decent work in accordance with international plans and policies. These debates lay the foundation for the ideological positions in the dominant discourse that shape the anti-trafficking campaigns and responses that is presented in the next chapter.

In this chapter, I critically engage with the academic work of various post-colonial and feminist scholars, prominent among whom are Kamala Kempadoo, Professor of Social Science at York University in Canada who has published widely on sex workers' rights and human trafficking from critical antiracist and transnational feminist perspectives; Saskia Sassen, a Dutch American Sociologist and Professor of Sociology at Columbia University in New York City and Centennial visiting Professor at the London School of Economics, who is well-known for her work on globalisation and international human migration, and Jyoti Sanghera, Section Chief, Human Rights and Social and Economic Issues at UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Geneva.

## **2.1 The Emergence of Human Trafficking as a Concern for Global Policy, Action, Advocacy and Research**

The issue of human trafficking became a concern for global policy and action in the mid nineteenth century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a growing

consciousness in the West around Human Trafficking (Kempadoo 2015: 8, 9). In this section, I present a background of the global concerns around human trafficking in the context of cross border migrations and globalisation.

In her Introductory article titled, “Abolitionism, Criminal Justice, and Transnational Feminism: Twenty-first-century Perspectives on Human Trafficking” (2012), Kamala Kempadoo presents a detailed historical background of the emergence of human trafficking. She notes that human trafficking is believed to be a global problem, a concern pressed mainly by governments and feminists. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the concern for human trafficking made its way into public consciousness which was pressed by the governments and feminists and soon took the attention of media (Kempadoo 2012: vii). Further, in the article “The Modern-Day White (Wo)Man’s Burden: Trends in Anti-Trafficking and Anti-Slavery Campaigns” (2015: 8-20), Kempadoo shares how the campaign got intensified with modern anti-slavery movements taking up the cause of women and girls held captive for the purpose of sexual exploitation for profits and the feminist movement working alongside to take up the cause of the rights of labour migrants (Bales 1999; Kara 2009; Quirk 2011; Kristof & WuDunn 2010, cited in Kempadoo 2015:9). Kempadoo notes that award-winning author of several books on the subject, co-founder and former President of “Free the Slaves”, a U.S offspring of the British Anti-Slavery International, American Kevin Bales influenced the global arena by bringing the subject to centre stage in the late 1990s. Referring to it as “modern day slavery”, Bales’ contribution to the anti-trafficking campaign has been immense, Kempadoo (2015:9) mentions. In *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy (2004)*, Kevin Bales elaborately describes the New Slavery in contrast to the Old Slavery. While attacking corrupt governments that take advantage of growing population and impoverishment in third world countries, he illustrates the law of demand and supply, the availability of cost-effective slaves, with low risk and very little or no investment, unlike old slavery. According to Bales, new slavery on the other hand is easily disposable when it loses its potential for profit. He adds that today no slaveholder wants to keep their slaves with any addition of liabilities, such as women forced into prostitution with infants or diseases or injury that obstructs profit, who have no value to the slaveholders, who either desert them or leave them to die (Kempadoo 2015:9).

Kempadoo (2012: vii-xxxi), highlights the strong anti-migration and anti-prostitution foundations that shape the discourse on human trafficking and therefore its influence on policy and action. The discourse on human trafficking can be located during the late nineteenth/ early-twentieth century with concerns in Western Europe and North America on cross-border migration by women in the context of globalisation. The abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century and the large-scale international relocations and displacements of people in the period of globalisation between 1850 and 1914 was accompanied by the internationalisation of wage labour. Men and women, from predominantly poor and working-class communities, crossed borders in search for new avenues. The crossing of the borders positioned the migrant work force to endure systems of bonded labour and indentured servitude. Kempadoo further notes that their labour was not regulated and hence was cheap and easily disposable. Women moved and crossed borders, clandestinely or not, through organised channels or as independent migrant workers. This paved way for women working as sexual and domestic partners. Kempadoo posits that migrant women workers, within their own right, service and reproduce the migrant workforce. Quite often they do obtain new freedoms through non-marital sexual relations and work, which could include prostitution (Kempadoo 2012: xii). Kempadoo further argues that the narratives about the mobility and trade of women's labour and bodies under nineteenth-century contract labour, indenture and, and debt-bondage systems ignored the impacts of colonialism and demands of patriarchal, racialised capital, and linked the emergence of migrant women in prostitution to notions of "loose" sexual relations and degraded feminine sexuality.

In the nineteenth-century narratives, women were often portrayed as coerced, deceived, lured, trapped, kidnapped, and forced into prostitution, explained by the "natural" sexual depravity and uncivilised character of (im)migrant communities. These gendered international migration patterns are identified by several scholars as a racialised social panic about the "White Slave Trade" which increased with the arrival of growing number of women and men from the Global South into the global North. As these people, predominantly from Asia, looked forward to new life-opportunities in the Global North, the middle class and elites got suspicious and anxious about this phenomenon and created ideologies about the entrapment and enslavement of white, Western European, and North American women in prostitution. Kempadoo argues that the imaginations of white women being brutalised by the

barbaric, uncivilised, and brutal non-Western Other served to lead the restriction of women's mobility and sexual freedoms. These narratives and anxieties led to a series of international debates and conventions in the early twentieth century, beginning with the 1904 "International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic" with the intent to halt the procurement of women and girls for immoral purposes abroad. This was followed by a series of national and internationally defined laws and policing efforts to curb and eradicate prostitution, which is understood to be serious violence against women. However, critics and advocates of women's sexual autonomy, such as Emma Goldman, note that the anti-white slavery crusade became what we see now as anti-prostitution and anti-trafficking campaigns supported by Western European and North American feminists and reformists who tirelessly work to "save" the "fallen sisters". This anti-prostitution feminist approach, argues Kempadoo (2012: xiii), "imparted an imperialist bourgeois logic to early anti-trafficking campaigns, containing a very particular script about women's sexuality."

It is within this background and context that this researched is premised. To understand these contestations and issues better, I believe that learning from women's perspective is crucial. This dissertation expands its horizon of learning by engaging with women to understand the systemic and structural challenges that impedes women from living a life of fullness with dignity. Vulnerable trafficked and migrant working women therefore need to occupy centre spaces in research, policy and praxis. Representation, not tokenism, is vital in these discourses for it is their subjugated knowledge that is under-utilised in the academic, theological and policy circles. These aspects are elaborated in each chapter thematically. The active participation of women and women's organisations that believe in the autonomy of women is necessary and must be included in the mainstream discourses. To create transformative pathways for a just world, I firmly believe that our collective action must be centred towards being in active and intersectional solidarity with vulnerable and marginalised populations. To be in solidarity with the trafficked, it is pertinent to understand the issue deeper. In the next section, I lay the foundations of a global understanding of human trafficking which is widely accepted, despite the prevalent contestations.

## **2.2 Understanding Human Trafficking**

In this section, I present what constitutes human trafficking, who are vulnerable to trafficking, why some fall under the ambit of trafficked persons, why and how does trafficking take place.

I further state the definition of human trafficking as described in the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, the estimates and magnitude of the problem reported by several agencies including the United Nations and the US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report (TIPS) amongst others. Human trafficking involves movement of people from one place to the other, from rural to semi-urban and urban cities within countries and across international borders. Trafficking in persons, specially of women and children, has been understood to be done primarily for “sexual slavery” with phenomenal profits estimated to be as high as the clandestine gains made from the underground trade in arms and narcotics (Sanghera 2005: 6). The notion of human trafficking has been evolving with time. In recent times, it is understood as not necessarily involving movement of people from one place to the other.<sup>2</sup> People in a state of servitude, or victims of exploitation at the home state or destination places, including those who consented to work but experience exploitation and enslavement by traffickers, are all included in the ambit of trafficked persons. This is what is called “modern slavery”.<sup>3</sup> However, the dominant discourse and anti-trafficking paradigm assume and project that most trafficking takes place for the purpose of prostitution. Therefore policy, action and advocacy lean heavily in this direction (Kempadoo eds., 2012). Most anti-trafficking response is centred around raid, rescue, rehabilitation, and repatriation of girls and women from brothel-based

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<sup>2</sup> Human trafficking can include, but does not require, movement. People may be considered trafficking victims regardless of whether they were born into a state of servitude, were exploited in their hometown, were transported to the exploitative situation, previously consented to work for a trafficker, or participated in a crime as a direct result of being trafficked. At the heart of this phenomenon is the traffickers’ aim to exploit and enslave their victims and the myriad coercive and deceptive practices they use to do so.

<https://www.state.gov/what-is-modern-slavery/>

<sup>3</sup> “Trafficking in persons,” “human trafficking,” and “modern slavery” are used as umbrella terms to refer to both sex trafficking and compelled labor. The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (the Palermo Protocol) describe this compelled service using a number of different terms, including involuntary servitude, slavery or practices similar to slavery, debt bondage, and forced labor.

<https://www.state.gov/what-is-modern-slavery/>

prostitution (Sanghera 2005: 16) which thereby excludes or limits assistance to other trafficked victims (Kempadoo eds., 2012).

In 2005, the US Department of State in its TIPS report estimated that some 600,000 to 800,000 people were trafficked worldwide, of which 80% were women and girls. Bales (2009) estimated that there were 27 million slaves around the globe at any point in time.<sup>4</sup> He further pointed that out of the 27 million, 15 to 20 million represented bonded labour in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Asia is seen as the most vulnerable region for human trafficking because of its huge population, growing urbanisation, lack of sustainable livelihoods and poverty (Kempadoo eds., 2005). The most recent *Trafficking in Persons Report 2021*<sup>5</sup> mentions that global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, discriminatory policies, harmful practices and systemic inequality disproportionately affects people who live with existing socio-economic and political vulnerabilities to exploitation and human trafficking. The inhuman systemic cycle of discrimination and injustice towards the socially excluded and marginalised groups further strengthens the existing inequities and imbalances in the world around us. Systemic violence and stereotypes towards race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and social identities such as racial, ethnic, and gendered violence (Kempadoo eds., 2012), therefore needs to be addressed at a macro level.

The *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* (2009)<sup>6</sup> by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) provided information based on data gathered from 155 countries. It reported that the most common form of human trafficking (79%) is sexual exploitation, with predominantly women and girls as victims. The report mentioned that the second most common form of human trafficking is forced labour (18%). The report however acknowledged the possibility of misrepresentation because forced labour is less frequently detected and reported than trafficking for sexual exploitation. The report added that worldwide, almost 20% of all trafficking victims are children,<sup>7</sup> while women make up two thirds of the world's

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/47255.pdf>; Bales, K., 1999, *Disposable people: New slavery in the global economy*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/TIP\\_Report\\_Final\\_20210701.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/TIP_Report_Final_20210701.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/documents/Global\\_Report\\_on\\_TIP.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/Global_Report_on_TIP.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/global-report-on-trafficking-in-persons.html>

human trafficking victims.<sup>8</sup> In 2010 based on various studies, the US State Department acknowledged and reported that most of the human trafficking in the world takes the form of forced labour, which includes labour in different sectors, agriculture, domestic workers, factory, shipping, fishery, carpet industry, and many more.<sup>9</sup> The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that for every trafficking victim subjected to forced prostitution, nine people are forced to work.<sup>10</sup> In 2012, the ILO estimated that globally 20.9 million people were victims of forced labour.<sup>11</sup> This figure included all those people who were in situations of forced labour and sexual exploitation having been coerced or deceived into work that they were trapped into and could not escape from. These estimates however excluded people who were trafficked for the purpose of removal of organs and for forced marriages/ adoptions and practices that lead many to situations of forced labour or service. They do come in the ambit of trafficked persons but are not included in this ILO study mentioned. Therefore, it can be safely concluded that human trafficking takes place for different purposes including sex trafficking but not limited to it. Forced labour, forced marriage, domestic servitude, recruitment of children as soldiers, work in sweat shops and other informal and unorganised sectors, supply chains such as in agriculture, fishing, manufacturing, and construction work include the domain of trafficking when the recruitment process is coerced, or includes deception, threat, abduction or exploitation as mentioned in the universally accepted definition in the UN Protocol (Kempadoo 2015).<sup>12</sup>

The estimates by different agencies vary and critics question the scope, validity and methodology of research and data collection since research in the field of human trafficking comes with many challenges. Finding and meeting with the populations that are relevant and significant for trafficking studies is difficult. People labelled within the framework of 'illegality' such as migrants, prostitutes, who may have been trafficked 'victims' or 'survivors', and

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/toc/en/crimes/human-trafficking.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2010/index.htm>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2010/>

<sup>11</sup> ILO Global Estimate of Forced Labour, International Labour Organization 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Trafficking in Persons Report 2021, Department of State, United States of America, pg.24-28.

'criminals' such as traffickers, members of a criminal syndicate and women in sex work with experiences of trafficking, go hidden, and constitute the so-called 'hidden populations' (Doezema 1999; Kempadoo eds., 2012; eckathorn 1997 cited in Tyldum and Brunovskis 2005:18).<sup>13</sup> With unknown size and boundaries of hidden populations being unknown, reaching out and having hidden populations in sampling is difficult. Even if they are accessed for any research, their responses may not be reliable as they fear stigma, deportation, repatriation against their will, and harassment by law enforcement agencies. The fear of facing the very challenges that pushed them out of their source countries/ villages/ towns/ cities, with additional challenges of stigma, isolation and discrimination, compels them to conceal facts about themselves during any research study (Simkhada 2008; Poudel 2011). I have earlier had first-hand experience of working with girls and women from Bangladesh, Nepal, and India who conceal vital information about themselves unless a relationship of trust and confidence is established. With such challenges, it can be concluded that estimates on trafficked persons cannot be reached appropriately as the numbers are disproportionately portrayed as trafficked. The hidden populations continue to be unreachable and deprived of appropriate assistance meant for trafficked persons and remain out of the estimates presented by different studies.

### *Defining Human Trafficking*

It will be appropriate here to briefly highlight the definitions, legal provisions, and describe the socio-economic factors that enable or impede human trafficking. The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children<sup>14</sup>, which is the most widely accepted definition, was adopted on 15<sup>th</sup> November

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<sup>13</sup> A hidden population is a group of individuals for whom the size and boundaries are unknown, and for whom no sampling frame exists. Furthermore, membership in hidden populations often involve stigmatized or illegal behaviour, leading individuals to refuse to cooperate, or give unreliable answers to protect their privacy (Heckathorn 1997). For empirical studies, this brings other challenges, and requires approaches different from those commonly used for more easily observable populations (Tyldum and Brunovskis 2005:18).

<sup>14</sup> The Protocol was adopted by resolution [A/RES/55/25](#) of 15 November 2000 at the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. [United Nations, Treaty Series, [vol. 2237](#), p. 319; [Doc. A/55/383](#).] The UN Protocol is the first legally binding instrument with an internationally recognized definition of human trafficking. This definition provides a vital tool for the identification of victims, whether men, women or children, and for the detection of all forms of exploitation which



2000, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The UN Convention came into force in September 2003 and the Trafficking Protocol in December 2003 (Sanghera 2005: 10). As of May 2020, 178 State parties have ratified or acceded to the UN TIP Protocol<sup>15</sup> which defines trafficking in persons and contains obligations to prevent and combat the crime.<sup>16</sup> In March 2007, the Inter-Agency Coordination Group Against Human Trafficking (ICAT) was formally established, in response to the request for intergovernmental agencies to cooperate, strengthen and provide technical assistance to countries in human trafficking by Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).<sup>17</sup> ICAT is a policy forum mandated by the UN General Assembly, with the participation of ILO, IOM, UNICEF, UN Women, UNHCR and UNODC, is responsible to improve coordination among UN Agencies and other relevant international organizations to facilitate a holistic and comprehensive approach to preventing and combating trafficking in persons.<sup>18</sup> In 2010, the General Assembly adopted the Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, urging Governments worldwide to take concerted efforts to combat trafficking in persons and calling for integrating the fight against human trafficking into the UN's broader programmes to strengthen security worldwide. Thereafter, the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for victims of trafficking, especially women and children was established in August 2010.<sup>19</sup> The Trust Fund is to provide assistance and protection to victims of trafficking from a context of armed conflict and those identified

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constitute human trafficking. Countries that ratify this treaty must criminalize human trafficking and develop anti-trafficking laws in line with the Protocol's legal provisions.

(Source: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/protocol.html>)

<sup>15</sup> UNODC offers practical help to states with drafting laws, creating comprehensive national anti-trafficking strategies, and assisting with resources to implement them. The protocol commits ratifying states to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, protecting and assisting victims of trafficking and promoting cooperation among states in order to meet those objectives.

(Source: "[UNODC – Signatories to the CTOC Trafficking Protocol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protocol_to_Prevent,_Suppress_and_Punish_Trafficking_in_Persons,_Especially_Women_and_Children)", [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protocol_to_Prevent,_Suppress_and_Punish_Trafficking_in_Persons,_Especially_Women_and_Children) )

<sup>16</sup> Trafficking in Persons Report 2021, Department of State, United States of America, pg-24.

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/Annex II - Definition and mandate.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/Annex_II_-_Definition_and_mandate.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <https://icat.un.org/about>

<sup>19</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2010/08/349302-un-launches-global-action-plan-combat-scourge-human-trafficking>

from larger refugee and migration flows.<sup>20</sup> The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda adopted in September 2015, embraced the goals on trafficking in persons and called for an end to trafficking and eliminated all forms violence against and exploitation of women and children.<sup>21</sup> The UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants, in their New York Declaration, besides others, committed to concrete action against the crimes of human trafficking and migrant smuggling.<sup>22</sup>

The UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol defines 'trafficking in persons' as:

*“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. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery); servitude or the removal of organs”.*

- [Article 3: Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, Pg 2]

The fundamental elements of human trafficking, as defined by the Protocol, involves different stages and aspects. The process of trafficking involves an “act” which is the recruitment, transport, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons. The “means” refers to the methods used to actualise the “act”. Means engages in the use of force, threat, deception, coercion, abduction, fraud, abuse of power or a position of vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits. These terms are explained as not necessarily precise from a legal point of view and may be defined differently in different jurisdictions. The “purpose” is meant for profits and gain by

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[https://www.unodc.org/pdf/human\\_trafficking/UN\\_Victims\\_Trust\\_Fund\\_Basic\\_Facts\\_Dec2017.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/pdf/human_trafficking/UN_Victims_Trust_Fund_Basic_Facts_Dec2017.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> <https://justiceandpeace.org.au/events/world-day-against-trafficking-in-persons/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/observances/end-human-trafficking-day/background>

the exploitation of the victim. The Protocol definition refers to a list of exploitative practices: sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery and slavery-like practices, and removal of organs.<sup>23</sup>

In this section, I described the different stages of what constitutes human trafficking, therefore, understanding the aspects of where it begins, when it takes place, how it takes place enables us to understand what is human trafficking and what violations that take place in each stage. Sanghera (2005) notes that analysing these stages of trafficking will enable us to understand risks and vulnerability factors to trafficking. I believe that a deeper analysis and engagement will help understand the violations and rights deprivations, systemic and structural, that push people to move out from where they live.

In this research, the engagement and participation with the study participants has helped in understanding both the micro and macro factors that contributes to their vulnerabilities to trafficking. They contribute to the body of knowledge by sharing their perspectives on the ambiguity between the notions trafficking, migration and work. This research brings the lived experiences of trafficked and migrant working women who have the experiences both of victimisation and survival of exploitation, marginalisation, discrimination and vulnerability. They share how they utilise their agency to liberate themselves not only from the trafficked situation, but also from the victimisation that comes from the stigma attached with trafficking because of the hyper sexualised image of trafficked victims. In this dissertation, women share the different stages of their lives, from negative to positive experiences, from being vulnerable to being agents of their transformative journey in order to fulfil their dreams and aspirations for a decent life. The next section is the crux of this thesis, which brings forward the different contestations in the anti-trafficking discourse and situates the debate upon which this research is premised upon.

### **2.3 Situating the Debates**

Human trafficking is a highly contested issue with conflicting discourses ranging within feminist circles, activists and scholars (Doezema 2010, Sanghera 2005, Kempadoo 2015). In the first sub-section, I highlight the dominant discourse on sexual slavery and counter

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<sup>23</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/Annex\\_II\\_-\\_Definition\\_and\\_mandate.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/Annex_II_-_Definition_and_mandate.pdf)

arguments on women's right to sex work. In the second sub-section, I present the perspectives on human trafficking as a crime against women and an issue of human rights.

### **2.3.1 Sexual Slavery or Sex Work?**

The dominant discourse on human trafficking largely focusses on prostitution of women in Southeast Asia and migrant women in Western European sex industries (Kempadoo 2015:8). In this dissertation, I have cited several scholarly articles on human trafficking by the rights group "The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women" (GAATW) that produces research articles on human trafficking and its intersections with gender, labour and migration. After a long period of struggle to bring this discourse on the forefront, there is a visibility and acceptance to the issues that are highlighted by their work. The dominant discourse, which draws its ideological position from the abolitionist discourse, is now being challenged by these scholars who have been pushing for scientific research that is inclusive of the perspectives of women who are marginalised in this discourse on their lives. These debates may have deepened the divide between the actors who work towards eradicating human trafficking, but the outcome is evident. In recent years, the discourse on human trafficking is getting broader with the recognition and inclusion of labour trafficking and migration in this ambit. In this sub-section, I bring forward debates surrounding sexual slavery, sex work, sexual oppression and notions on bodily autonomy of women.

Trafficking in persons is largely understood in connection to prostitution (Barry 1995; Kempadoo 2015, Kotiswaran 2014, Sanghera 2012). Therefore, policies, programs, and campaigns to curb trafficking in persons, largely focus on regulating the sex industry (Kempadoo 2015: 9-12). Kempadoo notes that the abolitionist feminist discourse relates to Radical Feminism. Even though postcolonial feminists from the third world have critiqued the Euro-American centrism in the theorizing and politics, the definition of prostitution remains unchanged, being unconditionally viewed as violence against women. Abolitionist feminism introduced the notion of 'sex trafficking', where all prostitution is seen to constitute female sexual slavery. The conflation between trafficking and prostitution leads to stigmatisation of most trafficked women. The sensationalised and over romanticised aspect of trafficking linked with 'female sexual slavery' has infringed the rights of all women to live with dignity after they come out of the trafficked situation. The failure to make distinctions between trafficking and prostitution has meant that 'sexual slavery' and 'sex work' also become

conflated. Feminist scholars have noted that this leads to stigmatisation of most trafficked women (Simkhada 2008; Jayagupta 2009; Poudel 2011; Hoang 2015). While the dominant discourse has failed to identify and distinguish the interconnectedness between the social phenomena of trafficking and prostitution, the discourse has only moved to the categorisation of trafficking and prostitution into 'sexual slavery' and 'sex work' (Poudel 2011, Barry 1984). Therefore, trafficking is seen as synonymous with prostitution where victims of trafficking and prostitutes are both considered as victims of sex trafficking. This leads to flawed methods of data collection, and therefore program planning and policy advocacy emphasise more on brothel-based prostitution and sex trafficking while ignoring other forms of trafficking to a great extent (Sanghera 2005). Recent reports and estimates, such as the widely accepted annual US TIPS report, highlight the prevalence of other forms of trafficking.<sup>24</sup> Many reports and scholarly articles highlight that not all trafficked people are duped participants, and their movements are not necessarily involuntary, they are exploited labourers in many industries including agriculture, construction, factories and domestic service (Melissa Ditmore 2003:2). A more nuanced understanding would distinguish trafficking from sex work.

It is important here to unpack the discourse on prostitution due to the conflation between sexual slavery and sex work. I refer to the scholarly works of Kamala Kempadoo, Melissa Ditmore, Julia O'Connell Davidson and scholarly articles by the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) such as "Beyond Borders: Exploring Links between Trafficking and Gender" GAATW Working Papers Series 2010 and "The Anti-Trafficking Review", a peer reviewed journal on human trafficking that explores trafficking in its broader context and its intersections with gender, labour, and migration.

The notion that prostitution is inherently exploitative and should be banned and eradicated comes from proponents who take a moral position on the issue and harbour the idea that women in prostitution are incapable of taking decisions for themselves and their bodies. They believe that decriminalising prostitution will increase sex trafficking and the market for sex workers and therefore advocate for abolition of prostitution. This view is believed to favour

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2018/>

exploited women. Prostitutes are considered dirty women and called whores. These notions about women in prostitution shames and stigmatises them for life.

Critiques in favour of decriminalisation argue that laws that treat them as criminals deprive them of legal protection and subject them to harassment by the law enforcement agencies. This makes their workplace unsafe as the clients feel entitled to violate women. It further reduces women's negotiation capacities either in form of remuneration or from protection from abuses and unsafe sex during the act. This deprives women of their agency and dignity. The dangerous unprotected working conditions gives liberty to the clients that women in prostitution can be their targets of violence without any fear of punitive action against them. When prostitution is not considered legitimate work, they are always at risk of being 'othered' due to stigma and shame attached to it. Their strategies of survival get compromised, and they live in fear of being deprived of work and sustenance (Ditmore 2013; O'Connell Davidson 2002). The proponents in favour of decriminalisation advocate for improving the quality of lives of sex workers, with access to health care and public safety.

With the conflation of human trafficking and sex work, research on the interconnectedness between the two has a risk of being flawed which affects policy and planning. I concur that the othering, labelling and criminalising of prostitutes as delinquents, whores, and people incapable of taking 'good' decisions for themselves puts trafficked women in prostitution in similar risks being bracketed in the same category, by the majority of anti-trafficking actors, law enforcement agencies, judiciary, media and the civil society. O'Connell (2002: 84-98) in her essay, "The Rights and Wrongs of Prostitution" argues that to develop analyses on the conceptualisation of rights and wrongs of sex work, we need to go beyond experiences of a small minority of "First World" women. In this dissertation, I have argued for developing analysis based on the subjective experience and knowledge of trafficked and migrant women workers from the Global South, sex worker or not.

While I acknowledge, and support women's right to choose sex work as a legitimate form of employment, in this study I am interested in women who have been deceived or coerced to acts without informed consent and live with the trauma and stigma of the trafficking experience. I am interested in those women whom The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture has classified as victims of trafficking who are often confined, forced to work long periods of time and subjected to severe forms of physical, sexual and mental violence "that may amount to

torture or at least cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment”.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, I am interested in economic migrants who in their journey for work, better life and fulfilment of their dreams and aspirations may have been vulnerable to or experienced trafficking. These are women who in their daily lives struggle and empower themselves to live a life of dignity.

### **2.3.2 Human Trafficking: Perspectives on Crime Against Persons and Human Rights Violations**

Human trafficking is a pervasive phenomenon that takes place around the globe.<sup>26</sup> The vulnerable and trafficked women, men, and children, as well as the agents, small time operators and traffickers, all aspire to a better life. The United Nations acknowledges human trafficking as a serious crime and a grave violation of human rights affecting almost every country, as countries of origin, transit, or destination.<sup>27</sup> It is estimated to be the third largest organized criminal activity in the world, next to drugs and arms trafficking.<sup>28</sup> A 9 billion USD enterprise, it is the fastest growing business in the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>29</sup> and involves a huge

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<sup>25</sup> UN General Assembly, Human Rights Council, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (A/HRC/7/3), 15 January 2008, para. 53.

<sup>26</sup> “Trafficking in persons,” “human trafficking,” and “modern slavery” are umbrella terms—often used interchangeably—to refer to a crime whereby traffickers exploit and profit at the expense of adults or children by compelling them to perform labor or engage in commercial sex. When a person younger than 18 is used to perform a commercial sex act, it is a crime regardless of whether there is any force, fraud, or coercion. The United States recognizes two primary forms of trafficking in persons: forced labor and sex trafficking. Forced labor, also referred to as “labor trafficking,” encompasses the range of activities involved when a person uses force, fraud, or coercion to obtain the labor or services of another person. Sex trafficking encompasses the range of activities involved when a trafficker uses force, fraud, or coercion to compel another person to engage in a commercial sex act or causes a child to engage in a commercial sex act.

[Trafficking in Persons Report 2021, Department of State, United States of America, pg-24]

<sup>27</sup> Every country in the world is affected by human trafficking, whether as a country of origin, transit, or destination for victims. Traffickers the world over continue to target women and girls. Most detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation and 35 per cent of those trafficked for forced labour are female. Conflict further exacerbates vulnerabilities, with armed groups exploiting civilians and traffickers targeting forcibly displaced people.

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/end-human-trafficking-day/background>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.unric.org/en/human-trafficking>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2015/>

organised criminal nexus in the world affecting people, largely from poor, impoverished and marginalised communities.<sup>30</sup> In this sub-section I examine these reports and contestations that argue human trafficking as a human rights violation that yields to a highly profitable business built upon crime against women.

Trafficking has been established as a crime against persons that extends beyond the realm of prostitution. Some critiques argue for lack of evidence-based research to establish the fact that human trafficking is an organised criminal network with large scale operations (Ditmore 2003: 5). Kempadoo critiques the trafficking rhetoric as a criminal activity. She argues that such narratives are scripted to regulate the sex industry and to control immigration and borders.

In the beginning of the twenty-first century human trafficking was identified as a transnational crime, and was cast by political leaders, alongside terrorism and drug trafficking, as one of the three “evils” to haunt the globe. Beliefs about human trafficking have also created a veritable anti-trafficking industry as well as a set of durable narratives. These narratives have informed law enforcement efforts to control immigration and transnational crime, state policies and interventions to closely survey and regulate sex industries, and an array of social work and other activities aimed at undocumented migrants, sex workers, and bonded labourers (2012: vii).

In my work as a development practitioner and researcher, I have found evidence in the existence of a nexus between traffickers and their allies at different levels: rural areas (source areas), transit areas and in destination points. These are mostly small-time operators functioning with family members and other villagers in source areas and with few collaborators in the destination points, largely within the country in different States of India. The collaborators also include local police and government officials who help traffickers both at the source areas and at destination points. These small-time operators as well as the vulnerable and trafficked, I argue have one thing in common – they lack opportunities for growth and development, such as education, livelihood options, health care and quality of life. Unless governments and civil societies work towards bringing positive changes to address

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/global-report-on-trafficking-in-persons.html>; <https://www.unric.org/en/human-trafficking/27448-how-serious-is-the-problem?format=pdf>



systemic and structural gaps, the cycle of poverty, the need to migrate for work, and the cycle of exploitation and human rights violation will continue. I do acknowledge the presence of crime syndicates operated by the likes of Jeffrey Epstein and others. However, this dissertation is about women from Global South who in search of decent work and better quality of life migrate for work and often get exploited at their workplaces and experience vulnerability to trafficking during the migration path, who do not often fall in the trap of such big syndicates. This research has undertaken a human rights-based approach using a gendered lens that focusses on affirming the dignity and rights of vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women. Therefore, this dissertation argues for engaging with the systemic and structural gaps to address the conditions that makes women from the Global South vulnerable to trafficking instead of limiting it within the ambit of trafficking as a crime against women.

Understanding the human rights violation that takes place during the entire process of trafficking and after is essential. Whether trafficked persons work as a domestic worker, sex worker, or are in situations of forced marriage, they suffer severe violations of their human rights at the sites of exploitation. The violations can take place in different stages of their migration and trafficking trajectory – during the recruitment and transfer process, or in confinement, the tactic of deception, coercion and oppression could vary. I emphasise that a critical analysis from the perspective of the trafficked and a collective reflection of concerned stakeholders is necessary to foreground the rights, agency, and dignity of the vulnerable and trafficked specially while formulation policies, laws and assistance programs for them. I contend that the violation of human rights of trafficked ‘survivors’ continue even after they have come out of places and situations of living as trafficked ‘victims’. The process of victimisation does not end at the exploitative sites or at the hands of the traffickers. From systems that perpetually oppresses vulnerable, poor, and marginalised women to the community at large that indecently marginalises and dehumanises the already oppressed, trafficked women are at constant risk of suffering even at the hands of those who intend to save and care for their lives. When the voice, agency and dignity of trafficked people are diminished, the rights of the trafficked are violated in the shelter homes or communities they live. Systemic and structural violence must be challenged along with traditional and cultural gender norms that continues to violate trafficked survivors to live and work with dignity. I

further argue that trafficked women are not the only victims in the spectrum of human trafficking, families, and communities of the trafficked also suffer from stigma, shame and exclusion. These layers of exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation of people who live in the same context as that of the trafficked women, can put them at further risk of trafficking. The central purpose of this research is to understand how women with experiences of vulnerability and exploitation utilise their power-within and agency to liberate and empower themselves towards living a life of dignity. In this research, constructs of vulnerability, victim, gender, sexuality and indecent work have been problematised and reflected upon with women by creating safe spaces to have their insights and knowledge based on their embodied experiences.

With these divided opinions and contestations on human trafficking, on sexual slavery, sexual labour, crime and border control perspective and human rights violations that takes place during and after trafficking, this sub-section brought together the ideological and political positions that guide the narrative, discourse and policies on human trafficking. In the next sub-section, I share insights from the literature on human trafficking and migration and the interlinkages of human trafficking with globalisation, global capitalism and its impact on the labour market. At the end, I present my position on the subject.

#### **2.4 Interlinkages of Migration and Human Trafficking with Globalisation, Global Capitalism, and its Impact on the Female Labour Market**

This section continues to focus and delves deeper in understanding human trafficking from a rights framework. It explores the broader context of neoliberal globalisation and its intersections with human trafficking, migration, labour and gender. In this section, I begin with exploring the broader context of women at large from the Global South, who like my research participants are vulnerable to trafficking. I elucidate the micro and macro factors of trafficking and migration from critical studies on trafficking. I deconstruct the politics of female victims and the feminised image of trafficked victims in the context of migration and globalisation.

Academic literature and reports, including the GAATW 2010 working papers and the USTIPS reports, indicate that those vulnerable to trafficking belong to places that are affected by economic and political instability, social imbalances, communal and religious tensions,

military unrest, famines, epidemics and climate induced distress and displacement due to loss of land tenure, violation of land rights, natural disasters and food insecurity. Other factors such as feminisation of poverty, lack of gainful unemployment, discrimination and violence against sexual and religious minorities also contribute to people moving out from their places of origin. Therefore, as indicated, the root causes of trafficking can broadly be looked at two levels - micro and macro factors. Micro factors include violence and discrimination within the homes or communities of origin. Macro factors include political instabilities, climate change, gender-based discrimination in systems and structures and economic policies that have a direct bearing on the livelihood of migrating population and individuals. Poverty, the shrinking of the welfare state and constriction of social security and safety nets push people to migrate and that makes them vulnerable to trafficking. Trade relations and development strategies, harmful cultural and religious practices, organised crime networks and their nexus with the corrupt systems and authorities contributes largely to the root causes of trafficking. Besides, changing environmental conditions and the global demand for migrant women as workers in the garment industry, as domestic workers, in small scale manufacturing units amongst many others, have an impact of women's shifting livelihood opportunities beyond borders (domestic and international) of their places of residence (GATW 2010: 11,12, 13).

Sanghera (2005: 7) notes,

The growth of trafficking in persons has been attributed to many causes including poverty, lack of sustainable livelihoods, structural inequities in society, gender discrimination, war and armed conflict, and other forms of natural and constructed disasters. However, it is critical to understand that these factors are not in themselves the causes of trafficking; they merely exacerbate the vulnerability of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and render them increasingly more susceptible to a variety of harms. Factors such as lack of livelihood options, conflict and structural inequities, creates condition for the displacement and mobility of populations and, hence, contribute to the "freeing" up of marginal and vulnerable groups, thereby creating a potential group of migrants and livelihood-seekers. The sites of work that draw the supply of these migrant livelihood seekers are contingent upon demand from particular sectors of the economy for certain types of labour that would enable maximisation of profit.

In my opinion, the systemic, structural and causal factors of migration and trafficking are critical to any analysis and must be a part of discourse for policy planning and implementation and for richer scholarship in the academia. Within the violence against women framework, Kamala Kempadoo (2015: 13) argues, lies the stereotypical infantilised image of the female trafficked victim, as being tortured and exploited whether in the Indian brothels or in the Thai Massage Parlours or elsewhere. I examine this perspective and study how such stereotypical images further victimises the trafficked and those in the ambiguous side-lines of the trafficking ambit, such as female economic migrants. Such rhetoric takes away the focus from addressing the structural and causal factors that pushes women to migrate out of their homelands and move to the network of a globalised order what Sassen (2002:503) calls the “counter - geographies of globalisation”.

Saskia Sassen, in her article, “Women’s Burden: Counter-Geographies of Globalization and the Feminization of Survival” (2002: 503-524), mentions that “households and whole communities are increasingly dependent on women for their survival. Governments are too dependent on their earnings as well as enterprises where profit making exists at the margins of the ‘licit’ economy” (2002: 255). Sassen mentions that in the context of the broader structural conditions, women’s presence in the cross-border circuits is increasing in the past few decades. These circuits are diverse, they are a source of livelihood for women themselves, and a source of profit-making and accrual of foreign currency. These are places where illegal trafficking for sex work and other forms of work take place. These sites are also used for cross-border migrations, documented or not. The key actors in these circuits are illegal traffickers, contractor, government of home countries and disadvantaged women, who are a source of convertible currency for the governments in home countries.

Sassen (2002: 503-504) conceptualises this as counter-geographies of globalisation that,

overlap with some of the major dynamics that compose globalisation: the formation of global markets, the intensification of transnational and trans-local networks, and the development of communication technologies, which easily escape conventional surveillance practices. The strengthening and, in some cases, formation of new global circuits is made possible by the existence of a global economic system and the associated development of various institutional supports for cross-border money flows and markets. The counter-geographies are dynamic; to some extent they are

part of the shadow economy, but they also use some of the institutional infrastructure of the formal economy.

In the context of women working in the margins of the licit economy and shadow economy that they depend upon; in this research I investigate how female economic migrants and trafficked women mitigate risks together with their own circuits of survival and solidarity. In this dissertation, the research participants who have contributed to the body of knowledge are internal economic migrants with some having experiences of trafficking. They have not crossed international borders yet, though few shared their aspirations to go international. These women have crossed domestic borders and have experiences what migrant women share in common: ostracization, stigma, cultural and social exclusion, challenges to find decent work and housing. Over the years, they have found themselves finding courage and strength to overcome these challenges in their daily lives, to be self-reliant and confident. Economic independence gives them courage, grit and determination to live a decent life and to support their families. This section of the chapter has four sub-sections. I first explore the micro factors that make economic migrant women vulnerable to trafficking. I examine the linkages between violence against women and human trafficking. In the next sub-section, I explore the macro factors that contributes to the trafficking of women, which includes global capitalism, globalisation and neo-liberal economic policies. In the third sub-section, I present the impact of the feminised image of the victims of trafficking in the context of globalisation and migration. In the concluding sub-section, I attempt to deconstruct the politics of female victimhood in the context of trafficking, migration and global capitalism. I conclude this section by sharing my notion of indecent work and indecent world of work for women from the Global South.

#### **2.4.1 Micro Factors: Linkages between Violence against Women and Human Trafficking**

In this sub-section, I explore the micro causal factors that makes poor women vulnerable to trafficking. I begin my argument by affirming that human trafficking is not just a crime against people, it is a consequence of several other interconnected social factors (GAATW 2010:1). In the GAATW Working Papers Series 2010 titled, *Beyond Borders Exploring Links between Trafficking and Gender*, the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women while supporting the need to protect the rights of trafficked persons, argues that the excessive focus on the issue of human trafficking tends to ignore related phenomena, such as people's experiences in

migration and work. I concur that understanding the complex social realities and interconnected social factors that puts women at risk of trafficking is necessary which can be done by engaging with women's embodied experiences. I adapt a gender and human rights lens in this research to deepen my understanding from the perspective of women themselves. I believe that this approach will constructively contribute to the progressive social, religious, ethical and political consciousness and drive change for long term sustainable solutions.

Trafficked persons are typically people who have moved from places that have limited opportunities for livelihood, employment, education, health care and other social security systems. They move to areas that offer 'greener pastures', for survival and to fulfil their aspirations for a better life. They are people largely from the Global South who move to the Global North or migrate from impoverished rural areas to bigger cities within their countries (IOM: 2002; Sassen 2002; GAATW, 2010). Women are subject to many forms of discrimination and exploitation, which begins with being given less preference and opportunities than their male siblings at home. They are discriminated or violated if they do not confirm to social norms assigned to their sexuality and the roles assigned to their gender in their homes and community. Women are discriminated and deprived from gainful employment or livelihood options because of barriers in education and formal skill training. They receive lower wages in comparison to their male counterparts. They are subject to work-place harassment including sexual exploitation. They suffer sexual violence in places of conflict with rape being used as a form of oppression in conflict ridden places. In addition to heterosexual women, transgender women, bisexual women, lesbians and anyone who falls in the queer category suffer much more discrimination and exclusion (GAATW 2010: 8-12).

This dissertation focusses on vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women; hence the literature review specifically focussed on women and not others. Women have dual responsibilities of caring for and nurturing their families. With the changing socio-economic and geo-political contexts, women have additional responsibilities to provide for their families (Sassen 2002; GAATW 2010). However, social notions about women render them vulnerable to trafficking as they move out of their homes in search for alternative livelihood options and gainful employment (GAATW 2010). The prevalence of various forms of discrimination against women affect them in the choices they make, like the places they can travel to, how and with whom can they travel, or what kind of work can they take up, where can they work, etc. While

men do not have to account for these choices, women are discriminated and being accounted for every decision they make. This is where women are expected to conform and their agency, freedom and rights are negotiated and infringed (GAATW 2010). Discrimination against women is identified as one of the main causes of trafficking. Women are discriminated from their male counterparts while making decisions concerning them, which includes where and what kind of work she can engage in, whether she can travel and migrate for work and whether she can migrate alone or needs supervision (GAATW 2010: 8). I contend that the protectionist agenda for women not only overemphasises her vulnerability but challenges her autonomy in the decision-making process.

Bandana Pattanaik, the International Coordinator of GAATW posits that,

States and many NGOs still take a very protectionist approach to trafficked women, despite all of the lip service to women's rights. The protectionist approach is stronger towards working class women. Women who have been advocates and activists do not want other women from other classes to be as adventurous in their own lives, so they try to 'protect' them from harm by banning them from travelling or putting them in safe houses involuntarily.

- Bandana Pattanaik, GAATW, Gender-Migration-Labour-Trafficking Roundtable, 2008.

An isolated focus on women's vulnerability can itself be discriminatory against her (GAATW 2010: 9). I concur with this view that such assumptions can take away from women the right to take decisions for herself. Women's strength, resourcefulness, power, discernment and perspective will all get prominence if we listen to their perspectives gained from their lived experiences in their journey towards an empowered life. This is possible only when we address discrimination and be inclusive in our anti-trafficking responses. Gender based discrimination can exacerbate violence against women.

'Violence against women' (VAW) refers to act/s of violence against women simply because they are women and because they are perceived as people on whom power can be exercised. Women can be violated in different ways, they can be subject to physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse. Other forms of violence include economic and social abuse when they do not have control over their income/ family income, when their spending

is controlled and under surveillance, when they lack the choice to save and spend. Social abuse refers to their social life, with limitations of control on who they can talk to or interact with, how they can participate in social and community life. The subjugation of women in family life, marital life, community life and even in professional life impacts their mental health and overall wellbeing. Violence against women takes place because of unequal power relations that is established between women and their perpetrators (perpetrators of VAW include men and women in positions of power over the dominated woman in their homes, community, workplace or institutions, the State and their authorities, by the military in areas of armed conflict where rape is used as a tool of power and war and the traffickers (GAATW 2010:21-22)).<sup>31</sup>

In the context of trafficking, trafficked women are likely to have experienced violence. Domestic violence or gender-based discrimination at home could be a reason for women to flee from their homes. Traffickers, mostly exploit these realities and help women escape, luring them with the dream for a better life. Women do experience violence from their traffickers, recruiters and agents. Violence from employers in garment factories or other industries and violence towards sex workers is evidenced in several studies (GAATW 2010: 21,22). Women are subject to violence by authorities, by the border police, at the detention centres or by law enforcement agencies. Reports indicate that rehabilitation centres and shelters, do violate women by controlling their freedom to movement and their autonomy to participate in decisions concerning their lives. This is elaborated in the next chapter. Returnee women are violated back in their homes and community, due to the stigma and shame labelled around trafficked women. Traffickers prey upon women who escape or return to re-traffic them from the source areas. Women are vulnerable to secondary victimisation post escape or return. Re-traumatisation of survivors take place while they seek legal or medical assistance. As I explain in detail in the next chapter, the anti-trafficking framework overemphasises on patriarchy, entitlement, superiority and misogyny but obliterates any intersectional and structural analysis of the experiences of trafficked person based on gender, race, class and nationality. In my dissertation, I attempt to understand the intersectional

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<sup>31</sup> "Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the protection of women against violence" (PDF). Council of Europe Committee of Ministers. 30 April 2006. Retrieved 1 April 2018.



experiences of women that comes with the denial of agency, dignity and rights of women, the right to self-determination, the right to decent livelihood (GAATW 2010) and how systemic and structural gaps perpetuates their exploitation.

Current evidence and statistics on who gets trafficked is biased towards women and excludes men, queer, and transgender women (GAATW 2010:8).<sup>32</sup> Whether this bias helps women or further harms them is to be contested. I argue that the over emphasis on the vulnerabilities of women to trafficking and the panic around the female victim of trafficking is problematic as it masks women's agency and infringes her rights and freedom to movement, livelihood and better life. By taking this position, I do not undermine the trauma and suffering of trafficked women who undergo severe forms of torture, exploitation, exclusion and isolation. I do acknowledge the need to protect women and all trafficked people, including children from extremely harmful situations. However, I posit that vulnerable and trafficked persons should have the freedom to exercise their agency to take decisions about their lives. The literature review established that post-rescue, trafficked women are deprived of exercising their agency while in institutional care services. I opine that just as 'forced labour' is harmful for the vulnerable and trafficked person so is 'forced rescue' and 'forced rehabilitation' in shelter homes harmful for them. In both cases, their personhood and dignity are compromised. There are several reports of women complaining about being incarcerated and violated in the very shelter homes where they are supposed to feel safe and secure. While staying in shelters that dehumanises them, they are deprived of earning a decent living. I do acknowledge the benefits of immediate institutional care for women at risk. Many of them do provide a safe haven to women in need, but there is evidence of several such institutions patronising their roles as service providers. In the next chapter, I have further elaborated how the anti-trafficking rhetoric, discourse and praxis, excludes women who do not conform to the social norms. Women who defy gender stereotypes and exercise their agency are most often excluded being considered deviants (GAATW 2010 :25-28).

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<sup>32</sup> Women and girls accounted for 71 per cent of modern slavery victims. Global estimates of modern slavery: Forced labour and forced marriage International Labour Office (ILO), Geneva, 2017. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_575479.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf)

In my analysis of the anti-trafficking framework, I find that it is a particularly narrow conception of addressing the concerns, with rescue and rehabilitation of the trafficked being the primary concern of the anti-trafficking stakeholders. As much as these approaches are necessary, a broader approach of addressing the causal factors to prevent trafficking and protect future generations is a necessity. In my opinion, advocacy and efforts towards identifying and addressing the broader systemic and structural causes that makes economic migrants vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation in workplaces and host cities, is necessary. Working towards social, economic and gender equity is essential along with creating circles of just solidarity. Further, while I acknowledge that human trafficking affects children, men and queer people and not just women, this dissertation focusses on women. Therefore, the literature review and analysis is done using a gendered lens. The intersections between gender, work, migration and trafficking are critical to this dissertation.

#### **2.4.2 Macro Factors: Linkages between Global Capitalism, Globalisation, Neo-liberal Economic Policies and Human Trafficking**

There are several backstories of people who are vulnerable to trafficking including but not limited to gender-based discrimination and violence against women. In this sub-section, I delve deeper into the macro causal factors that propel people's movement and, its linkages with global capitalism, globalisation and neo-liberal economic policies. I examine factors that make women in traffic vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. I use the phrase 'women in traffic' to draw attention towards the panic regarding women's movement, in stark contrast to their male counterpart, especially in the context of human trafficking and transnational migration. In this dissertation, I have argued for a need to normalise women's autonomy and mobility. I advocate for women's right to decent work and migration, which includes domestic migration and transnational migration.

It is an established fact that the systemic and structural inequalities, and the constriction of social security systems are the major causes which exacerbates the conditions that make people vulnerable to trafficking. It is in this context that Sassen (2002: 503, 504) mentions that globalisation and current neo-liberal policies are major contributing factors to the current patterns of global migration and trafficking which is anchored on the existing and ever-expanding profit-making activities of the globalised markets and the survival strategies of the available workforce in the Global South where women, as well as illegal contractors,

agents and traffickers, share a few things in common: they are all in search of livelihood. They constitute a large chunk of workforce and are allies in the informal economy. While households and communities are increasingly dependent on the earnings of women for their survival, governments are also dependant on the earnings of women and the remittances they send back home. Working class women from the unorganised labour sector contribute largely to the “shadow economies” of these countries. The profit-making enterprises, therefore, Sassen suggests, exist largely on the backs of women and operates at the margins of the “licit economy”. The presence of organised criminal networks in the shadow economy accrues to high rates of profits with lesser risks. They are more active in operation now than ever before. Traffickers range from small scale informal operators to large scale organised networks. The potential ‘victims’ are promised better lives, decent jobs and gainful employment.

Sassen (2002: 504, 506) notes that with economic globalisation, the global circuits that incorporates women from the developing economies have strengthened. While the developing economies implemented new policies associated with economic globalisation, such as the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), these economies opened avenues for foreign firms eliminating multiple state subsidies. These conditions in most of the countries created enormous costs for certain sectors of the economy and populations. While the governments of developing economies continue to be debt ridden, these costs have contributed to the growth in unemployment. With the closure of traditional sectors that were oriented to the local or national market, and with the increased production of cash crops for exports, the traditional survival agriculture, food production for local consumption and markets have diminished, putting heavy burden on individuals as well as governments in most of these economies. These conditions result in the shrinking of opportunities of male employment and traditional profit-making and income generating avenues. Within the conditions, arises new conditions for a new political economic reality for a growing number of developing economies, argues Sassen. In this article, Sassen (2002: 504, 506) notes that,

the systemic connections between low income individuals, who are often represented as burden rather than a resource, and what are emerging as significant sources of profit and government revenue enhancement, partly in the shadow economy. Prostitution, labour migration and illegal trafficking in women and children in the sex

industry are growing in importance as profit making activities. The remittances sent by emigrants, as well as the organised export of workers, are increasingly important sources of revenues for some governments.

Researching the sex industry and its impact on globalisation, Sidharth Kara (2009) provides a business analysis of the sex industry through his work in the book titled, *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*. With the selling of inexpensive sex around the world, Kara argues that the sex industry derives immense profit through unjust practices and has contributed largely to the growth of sex trafficking by creating harmful inequalities. Economic globalisation has not only led to increased economic disenfranchisement of the poor, but it has also deepened rural poverty and resulted in the extraction of resources and wealth from the poor economies to the rich ones. This results in the erosion of human freedom from the developing world.

In 2012, the ILO estimated that globally 20.9 million people were victims of forced labour.<sup>33</sup> With changing of structures in the global economic market that promote people's movement and governs their freedom in multiple ways, migration can be interlinked with globalization that together have influence on the trends and structure of trafficking. The structural adjustment programmes (SAP) have further altered the variables in the root causes of trafficking, including gender inequality, social and economic marginalization and discrimination based on race, caste, and class.<sup>34</sup> With a high rate of unemployment and economic disparity, loss of agrarian based livelihood sources and a growing rate of movement of people from rural to peri-urban and urban areas in search for work, and with the availability of ignorant, illiterate labour, together with inadequate or unexercised policy frameworks of the government, traffickers have easy access for cheap labour that can be deceived, coerced, and exploited for the purpose of maximising profits Kara (2009).

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<sup>33</sup> ILO Global Estimate of Forced Labour, International Labour Organization 2012.

<sup>34</sup> International Labour Conference, 98th Session, 2009, *Report VI Gender equality at the heart of decent work*, International Labour Office Geneva.

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Racism/IWG/Session7/GenderEquality.pdf>

Labour trafficking takes multiple forms, ranging from traditional settings in agriculture, brickmaking, garment industry, leather making, mining, quarrying, gem work, jewellery making, cloth and carpet making, domestic servitude, prostitution, to forced labour in construction, fishing, manufacturing, adult entertainment industry and in Spas and Massage Parlours. Though the consumption of these services and products used to be much at local level, neo liberal economic globalisation has opened avenues for reaching slave made goods and services from the third world to the doorsteps of consumers in the first world (Bales 1999; Quirk 2011; Kara 2009). Kara (2009) further notes that the cost of slaves in the third world countries is much lesser than the first world. The corporations in our global economy therefore move to countries where the cost of production is cheap but yields high profits. Most of these labour trafficking takes place in informal settings. Traffickers use calculated tactics to keep their victims isolated through intimidation and threats by taking away all their legal documents, passports, identity cards and educational and training certificates. Most of these cases go unreported and hence lesser impunity of traffickers and investigations by law enforcement agencies. The trafficked victims are made to live in fear of law enforcement agencies as they may seem to have colluded with their migration by illegal means, including crossing of borders without legal documents. They fear being treated as criminals themselves. This deters them from reporting their violations to the law enforcement agencies. They are also not aware of their rights in such trapped situations and live in ignorance of where and how to file a complaint for their freedom. The hidden nature of such cases of trafficking therefore remains outside the awareness of public domain. This escalates the incidence of labour trafficking as labour recruiters continue targeting vulnerable children, women and men looking for opportunities for a better life and employment while employers seek cheap unskilled labour willing or coerced to work in the unregulated unorganised sectors not knowing how unsafe and exploitative conditions of work may await them.

Women constitute a majority of group in sex trafficking, sexual labour and other forms of labour, some of which are in highly regulated industry such as in nursing, while many are in prostitution which can be illicit and illegal. These circuits, Sassen mentions, depend on the backs of women. She introduces the concept of “feminisation of survival” to draw attention towards the dependence of households, communities and governments to women’s earnings and profit making in the margins of “licit” economy (Sassen 2002: 506).

I ask, when women play such an important role in the crucial economic processes of their countries and support their families and communities, then why is their work invisible and considered indecent? The gender dynamic that veils women's economic labour needs serious and intentional unpacking and must be recognised as contributing to the well-being of their families, communities and economies. Instead of being victimised, shamed and stigmatised with the labels that come with the notions of trafficking, their work in the informal economy must be regulated with the inclusion and protection of worker rights. While governments, non-government organisations, media and civil society play an important role in addressing the trafficking of persons, it is important to understand the underlying conditions that makes women vulnerable to work in unregulated sectors. While it is established that the trafficking of persons is a profit-making industry, which involves criminal activities and human rights violations, the illegal activities will continue unless there are concrete plans to address poverty, unemployment and overall well-being of communities, whether in Asia or the former Soviet Union, which continue to be major trafficking areas. Trafficking in migrants and exploitation of workers will continue to be a profitable business which is developing as an organised crime. A UN report<sup>35</sup> mentions that in the 1990s, criminal and profit-making organisations generated an estimated amount of US\$ 5.3 billion per year by trafficking economic migrants, not just women (Sassen 2002: 517).

Trafficking involves movement of a person from one place to another. The choice of movement could possibly be voluntary migration in search of work or for a better life. In cases like this, the trafficked person may collude in her being trafficked with/without realising the consequence of what could possibly awaits her at the other end. The choice of movement may be voluntary but not necessarily an informed one (Sanghera 2005; Ditmore 2003). However, since she has travelled out of her own will, she may look like a criminal or vagrant who has colluded in the process of trafficking. In most cases the woman who migrates for work is deceived and coerced to work at the point of destination. It is at the point of destination where she becomes a victim of trafficking, where threat or violence is used upon her to take up a work against her consent, where she finds it difficult to retract from her choice of movement for work, and is put into situations of forced labour, servitude, and slavery like practices. It is here where she is moved to a workplace that makes her invisible

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<sup>35</sup> IOM 1996

and isolated. It is here where she becomes a victim of crime, and her rights are violated as trafficking gets extremely clandestine at this stage and she gets trapped into a situation that she had least expected (Sanghera 2005: 3-11; Desyllas 2007: 57-62).

In this research, I am interested in the “hidden populations” to understand their lived experiences and realities and how they self-construct their identities in this backdrop. I am interested to understand how the public perception of trafficked, migrant and modern-day slaves impacts their everyday life experiences in the host communities and what are their expectations from the larger community to be in solidarity with them. I am also interested to hear their views on the role of gender in their migration and trafficking trajectory. The next sub-section delves deeper into the feminization of the image of the victims of trafficking in the context of migration. My research participants are women working in unorganised sectors who work on low and unequal wages. They work for long hours, sometime seven days a week. They lack social security measures. These factors make them extremely vulnerable to exploitation and to trafficking when they try to escape to another city or country. Some aim to go abroad for work and for better wages. In my opinion, it is crucial to address women’s vulnerabilities to trafficking in their migration trajectory by providing them with the tools and resources to protect themselves from any harm and for them to have easy access to decent work.

### **2.4.3 Feminisation of the Image of the Victims of Trafficking in the Context of Globalisation and Migration**

In the past few decades, women have been migrating from one place to the other in search of a better life and better opportunities for work to support their families back home. In the previous section, I presented the root causes of this geographic mobility of people and the aspects that make them vulnerable to trafficking. I also presented the discourse on the impact of globalisation on labour, migration and trafficking from the perspective of the Global South. Since this research is utilising a gendered lens in the analysis of the context of trafficking and migration and women’s lived experiences in their trafficking and migration trajectories, I move further from the notion of feminization of survival in the counter-geographies of globalisation (Sassen 2002: 503-524) to the notion of feminisation of the image of the victims of trafficking in this sub-section. I begin first by expounding the notion of feminisation of labour migration, and then highlight aspects of feminisation of poverty and migration.

The GAATW Working Papers Series 2010, *Beyond Borders: Exploring Links between Trafficking and Gender*, mentions that women, hard-working and committed as they are to their work, are perceived as less troublesome than their male counterparts in organising as Unions or in resisting exploitative working conditions. Since they pose lesser risk, their wages are lower in comparison to men. The global demand for migrant women workers is increasing, both inside the countries of origin and in foreign countries. They have opportunities to work as domestic helpers, workers in small-scale manufacturing units, garment industry, factories and horticulture, besides a host of other work avenues. With changing geo-political and socio-economic contexts, parents are also supportive of sending their daughters out for work as women support their families from what they earn. The changing roles of women as providers to their families facilitates women migrating autonomously even for precarious work. With the heavy reliance on cheap labour force, women migrants are preferred in the global and urban markets. Women constitute half of all migrant population. With the demand for typical gender-selective work such as domestic work, caregivers in health sector and entertainment industry and for the organised migration and trafficking of women into the sex industry, the 'feminisation of labour migration' is used to describe the increasing number of autonomous working-class women who migrate for work (GAATW 2010: 30).

In her article, "Victims of Trafficking: The Feminisation of Poverty and Migration in the Gendered Narratives of Human Trafficking", Amy M. Russel (2014: 532-548) mentions that in a globalized economy, the role of gender is a distinctive pattern in the case of female migration. The feminisation of migration, she argues has caught more attention than the feminisation of poverty (2014: 532). The feminisation of the image of the victim of trafficking along with the media attention on sex trafficking, has heightened the awareness both on human (female) trafficking and migration (2014: 533).

Similarly, in her article "Unpacking the Trafficking Discourse", Jyoti Sanghera (2005: 8-10, 21-21) notes that the gender bias regarding women that they need constant protection from men and/the State in every stage of their lives exacerbates women's vulnerability to sexual exploitation and sex trafficking. Regulating women's mobility is yet another element of patriarchal control. There exists a bias against marginalised women that those who migrate are vagrants and sexual delinquents. This bias further makes them invisible when they migrate for work. The attention towards this problem is largely due to the sexual exploitation



of women and girls, largely in the sex industry. The gender-based violence that takes place in the context of trafficking is interlinked with globalisation, feminisation of poverty, feminisation of migration and feminisation of survival. These are women and girls who have either escaped violence at home and/ or have lacked opportunities for personal growth and development to sustain themselves socially and economically. These very factors increase their vulnerability and puts them at further risk when they migrate for work to support themselves and / the survival of their families back in the villages. A clear distinction between trafficking and migration has remained a challenge for a long time. A thin line of difference continues to exist, and this lack of clarity leads to unrealistic and problematic solutions. Sanghera notes that the current anti-trafficking paradigm focusses on curbing migration to prevent trafficking for those who are vulnerable to trafficking. The effort to curb migration restricts women's rights to mobility and migration for work (Sanghera 2005). Studies indicate that curbing migration through stringent border control measures has only pushed the activity underground thereby making women invisible and inaccessible when vulnerable to exploitative situations (Sanghera and Kapur 2001).

While some put forward their views about the "dark side of globalisation" (Sanghera 2005: 6) by creating new kinds of conservatism that upholds old traditional roles of women, Yuval-Davis (2009) argues that for many it has opened avenues for new opportunities, access to alternative spaces that were previously not permissible. Despite the fact that women as economic migrants have specific gendered and low paid work opportunities, whether as domestic workers, nurses, carers or sex workers, for most of them migration itself can be understood as a form of resistance and transgression (Yuval-Davis 2009 cited in Russel 2014: 536). If women are utilising it to "escape from oppressive or violent environments, to transcend traditional sex-role constraints and to create a 'better life' for themselves" (Gülçür and İlkkaracan 2002 cited in Russel 2014: 536) or to send remittances back to their homes (Sassen 2002), migration for the poor and undocumented women workers is a complex reality. The feminisation of migration is problematic, with gender stereotypical images that reinforces the image of a vulnerable women. The construction of "migration" in itself is a distinction based upon class, "race" and ethnicity (Agustín 2007 cited in Russel 2014: 536). Further, the voices of trafficked women are most often silenced or suppressed, with their 'victim' status or as 'sexualized others' who are assumed to be lacking agency (Andrijasevic

2007, Aradau 2008, cited in Russel 2014: 538). It is therefore prudent to examine women's own understanding of their identities and subjectivities in the decision-making processes and how they utilise their agency to empower and liberate themselves from situations of oppression and exploitation.

In the context of the above debates, I situate my work within the broader scholarship and activism of human trafficking, migration, gender equality and the right to decent work. Locating myself in the domains of such diverse and contested issues, I foreground my research by privileging women's epistemic insight to contribute to this body of knowledge. To bring women's articulations, perspective and standpoint at the centre of this work, I transgressed many borders and crossed several barriers to include different sites of knowledge production which I elaborate in Chapter 6 that describes the research process and the realities of doing Critical Feminist Research.

#### **2.4.4 Deconstructing the Politics of Female Victimhood in the Context of Trafficking, Migration and Global Capitalism and a Call for Women's Right to Decent Work**

In the review of literature on trafficking and migration, I came across several terms, such as ideal victim, naïve victim, deserving victim, passive victim, hopeless victim, potential victim, trafficking victim, victim assistance, victim identity, and the list goes on. Since this research is based on the lived experiences and knowledge of women with experiences and vulnerability to trafficking, I attempt to unpack and deconstruct the notion of women's vulnerability, victimhood, alongside women's agency, strength and power in my engagement with the research collaborators presented later in the seventh chapter. In this sub-section, I draw insights on this issue from several academic literatures to briefly describe the notions of these constructs on victimhood.

The notion of a female victim of trafficking, Kempadoo and many others, argue, comes from the image of a women locked up in a brothel who is in desperate need of 'rescue' (Russel 2015: 538).

Kempadoo (2005: 13,14) asserts that:

The rescue fantasy is a means through which the endeavours are legitimized as altruistic and humanitarian, obscuring the reliance on and reproduction of the racial

knowledge of the Other in the historical tropes of, on the one hand — the hopeless victim, impoverished and incapable of attending to one's own needs.

The 'innocent victim' in the trafficking discourse has emerged from the white slavery campaigns. The image of young, innocent, hopeless, passive, white and virgin women, kidnapped and forced into prostitution was then used to generate public sympathy and for legal reforms continues to persist in the contemporary anti-trafficking discourse. This innocent feminine subject waiting to be rescued by the law enforcement agencies is completely different from the 'illegal' immigrant sex worker, who may also need assistance. The ideal iconic victim, having a remarkable resemblance with the white female slave co-operates with the law enforcement agencies and becomes a witness for the prosecutors (Kempadoo 2015: 13-15, Balganwala 2016: 15, 16). The innocent victim (Balganwala: 2016: 21, 22) is one who does not want to be in a trafficking situation but is unable to free themselves. Gender stereotypes keep out men from receiving this assistance in cases of labour trafficking and work in exploitative and harmful conditions. The innocent female victim requires help to be rescued. This victim has a bias from the law enforcement agency. On the other hand, there are individuals who self-escape from traffickers and from trafficked situations. They are less inclined to identify themselves as "victims" of trafficking. Since they exercise their capacity of decision-making and agency, their status as victims with agency becomes problematic. The Trafficking Protocol and Smuggling Protocol attempts to make this distinction, where migration cases occupy a grey area in between them. In this categorisation, between the perfect victim and women with agency, I contend that while trafficked women are deprived of their agency to take decisions for themselves, migrant working women are deprived of support and assistance when they require it. The nuanced victim construct needs to be problematised and understood from women's perspective. The GAATW working paper series (2010 :9) mentions that the isolated focus on women's vulnerability can further entrench her vulnerability since she will not be able to act on her behalf. The paper argues that if we begin our work considering women's vulnerability, then it will be difficult to look at her strength, decision making, responsibilities, power etc. Drawing from women's articulations the paper further draws attention to the consequences of excessive focus on

women as victims (GAATW 2010: 9):

The focus on women as being victims of, and vulnerable to, trafficking also masks women's other roles in trafficking processes – as traffickers, recruitment agents, or as those who benefit from other women's exploitation (e.g., employers of exploited domestic workers). Discrimination against women increases women's vulnerability to trafficking, but focusing on women's vulnerability rather than women's rights can lead to anti-trafficking measures that harm more than help. Anti-trafficking measures can result in further restrictions on women's mobility if it is assumed that a woman's vulnerability is something that is an inherent part of being a woman rather than the result of a discriminatory context.

In this context, Sanghera (2005: 14, 15) notes that human trafficking is a complex reality. It is deemed to be a crime against persons and violation of human rights. The core elements in the definition of trafficking involves movement of a person, under deception or coercion, into a slavery like situation. However, there are many trafficked migrants, who have voluntarily colluded with their traffickers to migrate. The traffickers usually come across as people known to the trafficked, as their well-wishers or romantic partners, who deceive them by promising a lucrative work or marriage. The first stage of trafficking goes smooth for the trafficker. It is in the next stage at the destination point where the trafficked migrant experiences trafficking. They find themselves in confined areas, in situations of forced labour or slavery like practices. A willing collaborator at the recruitment level and in the migratory process becomes a trafficked person at the destination. The complexity of this process, which involves an active agent in her migration journey with aspirations for a better life, becomes a victim. She may be viewed as a co-conspirator by the law enforcement agencies if her migration is steeped with illegalities. Instead of receiving assistance as a victim, she may be treated as a criminal. The complexity of the trafficking process and the identification of a trafficked victim is a complicated one, where the trafficked migrant may experience a systemic violation of her rights.

I affirm the need to protect<sup>36</sup> the rights of trafficked women but challenge the representation of ‘victims’ in trafficking narratives that undermines women’s resources of resilience, strength, courage, agency and dignity in their lived experiences of trafficking, migration and work. I emphasise the need to focus on people’s lived experiences in affirming their dignity and agency rather than over emphasising and sensationalising their stories of vulnerabilities and victimisation that creates a sexualised image of the trafficked victim which has the risk of their “secondary victimisation” (Cojocaru 2016: 12-38). The purpose of highlighting the construct of female victimhood in the trafficking narratives, is to bring to attention that women have the capacity to make decisions for themselves even if they are violated in their migration path, they can be a victim to trafficking. The assistance that they require must be accessible and provided to them even if they do not fall in the ‘ideal’ victim category. Post assistance, women should be given the autonomy to make decisions for themselves instead of being pushed into ‘forced rescue’ and ‘forced rehabilitation’, which have the risk of putting them into secondary victimisation and exploitation. These aspects are shared in depth in the next chapter.

I conclude this section by sharing in brief the notion of indecent work and emphasise on the right of every person to decent work. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines decent work as “productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity”.<sup>37</sup> The European Commission’s website<sup>38</sup> notes that generally, work is considered decent, when it pays a fair income, it guarantees a secure form of employment and safe working conditions, it ensures equal opportunities and treatment for all, it includes social protection for the workers and their families, it offers prospects for personal development, it encourages social integration where workers are free to express

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<sup>36</sup> Protection is key to the victim-centered approach that the international community takes in its efforts to combat human trafficking/ modern slavery. Effective victim protection entails identifying victims, providing referrals for a comprehensive array of services, directly providing or funding NGOs to provide those services, and supporting these individuals as they rebuild their lives.

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.ilo.org/global/lang--en/index.htm>

<sup>38</sup> [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/sustainable-growth-and-jobs/employment-and-decent-work\\_en#:~:text=The%20Decent%20Work%20Agenda%20was,creation%20as%20its%20priority%20objective.](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/sustainable-growth-and-jobs/employment-and-decent-work_en#:~:text=The%20Decent%20Work%20Agenda%20was,creation%20as%20its%20priority%20objective.)

their concerns and to organise. The Commission's website further mentions that informal work represents more than 50% of non-agricultural employment in most regions of the developing world: 82% in South Asia, 66% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 65% in East and Southeast Asia, and 51% in Latin America. Female labour force participation is low in Asia and the Pacific. South Asia holds the highest rates of informal employment in the world. With precarious and informal employment remaining high along with high youth unemployment rate, the income disparities are getting worse. Further, the region is faced with the challenge of absorbing a lot of migrant workers.

In order to foster the creation of secure and decent jobs, "The Decent Work Agenda" was formulated by the ILO in 1999. Later, at the 2005 UN World Summit, countries agreed to make employment and decent work for all a central objective of development strategies to support fair globalisation. And in 2014, the G20 declared employment creation as its priority objective. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all members states of the United Nations in 2015. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.<sup>39</sup> Agenda 2030, in the 8<sup>th</sup> SGD – Decent Work and Economic Growth - places decent work for all, and the ILO's mandate and purpose of social justice, at the heart of policies for sustainable and inclusive growth and development. The *ILO Decent Work and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* document<sup>40</sup> 8.5 commits to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value and in 8.8 commits to protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.

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<sup>39</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<sup>40</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---ilo-lisbon/documents/event/wcms\\_667247.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---ilo-lisbon/documents/event/wcms_667247.pdf)

The documents states that women's economic empowerment is fundamental to gender equality. For most women, the most important source of economic empowerment and dignity is a job. Closing gender gaps in employment, ensuring decent work for all women and equal pay for work of equal value is thus key to achieving gender equality. With a goal to reduce inequalities, its emphasis is on a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for individuals and families, is a direct means to reduce. It aims at peace, justice and strong institutions by establishing effective and inclusive institutions that promote decent work for all, based on respect for international labour standards and shaped through social dialogue that are fundamental to just and peaceful societies and participative decision-making. 16.2 in the document notes that a priority is to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

However, this dream is far from reality considering the aim is to achieve these goals in a few years from now. Opportunities to decent work are not available specifically in the Global South. People accept jobs that are available for them, despite unfair income, unsafe working conditions, lack of social protection, lack of decency and dignity at workplace. Women and young people are vulnerable in the informal economy. They accept indecent work to survive. Society in-dignifies them for engaging in work that is supposedly 'indecent', while employers make profit out of their labour and consumers benefit from the low-cost services or products they receive. Shaming and stigmatising women for choosing the work opportunities that are available for them, despite unsafe working condition and unfair wages to name a few, women are categorised as indecent women having given in to indecent work. People centred, gender focussed and micro and macro-economic policies in the globalised economy is not only necessary, but in my opinion the right of every woman struggling in between the borders of decency and indecency of the bodies of work. Inclusion of social protection policies, fair wage policies and inclusive approaches to female labour participation is necessary.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I described the history and background of the emergence of global trafficking as a concern for global policy and action. I drew attention to the conflicting discourse within the anti-trafficking paradigm between abolitionists and the advocates for migrant sex workers right to work. I mentioned that analysis of these complex social and economic realities is not possible from a single lens. Doing so, will not only deprive migrant women workers to access

assistance when caught in the trafficking nexus, but a paternalistic and protectionist approach of assistance to the trafficked can put them at risk of secondary victimisation. The agency of trafficked women gets undermined in the anti-trafficking rhetoric. After highlighting the strong anti-prostitution and anti-migrations foundations in the dominant discourse, I brought to attention the interlinkages between human trafficking and migration with globalisation, global capitalism and female labour participation. In this research, I use an intersectional lens to study the research problem where women's subjugated knowledge is utilised for learning from them their subjective experiences. Therefore, I established the existing links between trafficking, migration and labour and their intersections with gender and class in the broader context of globalisation and security. I brought to attention the conditions, micro and macro factors, the structural and systemic gaps such as the social inequities, structural gaps together with human displacement due to war, conflict, climate emergencies, natural and human caused disasters, that heighten the risk of trafficking in person in the larger context of migration, globalisation and global capitalism. I described how the feminised and sexualised image of trafficked victim, with special focus on sex trafficking and sexual exploitation in the media and advocacy campaigns has brought the issue of trafficking to much attention in the public view. I argued for deeper understanding of the complex realities of women, as they experience feminisation of survival under these underlying conditions which is interlinked with feminisation of poverty and feminisation of migration. In conclusion, I introduced the Decent Work for Agenda by the International Labour Organisation and the commitment of the United Nations member States towards providing decent work to all which as necessary as it is, seems far from being a reality anytime soon specifically for women workers in the Global South. Indecency, I argue is in the minds of the society, that in dignifies women's labour that she engages in from the limited job options available for her to survive and to work in the informal economy. Further, indecency is in the unregulated profit-making businesses and corporates that extract labour from women working in the shadow economy curbing their rights to decent work and staying unaccountable for violating human rights of poor migrant workers. Indecency, I argue is in the lack of political will and commitment of the United Nations member States that have committed to the Agenda for Decent Work for All. Indecency is in the agenda of financial institutions that control and manage the economic growth of countries from the Global South.



In this research, I have focused on understanding women's resourcefulness in the realities of their context. It is important to note that despite adverse situations women contribute to the economy of the home countries by sending remittances to their families. I draw attention in this chapter that curbing migration, categorising women as illegal migrants, whores, deviants are unhelpful. Instead providing decent work for all, including fair wages, social security, safe workplaces and dignity at work are empowering to women and to the families and the economies of countries from the Global South. I posit that trafficked and migrant women workers, despite their negative experiences of migration and trafficking, exercise their rights by using their resources of discernment, courage, resilience, strength, agency, dignity and solidarity to resist systems and situations of oppression and exploitation. Their empowering experiences even in adverse situations is critical to this study. This mapping and review of critical trafficking studies within a transnational sociological and human rights framework establishes the foundations for this dissertation. It is in the background of a complex reality of the trafficking process and an oversimplified understanding of the construct of trafficked victim, the anti-trafficking campaigns and efforts are designed. The next chapter focusses on the evolution of anti-trafficking paradigm and campaigns and critiques some of the dominant discourses that shapes the responses to trafficking in persons.

## Chapter 3

### The Anti-Trafficking Paradigm

#### 3.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I described the research problem which included putting in perspective the notion of human trafficking and the strong anti-prostitution and anti-migration foundations that largely guides policies and action. I engaged with critical, transnational feminist and post-colonial scholars to present my understanding of human trafficking in the context of globalisation and its interlinkages with migration and labour. I have used a gendered lens to position the research context within a human rights framework the review and analysis of literature. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the anti-trafficking paradigm, which includes the basis for designing advocacy campaigns, efforts to combat trafficking and the framing of laws and policies to prevent trafficking, protect trafficked persons and prosecute the traffickers. In this chapter, I present an overview of the current anti-trafficking paradigm. While I highlight the current strategies of the anti-trafficking work, I engage with the views and critiques of the current anti-trafficking discourse from a postcolonial lens. A post-colonial lens provides a critique of the influence of western lens for the non-western people, women in particular from the Global South. This chapter engages with the popular rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration efforts done by NGOs and different stakeholders in the anti-trafficking arena. I present the anti-trafficking response to address human trafficking globally and particularly in India.

In this chapter, I begin with presenting the campaign on trafficking as modern-day slavery. I argue for a deconstruction of the popular connotation of 'modern slavery' – a term and understanding being used globally by religious organisations, United Nations, International Labour Organisation, the International Organisation of Migration, the Anti-Slavery International and many other leading organisations worldwide. I engage with Kamal Kempadoo's article, titled "The Modern-Day White (Wo)Man's Burden: Trends in Anti-Trafficking and Anti-Slavery Campaigns" (2015), and present the historical context of the evolution of human trafficking as 'modern slavery' and the enthusiasm of abolitionist feminists from the global North for the racialised women from the Global South. I concur with Kempadoo that the current discourse on modern slavery, violence against prostituted women and the practice of the "rescue industry" (Agustin 2012 cited in Kempadoo 2015: 14) denies

dignity and agency of the trafficked migrant to a great extent. These anti-trafficking efforts exclude women with agency and labels them as “vagrants” not in need of assistance. I posit that the western fantasies of rescuing suffering bodies (Kempadoo 2015: 13) undermine the resource of the trafficked migrant workers in such challenging times, including the social solidarities and resistance groups (unstructured and loose) formed within these communities to empower themselves individually and as a collective. These aspects are covered in the first two sections of the chapter.

Since this research is about women from the Global South with research collaborators and knowledge contributors from India, I have delved into the phenomena of human trafficking in India in the third section. India’s response to combat human trafficking is mentioned in the fourth section. In the fifth section, I have detailed the discourse and critique on Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2021. For this chapter, I have drawn resources from international reports that are widely accepted and present views on the subject from scholarly articles by post-colonial feminist scholars.

### **3.1 Human Trafficking in Modern Slavery Campaign**

In recent times, trafficking of persons is described as contemporary or modern-day slavery. In this section, I bring to attention the modern slavery campaign and discourse as human trafficking is one of the facets under the ambit of this campaign. Kempadoo (2015: 9) notes, that although the notion of human trafficking is often used interchangeably with modern slavery and forced labour, the definition and ideas of human trafficking has become murkier and more confusing. Anti-trafficking campaigners call upon States, the civil society and faith-based organisations to oppose slavery and commit to defend human rights and freedom. The head of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) introduced the term ‘modern slavery’ in 2008 at the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT) Conference in Vienna. In his opening speech he said, “Two hundred years after the end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, we have the obligation to fight a crime that has no place in the twenty-first century. Let’s call it what it is: modern slavery”.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/2008/HumanTrafficking-AnOverview.pdf>

The Anti-Slavery International (ASI), defines modern slavery as “when an individual is exploited by others, for personal or commercial gain. Whether tricked, coerced, or forced, they lose their freedom. This includes but is not limited to human trafficking, forced labour and debt bondage”.<sup>42</sup> The US Department of State, Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, uses the terms, ‘Trafficking in Persons’, ‘Human Trafficking’, and ‘Modern Slavery’ as umbrella terms to refer to both sex trafficking and compelled labour. The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 (Pub. L. 106-386), as amended, and the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* (the Palermo Protocol) describes this compelled service using a number of different terms, including involuntary servitude, slavery or practices similar to slavery, debt bondage, and forced labour.<sup>43</sup>

Modern slavery is understood as a hidden crime, affecting every country in the world, and is found in many industries. These industries include garment manufacturing, mining, and agriculture, and in many contexts, from private homes to settlements for internally displaced people and refugees. The labour of modern slaves impacts us all, from the food we consume, the clothes we wear and the goods we purchase. Hence, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Walk Free Foundation, Anti-Slavery International (ASI), United States Department of State and many other International agencies call for responsibility and accountability from consumers and producers to address and eliminate what is called the crime of modern slavery. Modern slavery covers a set of specific legal concepts. It includes forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage, slavery and slavery-like practices and human trafficking. However, modern slavery is not defined by law even though it is used as an umbrella term that focuses attention on commonalities across these legal concepts. It refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power (ILO, IOM Report 2022:13).<sup>44</sup> ASI notes that many people have fallen into this trap

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/modern-slavery/>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.state.gov/what-is-modern-slavery/>

<sup>44</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms\\_854733.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_854733.pdf)

because they were trying to escape poverty or insecurity, to improve their lives and to support their families.

Walk Free Foundation in its *Global Slavery Index Report (2014)* describes modern slavery in which one person deprives the freedom of another people of their freedom, the freedom to quit job for another, the freedom over their own body. In my own work engagement with women workers, I have met women who have been deprived of health care, a day-off, rest in between long working hours, confiscation of passport, identity cards, education and experience certificates, wage thefts and holding their wages with the employers in the guise of keeping it safe with them. While I agree that migrant women workers whether in domestic servitude or other forms of exploitative labour are kept in a state of incarceration by their employers often in connivance with the ludicrous placement agents, I urge the countries to have laws in place and enforce those laws to protect the rights of migrant workers. In the absence of safe workplaces, women suffer exploitation and are rescued to be sent back to their homes and places of origin. They lose their right and opportunity to decent work.

*Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage*, a report by International Labour Organization (ILO), Walk Free, and International Organization for Migration (IOM), estimate that worldwide fifty million people were living in modern slavery in 2021, with 28 million in forced labour and 22 million trapped in forced marriage. The report informs that modern slavery occurs in almost every country in the world, where women and children remain disproportionately vulnerable. It further suggests that modern slavery cuts across ethnic, cultural and religious lines. Most common types of slavery as mentioned in the report are, human trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage/ bonded labour, descent-based slavery (refers to people born into slavery), child slavery, forced and early marriage and domestic servitude. To make this set of complex legal concepts measurable, the global estimates focus on two key forms of modern slavery: forced labour and forced marriage (2022: 13).

The purpose of highlighting the discourse on modern slavery is because the subject of this dissertation – ‘human trafficking’ is covered under this umbrella term. I posit for policy and action to be formulated from the perspectives of the ‘modern slaves’ specifically from the Global South including migrant women workers who are vulnerable to trafficking, exploitation

and loss of freedom at their workplaces.<sup>45</sup> I now draw insights from the perspectives of critical scholars and activists on the campaign and connotation of modern slavery or modern slaves.

In her article, “The Modern-Day White (Wo)Man’s Burden: Trends in Anti-Trafficking and Anti-Slavery Campaigns” Kamala Kempadoo (2015) draws to attention significant characteristic of the modern slavery discourse. Kempadoo (2015:10) notes that modern slavery is not the same as chattel slavery. In the case of enslavement of Africans, chattel slavery and classical slavery, Kempadoo brings to attention that these were premised on the ownership for life of one person by another. On the other hand, modern slavery is located in the notion of force, or of violence by an individual or company towards another. The victim here exists in a state of total unfreedom as the victim loses control over her or his life. The majority of cases cited in modern slavery do not fit into the category of the historical forms of slavery. The dividing line between slavery and freedom, and between forced labour and poor working conditions in contemporary slavery is difficult to determine. Kempadoo (2015:11) argues that this individualization of the problem has important ramifications for modern anti-slavery interventions and solutions.

The other cause that dominates the modern slavery discourse is by abolitionist feminists, guided by the importance of morality, that is commonly expressed through religious notions of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. On abolition feminism, Kempadoo (2015:11) posits that it does not draw on the earlier black slavery abolitionism as the modern-day anti-slavery campaigners do. She further mentions that moral outrage and analysis of abolitionists is built from the history of campaigns against white slavery. It is premised largely on sexual violence against women within a patriarchal framework. They focus on the workings of patriarchy with exclusive focus

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<sup>45</sup> The new Global Estimates revealed that in the year 2021 an estimated 50 million people were living in situations of modern slavery on any given day, with the most vulnerable being – women, children and migrants. Migrant workers were three times more likely to be in situations of forced labour than non-migrant workers, with women and girls accounting for over 54 per cent of the global estimates. Encouragingly, countries are starting to recognise the expertise of those with lived experience. Sixteen governments, out of the 176 governments reported, from across the globe have either consulted with survivors as part of policy development or have provided them seats on their national coordinating councils or as part of a separate survivor advisory council.

<https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/findings/global-findings/#:~:text=An%20estimated%2050%20million%20people,million%20were%20in%20forced%20marriages.>

on sexual violence against women. Prostitution is considered by them as male-created, patriarchal institution for the terrorization, control, and exploitation of women, similar to that of marriage, the family, and the veil. The abolitionist feminist discourse is known in feminist circles as Radical Feminism. It emerged out of the North American and Western European women's movement in the 1960s. Yet, while many ideas in Radical Feminism have been contested, including by Black, "Third World," and postcolonial feminists who have critiqued the Euro-American centrism in the theorizing and politics, and some ideas have been rethought, an unreconstructed, unexamined definition of prostitution has been maintained." Prostitution is viewed as violence against women, and all prostitution as female sex trafficking. This sector holds a huge space in the modern slavery discourse.

I have noted a shift in the narratives and discourse on modern slavery over the years. *The Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage* (2022:1) mentions it as "the very antithesis of social justice and sustainable development." It further indicates that on any given day there are 50 million people in situations of modern slavery who are either forced to work against their will or in a marriage that they were forced into.

This number translates to nearly one of every 150 people in the world. The estimates also indicate that situations of modern slavery are by no means transient – entrapment in forced labour can last years, while in most cases forced marriage is a life sentence. And sadly, the situation is not improving. The 2021 Global Estimates show that millions more men, women, and children have been forced to work or marry in the period since the previous estimates were released in 2017.

- Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage, 2022, pg 1.

The report has highlighted different crises that escalates the problem, such as

the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts, and climate change. It also refers to the unprecedented disruption to employment and education, increases in extreme poverty and forced and unsafe migration, and an upsurge in reports of gender-based violence, together serving to heighten the risk of all forms of modern slavery. As is usually the case, it is those who are already in situations of greatest vulnerability – including the poor and socially excluded, workers in the informal economy, irregular

or otherwise unprotected migrant workers, and people subject to discrimination – who are most affected.

- Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage, 2022, pg.1

The categorisation and individualisation of modern slaves, in my opinion, needs to be problematised and investigated from those who are perceived to have lived in slavery like situations. It is prudent to learn how it impacts their subjective identities, and whether the slave identity impedes or enables their process of actualisation of their dreams to live life in its fullness and with dignity. Engaging with the experiences and perspectives of the modern slaves is central to my argument. Having their voices in the decision-making processes in policy and praxis is very important. The knowledge of trafficked and migrant women from the Global South has been systematically undermined or excluded. Hence, it is important for scholars to deeply engage with women who have experience of living in modern slavery like situations which can be a resource for policy makers and influencers.

It is with this deep commitment, that I demonstrate in this research the importance of engaging and collaborating with the research participants to have their perspectives in the knowledge making process. Since this research is shaped with a gender lens and within a human rights framework, having the collaboration of women to contribute to the body of knowledge for sound scholarship, to inform and influence theology, policy and praxis is central to this dissertation. I content for the active participation of people having the experience of living in ‘slavery’ like situations in the doing of sociology and theology. I argue that policies and strategies to address a problem, such as trafficking of women, modern slavery or forced labour, terms that are used interchangeably by different agencies, be made together with them and not just for them. I emphasise for women’s active participation in the process of knowledge contribution and not as an act of tokenism or for the sake of representation. In the next section, I share the current anti-trafficking strategies and the ideological foundations that shape these narratives.

### **3.2 Anti-trafficking Strategies**

In this section, I present a background on the ideological positions that shaped responses to human trafficking by engaging with post-colonial scholars whose critique to these ideological



positions are critical for this dissertation. As mentioned earlier, the abolitionist feminists and governance feminists,<sup>46</sup> with a neoliberal sexual agenda along with the religious right play a substantial role in shaping policy and praxis. They advocate for legal reforms in reducing sex trafficking. Alongside them are countries that aim at protecting their borders from the influx of migrants, considered to be illegal. Migrants<sup>47</sup> from several countries in West Africa and Middle East are people risking their lives to cross the borders in order to escape the consequences of war and poverty (Kodeeswaran 2014: 357-359; Kempadoo 2015: 8-20). *The Global Slavery Index 2023* by Walk Free reports that, the countries estimated to have the highest prevalence of modern slavery tend to be conflict-affected, have state-imposed forced labour, and have weak governance. The report mentions that, besides increasing conflict, conditions such as environmental degradation, over a decade of global democratic decline, a global rollback of women's rights, and the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and responses to it, are contributing factors to the worsening of the situation. These compounding crises, the report states, have led to significant disruption to employment and education, increases in extreme poverty, and forced and unsafe migration, which together heighten the risk of all forms of modern slavery, particularly for those who are already vulnerable.<sup>48</sup>

Annie Hill, in her article "Producing the Crisis: Human Trafficking and Humanitarian Interventions", (2019: 1-5) argues that the trafficking rhetoric not only describes the situation

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<sup>46</sup> Kotisawaran (357) elaborates on what Janet Halley has explained on the concept of governance feminism (GF): "GF is, I think, an underrecognized but important fact of governance more generally in the early twenty-first century. I mean the term to refer to the incremental but by now quite noticeable installation of feminists and feminist ideas in actual legal-institutional power. It takes many forms, and some parts of feminism participate more effectively than others; some are not players at all. Feminists by no means have won everything they want—far from it—but neither are they helpless outsiders. Rather, as feminist legal activism comes of age, it accedes to a newly mature engagement with power."

Halley et al., *supra* note 5, at 340.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants/>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/findings/global-findings/#:~:text=An%20estimated%2050%20million%20people,million%20were%20in%20forced%20marriages.>

<https://cdn.walkfree.org/content/uploads/2023/05/17114737/Global-Slavery-Index-2023.pdf>

of trafficking but produces the “human trafficking crisis” by attaching it to racialized and gendered groups. She presents a case of the dangers of profiling migrants and sex workers which resonates with the terror rhetoric of those migrating from the Middle East. The influx of these migrants is seen as a terror crisis. Migrant labour and sex labour are under constant surveillance in host communities and countries. When they are represented to law enforcement as victims of trafficking, rehabilitation becomes an obvious resort to resolve the crisis. Rehabilitation of migrant and sex workers is argued by many as incarceration of migrant working women thereby restricting their bodily autonomy and dignity to work. The anti-trafficking strategy that supplies immediate care packages to women and girls, pushes aside the need for sustainable intervention for the addressing of structural and causal factors that contributes to their vulnerability to trafficking and other forms of exploitation. There is a modest recognition in recent times that human trafficking is not an issue related to prostitution alone.<sup>49</sup> However, several post-colonial scholars argue that the obsession on sexual slavery and migrants crossing international borders continues to dominate the trafficking discourse.

Abolitionists believe that prostitution, a patriarchal institution, for men, created by men, to control, abuse and terrorise women, is a violence against women (Kempadoo 2015: 11). The conflation of human trafficking and prostitution arises from these viewpoints. Kempadoo (2015: 8-20) further presents a background on the emergence of this view that I share here. The ideology of rescue of women, she argues, comes from the abolitionist feminist discourse. It is argued that the rescue of innocent victims from brothels is punitive in nature. It increases surveillance on the sex industry, clients and traffickers, and violates the rights of labour migrants, especially refugees and women. Kempadoo argues that the cause of this ideology is rooted on the panic and anxiety around illegal migrants and refugees (Anderson, Sharma, & Wright, 2009; Bernstein, 2010; GAATW, 2007; Kempadoo, Sanghera, & Pattanaik, 2005 cited in Kempadoo, 2015). According to her and many other scholars, white supremacy, neoliberalism and global capitalism together co-create and sustain the underlying problems. I opine that without “getting to the bottom of things” (Goldman, 1911/1969 cited in Kempadoo, 2015:12), the real concerns around issue will continue and widen the social and

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<sup>49</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/humantrafficking/what-is-human-trafficking>

economic inequities between the majority of the poor worldwide and the minuscule rich and wealthy people who maintain the status quo.

Kempadoo (2015: 13) mentions that white supremacy defends and maintains a system where white wealth, power and privilege, as an ideology and not in skin colour, takes for granted the role of leaders, thinkers and decision maker. She further notes that white supremacy or white supremacism is premised on the notion that white people are superior to other races. In academic studies as in critical race theory and intersection feminism, it denotes a system of structural or societal racism where white people enjoy a position of privilege over people from other races. People from the Global South from racialised minorities who are complicit with this idea become 'honorary whites', with a deep longing and desire to help the Other (hooks 1995: 189, Macedo & Gounari 2006 cited in Kempadoo 2015: 13). This ideology fits in well in the context of neo-liberalism. The anti-trafficking campaigns stem from within these 'developed' racialised centres of the world where white women and men fulfil their 'rescue fantasy' what Laura Agustín calls "the soft side of imperialism" (Agustín 2012: para. 6 cited in Kempadoo 2015: 14). Laura Agustín who has written extensively on the praxis of rescue industry from sex trade mentions that the praxis of the rescue industry is based on the idea of saving miserable, helpless female victims from what Lara Agustín posits is "the wrong side of the sex" (Agustín 2012: para. 6 cited in Kempadoo 2015: 14). These suffering bodies, Kempadoo (2015:14) emphasises whether in the Indian brothels, Thai Massage Parlours, Nigerian slums or in the Bangladeshi factories are rescued, rehabilitated and returned to their homes after several rescue stories and photo shoots are shared with the world through reports and social media platforms. These rescue missions are legitimized as by the portrayal of the victim's reliance on this mission for their freedom. The benevolent civilised white, by bearing the burden of the world's poor, derives a sense of fulfilment and transformation while obliterating any strength, wisdom and courage that the Other possesses (Agustín: 2012; Ahmed: 2014; Kapoor: 2013, hooks: 1992; cited in Kempadoo 2015:12). These global interventions by the Western benevolent humanitarians fulfil the desires of the white supremacists, women and men, and enhances their own subjectivity, identity and self-esteem (Heron 2007 cited in Kempadoo 2015: 14).

Citing from the scholarly work of S. Ahmed :2000; hooks: 1992; Kapoor: 2013, Kempadoo (2015:14) further notes,

The rescue fantasy is a means through which the endeavours are legitimized as altruistic and humanitarian, obscuring the reliance on and reproduction of the racial knowledge of the Other in the historical tropes of, on the one hand—the hopeless victim, impoverished and incapable of attending to one’s own needs—and, on the other, the benevolent civilizing white subject who must bear the burden of intervening in poor areas of the world. The rescue mission then becomes a vehicle of transformation of the self—through contact with the Other—providing the “rescuer” with a sense of satisfaction and a form of pleasure or even enjoyment due to the psychic investment that is made in the process.

On similar lines, in her article, “Beyond Sexual Humanitarianism: A Postcolonial approach to Anti-trafficking Law” (2014: 354-406), Prabha Kotiswaran brings to attention concerns on sexual humanitarianism. She posits that the conflation between trafficking, trafficking for sex work and what is called the modern-day slavery in the developing world has raised a moral urgency for sexual humanitarianism.<sup>50</sup> She argues that sexual humanitarianism largely focusses on strategies for raid and rescue operations to “transform” the lives of those at risk or violated. The imagery of the Indian women’s victimhood paves way for pushing the agenda for the criminalisation of the customers of sex workers. She adds that like herself, many postcolonial scholars have critiqued and contested the abolitionist discourse and polemic narratives by foregrounding the agency of third world actors.

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<sup>50</sup> ‘Sexual humanitarianism’ is a term coined by Nicola Mai. See Nick Mai, *Between Embodied Cosmopolitanism and Sexual*

*Humanitarianism*, in *Borders, Mobilities and Migrations: Perspectives from the Mediterranean in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* 175, 176–77 (Lisa Anteby-Yemini et al. eds., 2014 cited in Kotiswaran 2014: 354).

It is referred to humanitarian interventions, which Mai (2014: 176) describes as the “pathologization and criminalization of specifically gendered and sexuality-related forms of migration in terms of trafficking and exploitation (Aradau, 2004) are part of emerging forms of ‘neurotic’ (Isin, 2004) sexual governance through the parallel production of moral panics (Weitzer, 2007) and related humanitarian interventions, or ‘sexual humanitarianism’”.

Nick Mai, in his article “Between Embodied Cosmopolitanism and Sexual Humanitarianism: The Fractal Mobilities and Subjectivities of Migrants working in the Sex industry” (2014: 176, 177), argues that sexual humanitarianism and the interventions,

creates a hierarchical humanity around essentialized and moralized understandings of secularism, gender and sexuality. Sexual humanitarianism operates by containing, through social interventions, the mobility of migrant groups that have been strategically essentialized and othered as ‘pure’ victims of sexual oppression and exploitation. Since migrants’ nuanced understandings and experiences of ambivalence, vulnerability and resilience are obfuscated, only a minority receives appropriate support through sexual humanitarian social interventions.

He further argues that the hegemony of neoliberal ideologies has transformed previous ideologies and practices of social solidarity, social protection and economic participation. Therefore, instead of reducing the vulnerabilities of migrants to exploitation, these interventions become a tool of targeted control.

Mai (2014: 176, 177) further posits that,

it prevents citizens of the global North, which excludes underprivileged classes and marginalized places in the West, from reflecting on their own increasing exploitability, commodification and alienation in neoliberal times.

Such interventions highlight the chivalry of the neoliberal white crusader. It speaks of the power and subjectivity of the North, while people of the South seem to be helpless pure victims in dire need of rescue and charity. These interventions, it is argued, have no impact on the causes of the problem, nor does it engage with the subjectivity, personhood and experiences of women from the Global South and the “subaltern” (Ho, 2005; Kapur, 2010 cited in Kempadoo 2015: 18).

In addition to ‘rescue’, ‘rehabilitation’ and ‘reintegration’/‘repatriation’ of trafficked persons, the anti-trafficking responses by the governments, donors and civil society organisations include ‘prevention’ of trafficking in persons, ‘protection’ of victims of human trafficking and ‘prosecution’ of trafficking offenders. Traffickers are mostly prosecuted for crimes related to sex industry, where laws relating to prostitution are applied to prosecute traffickers, such as

procurement. Serious harms inflicted upon trafficked persons, such as physical, sexual, and psychological violence; torture and exploitations in forced labour and slavery like conditions and in incarcerations are areas that get ignored in the prosecution of traffickers and their allies (US TIPS Report 2020, 2021; Sanghera 2005: 16,17).

To prevent and reduce trafficking in persons, creating awareness on the issue of human trafficking is one of the anti-trafficking strategies. However, there is not much information or data to ascertain substantive impact of awareness raising on the reduction and prevention of trafficking. There are disagreements on this amongst anti-trafficking practitioners. One of the main concerns raised by scholars and critiques is who produces public perception and why, does it lead to a substantive and meaningful anti-trafficking action? (Kempadoo 2015 :8-20; Sharapove et. al., 2019: 2).

The major anti-trafficker actors focus their advocacy and practice on anti-trafficking interventions such as rescue (largely sex-trafficking and brothel based), and re-integration / repatriation of trafficked persons. The approaches to rescue, rehabilitation approaches and re-integration of rescued and rehabilitated survivors lacks critical and collective reflections. Most often, those re-integrated return to the very places where they were vulnerable and struggled to live a decent life. These places having not changed much become difficult for their survival. They are doubly re-victimised because of their trafficking status and the stigma attached to it. Re-integration of rescued girls and women from the sex industry has been the most difficult one.

Rescue operations in South Asia are mostly confined to brothels in red-light areas and excludes other forms of sex trafficking such as escort services, mobile prostitution in rented apartments, out call services in hotels and guest houses, and massage parlours (Sanghera 2005 :17). The media and the rescuers most often highlight the rescue operations with much insensitivity and indignity, harming the personhood of the rescued person. In my view, while it is essential for trafficked persons to be rescued from forced labour and from slavery like practices, including forced prostitution, the role of the police, NGOs and media must be gender sensitive adapting a human right based approach. The consent and dignity of the rescued person (women in particular) should be a priority over making a sensational report

of the operation which eventually dehumanizes and in dignifies the personhood of the trafficked while making a Hero, Messiah and Crusader of the Rescuer.

The rescued victims are often women and girls who look like minors. The actors in the rescue sector most often lack clear strategies and after-rescue concrete plans in the best interests of the rescued person. Rescued victims are handed over to government homes or NGO shelter homes. Most of them are not sensitive to the concerns of trafficked persons, where those rescued from brothels become victims of dehumanised treatments as whores and criminals (Sanghera 2005:17). I suggest scientific studies on the impact of rescue and rehabilitation efforts on trafficked persons that keep the voice and perspectives of the rescued at the centre. The challenge is to develop innovative, alternative and community-based models of rehabilitation and re-integration of trafficked persons who have the fear and risk of living with the stigma associated with trafficking. A rights-based humane approach of rehabilitation must respect the agency, consent and dignity of women whether living in institutional care or in communities.

The re-integration of the rescued in the context of stigma and shame is both a challenge and responsibility of the NGOs that provide with shelter and care. The concept of re-integration lacks clarity and precision (Lisborg 2009; UNIAP 2012; OHCHR 2013; Frederick 2012, cited in Bearup 2016: 2). In his article, "Reintegration as an Emerging Vision of Justice for Victims of Human Trafficking" Luke Bearup (2016: 1-13), examines the discourse and practice of re-integration within the anti-trafficking paradigm. He highlights the discursal shift within the trafficking protection, programs and policy, with specific reference to the Cambodian context. He argues that though it has become the responsibility of the NGOs to re-integrate trafficked victims, the lack of conceptual clarity of re-integration is problematic. He argues that NGOs and practitioners cannot re-integrate anyone, at least not in any substantive sense. He proposes more research on the social and cultural foundations of justice in this context. Bearup mentions that from within the protectionist discourse lies a dualistic conception of reintegration, therefore he proposes a dualistic concept comprising of 'procedural' and 'substantive' elements.

According to IOM's definition,

Reintegration in general is understood as the re-inclusion or re-incorporation of a person into a group or a process, e.g., of a migrant into the society of his or her country of origin or habitual residence. It is a multidimensional process that requires the re-establishment of economic and psychosocial ties. As such, successful reintegration depends on various factors such as the migrant's time spent abroad as well as his/her personal abilities and resources; the acceptance by his/her family, peers, and community; but also, on environmental and structural capacities as well as development and economic opportunities available in the country of origin.

- *Towards an Integrated Approach to Re-integration in the Context of Return*; 2017, page 2.

Therefore, re-integration is a process understood to enable the returned person to participate in the social, cultural, economic and political life of his or her country of origin (IOM 2015). However, re-integrating trafficked person is a challenge, but is it a necessity? This is a question that, in my opinion must be reflected upon before making attempts to re-integrate women back into their communities. Who takes the decision of reintegrating women back into their communities? Do women want to return back to the same situations or conditions that propelled them to move out of their homes? Is it safe enough for them to return considering the circumstances that motivated them to migrate? If stigma and shame is attached to trafficked and migrant working women, will they have a secure place to live back in their homes? If women's income contribute to the well-being of their families, then how will re-integration ensure the families well-being?

In their studies on survival strategies of trafficked women and girls, Padam Simkhada (2008), Thi Tue Phuong Hoang (2015) and R. Jayagupta (2009) have highlighted concerns over re-integration in the context of shame and stigma in Nepal, Vietnam and in the Greater Mekong sub-region. They highlight the enormity of struggles that the returnees face back in their communities and families. Social stigma attached to trafficked persons make it difficult for women to live with dignity with their families and in their communities. There is evidence in these studies that women prefer staying back in the cities, even if they have to live in the brothels. They have more acceptance in those communities than in their homes. Reintegrating trafficked women without preparing their families and communities can be



harmful. The rehabilitation efforts and re-integration efforts are hindered by such traditional values and norms obstructs their way from returning home and pushes them back to where they came from, even the brothels. Therefore, what is required is a critical need to create an environment and attitude that can embrace them to live a life of acceptance and dignity.

In the Vietnamese context, Hoang (2015) points out that even though Vietnam's laws follow the international framework of victim-centred rights-based approach, the enforcement of law fails the trafficked persons who can be sanctioned for status related offences. The trafficked persons are treated as passive victims rather than people with agency and autonomy who can make informed decisions about their life. She further highlights that Vietnam views trafficking as synonymous to sexual exploitation and prostitution which is viewed as a 'social evil' and therefore trafficking is seen as an issue connected to maintenance of national pride and identity. This, further shames trafficked women in prostitution.

Shame, humiliation and stigma of trafficking is not restricted to the victim alone, their families are also subject to shame and humiliation. Further, fear of being ostracized and excluded compels the families not to accept their returned girls and women back into their homes. The fear of not being able to get their other daughters married constrains the families to accept trafficked women back into their families. Daughters are construed as burdens due to traditional practices such as dowry. Therefore, they have lesser values as compared to boys who are considered to be the economic providers (Fikree and Pasha 2004; Goel: 2005). Similarly, Derks (1998) establishes that after returning to their homes and/ communities, whether out of their own choice or as a result of deportation, trafficked women face additional socio- economic challenges. Further, the trauma of rejection, non-acceptance and hostility adds on to their prevailing psycho-social concerns. Their return to the very context that had made them vulnerable to trafficking remains unaltered. Their return with limited or no financial gains further exacerbates their re-integration process. Anticipation and anxiety of stigma associated with the conflation of trafficking with prostitution, and the fear of difficult passage back into their communities, often compels some returnees to choose not to reunite with their families (Derks 1998: 11). Another aspect that makes re-integration challenging is the fact that many trafficked victims are reintegrated without psycho-social and financial assistance. The re-integration strategies adopted by NGOs is unclear. Re-integration assistance has only been available recently. Those who are provided with assistance

themselves are often not prepared to return, especially if they have been in sex work (Derks 1998, Jayagupta 2009).

Similarly, in the case of Thailand, Jayagupta (2009) notes that traditional values degrade brothel returnees. Therefore, as much that they would want to unite with their families they choose to settle in urban areas, set up small businesses or continue in the sex trade, either as madams or brokers. Jayagupta proposes further research on the coping strategies employed by trafficked girls that would assist in developing effective reintegration strategies. Likewise, while investigating surviving strategies of sex trafficked girls in Nepal, Simkhada (2008) found that sex trafficked victims were unable to forgive themselves. They had difficulty processing and overcoming shame and guilt. Many of them have difficulty to return to 'normal lives' therefore, despite the trauma and torture they experience in sex work, they return to the trade.

In her article "Purity, Victimhood and Agency: Fifteen years of the UN Trafficking Protocol", Marjan Wijers (2015:56-79) highlights a fundamental problem in the anti-trafficking paradigm. She argues that the focus on the movement of traffic in people takes away the focus from the outcomes of human trafficking with forced labour and slavery like practices. The cross-border movement focus, she critiques provides States a justification to control their borders in the guise of 'combatting' trafficking. While this approach privileges a subgroup of people who arrive in a situation of forced labour through trafficking, Wijers (2015:63-64) opines that it marginalises those who find themselves in slavery like situations and in forced labour but do not fall in the ambit of trafficking definitions or assistance. I concur with Wijers that a human rights perspective should focus on stopping the exploitation of people in forced labour or slavery like conditions, irrespective of how they arrived in this situation. The discourse and policy focus need to move towards making working conditions in the informal economy fair and just and protect the rights of migrant workers.

Mellisa Ditmore (2012: 107) in her article "Trafficking in Lives – How Ideology Shapes Policy", draws attention towards the history of concerns to women's economic independence, their mobility, and autonomy. Questions of morality and chastity, she argues, have historically been the primary concern when women's situations changes, particularly when it concerns 'unsupervised' women. Female migration, that has in recent times outnumbered male migration, whether from the rural to urban or across international borders, brings in

protection concerns from trafficking and prostitution. These perceived problems and oversimplistic solutions, I contend need to be problematised and deliberated upon from women's perspective when their bodily movement and autonomy is controlled and supervised in the name of protection and rights.

Trafficking of women is a complex issue; therefore, I contend that simplistic solutions may provide immediate relief to the trafficked but does not pave way for long-term sustainable solutions. With the dominant discourse on the subject being premised on moralistic positions, it is based much on a set of assumptions, anecdotal information, unexamined hypothesis and lacking evidence-based research (Sanghera 2005:5). The anti-trafficking interventions, with specific reference to South Asia and India, with all their good intentions, deprive women their freedom to exercise their agency both in policy and practice. It pushes them further to marginalisation, deprivation and violations. Therefore, making the informal sector of work more clandestine and exploitative.

It is with this background that this research places the experiences, perspectives and standpoint of trafficked and migrant working women representing women from the Global South at the heart of all research engagement. I have detailed in the following chapters the theoretical and theological foundations of the research, the process of participation with the research collaborators, and their contribution to this body of knowledge. While I concur with the viewpoint of Kotiswaran (2014), Hill (2019) and Mai (2014), Kempadoo (2015) and others, I add that the agency and subjugated knowledge of Global South actors be affirmed for all trafficked women and migrant workers, including sex workers. I contend that the subjectivity, humanity and experiences of trafficked and migrant women need to be recognised and utilised, especially by scholars to inform praxis, policy-making and development of anti-trafficking law.

The migrant working women, whether trafficked or not, whether working in the sex industry or not, are portrayed as indecent women do deserve assistance when they get trafficked. In reality they need to be liberated from the stereotypical sexualised image of women in indecent labour and have opportunities for employment in decent work. I further emphasise the need to address the "feminization of poverty and women's human rights" (Moghadam 2005). I insist that addressing the root causes of trafficking, i.e., structural, systemic and socio-economic, be the starting point of any discourse in policy and action for long term sustainable

solutions. The primary focus of sexual humanitarianism to the trafficked is immediate relief and must be done as necessary. However, as mentioned earlier, it can lead to secondary victimisation and secondary exploitation (Cojocar 2016: 12-38) with continued cycle of abuse and that must be prevented. I urge for policies and programs to be gender responsive, to support decreasing gender pay gaps, and to increase women's participation in equal-pay occupations. Increasing family support mechanisms and facilitating changing family structures that is empowering for women is vital for women's liberation and empowerment. Most importantly providing public supports and services to women, from access to affordable and quality education, access to health care and provision of jobs that uphold their dignity and worth are empowering strategies that would decrease women's vulnerabilities to violence, exploitation and trafficking. Therefore, I emphasise the need for sound research that supports women's empowerment process as long-term solutions that must be included in the anti-trafficking discourse and strategic planning of programs and policies. Limiting the discourse and praxis to rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration, which are currently the primary activities in the anti-trafficking efforts (Sanghera 2005: 3-24) with some attention to prosecution, protection and prevention does not provide sustainable solutions. Such activities undoubtedly are necessary for those in need of immediate care and protection. Even these approaches and operating procedures need revisitation from the standpoint of women. In this research, I have centred the standpoint of trafficked and migrant working women in the research questions, objectives, and process to understand their lived experiences of affirming dignity in their everyday lives and what solidarity do they expect from the wider community, faith-based groups, Church, and the State.

### **3.3 Phenomenon of Human Trafficking in India**

India is one of the fastest-growing countries in South Asia for human trafficking in the world. In this section, I present the context, nature and estimates of trafficking in India. Trafficking in persons is widespread in India which is a source, destination and transit country for boys and girls, men, and women for the purpose of labour and/or sexual exploitation. 90% of human trafficking in India is domestic (intra state and inter-state), with the remaining 10% taking place across international borders.<sup>51</sup> The Department of States, United States of

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<sup>51</sup> Human Trafficking in India: Dynamics, Current efforts and intervention opportunities for the Asia Foundation (2010) ; [www.globallslaveryindex.org](http://www.globallslaveryindex.org); The "2018 Trafficking in Persons Report" by the

America “2022 Trafficking in Persons Report”<sup>52</sup> mentions that human trafficking affects impoverished communities and people, especially women and children from marginalised, vulnerable and excluded communities like, religious minorities, Dalits and Tribals. Trafficking involves movement of people voluntarily or through coercion or by luring them with the promise of a better quality of life through false promises of marriage or decent job or by force and deceit to an unknown, isolated, and exploitative place of work. Many victims are from poor rural areas who are easily lured being ignorant of what lies ahead of them, they land up to find themselves or their children forced to work or sold to what is called “modern day slavery”.

The *Trafficking in Persons (TIPS) Report* by the US Department of State is a widely accepted annual report worldwide that draws from various reports, suggest that in India children and women live and work in debt bondage. Most often debt bondage is inherited from previous generations. They are forced to work in extremely difficult and often inhuman circumstances in agriculture, farms, rice mills, brick kiln, construction sites, in the textile and garment industries, embroidery workshops, sand mining and domestic servitude. Several unregulated placement agencies lure the vulnerable population and traffic them for different kinds of work including domestic servitude, sex trafficking and forced marriages. However, they end up in unregulated and unorganised sectors of work, where they are forced to work in exploitative and harmful conditions in domestic servitude, sex trafficking and forced marriages. Many of the women and girls are most often exploited and abused sexually at their places of work. Women and children who are victims of sex trafficking end up not just in traditional red-light areas but in other discreet places such as Massage Parlours and in rented places, guest houses and hotels as in-call and out-call escorts. Most of them work under threat while their documents like identity cards and educational certificates are confiscated and kept by the agents or employers. The agents and traffickers operate through mobile applications, websites and online advertisements. Some cases of trafficking are reported for surrogacy, for conceiving and delivering babies for sale.

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Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, US Department of State.

<sup>52</sup> Trafficking in Persons Reports 2022  
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/>

Traffickers deceive the victims with the promise of a better life, sometimes acting as lovers taking them outside for marriage, false promises of job prospects, or for arranging sham marriages within India or outside in the Gulf States or elsewhere. Skewed sex ratio due to female infanticide and foeticide,<sup>53</sup> in a northern Indian State like Haryana, become destination points for marriage trafficking where the girl or woman is sexually exploited and raped by several men in the family. They are exploited for excessive labour without wages. The underlying causes of trafficking in India includes factors such as, poverty, socio-cultural norms, and practices such as gender discrimination, loss of livelihoods, impact of globalisation, loss of resources such as agricultural lands and internal displacement and lack of alternative livelihood options (Sanghera 2005; TAF Report 2010; TIPS Report 2018,2019, 2020, 2021).

Over the past few years forced labour has started getting attention, besides the usual immense attention on sex trafficking in red-light areas (TIPS Report 2018,2019, 2020, 2021). In 2016, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) of India reported an increase by almost 20 per cent of cases in human trafficking from the previous year. The NCRB report notes that 11,212 victims, forty-five percent of victims were trafficked for the purposes of forced labour, and 7,570 exploited in sex trafficking which constitutes 33 percent for sexual exploitations in prostitution and child pornography. The report identified 8,651 boys, 7,238 women, 5,532 girls, and 1,696 men as trafficking victims. Of the victims, 22,932 were Indian, 38 Sri Lankan, 38 Nepali, 36 Bangladeshi, and 73 were various other nationalities, including Thai and Uzbek.<sup>54</sup> The report noted over 60 percent of the 23,117 victims rescued were children. Women and girls accounted for 55 percent. The report highlights that the number of rescued victims is higher than the number of trafficked people as rescued victims may also include

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<sup>53</sup> Female foeticide is a widespread phenomenon in India. It has contributed to a shortage in women, such as in the state of Haryana, where there are only 830 girls for every 1,000 boys. Evidence suggests there is a growing trend for brides to move from the poorer eastern or southern parts of the country to the more prosperous areas in the north where there is a higher male to female sex ratio. The skewed sex ratio in some regions in India is fuelling trafficking and selling of brides within India. Women are reportedly sold off into marriage by their families, sometimes at a young age, and end up enduring severe abuse, rape, and exploitation by their husbands. <https://www.globallslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/country-studies/india/>

<sup>54</sup> The 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report by the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, US Department of State reports; [ncrb.nic.in/](http://ncrb.nic.in/)

persons trafficked in the previous year. However, many activists and anti-trafficking players have shared their concerns about the under-reporting of cases of human trafficking. The report notes trafficking for other purposes than female sex trafficking, such as for domestic servitude, forced marriage, begging, drug peddling and the removal of their organs. The NCRB figures showed 3,824 victims were reported to be exploited in an unspecified manner and 349 exploited in forced marriage, either for forced labour, sex trafficking or both.

### 3.4 India's Response to Combat Human Trafficking

In this section, I first present the India's response to human trafficking, including the legal provisions which comes from a detailed study on the existing legal frameworks and reforms in process. In its response to combat<sup>55</sup> human trafficking, India has criminalised most forms of 'modern day slavery' like trafficking, slavery forced labour and child sexual exploitation in its Penal Code while forced marriage is criminalised only when the victim is kidnapped. The Indian government has ratified two core ILO (International Labour Organisation) Conventions in 2017, namely No. 138 on Minimum Age to Employment and No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour.<sup>56</sup> In 2016, a National Plan for Action for Children<sup>57</sup> was established. *The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act* was passed in 2016<sup>58</sup> which allows children to work in his or her family after school hours and during vacations and sets the minimum age limit of 18 years for hazardous work.

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<sup>55</sup> 'Combat' symbolizes war, active military engagement with enemies. I problematize this connotation as, in my opinion the failure of the duty bearers, primarily the State and civil society to address socio-economic inequities and gender discriminations are factors contributing to women's risk to trafficking. The State cannot get into a war with itself, it can only challenge itself and take the responsibility to address the root-causes of socio-economic and gender unjust practices, systems and structures and find solutions for establishing a just society for all. Combating trafficking is an expression used by many stakeholders and law makers across the globe. It is mentioned in India's draft Bill, The Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation Bill, 2021.

<sup>56</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_557295/lang--ja/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_557295/lang--ja/index.htm)

<sup>57</sup> <https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/National%20Plan%20of%20Action%202016.pdf>

<sup>58</sup>

<https://pencil.gov.in/THE%20CHILD%20LABOUR%20%28PROHIBITION%20AND%20REGULATION%29%20AMENDMENT%20ACT,%202016%281%29.pdf>

*The ILO Convention 189*, which was adopted in 2011, offers protection to domestic workers. It requires States to take measures to make it a decent work for domestic workers as a formal commitment to implement all the obligations, including passing of comprehensive legislation for domestic workers. India voted in favour of the Convention yet has not ratified it. There exists not a single law in the country that specifically deals with this unorganized sector, of which 80% are women.<sup>59</sup> In 2010, the National Commission for Women and the National Platform for Domestic Workers drafted the “Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act” to help address complaints about unpaid wages, starvation, inhumane work hours and verbal, physical and sexual abuse. A draft Domestic Workers Regulation of Work and Social Security Bill 2016 has been submitted to the Indian government. This bill seeks to extend existing labour laws to cover domestic workers and ensure that they are entitled to the

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<sup>59</sup> In India, challenges in gauging the depth of domestic workers’ problems arise at the very start – when it comes to determining how many people are engaged in domestic work, for instance. While according to official statistics, there are 4.75 million domestic workers in India, three million of whom are women, the International Labour Organisation, along with others are firm that the real number is much more, ranging from a wide 20 to 80 million. The main reason that the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) identifies as contributing to the ineffectiveness of India’s “piecemeal approach” towards domestic work is that all relevant action is de-federalised, with no overarching and binding rules to govern the working conditions of domestic labourers. Leaving individual states to formulate their own protections and maintain their own databases – especially in a sector that sees migration and movement from state to state – ensures loopholes that are difficult to bridge. In addition, the report notes that state protections “are neither consistent nor uniformly implemented, and in some cases, non-existent.” The Unorganised Workers’ Social Security Act, 2008, for instance, asks all states to set up welfare boards to ensure domestic workers get benefits. But some states still haven’t. Such discrepancies and differing labour laws among states makes labourers vulnerable to the pitfalls arising from lack of awareness of such laws, which also directly affects their ability to access benefits.

Migrant domestic workers, especially women, are already under financial pressure and find themselves unable to address exploitative recruitment practices, unfair ‘placement fees’, unfair clauses in employment, and sexual harassment. When it comes to harm done to them, often by employers, women domestic workers have no support other than to approach police, which, thanks to power inequality equations at play is often a deterrent. Thus, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013, the report says, must be reviewed to improve complaint mechanisms for domestic workers.

[Based on report by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI). The report by the CHRI urges India to ratify the Domestic Workers Convention or 'C189' as a step towards streamlining national protections for an enormous sector that is largely left to fend for itself. <https://thewire.in/labour/indian-domestic-workers-chri-labour-code>]



minimum wage and to access social security. The Bill is still in parliament awaiting to be passed (Sarkar, Soumashree: 2021).

Though India is committed to protect victims of trafficking and prosecute the offenders as a signatory of International Instruments and Conventions on Trafficking, it does not have a National Action Plan to tackle trafficking. On 28 February 2018, the Union Cabinet approved the Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018 (commonly known as the 'Anti-Trafficking Bill'). The Bill calls for the creation of a special agency to investigate trafficking crimes, anti-trafficking committees at the district, state, and central levels, and the establishment of special courts to prosecute trafficking crimes. It includes provisions for cross-border repatriation of victims from other neighbouring countries. The Bill was approved by the Union Cabinet in late February 2018 but lapsed without the approval of the Upper House. Currently, the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2021 awaits to be passed by the Parliament. The 2021 Bill makes the National Investigating Agency the lead investigating agency on such matters. However, it is pointed out that the Bill did not elucidate rescue protocols (Roy, Esha: 2021; Singh, Shiv Sahay: 2021). With this background, I move to the next section presenting a discourse and critique on the current Indian anti-trafficking Bill.

### **3.5 Discourse and Critique on the Current Anti-Trafficking Bill**

In this section, I first highlight the legal provisions existing and underway to address the growing concern of human trafficking in India. Thereafter, I present a critique and analysis of the same. For this section I have drawn resources from the websites of the Indian government, the United Nations Reports and from articles titled, "The Problem with Forced Rescue and Detention in Anti-trafficking Initiatives" (2019)<sup>60</sup> and "End the System of Forced Rescue and Institutionalisation in India" (2019),<sup>61</sup> by Kimberley Walters, Assistant Professor, California State University.

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<sup>60</sup> <https://delta87.org/2019/02/problem-forced-rescue-and-detention-anti-trafficking-initiatives/>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.opendemocracy.net/beyondslavery/kimberly-walters/end-system-of-forced-rescue-and-institutionalisation-in-india>

India has signed and ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.<sup>62</sup> International instruments on Human Trafficking under categories of UN Conventions and the International Labour Organisations have a bearing on India. India has also ratified the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Convention in 2002 to establish regional co-operation to protect trafficked children and women.<sup>63</sup> The UN Protocol requires India to formulate a comprehensive approach to eliminate all forms of trafficking. The ratification of these conventions requires translating them into domestic laws for positive outcomes.

India is currently guided by the Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act 1956 (ITPA)<sup>64</sup> along with provisions in the Constitution of India and the Indian Penal Code (IPC). However, there are limitations in the ITPA as it is not victim centred. Instead of protecting victims, it often arrests victims while traffickers remain unprosecuted. Anti-trafficking actors have long debated these loopholes and are unanimous in their demand for repealing the ITPA. A new Bill, Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018 was passed by the Lower House. However, it could never make its way to the Upper House. A new Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2021 is underway.<sup>65</sup> Many elements from the proposed ToP Bill, 2018 will remain in the new Bill. The 2018 Bill proposed for a 3-tiered structure to combat trafficking, with the creation of a National Anti-Trafficking Bureau (NATB) at the National level that will facilitate, monitor and co-ordinate activities between law enforcement agencies, NGOs, and other actors. The abolitionists who take a moral ground towards prostitution as violence against women are the major players in the anti-trafficking

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<sup>62</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/southasia/en/frontpage/2011/may/indian-govt-ratifies-two-un-conventions.html>

<sup>63</sup> <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/fr/countries/asia/india/2002/south-asian-association-for-regional-cooperation;>  
<https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/media/files/un%20women/vaw/full%20text/asia/south%20asian%20association%20for%20regional%20cooperation/saarc%20convention%20on%20preventing%20and%20combating%20trafficking%20in%20women%20and%20children%20for%20prostitution.pdf?vs=3229>

<sup>64</sup> <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/fr/countries/asia/india/1956/immoral-traffic--prevention--act-1956>

<sup>65</sup> <https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/DRAFT%20TRAFFICKING%20IN%20PERSONS%20%28PREVENTION,%20CARE%20AND%20REHABILITATION%29%20BILL%202021%20%281%29.pdf>

arena in India. These NGOs are heavily invested in rescue and rehabilitation of trafficked persons, especially women and children from brothels. They have largely been involved in the drafting and in providing their inputs to this Bill. However, huge debates between civil society groups, the abolitionists and the rights activists have been taking place in the country. The rights activists viewed the Bill to be infringing the rights of voluntary sex workers and causing harm to those who migrate for work in the informal sector.

The anti-trafficking actors found it to be a comprehensive one to combat trafficking in women and children. However, the rights activists demanded this Bill to be referred to a Parliamentary Committee to plug in the gaps in the Bill. The new Bill, it is argued, has a humane approach for redressal like the abuse and scandals inherent in the rehabilitation centres. It has guidelines outlining the management and regulatory mechanisms for non-compliance by the protection and rehabilitation homes, which in my opinion is a good step. I contend that the autonomy and rights of women must be upheld even for those who were trafficked victims earlier and are now voluntary sex workers. I have been engaged in this discourse and have been observing this process since over two decades. Hence, I bring the perspectives of both side of the debates from these conversation into this chapter in particular and throughout the dissertation.

The new Bill, according to anti-trafficking actors and experts, places the rights and welfare of the trafficked victims and takes a multi-pronged holistic approach to create a robust policy for the prevention, protection and rehabilitation of victims. For the protection and rehabilitation of trafficked victims, the Bill sets provisions for shelter homes with clear guidelines for their management and regulations, failure to compliance may be punishable as per Section 23. Section 17 (4) of the Bill has provisions for the 'consent of adult survivors' who can have a choice to stay in the rehabilitation homes by applying before a Magistrate, accepting, or declining rehabilitative services. Critiques argue that this provision is ambiguous since the Magistrate may or may not approve such an application. The approval of the Magistrate is dependent on the assessment of the victim's risks and vulnerability by the District Anti-Trafficking Committee. The ToP Bill restricts the stay of women for a short stay but lacks clarity in how long would be 'the short stay'. Under the current ITPA, rescued victims should be produced in court within 28 days, however evidence from shelter homes in New Delhi, Hyderabad and Mumbai concurs that due process for such cases takes months, with a

minimum of two to three months and it is also dependant on how long the NGO co-operates with the victim. The proposed ToP Bill remains ambiguous in this regard (Walters 2019).<sup>66</sup>

In the context of these debates, I emphasise the need to understand what happens to women post trafficking. What does their daily life look like after rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration. Questions like, who determines how and where they should move forward in their lives and what challenges do they face to normalise their lives in their own terms. There have been reports on secondary victimisation and secondary exploitation of women after they are re-integrated back into the communities. Lack of evidence-based research in this area gives an unclear picture of whether the assistance provided to them have long term positive impact. There is not enough research on the post-rescue and rehabilitations phase. I argue that unless programs and policies are built upon their insight, knowledge and lived experiences, the policies and programs would not have the desired impact and will risk causing harm to them. Strategies for empowerment with focus on self-reliance and economic justice is essential. Critiques such as Walters (2019) argue, that forced rescues and forced rehabilitations puts them at risk of loss of income that entraps them in continuous debt cycle, disempowering them from a sustainable livelihood and decent life.

The notion that victims of sex trafficking sell sex by force all their lives is highly contested. In India, many believe that girls and women who are sex trafficked would like to come out of it. However, many contradict this notion, stating that women find more comfort staying in the brothels than outside as living with people who understand and accept them in comparison to the places they come from. These perceptions are drawn from my listening to both sides of debates in Conferences that I have participated in. Over the years in my engagement with women and NGOs that work in this field, I have heard them share how stigma and shame often excludes them from their community and family which puts them at greater risk of being re-trafficked. Most sex trafficked victims turn to become voluntary sex workers and do not want forced rescue and forced rehabilitation. They argue, forced rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration shames them, deprives them of dignity and takes away their source of livelihood and sustenance. Once re-integrated back to their families, they are at greater risk

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<sup>66</sup> Walters Kimberly, 2019, *End the System of Forced Rescue and Institutionalization in India* <https://www.opendemocracy.net/beyondslavery/kimberly-walters/end-system-of-forced-rescue-and-institutionalisation-in-india>

of being re-trafficked as they return to the same circumstances that were detrimental for their trafficking, and now the burden of shame and stigma deprives them of any dignity. To many, forced institutionalisation is like secondary trafficking, being forced to stay in closed institutions that takes away their autonomy.

Walters (2019) argues that the term 'forced' should not be applicable to work rendered because of financial urgency. She opines that 'force' should refer to physical force, threats, beatings, blackmail and cheating. It should not apply to situations where people take up work for financial compulsions. If that was the case, she argues that majority of workers working all over the world would fall in the category of 'forced workers', not just prostitutes in forced work. A distinction between people trafficked for 'sex work' and those who voluntarily want to continue in sex work needs to be made. Women earlier trafficked for sex work against their will, in present day chose to continue living with the community where they feel a sense of belonging and chose to continue in the same profession. Forcing them out of their communities and work, could be a violation of their right to agency. Rescue and rehabilitation of such workers can be termed 'forced' since their acknowledgement and consent are least considered during the process. That does not undermine the need to rescue and rehabilitate those women who are trafficked, forced into sex work and desire to be rescued.

However, the ITPA does not acknowledge the fact that many women are voluntary sex workers, therefore considers it legitimate to rescue all women. I argue that raid and rescue operations when forced and is against the will of women are detrimental to the agency and personhood of women. Rescue operations are like raids and are detrimental to the mental health of trafficked victims. Many of them despite wanting to be liberated from the brothels, abhor the process of rescue and the treatment meted out to them by the Police personnel. In my opinion, victim shaming and bullying are against the principles of human rights, and it causes more harm than benefit to them when their dignity and humanity is at stake. Besides, the remand homes and protective homes often turn out to be places where women are most often treated as criminals, social and sexual deviants. They feel like being incarcerated in prisons without having the liberty to live life with freedom, as they are unable to be in touch with the outside world. The institutional caregivers may have valid reasons for curbing the freedom of their inmates, to protect women from escaping or from any harm from the traffickers or brothel managers. However, institutionalisation of adult women against their

will has a deep impact on their psychological and financial wellbeing. It curbs their freedom to a life and vocation of their choice. They are forced to learn skills in these centres which may not be of their interest or skill. These new skills if acquired may or may not be feasible for them to earn their living. They are deprived of their livelihood and sustenance. These are times when they risk their savings for their future. These are times when they are unable to provide support to their families, which could be providing medicines and treatment of an ailing parent, school fees for children and siblings or grocery bills. Lack of livelihood at one end can result in unmet daily needs of themselves and their families that depend on their income. This affects their mental health, which can make them angry, temperamental, rebellious and sometimes violent, they can get into rioting. Often trained counsellors in shelter homes are incapable of handling such situations and women in deep anguish. These women resort to escaping the rehabilitating homes or even try to take away their own lives. Staff of shelter homes are reported to resort to physical, emotional, and psychological violence towards them, when they are not able to manage them. The National Human Rights Commission study report has critiqued the forced removal of women from brothels, the way the raids and rescue are conducted, by detailing the violence and inappropriate approach by the Police. It has also critiqued the removal of women from their source of earnings and of the leaving behind of their children who live with their mothers (Sen and Nair 2004).

The Bill has made provisions in Section 17(5) for the victims to be provided with psychosocial counselling by trained mental health professionals, which is a step worthy of applause. However, it does not specify how to help the victims cope with loss of livelihood and provisions for supporting her family in the absence of any income. Provisions for having a mental health professional to help her cope with trauma and pain is a good attempt, but the steps to redress them from anxiety caused by removing them from their source of income is not mentioned. The risk of having a highly moralistic opinionated trained mental health professional is detrimental to the women's wellbeing, as they are bound to be filled with shame and guilt for the profession that they have been forced to or have opted to continue. In recent times, the shelter systems in India have come under public scanner because of irregularities and scandals systematically being reported by the media. The presence of violence and abuse within such institutions, include physical, sexual, emotional and psychological is getting recognition in the public domain.

With regards to woman's autonomy and consent, the major actors from the anti-trafficking sector claim that women's autonomy is recognised in Section 17(4) (Walters 2019). However, a closer look at this section can be a matter of concern.

Section 17 (4):

Provided that, if the victim or any person rescued is not a child and he voluntarily makes an application supported by an affidavit for his release and if the Magistrate is of the opinion that such application has not been made voluntarily, the Magistrate may reject such application after recording his reasons in writing.

Critiques argue that without the will and cooperation of the NGO where a victim is placed, it would become difficult for a victim to approach an appellate court. The new Bill does not have provisions to educate the victim regarding these provisions. Walters (2019) has argued that the budget of protection homes and shelters being directly linked with the number of inmates, they would not like to speed up this process in favour of the victim but rather try to hold the victim in their centres for longer times. This would have a direct bearing on the delay in release of the victim and restrict their autonomy. The bill is silent on how they would ensure non-delay in these procedures and timely action for the release of the victims. Victims cry foul often and state that such protective homes are like living in prisons for them. The language in this section is negatively and ambiguously worded, risking forced institutionalisation of victims for longer periods.

The current law on trafficking only criminalises the act of trafficking. There is no framework for prevention of trafficking, or the protection and rehabilitation of victims. The Bill creates a dedicated three-tier institutional framework at national, state and district level to ensure the effective implementation of the law at all levels. However, issues of consent, adults, institutionalisation and shelter homes have been contentious issues and need a closer examination. The Bill, in my opinion, considers trafficking more as a crime control issue than a human rights concern. My views are based on how the issues of autonomy of women and their consent is dealt with in the Bill, which is like the current law, ITPA (1986). In my opinion, the Trafficking of Persons Bill over emphasises sex trafficking which increases the burden of stigma and shame on all trafficked victims, who are trafficked for other forms of labour and exploitations. The Bill overemphasises institutional rehabilitation while leaving out other

alternatives like Open Shelters, Community-Based Rehabilitations (CBR) and creation of Community Based Protective Mechanisms. The voice of survivors is missing, and even if they have been brought in during the process, the voice seems to be marginalised. The voices, insights and knowledge of the vulnerable and trafficked are critical for effective and feasible program and policy planning. Their views are essential in understanding consent, coercion, force and freedom. An intersectional approach and not a linear one needs to be adapted to address the issue of human trafficking.

It is proposed that the Bill should be referred to a committee that should have clear terms of reference to accomplish tasks within a given timeframe. One of the most important tasks would be to utilise the knowledge of the women themselves based on their lived and intersectional experiences to understand their views on rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration and how should it be done for the trafficked. The committee must clarify in the Bill how the protection and best interest of voluntary sex workers and of migrant workers will be upheld. It should mention how not to put women at risk of re-trafficking or in positions of incarceration in institutions. To prevent women from forced institutionalisation, the committee must consider alternative forms of rehabilitation, where women can still have the autonomy to stay in the protection home while having the freedom to earn their livelihood and support their families. Alternatives, like Open Shelters, Community-Based Rehabilitations (CBR) and creation of Community Based Protective Mechanisms are a necessity and must be explored and piloted for replication. Alternatives need to be developed for women to be able to get out of trafficked situations without having to go through the intimidation and humiliations meted out by the Police and others in positions of power over them. In my perspective, the ultimate objective should be to work with communities, where women would like to live and be able to live with dignity, despite their choices of work. The community here is not just her village, her family or her community, but also a community of her choice where she feels embraced, where she can live with dignity in and near her place of work. The call ultimately is to build safe, secure and inclusive communities both in the host and home communities.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter is to bring to attention the context of the research problem globally and in India. I drew insights from different reports and discourse within the academia



on the subject on the ideological positions that shape anti-trafficking campaigns, responses, laws and policies. I engaged with these dimensions to draw attention to how the anti-trafficking paradigm impacts the lives of the vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women. I conclude this chapter by sharing my position on the issue and recommend changes in policy and praxis.

Based on the issues highlighted in this chapter, I conclude that the anti-trafficking paradigm must promote a human-rights and gender based approach to counter trafficking. Laws, policies, praxis and research need to include gender analysis based on exploring trafficking in its broader context that intersects with labour and women's migrant rights. The challenge therefore is to bring in many more actors in the anti-trafficking discourse within a human rights framework who would bring in strong voices for changes in policy and action for long term sustainable outcomes. The purpose is to bring in a deliberate shift from the "modern day white-(wo)-man's burden" (Kempadoo 2015:8), glorifying the Messiah's of the trafficked victims towards empowering the vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women. From a feminist standpoint, when women are facilitated through a process of wilful social transition from a state of oppression to a liberative and empowering one, a feminist ethics of care is established. It is when women can themselves make informed choices without inhibitions for their life and work, can they then live and work with dignity.

I believe, that when women's security and autonomy is at the centre of these processes, women can counter intersectional oppressions of race, ethnic, caste and gender-based violence in the existing power relations. I believe the collective prejudice against women with agency and voice needs to be introspected because women from the Global South despite being victims of unjust systems and structures are leaders of transformation. They act as positive forces and create solutions for tangible changes. Being in just solidarity with them would mean utilising their insights and experiences for transformational development and establishment of a just and fair world.

In this dissertation, I view the empowerment process of women as how, despite the supposed risk of being trafficked or getting into exploitative work, women utilise their agency to work and live with dignity. I put forward my opinion from the perspective of women from the Global South who migrate for work by listening to them and having them to contribute to the knowledge production process in this research. I urge policy makers to look at the root causes

of trafficking and migration while framing policies and programs. For long term sustainable solutions to these existing phenomena which has not changed despite the anti-trafficking efforts, I emphasise on the need to address structural inequities and systemic violence against the poor, especially women who leave their homes to work in the informal economy. I urge for ethical practices by those who govern and benefit from the labour of migrants in a globalised economy and for provision of decent work for all. The role of researchers, academician and theologians is critical in this context. Their contribution in this area will strengthen the efforts of creating a humane and just response towards mitigating the factors that curb women's autonomy for work and movement and in laying strong foundations to address the issues that surrounds labour exploitation of women from the Global South, which includes fair wages, safe and secure working conditions, social security and dignity of work. In the next chapter, I lay the theoretical foundations and theological underpinnings that gives epistemological privilege to women as agents and contributors to knowledge building, both for doing theology and for praxis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Women as Agents of Knowledge: Theoretical Foundations and Theological Underpinnings – an Epistemological Privilege of Subordinate Women in the Margins**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

In the previous two chapters, I described the notion of human trafficking, widely accepted definition of human trafficking, estimates and cause and consequence of trafficking. I explored critical studies on migration and trafficking and looked at both micro and macro factors that contributes to people's vulnerability to trafficking. The impact of global capitalism and neo-liberal economic policies, especially after the Cold War, has had immense impact on people from the Global South for their livelihood and survival. Given realities shaped by both micro issues such as gender-based discrimination, violence against women and patriarchy that exists within families and communities and macro factors such as systemic and structural failures to sustain, strengthen and uplift the poor and the marginalised men, women and children, a large group of people migrate out for a better life with many being vulnerable to trafficking. Thereafter, I presented the anti-trafficking paradigm alongside a critical discourse on it with specific reference to the Indian context. I emphasise on the need to centre women's perspectives in policy-making, praxis and research. I highlighted the importance of alternative forms of rehabilitation and care for the trafficked which includes building inclusive communities, community-based rehabilitation mechanisms and open shelters. Centring the voice, autonomy, and dignity of women at all levels is important for trafficked and migrant women working in the informal economy.

Statistics indicate women to be most vulnerable to trafficking, especially sex trafficking. However, in recent times other forms of trafficking, such as domestic servitude and forced labour are being recognised in policy, juridical and academic work. Recent trends and estimates indicate that informal economy profits more from the labour of trafficked persons working in agriculture, manufacturing industry, entertainment industry, domestic work,

hospitality sector and the commercial sex industry.<sup>67</sup> The labour of these vulnerable and trafficked people contributes to the informal economy of both the sending and receiving countries. While the discourse around trafficking was mostly around cross border trafficking earlier, in recent times the traffic of people within the countries, from rural to urban cities is being recognised.<sup>68</sup> While the backstories of the vulnerable people put them at risk of being trafficked, the public perception of trafficking as sexual exploitation and the notion that victims of trafficking have no control over themselves puts them at risk of secondary victimisation and exploitation at the hands of those who claim and perhaps genuinely desire to save them. Keeping their dignity at the centre of all discourse, the purpose of this research is to create safe and sacred spaces for vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women to articulate their lived experiences, especially experiences of exclusion, marginalisation, exploitation, courage, resilience, hope and agency in the face of marginalisation.

I argued in the previous chapters that a critical discourse and analysis on trafficking representation is essential to deconstruct the ‘victim’ construct and the ‘modern-day slavery’ connotation. I argued for deeper social analysis to understand the migration and trafficking trajectory for workers in the unorganised and informal sector within a human rights

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<sup>67</sup> Out of the 24.9 million people trapped in forced labour, 16 million people are exploited in the private sector such as domestic work, construction or agriculture; 4.8 million persons in forced sexual exploitation, and 4 million persons in forced labour imposed by state authorities. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by forced labour, accounting for 99% of victims in the commercial sex industry, and 58% in other sectors

Source: [Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage](#), Geneva, September 2017.

<https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>

<sup>68</sup> Prevalence of human trafficking is difficult to measure; however, a number of international organizations have estimated that traffickers exploit a majority of human trafficking victims without moving them from one country to another. For example, the ILO estimated that traffickers exploit 77 percent of all victims in the victims’ countries of residence. Likewise, UNODC reported in 2018 that, for the first time ever, a majority of victims had been identified in their countries of citizenship, stating: “While transnational trafficking networks are still prevalent and must be responded to through international cooperation, national justice measures, strategies and priorities should acknowledge the increasingly national nature of the trafficking problem.” The same UNODC report also found that the clear majority of traffickers were citizens of the countries where they were convicted (Trafficking in Persons Report 2019).

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019-Trafficking-in-Persons-Report.pdf>

framework to inform policy, praxis and theology. Therefore, this study explores linkages between trafficking, migration, labour and how it intersects with their experiences of gender, race, ethnicity, class, caste and sexuality.

An in-depth review of literature brought to my notice that the subject of trafficking has not been developed into a recognized theological discipline in the academia. Therefore, I was motivated to study and understand the conceptual components of embodied dignity within contexts of trafficking for developing a theology towards trafficked dignity. Further, the literature review highlights that there has hardly been any analysis on the experiences of women in the context of trafficking specifically their post trafficking experiences. Attempts have rarely been made by scholars to conceptualize the context in which trafficking emerges and theorize the experiences of trafficked women. The literature review has established the need to dialogue with the everyday experiences of trafficked women that recognizes the agency of the marginalised women in 'indecent' work or in a position of vulnerability. The review of literature affirmed my own understanding that the marginalized do have agency for their liberation and empowerment. To work towards developing a theology by the trafficked dignity and decent work for migrant women, I place their voice, agency and dignity at the centre of all discourse and research engagement with women. I am interested in creating safe, sacred, enabling and empowering spaces for vulnerable and trafficked women to articulate their notions of agency, empowerment and dignity within the context of trafficking, migration and labour.

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the conceptual components of embodied dignity within the contexts of trafficking. It explores the theological/religious dimensions of dignity in the embodied experience of women who have been vulnerable to or have experiences of trafficking. This dissertation analyses ways in which notions of 'trafficking' reconfigure notions of 'dignity' and 'indecent work' for women with vulnerability to and experience of trafficking who now work as migrant working women. It explores how these conceptual components can contribute to a theology of trafficked dignity and indecent work.

In this chapter, I focus in-depth on the theoretical and theological foundations of this research which is aimed at exploring women as the agent of knowledge. I argue for giving epistemic privilege to subordinate women in the margins which is not only revolutionary for the inclusion of marginalised women in knowledge production and policy changes but also

transformative in creating an equitable and just world for women. In the first section I delve on the theoretical framework for this study and in the second section I explore the theological underpinnings that form the basis of this research.

#### **4.1 Theoretical Framework**

Given the interdisciplinary nature of this research, it is important to describe the lens from which this research approaches the subject of trafficking, migration and work. While engaging in dialogue with other theories, this study is framed within an overarching theory of Feminist Standpoint and Feminist Intersectionality. I have grounded this research based on the work of Standpoint theorists Dorothy Smith (1987, 1992, 2005, 2012) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 2000, 2002, 2009). I have drawn insights from the work on subaltern strategies of resistance to domination by political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott (1990). Paulo Freire's (1970, 2000, 2012) contribution on dialogical practice and liberative praxis has been grounded and adapted for practice in the methodological approach framed for this study. Others from whose work I have drawn my theoretical and analytical framework include Intersectional and Critical Race Theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989), Yuval Davis (2006, 2008, 2011) and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (2014).

##### **4.1.1 Feminist Standpoint Theory**

In the theoretical framing of this research, Feminist Standpoint Theory is central to this research. In this sub-section, I present the foundations and arguments for a Feminist Standpoint Theory which is the basis of this research. Feminist Standpoint Theory is a feminist theoretical perspective that stems from Hegel's account of master/ slave dialectic and that of Marx and Lukacs' notion of the standpoint of the proletariat (the producers of capital). It is rooted in the Marxist argument that the oppressed have access to knowledge which the privileged do not have. It was Hegel who argued that a slave arrives at a state of freedom of consciousness after s/he reaches a state of self-consciousness against their master with reference to their physical labour and struggles. Hegel's analysis contributed to the insight of the oppression and injustice from the viewpoint of the slave rather than that of the master. Based on the Hegelian idea on the dialectic of class consciousness, Marx, Engels, and Lukacs developed the notion of standpoint of the proletariat as an epistemic position. These standpoint theorists argued that the proletariat have an epistemic advantage as their

experiences in social relations from their position of marginality offers them double vision (Bowell 2011).

Feminist Standpoint theorists believe that Feminist Research be grounded with the contribution and participation of women in the knowledge production process. They contend that the location of women as a subordinate group with difference in experiences other than men, allows women to experience and see the world differently than men (Narayan 1989). They argue that traditional research has ignored, othered and marginalised feminist ways of thinking even though knowledge stems from the social position of those who occupy a position of disadvantage, marginalisation, domination, and oppression. Drawing insights from Marxists views, feminist standpoint theorists examined how inequalities between men and women influence knowledge production and contribute to feminist epistemology. They emphasize that knowledge is socially situated and a society with stratification based on class, race, gender and sexuality, the perceptions and standpoints differ. The contribution of standpoint theorists to feminist epistemology is based on the knowledge gained from women's social positions. They argue that the starting point of research that focusses on power relations should begin from the lives and experiences of women. The epistemological contribution of Feminist Standpoint Theory is towards creating methodological debates, approaches and insights with a commitment to analyse power structures and systems. The goal is to create just and equitable societies that paves way for collective solidarity, critical, political, revolutionary feminist praxis and transformative action (Smith 1987; Bowell 2011).

The standpoint, a point of view of an individual is personal, based on their everyday experiences which shapes their epistemic view and knowledge. Feminist Standpoint Theory values the experiences and perspectives of women especially those in margins. Based on the Marxist view of standpoint of the proletariat, Sandra Harding reframed the notion of the standpoint of the proletariat and coined the term 'Standpoint Theory'. Feminist Standpoint theorists Sandra Harding (2007) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 2000) posit that knowledge is socially situated among the oppressed and marginalised groups who are more aware than anybody else of their social realities. Standpoint theorists emphasised the epistemic advantage of women who contribute to knowledge production because of their specific socio-political positions which can become sites of epistemic privilege and starting points of enquiry. One can agree with Sandra Harding who posits that the "Starting off research from

women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order" (1993: 56). Harding (2007) emphasises that since the objective strength of feminist standpoint lies in the belief that knowledge is socially situated therefore, the perspectives of individuals are shaped by their own social and political location and experiences. They have more awareness and knowledge not only of their own social and political marginalisation, but also of the lives of those who occupy positions of power and oppress those in margins (Collins 2000, Harding 2007). The epistemic advantage of the "double vision" comes from what black feminist Bell Hook's describes from her growing up in a small town in Kentucky:

Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out...we understood both (1984: vii).

This epistemic advantage of the outsiders who are in a better position to view the dichotomous divide in the society both from the view of the dominated as well as the dominant brings the notion of the 'outsider-within'. The outsider-within concept comes from the awareness and knowledge of the marginalised and oppressed who is uniquely positioned to not only be aware of their own social and political realities but that of the oppressors/ employers/ and people in positions of power over them. Therefore, they can critique and challenge the status quo of those in position of power and privilege (Collins 2000: 289).

Sandra Harding (1991: 127) elucidates this concept further:

Only through such struggles can we begin to see beneath the appearances created by an unjust social order to the reality of how this social order is in fact constructed and maintained. This need for struggle emphasizes the fact that a feminist standpoint is not something that anyone can have simply by claiming it. It is an achievement. A standpoint differs in this respect from a perspective, which anyone can have simply by 'opening one's eyes'.

Smith draws us to her notion of bifurcation of consciousness, based on her own personal experience of living in "two worlds" (1987: 82). The first is the one that she herself experienced in her concrete world, as a wife and mother at home, and other one was as a sociologist, in a masculine abstract world that one must adapt to. She emphasized each of



these two worlds, one that you experience in the concrete and the other that you adapt to in the abstract world.

Smith (1987:82) notes that,

It establishes two modes of knowing, experiencing, and acting—one located in the body and in the space that it occupies and moves into, the other passing beyond it.

The concept of bifurcation of knowledge brings us to the experiences of the subordinate groups, where they condition their views and adapt to the world of the dominant group even as they swim between the abstract and their concrete worlds. They are at risk of alienating themselves from their true selves. The journey of women's self-actualisation, through a process of internalisation, conscious raising, amidst their struggles, utilising their knowledge and wisdom being the 'outsider-within' is critical to this study.

Standpoint, as a method of inquiry, begins from the actualities of people's everyday lives as they experience it and does not subordinate the knowledge of the subject whose epistemic contribution to knowledge production is critical for Standpoint Feminist Research. I draw insights from Dorothy Smith's sociology which creates a method of inquiry that centres around women articulating and speaking from their subjective experience.

Smith's (1992: 88) sociology begins in the "actualities of women's experiences". She elucidates that,

It builds on that earlier extraordinary moment, unlike anything I've experienced or since, giving birth to ourselves – slow, remorseless, painful, and powerful. It attempts to create a method of inquiry beginning from the site of being that we discovered as we learned to center ourselves as speaking, knowing subjects in our experience as women.

This study is rooted in the ideological position, like all Standpoint Feminist Theorists, that challenges male hegemony and the intellect of the elite by empowering women from the margins to be collaborators in knowledge production. The process of inquiry is reflexive, political and begins with women's experiences and standpoint (Smith 1992: 94). The idea is to see women's world, including that of the dominant groups, from their perspective. To

understand how women in margins utilise their 'power within' to liberate themselves from oppressive systems and structures and how they empower themselves to assert their rights and affirm their dignity. This study provocatively blends with neo-Marxist ideology, concepts, and ideas, together with drawing insights from the body of work on class, body and sexuality. It explores the world from subject position of women with subjective experience of the world they live in and as they experience. As Smith (2005:10) points out, no two people have the exact same experiences and therefore no one can have the same objective knowledge of these experiences. She suggests that we must not take the standpoint from which we speak for granted. Instead, we must recognize it, be reflexive about it, and problematize it. Our situated, everyday experience should serve as a point of entry of investigation.

With this belief and standpoint that knowledge stems from the social position of women, it is critical to create forums to listen to the voices of women in the margins by encouraging them to challenge the status quo of the dominant groups. The epistemic knowledge and the voices of the marginalised women is central to this study to understand their resistance strategies that pave way for their empowerment and affirmation of their dignity and rights. In the next section, I take forward this argument and bring to attention why the representation and active participation of women in knowledge production is necessary in Qualitative Research such as this and on a subject as complex and sensitive as trafficking in women.

#### **4.1.2 Representation of Women in Knowledge Production**

The stereotypical representation of women by those who have not listened to the voices of women has been used as weapons to a form of psychological oppression and self-devaluation of oppressed women argues Patricia Hill Collins in her book titled *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000). Therefore, to overcome these oppressive societal methods of domination, it is important for oppressed women to develop a sense of self-value and self-definition that is not obtained from outside but from within. Collins points out that the source of women's oppression is not enough unless she argues that "women forge self-definitions of self-reliance and independence" (Collins 2009:1). When women are subject to different norms that prescribe their gender appropriate roles, their subjective identities shape their self-understanding which further influences how they affirm or reject their identities. Collins adds that these individuals shape their subjective

identities given their social location and prescribed social identities (gender, race, sexual orientation, caste, class, kinship status, trans/cis etc.), roles and relations.

In their article, “Trafficking (in) Representations: Understanding the Recurring Appeal of Victimhood and Slavery in Neoliberal Times” (2016), R. Andrijasevic and N. Mai bring to the forefront how representations of trafficking and forced labour are pervasive within media, policy-making, and humanitarian debates, discourses, and interventions (2016 :1-10).

Andrijasevic and Mai (2016:1) expound that,

The terms exploitation and trafficking are increasingly used to characterise the work that migrants do in the sex industry and other irregular employment sectors. Of late, the notion of ‘modern slavery’ is on show in campaigns aiming to raise awareness about trafficking and funds for anti-trafficking initiatives among corporations and local enterprises as well as the general public. Celebrity interventions, militant documentaries, artistic works and fiction films have all become powerful vectors of the global distribution of the trafficking and ‘modern slavery’ rhetoric. These offer simplistic solutions to complex issues without challenging the structural and causal factors of inequality. Through fictional and narrow representations of ideal victims they tend to entrench racialised narratives and conflate all sex work with trafficking, which legitimates criminalising policies and interventions exacerbating the social vulnerability of sex workers.

Therefore, the knowledge produced from this research gives epistemic privilege to the very women whose voices are marginalised and unrepresented in the development of anti-trafficking policies, praxis, advocacy campaigns and in academia. The idea is to bring into dialogue the complex social and economic trajectories of women whose diverse work and migration experiences are simplified. Women’s knowledge from their lived experiences needs to be heard and debated to bring in transformations in the neoliberal economic policies of the Global North. Restricting the discourse to the exploitations of women and girls trafficked into the sex industry, not only excludes the subjective experiences of the migrant working women, but even excludes the voices of trafficked women. This process of oversimplification and reduction of the embodied experiences of women is addressed in this research by having

them as collaborators in the knowledge production process. Since, the analysis of women's everyday life experiences contributes to this body of knowledge, I delve deeper on the importance of feminist epistemology for this dissertation. In the next sub-section, I continue with the argument of building knowledge with women and for women.

#### **4.1.3 Feminist Epistemology**

Feminist epistemology focusses on the social location and experience of the knower, that constructs her knowledge on what she knows and how. The power of self-knowledge determines how women find ways to bring positive and transformational changes in their lives. Feminist situated knowledge reflects the perspective of the knower and contributes to feminist epistemology. Thus, feminist epistemology, drawing insight from the knowledge of women and their standpoint, is committed in investigating women's self-understanding of their situation in the context of their social position. These insights and knowledge of women from the margins is the source of knowledge and resource for knowledge production. Contemporary standpoint theorists emphasise on the analyses of these lived experiences based on their social positions, gender, race, culture, and socio-economic status (Wallance and Wolf 1995, McCann and Kim 2003, Anderson 2007,2020).

As feminist standpoint theorists argue for grounding research and theory based on the standpoint of marginalised women and their feminist ways of thinking which comes from their everyday lived experiences, these sites of epistemic privilege are the starting points of inquiry for this study. The epistemic knowledge of the marginalised women is central to this research where women bring in their knowledge as the 'outsider within' of their sites of struggles along with their lived experiences of resistance, resilience, agency and dignity.

In this research, I explore women's embodied experiences from their everyday lives by doing Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study and then engage in analyses of their individual subjectivity and inter-subjective discourse. In this research, I place emphasis of women's diverse experiences, from being in situations of vulnerability, to being in positions of victimhood, and then from taking a path of liberation and empowerment that brings a transformational change in their lives where they struggle every day to actualise their dreams of living a life with dignity and abundance. These

diverse experiences cannot be analysed from a single lens; hence I interact and engage with the concept of feminist intersectionality, which I present in the next sub-section.

#### **4.1.4 Feminist Intersectionality**

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a leading scholar of critical race theory, developed the concept of intersectionality by introducing intersectional theory to feminism. In 1989, Crenshaw introduced the term 'intersectionality' while discussing issues with the oppression of black women's employment in the US. The notion of intersectionality holds an important place now on issues of identity-politics and racial justice and has helped shape legal discussions in the USA (Yuval Davis 2006: 193, Crenshaw 1989, 2014, 2017).

In her article, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", Crenshaw begins with the title of a Black women's studies books, *All the Women Are White; All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us are Brave*. She problematises the single axis framework that is dominant in anti-discriminatory law which treats gender and race as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis which is reflected in feminist theory and politics (1989: 139).

On the dominant conceptions of discrimination that conditions us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis, Crenshaw (1989: 140) suggests,

This single-axis framework erases Black women in the conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination by limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group. In other words, in race discrimination cases, discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex- or class-privileged Blacks; in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race- and class-privileged women.

Collins proposes the term "interlocking systems of oppression" and explains,

The notion of interlocking oppressions refers to the macro-level connections linking systems of oppression such as race, class, and gender. This is the model describing the social structures that create social positions. Second, the notion of intersectionality describes micro-level processes — namely, how each individual and group occupies a

social position within interlocking structures of oppression described by the metaphor of intersectionality. Together they shape oppression (Collins et al. 2002: 82).

Wo/men's and gender studies have for long focussed on the male/masculine power over women. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (2014: 9, 10), Research Professor of Divinity who has done pioneering work in Feminist Theology and biblical interpretation notes that,

variegated feminist, postcolonial, and critical race theories have come together, therefore, in developing the analytic of intersectionality as an instrument to analyze the complex situation of global domination and to demonstrate that the structures of heteronormativity, gender, race, and class are inextricably intertwined.

Thus, race, class, heteronormativity, disability, colonialism, and other structures of domination are included in this new mode of intersectional analysis.

Feminist intersectionality has extended a great deal of influence to feminist scholarship on women's gender and sexuality studies in conjunction with other fields (Davis 2008: 67; McCall 2005: 1771). The concept of 'intersectionality' is important for this study as it interacts with multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination. It supports understanding women from marginalised groups who are understood in a specific socio-historical and cultural context. Collins (2000: 18) explains,

Intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice.

Intersectionality has made an important place in contemporary public international discourse (Yuval-Davis 2006: 193, 194). Yuval-Davis notes that in the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) in September 2001 in Durban, South Africa, the special rapporteur of the UN Secretariat on violence against women, Radhika Coomaraswamy, stated about the importance of the notion of 'intersectionality' and described about its usage by various UN and NGO forums. The 58th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, passed a resolution on the human rights of women on 23 April 2002, and stated in its first paragraph that it:

recognized the importance of examining the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, including their root causes from a gender perspective.

(Resolution E/CN.4/2002/L.59).

Several discussion documents<sup>69</sup> indicate that the UN Beijing Platform for Action (1995) included the core elements of an intersectional approach (Yuval-Davis 2006: 196). Although the use of the term intersectionality did not appear until later, several discussion documents on intersectionality (such as that of the Working Group on Women and Human Rights at the Center for Women's Global Leadership in Rutgers University and of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom UK Section [www.wilpf.org] in 2001) point to the UN Beijing Platform for Action (1995) as including the core elements of an intersectional approach. They call for governments:

to intensify efforts to ensure equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all women and girls who face multiple barriers to their empowerment and advancement because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability or because they are indigenous people.

(Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2001 in Yuval-Davis 2006: 196).

Further, the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission Issue Paper 2001 states that:

An intersectional approach asserts that aspects of identity are indivisible and that speaking of race and gender in isolation from each other results in concrete disadvantage.

(Australian Human Rights and EOC, 2001: 2 in Yuval-Davis 2006, 197).

Yuval-Davis (2006: 197) shares about the structural emphasis mentioned in the report of the Working Group on Women and Human Rights of the Center for Women's Global Leadership

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<sup>69</sup> Such as that of the Working Group on Women and Human Rights at the Center for Women's Global Leadership in Rutgers University and of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom UK Section [www.wilpf.org] in 2001 (Davis 2006,196).

which states:

Intersectional approach to analysing the disempowerment of marginalized women attempts to capture the consequences of the interaction between two or more forms of subordination. It addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other discriminatory systems create inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes and the like. Moreover, intersectionality addresses the way the specific acts and policies operate together to create further empowerment.

On the methodological approach to intersectional policy, Yuval-Davis emphasises on the importance of introducing intersectional analysis to human rights discourse as part of gender mainstreaming, for the full diversity of women's experiences in order to enhance women's empowerment (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 204). The Working Group on Women and Human Rights in their background briefing paper on intersectionality suggests the development of new and augmentation of existing methodologies to explore women's multiple identities and how they converge and exacerbates women's subordination (Yuval-Davis 2006: 204). These methodologies, Yuval-Davis (2006: 204) notes will not only underline the significance of the intersection of race, ethnicity, caste, citizenship status for marginalized women etc but serve to highlight the full diversity of women's experience.

Intersectional theorists aimed at analysing power beyond class oppression and women's subordination. This meant having a framework for analysis on the impact of power on identity and oppression not just in sites of oppression and resistance but also including micro and macro systems of oppression that work together reinforcing one another. It is argued that situated gaze, situated knowledge, and situated imagination are constructed differently depending on how different social agents are affected by different social, economic and political projects (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis 2002; Yuval-Davis 2011).

In her book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 2000) refers to the sexual politics of African American women. She asserts that in the absence of no other choice but to submit, women's individual and collective agency intersects with race, gender and sexuality. She emphasizes



on the need to understand how power is organised and how it operates, because oppression and resistance are intrinsically connected and influence each other. She also opines that black women do create safe spaces to resist oppression and domination in their everyday lives. Proposing to work towards a politics of empowerment, she affirms embracing a paradigm of intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation, as well as Black women's individual and collective agency within them. Collins' Black feminist thought re-conceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance. It also addresses ongoing epistemological debates concerning the power dynamics and resistance.

As analysed by Collins and Crenshaw on the submission of women in the absence of alternative choices, trafficked and vulnerable women do submit to oppression in order to survive. The oppression and marginalisation, as I have presented in the previous chapters is complex and multi-layered. First, the systemic and structural failures in the world where women and girls grow contribute to the struggles and oppression of majority of the world's poor women to live a decent life with dignity. In the absence of alternate livelihood options for communities, women migrate for work. Some get trafficked in their migration journey. The violence inflicted upon women due to stigma and shame associated with women's trafficking by families, communities, religious and social institutions such as criminal justice systems use a single lens to comprehend women's experiences. These are the factors that alienate and isolate trafficked women from accessing support services and protection and silences their voices instead of giving them space to speak (Sleightholme and Sinha 1997). Therefore, an intersectional analysis of women's lived experiences is essential for this research. This research argues for creating spaces for women to articulate their subjugated knowledge in order to contribute to the academia and policy circles. Difficult to reach are the hidden populations, yet as I have demonstrated in this research, listening to them is crucial.

Schüssler Fiorenza (2014 :10) rightly opines that with race and colonialism in view, the gender dualism of masculine-feminine generally gets transposed into the dualisms "First world and two-Thirds world wo/men" or "white wo/men and wo/men of color". She problematises the dualistic gender identity frameworks that endangers the dichotomy between the space marked as "white wo/men/First world wo/men" and the space marked "wo/men of color/two-Thirds world wo/men."

Fiorenza (2014 :10) posits,

Identity politics claims that white, First world feminists can speak only about and in the name of white, First world wo/men, whereas wo/men of color/ two-Thirds world wo/men are called to form coalitions and considered able to speak for all wo/men of the so-called two-Thirds world. Feminist scholars in religion and theologians, so this argument goes, cannot but articulate either a “white/First world” or “a wo/men of color/two-Thirds world” the\*logy and hermeneutics.

It is therefore important to examine and understand how women view themselves and construct their identities, subjectivities and how they negotiate the decision-making process that concerns their lives and dignity.

In this study, I explore how vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women from the Global South create spaces to resist oppression and domination in their everyday lives. Since oppression and resistance are intrinsically connected and influence each other, it is important to understand how power is organised and how it operates, how women negotiate with conditions that offer limited choices and how individual and collective solidarity takes place within the intersectional oppressions and domination of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and labour. Working towards a politics of empowerment means addressing the debates around power dynamics and resistance, embracing a paradigm of not just of intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality but also intersectional experiences of affirming liberation, rights and dignity.

#### **4.1.5 *Can the Subaltern Women Speak and be the Agents of Knowledge Production?***

On the challenges of making of knowledge, culture, and ideology based on the experiences and relevance’s of women, Dorothy Smith (1987: 18,19) explains how women’s voices have been excluded and silenced historically.

This way of organizing society began to develop in western Europe some four hundred or five hundred years ago. It is an integral aspect of the development of a capitalist mode of production. Women have been at work in its making as much as men, though their work has been of a different kind and location. But women have been largely excluded from the work of producing the forms of thought and the images and

symbols in which thought is expressed and ordered.... This is how a tradition is formed. A way of thinking develops in this discourse through the medium of the written and printed word as well as in speech. It has questions, solutions, themes, styles, standards, ways of looking at the world. These are formed as the circle of those present builds on the work of the past. From these circles' women have been excluded or admitted only by a special license granted to a woman as an individual and never as a representative of her sex. Throughout this period in which ideologies become of increasing importance, first as a mode of thinking, legitimating and sanctioning a social order, and then as integral in the organization of society, women have been deprived of the means to participate in creating forms of thought relevant or adequate to express their own experience or to define and raise social consciousness about their situation and concerns. They have never controlled the material or social means to the making of a tradition among themselves or to acting as equals in the ongoing discourse of intellectuals. They have had no economic status independent of men. They have not had, until very recently, access to the educational skills necessary to develop, sustain, and participate in the making of a common culture. ... In so far as women's work and experience have been entered into it, it has been on terms decided by men and because it has been approved by men. This is why women have had no written history until very recently, no share in making religious thoughts, no political philosophy, no representation of society from their view, no poetic tradition, no tradition in art.

A lot has been debated about the contribution of women to knowledge production such as in, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (Spivak 1988) and can women be the 'knower' in contributing to feminist epistemology (Harding 1986). Traditional epistemologies have for long excluded the voice of women by not considering the possibility that women can be 'knowers' or *agents of knowledge* (Harding 1986). This research is about marginalised and oppressed women, who have not had the opportunities for education and participation from epistemological contribution. They are excluded from the making of knowledge, except when their voices are captured to promote an advocacy campaign for the trafficked. These voices, I argue are largely words put in their mouth to glorify the courage and sacrifice of 'rescuers' and 'protectors' and to speak of their plight of incarceration as victims of trafficking. The process

of learning from the subjugated knowledge of women about their lived experience of the world they inhabit, I believe must be liberating and empowering, and not agonising or glorifying their 'Messiah's'.

Political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott, in his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990), posits that among the most marginalised there are not always opportunities to speak or hear what the marginalised have within their bodies. He asserts that power relations affect the discourse among the dominant, oppressed and amongst one another. Scott further elaborates that groups under domination whether in forced labour or sexual violence will not be understood by their public actions. He opines that the oppressed always question their domination offstage. Their public behaviour and their offstage behaviour would always differ. In public they accept their domination, and when not in the presence of the dominant they articulate their resistance in different forms. They create secret discourse to critique power as they are not free to speak their minds in the presence of the powerful. Scott mentions that the oppressed speak in safe spaces, not in the public view where the dominant occupy space. Given the choice of structures explored, Scott privileges the issue of dignity and autonomy, which have typically been seen as secondary to material exploitation. Slavery, serfdom, the caste system, colonialism and racism routinely generate the practices and rituals of denigration, insult, and assaults on the body that seem to occupy a large part of the hidden transcripts of their victims. Such forms of oppression, Scott argues deny the subordinates the ordinary luxury of negative reciprocity (Scott 1990: xi,xii).

Women's secret discourses and hidden transcripts are resources for this body of knowledge. The process of facilitating these discourses is significant. Chapter five details the research design that is meant to uncover these hidden transcripts and women's subjugated knowledge. Chapter six describes the research process which is critical for this research as it facilitates and generates women's voices and subjugated knowledge. Chapter seven brings those voices and analyses their discourses. Women critique power and decode power relations, systems and practices that silences their voice. I explore the intersectional experiences of women in how their individual and collective agency takes form in the presence of intersecting oppressions of gender, class, caste, ethnicity and identity. Women do create safe spaces to resist oppression and domination in their everyday lives (Collins

2000: 100) but they do not articulate their resistance strategies in view of the dominant groups (Scott 1990: 136).

Patricia Hill Collins (2000: 275) emphasizes the need for dialectical approaches for social justice projects and for working towards a politics of empowerment.

Dialectical approaches emphasize the significance of knowledge in developing self-defined, group-based standpoints that, in turn, can foster the type of group solidarity necessary for resisting oppressions. In contrast, subjectivity approaches emphasize how domination and resistance shape and are shaped by individual agency. Issues of consciousness link the two.

Group-based standpoints were generated in this research through Focus Group Discussions and a Contextual Bible Study workshop. I adapted dialectical approaches using participatory tools to facilitated profound conversations. Creating the space for women's articulation of their voice and knowledge was the beginning of a work towards a politics of empowerment (Collins 2000: 273) and for transformative justice in the learning, sharing and knowing process, what Paulo Freire has mentioned as pedagogical action in the liberation process (Freire 2000: 68).

Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator in his book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) speaks of dialogical action as a means of achieving a sense of freedom for the oppressed as it provides them agency to reflect and share their insights and perspectives. On this liberative praxis he asserts that when the majorities are denied the right to participate as Subjects, they become dominated and alienated. Therefore, he suggests that for real transformation to take place, it requires that people act, as well as reflect upon their realities.

On dialogical practise of learning and knowing and on establishing epistemological relationship Freire (2012: 17) elucidates that,

In order to understand the meaning of dialogical practice, we have to put aside the simplistic understanding of dialogue as a mere technique. Dialogue does not represent a somewhat false Path that I attempt to elaborate on and realize in the sense of involving the ingenuity of the other. On the contrary, dialogue characterizes an epistemological relationship. Thus, in this sense, dialogue is a way of knowing and

should never be viewed as a mere tactic to involve students in a particular task. We have to make this point very clear. I engage in dialogue not necessarily because I like the other person. I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing.

With a grounding in the principle of producing knowledge together with my research participants as my dialogue partners and collaborators of knowledge production, I incorporated Freire's trajectory of liberative praxis by establishing an epistemological relationship with them and by adapting a dialogical practice which placed their dignity at the centre of all engagement and discourse.

#### ***4.1.6 Towards a Politics of Empowerment***

The theory of feminist intersectionality emphasizes on addressing the ongoing epistemological debates concerning the power dynamics and resistance that underlie what counts as knowledge. Collins emphasizes the need to understand how power is organized and how it operates as oppression and resistance are intrinsically connected and influence each other (Collins 2000: 274). She calls for women's self-definition, not clouded by objectification or silencing, but with affirmation that takes place in individual friendships and familial relationships (2000: 101).

The process of self-definition, Collins (2000: 112) describes as,

journey from internalized oppression to the 'free mind' in order to emphasize its significance in the formation of the collective consciousness of black women.

Power, in most of feminist literature, is understood in terms of a 'power-over' relationship (Allen 2008). Globally, women live being dominated by power relations and power structures that has historically subdued them to develop as self-reliant, confident, empowered beings in equal status and relations with men. The systemic violence, domination and lack of opportunities has caused them much harm to develop and live life in 'fullness'. While much of these oppressive systems, structures and relationships are found in feminist literature, much more needs to be included on the positive aspects of power that women employ for their deliverance, growth, development and success. When women gain power, this lopsided

power relation can be changed (Hedayat 2011). Nancy Hartsock refers to the understanding of power “as energy and competence rather than dominance” as “the feminist theory of power” (Hartsock 1983: 224 in Allen 2008).

The notion of ‘empowerment’ is understood within the feminist framework following Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970,2000). Freire critiques traditional education in which learners are treated as passive recipients of knowledge. In contrast, popular education uses an adult’s experience as the core of the learning process. It validates and expands each person’s knowledge and thus empowers him or her to act. It promotes critical consciousness which enables people to understand how their situations are moulded by systemic inequalities and helps to motivate collective action for change (Freire 1970; VeneKlasen & Miller 2002). Freire’s notion of empowerment was built upon ‘power over’ instead of ‘power on’. This was contrary to the traditional understanding of power which was measured based on power that people had on others (Yuval-Davis 2011).

For the non-dominated to join in such political struggles and share critical consciousness, Bowell (2011) elaborates the contributions of several theorists and explains that such problems can become research agendas to initiate policy discussions. These deliberations need to consider the prejudice of the dominant groups and must give epistemic advantage to the dominated and oppressed, where lived realities of women’s lives become the sites of inquiry, with objective and less partial view in nature.

In this research, I explore the strategies women employ to affirm their rights and dignity while empowering themselves and to pave a path towards a change and transformation of their realities and structures that have contributed to their subordination and exploitation. How do women utilise their ‘power-within’ to come out of their state of powerlessness and domination? How do they define and analyse their ‘power-within’? Various scholars have described and analysed ‘power-within’ with intangible assets such as self-esteem, self-confidence, self-awareness, assertiveness, conscious raising, confidence building, identity, dignity and the power and uniqueness to harness spiritual strength that exists in each one of us. ‘Power-within’ is described as an asset that makes one aware of one’s situation and gives the realisation and strength to change and do something positive about it (Williams et al., 1994; Rowlands 1997; Oxaal and Baden 1997; Mosedale 2003; Charlier and Caubergs 2007;

VeneKlasen & Miller 2002). 'Power within' as a concept is used in gender analysis, popular education, psychology and many approaches to empowerment (Nikkhah, Hedayat & Redzuan, Abu-Samah, 2011). Therefore, I explore the power-within of my research collaborators in the formation of their collective consciousness, solidarity, empowerment and transformation.

#### **4.1.7 Summary**

Standpoint feminism is a theory that encourages feminist social scientists to do research based on the standpoint of women or groups of women as they are better equipped to understand aspects of the world where they are located. Smith's notion of standpoint emphasizes that our knowledge is affected by our social location and subjective position (Smith 1987). The notion of standpoint does not stand for a theoretical construct only, it is a place to begin inquiry and is a sociology in the making (Smith 1992: 91) which is always reflexive (Smith 1992: 94). It is an ongoing dialogue with society and people, where the standpoint of women in contemporary capitalism is powerfully relevant in making the necessary changes in the society. This approach has been effective in the work produced in the contexts of struggle for change, racial injustice and inequalities in pay and employment equity, social policy, environmental activism and gay activism (Smith 1992: 97) Therefore, as Smith posits, the "point of entry" of investigation for this study begins with women's situated, everyday experience (Smith 2005:10).

As feminist standpoint theorists argue for grounding research and theory based on the standpoint of marginalised women and their feminist ways of thinking which comes from their everyday lived experiences, these sites of epistemic privilege are the starting points of inquiry for this research. It gives voice to the marginalised groups by privileging them to challenge the status quo of the dominant groups that oppresses them and makes them invisible both in theory and practice. As the 'outsider within' their knowledge of their sites of struggles, their lived experiences of resistance, resilience, agency and dignity is central to this research.

Standpoint theory is rooted on the notion that the marginalised and oppressed can contribute to knowledge production. It promotes giving epistemic privilege to those in margins. Liberation theologies recognise that the knowledge of the marginalised is fundamental to the



'doing' of theology. Without their knowledge there can be no theology that is liberating for them. Both Standpoint Theory and Liberation Hermeneutics emphasise on the power of individual and collective knowledge. Both value the perspectives of the oppressed and marginalised based on their lived realities and experiences. The next section delves into the theological underpinnings of this study.

#### **4.2 Theological Underpinnings (See-Judge- Act Analysis in Liberation Theology)**

This research has taken an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach. It engages in dialogue with a wide range of feminist standpoint theorists and post-colonial scholars. To draw theological resources for working towards a theology of trafficked dignity and decent work, which is the purpose of this research, I engage with the work of biblical scholars, liberation and feminist theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, one of the main founders and proponent of Liberation Theology, Gerald O. West, my Doctoral Supervisor from whose work on Contextual Bible Study and Liberation Hermeneutics I draw theological and methodological resources, and feminist theologians such as Marcella Althaus-Reid, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Gemma Tulud Cruz, Beverley Haddad amongst others.

A theology of trafficked dignity and indecent work is a challenge to work on, considering it is about women who are vulnerable, exploited, trafficked, and working in oppressive systems yet are resilient and exercise their agency to uphold their dignity despite living in a 'culture of silence'. These are women who in search of work and better life end up trafficked or working in indecent labour. What would dignity mean to a trafficked and migrant working woman who works in a sector that is informal, unorganised, exploitative and 'in-dignifies' women as they utilise their skills and labour to look after their families and work towards fulfilment of their aspirations to live life in its fullness? What are their experiences of embodying the dualism of a society and that of the Church that down-grades the bodies and labour of women? How do they counter or succumb to the body-based politics and the binaries of decent and/ indecent work?

For the purpose of this research and to contribute to developing a theology of trafficked dignity and (in)-decent work, I engage with Liberation Theology within a feminist framework that engages with aspects of migration, work, body politics, indecent marginalisation and survival, empowerment, dignity and transformative praxis. This is a work of being in solidarity

with the oppressed and exploited women from the Global South who struggle daily to live and work with dignity, despite the risks of migration that includes trafficking and indecent work. The embodied experiences of women's daily struggles and their agentic strategies to uphold their dignity is critical to this study. Their individual and collective experiences contribute to the process of knowledge production in this work which aspires to influence public policy, praxis, academia and theology keeping their voices and embodied experiences at the centre of all discourse. I begin asking questions – if liberation is Bible's central theme (Goldingay 1982) then what strategies can we develop to establish a relationship between theology and praxis? How would a hermeneutics of Liberation Theology negotiate in establishing a relationship between the oppressed and a liberating praxis? What kind of methodological framework can contribute to liberative scholarship, praxis and advocacy? In a world which inhabits deep and widespread oppression of women within the work force and outside, how does feminist liberation theologies address the issue of dehumanisation of women which has accepted androcentric injustice and undervaluation of women's work as a norm? In the context of highly insensitive feminised jobs worldwide and sexist work environments which inhabits and breeds misogyny and sexism, how can women from the Global South be protected by law working in the informal labour sector? How can Feminist Liberation Theology dismantle patriarchy and address the structural and systemic injustices towards vulnerable women to protect and empower them from being trafficked? How can we discern and work towards a transformative and liberative praxis and establish egalitarian relationships with the dominated and oppressed? How can a dialectic of communal experience and solidarity create an organic movement and social order that transcends class, caste, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality? How can theology challenge those who profit from the undervalued work of women from the Global South? How can the Church be in solidarity with women and ensure that they be enablers and active advocates of peace, social and economic justice for women worldwide, especially those whose bodies and labour are dehumanised, impersonalised and in-dignified? Importantly, how can the unjust systems within theology create spaces for women's contribution to knowledge production and in doing theology? With these questions and context of women, I engage with Feminist and Liberation Theology for the purpose of this dissertation.

I draw theological and methodological resources from the work of Prof. GERALD O. WEST, my Doctoral Supervisor. He has worked extensively with the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research for the past over thirty years, a project in which socially engaged biblical scholars and ordinary African readers of the Bible from poor, working-class, and marginalised communities collaborate for social transformation. He advocates and has demonstrated the importance of theological processes in which the knowledge of the excluded holds a central place. I adapt Contextual Bible Study (CBS) as a research method within a critical feminist Participatory Research paradigm in this study which is detailed in the chapter six. CBS is a reading process within biblical liberation hermeneutics that involves reading of the Bible with the ordinary, poor and marginalised readers.

#### **4.2.1 Preferential Option for the Poor, Marginalised, Oppressed, Vulnerable, Trafficked and Migrant Working Women**

Liberation theology evolved during a time when there was growing consciousness and concerns on the plight of the poor in developing countries which was the result of inequities in systems and structures created by the industrialised nations to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor. Peruvian philosopher, theologian and Dominican priest, Gustavo Gutiérrez, regarded as one of the founders and proponent of Liberation Theology. Others whose contributions are remarkable in Liberation Theology are Leonardo Boff, Clodovis Boff, Jon Sobrino, Oscar Romero and Juan Luis Segundo (Goldingay 1982: 4, 5: 133–161; West 2013: 508).

The emphasis of Liberation Theology is to challenge systems and structures that perpetuates poverty. To act against poverty is to fight against the sins that facilitates marginalisation, oppression and exploitation of the poor. It is the mission of the Church to bring justice to the world, and this can be done by taking sides with the poor for their liberation. Liberation Theology is based on Marxist ideology, it critiques an unjust and unequal social order and challenges the role of the Church that shared a happy marriage with the State to maintain the status quo of oppressive structures that came in with colonialism. Marxism paved the way for liberation theologians to explore and interpret different aspects of the Bible that shares concern with the plight of the poor, with the suffering and exploitation of workers, its understanding of the process of dehumanisation, im-personalisation and alienation of the

poor in the context of global capitalism. The emphasis is on praxis over dogma that addresses structural sins by taking sides with the poor to liberate them from material poverty and conditions that pushes them to be exploited (Goldingay 1982: 4,5: 133–161).

Gustavo Gutiérrez emphasises on salvation and liberation through the “preferential option for the poor” in his book titled, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (1988). He asks an important question and challenges us to reflect on how can we convey to the poor that God loves them? He asserts that this surely can begin with us having a preferential option for the poor.

A preferential option for the poor means working towards economic justice. Gutiérrez (1988: 163) elucidates and clarifies the term “poverty”:

The term *poverty* designates in the first place *material poverty*, that is the lack of economic goods necessary for a human life worthy of a name. In this sense poverty is considered degrading and is rejected by the conscience of contemporary man. Even those, who are not – and do not wish to be aware of this root cause of poverty believe that this should be struggled against.

Gutiérrez (1988: 163,164) further argues that when Christians tend to give material poverty a positive value, considering it to be a religious ideal, it actually means to be indifferent to the plights of the contemporary poor who aspire for freedom from exploitation and oppression. He further opines,

On the other hand, poverty has been thought of and experienced by Christians as a part of the condition – seen with a certain fatalism – of marginated peoples, ‘the poor’ who are an object of our mercy. But things are no longer like this. Social classes, nations and entire continents are becoming aware of their poverty, and when they see its root causes, they rebel against it. The contemporary phenomenon is a collective poverty that leads those who suffer from it to forge bonds of solidarity among themselves and to organise in the struggle against the conditions they are in and against those who benefit from these conditions.

What we mean by material poverty is a sub-human situation. And as we shall see later, the Bible also considers it this way. Concretely to be poor means to die of hunger, to

be illiterate, to be exploited by others, not to know that you are being exploited, not to know that you are a person. It is in relation to this poverty – material and cultural, collective and militant – that evangelical poverty will have to define itself.

The theology of liberation, Gutiérrez describes, is a process of reflection and active participation of the oppressed who raise voice against their oppressor to attain a form of freedom from all forms of exploitation. They aspire for a life of dignity. Gutiérrez (1988: 174) elaborates thus:

the theology of liberation attempts to reflect on the experience and meaning of the faith based on the commitment to abolish injustice and to build a new society; this theology must be verified by the practice of that commitment, by active effective participation in the struggle which the exploited social classes have undertaken against their oppressors. Liberation from every form of exploitation, the possibility of a more humane and dignified life, the creation of a new man – all pass through this struggle.... we will have an authentic theology of liberation only when the oppressed can free raise their voice and express themselves directly and creatively in society and in the heart of the People of God, when they themselves “account for the hope”, which they bear when they are the protagonist of their own liberation. For now, we must limit ourselves to efforts which ought to deepen and support that process, which has barely begun.

Gutiérrez cautions that the purpose of doing Liberation Theology is not for “intellectual self-satisfaction” but to “build a true human fellowship, in our historical initiatives to subvert an order of injustice - with the fullness with which Christ loved us” (1988: 174).

With its concern on issues of social, economic and political justice, the emphasis of this dissertation is ‘theological process’, centring women’s knowledge and experiences. The focus in Liberation Theologies is on theological process rather than the theological content, it works towards including the experiences of the disenfranchised and oppressed in doing theology (West 2013: 513). It is within Biblical Liberation Hermeneutics, West (2014:1) posits, that ordinary readers find a more central and integral place from being on the margins of academic biblical studies. Since, the purpose of this research is to bring to centre the subjugated knowledge of women in margins, which is what happens within liberation hermeneutics, it is

deeply committed to the epistemological privilege of the poor and oppressed (Frostin 1988, West 1991, cited in West 1993: 165).

In the struggle for a life of embodied dignity within the context of trafficking, migration and labour, there is a need to identify and name the 'idols of death' that impedes or enables trafficked women to live a life of dignity and enjoy life in its fullness and abundance (John 10.10). In his article, "Liberation Hermeneutics", West (2013:508) points to the primary struggles in liberation theologies which is against structural sins. West notes that the God of life is engaged against the idols of death, be it the idols of neoliberal capitalism, or the idols of patriarchy within cultures and religions or discrimination based on gender, religion, caste or identity, there is a need for forms of liberation hermeneutics that work with and proclaim the God of life. I would like this research to identify and name the 'idols of death' that impedes or enables trafficked women and migrant working women to live a life of dignity and enjoy life in its fullness and abundance. (John 10.10). West (2013) further notes that the primary struggle within liberation theologies is against systems and structures that bring death (Eph 6:12). Therefore, it is important to take sides, and I as a socially engaged scholar, researcher, practitioner and activist take sides of the vulnerable and exploited.

Highlighting Per Frostin's work, West (2013: 508) mentions that there are five distinctive features at the core of Biblical liberation hermeneutics - the choice of interlocutors; the perception of God; social analysis; the choice of theological tools; and the relationship between theory and practice. I base my study on these important features of Biblical liberation hermeneutics. Since the primary interlocutor in Biblical liberation hermeneutic are the poor, marginalised and exploited, my study chooses to take an ethical and epistemological commitment to have vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women as the primary interlocutor, as an interpretative starting point within their social experiences and their own social analysis.

Referring to Per Frostin's work (1988), West (2014:3) elucidates that,

the ethical choice of social relations as the crux of liberation theologies and the poor, marginalised and despised as the primary dialogue partners of liberation theologies require the epistemological privilege of the poor, marginalised and despised. Our

ethical choices have epistemological consequences, or so they should, and insists liberation hermeneutics.

Therefore, my role in the research process, including in the Contextual Bible Study, is to facilitate the process of uncovering the hidden transcript (Scott 1990) by providing safe space where their dignity is given voice. I bring along with me resources for reading the Bible from the perspective of the violated and exploited connecting them with their embodied struggles with the struggles mentioned in the Bible, to give voice to their silence and embodied experience of resilience and dignity.

To be in solidarity with the oppressed and dominated, theological reflection must stimulate the Church and the Christian Community in the world to be radical in its faith, acts of love and hope for the dehumanised people, without which any theological reflection will be of little value for the poor. There is no option but taking a preferential option for the poor. This is the foundation for the theological work undertaken for this research.

#### **4.2.2 Re-imagining Liberation**

It is important to have clarity on not only context, and the theoretical and theological underpinning of this study, but to have a clear idea on the outcome of this research. This would mean re-imagining liberation in the current context and working towards a path and a way forward, understanding 'liberation from what' and 'towards what'. Setting this objective at the outset is important before moving into working with women as research collaborators for knowledge production. The structural and systemic factors that contribute to the dehumanisation of women in the margins, including the socio-cultural and religious factors need to be addressed if one has to visualise a world where women can live, work and move outside the walls of their homes, with dignity. This research attempts to work towards systemic social transformation and theological transformation where the women who collaborate in this research are subjects of both.

In the context of dehumanisation of the oppressed, the dominated and the exploited, I agree with Freire who suggests that the restoration of humanity of the oppressed and oppressor is a necessary 'people's vocation' (Freire 2000: 43). Freire (2000: 44) posits that this vocation is negated and thwarted by,

injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity.

This inescapable concern for the humanisation of both the oppressed and the oppressor comes with the notion that Freire (2000: 44) points that,

dehumanisation, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a *distortion* of the vocation of becoming more fully human. This distortion occurs within history; but it is not an historical vocation. Indeed, to admit of dehumanisation as an historical vocation would lead either to cynicism or total despair. The struggle for humanisation, for the emancipation of labour, for the overcoming of alienation, or for the affirmation of men and women as persons would be meaningless. This struggle is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanises the oppressed.

Freire suggests that the historical task of the oppressed is to liberate themselves and the oppressor also, who despite their virtue of power do not have the strength to either liberate the oppressed nor themselves from the face of dehumanisation. Therefore, Freire (2000: 44) further emphasizes that,

Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both.

If the oppressed as individuals or as peoples must fight for the restoration of humanity, what would be their praxis amidst the oppressors acts of systemic violence and lovelessness, and also when the fear of freedom afflicts the oppressed? What would generate and give voice to the critical consciousness of the oppressed to liberate themselves? Most importantly, what would be our role as a society and as a Church to partake in this process of liberation, in the re-imagination of a world liberated from the vices and depravities of exploitation and injustice? To break an unjust social order, Freire (2000:45) advocates for true generosity that works towards transforming the world.



True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful subdued, the “rejects of life,” to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in striving so that these hands – whether of individuals or entire peoples – need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world.

Cuban American theologian Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz recommends a liberative praxis where women can hear themselves, can find themselves, can express their concerns and finally find ways for others to pay attention to those concerns (Isasi-Diaz 1996: 2). Making an epistemological and hermeneutical contribution to *Mujerista* theology,<sup>70</sup> Isasi-Diaz focusses on understanding the centrality of justice as a way of implementing the command to ‘love our neighbours’ and to discover being in solidarity with the poor and oppressed with a commitment for justice (1996: 6). Isasi-Diaz (1996:101,102) posits that,

Solidarity, then, is a virtue. It is an attitude and disposition that greatly influences how we act. As a virtue solidarity becomes a way of life. It becomes the new way of living out “the love your neighbour as yourself” that up to now has been interpreted as giving out of largesse. Given the network of oppressive structures in our world today that so control and dominate the vast majority of human beings, the only way we can continue to claim the centrality of love of neighbour for Christians is to redefine what it means and what it demands of us. Solidarity, then, becomes the new way of understanding and living out this commandment of the gospel.

I truly believe in a liberative praxis that not only frees those who are oppressed but also those who live disentangled, unbothered and insensitive to the impact of unjust social, economic and theological systems and practices that oppresses and exploits our sisters and brothers without whom we are not one humankind. To be in solidarity with our fellow human beings, means to be conscious of their realities, to understand the need for just action and work towards just solidarity. Liberation of the other would mean liberation for all. I opine that our

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<sup>70</sup> Isasi-Diaz explains that *Mujerista* theology is theological elaboration of Hispanic/ Latina women’s liberation theology, it is about creating a public voice for Latinas and capturing a political space for that voice.

understanding and strategy for just solidarity must begin with creating a ground of common interest, moving from one-sided charity to mutuality. To make solidarity a reality, we must look at ways of creating a praxis of mutuality with and for the oppressed. The moment of insight, even “from a ‘naive awareness’ to ‘critical awareness’ will take shape from dialogue” (Isasi-Diaz 1996: 94). This research has engaged in dialogue with oppressed women who strive to live a life with dignity. I hope that this body of knowledge can contribute in the creation of dialogue partners, such as theologians, policy makers, churches and faith-based organisations.

#### **4.2.3 The “Epistemological Privilege of the Poor”**

This research is grounded in Feminist Theory and Feminist Theology. The feminist methodologies utilised in this research are done with the purpose of doing theology with women in drawing their subjugated knowledge and in listening to their standpoint. By incorporating women’s knowledge and perspectives in the body of knowledge, this research attempts to dismantle the patriarchal constructs of knowledge production. It challenges power, domination and exclusion by engaging with ordinary trafficked and migrant working women to contribute their knowledge to a theology of trafficked dignity and decent work. I contend that without their biblical interpretation based on their lived experiences of their contextual realities of vulnerability, oppression, exploitation, resistance, agency and solidarity this research outcomes will be inadequate. Therefore, this research engages with Feminist and Liberation Theology. Within Liberation Theologies, it engages with Theologies of Work, Migration, Survival and Indecency.

This is a feminist work, a term used here to encompass the terms gender, postcolonial, liberationist and includes the context, lived experiences, perspectives and knowledge of trafficked and migrant women workers from the Global South. Feminist scholars insist that,

the study of the Bible and its reception history must be changed, since such malestream scholarship has not only theorized and served interests of domination but has also silenced wo/men as recognised subjects of interpretation by excluding us from professional biblical studies. Hence, feminist studies have raised the issue of power, exclusion, and domination Schüssler Fiorenza (2014: 3, 4).

In her article, “Between Movement and Academy: Feminist Biblical Studies in the Twentieth Century”, Schüssler Fiorenza (2014:4) clarifies her understanding of feminism. She posits, “I understand feminism in political sense in a radical notion that wo/men are fully entitled and responsible citizens of society, academy, and organised religion.” In this article, she expounds the meaning of “feminist” as articulated by Monica Melanchthon which was adopted by the authors present at a SBL meeting in 2010. Feminist work, while being sensitive to the context is meant to challenge/ destabilize/ subvert the subordination of women by giving space for reflection and appreciation of wo/men’s experiences, capacities and agency; that promotes transformative, renewing and transitional changes in religion and society.

I concur with Schüssler Fiorenza, Melanchthon and the authors who were present at SBL and deliberated on this issue, that if, in theological discourses the voice and dignity of vulnerable, trafficked and migrant women workers is negated and excluded then what are the philosophical, ideological and theological solutions to protect and include women in solidarity with them? What role can the Church, communities and theology play in ensuring the human rights and dignity of human beings, especially women in the margins, be restored? Therefore, women are utilised as a theology-generating agency in this Participatory Feminist Research. They are the active agents and co-workers with me in contributing to this body of knowledge. The purpose of working towards developing a theology for the trafficked dignity is to explore the embodied experience of resistance, survival and life of those women whose dignity has been damaged and denigrated because of their positions of vulnerability and marginalisation by oppressive systems and structures. Therefore, in this research the method adapted to interpret the feminist reading of the Bible was Contextual Bible Study. This process and engagement with women empowered women to participate and contribute to this body of knowledge by sharing their experiences of survival, empowerment, dignity and solidarity in their interpretation of Ruth in today’s context.

The emphasis in this work is on ‘theological process’. In liberation theologies theological process rather than theological content is the focus. By locating my work within the context of the ‘trafficked’, this work is a form of Liberation Theology. Therefore, the “epistemological privilege of the poor” is the starting point of all discourse in this research. Liberation hermeneutics is a process which begins with social analysis of a context (See), followed by engaging in the reading and analysis of the Bible in a similar context (Judge), that moves into

community-controlled action (Act), as championed by Fr. Joseph Cardijn (West 2013: 513; 2014: 15-17). This research looks into aspects of the contextual realities of the lives women inhabit. It focuses on understanding and analysing the systems and structures that oppress women and makes them vulnerable to trafficking and indecent work. By creating safe and sacred spaces for listening and reflection, this research sought to explore women's struggles and the utilisation of their agency from systems that oppresses them in their everyday lives.

Liberation theologies recognise that the knowledge of the marginalised is fundamental to the 'doing' of theology. Without their knowledge there can be no theology that is liberating for them. West (2011: 162) posits:

Human dignity, even the most damaged and denigrated of humanity, is a powerful force for the formation of discourses of resistance, survival and life. Those who are used to inhabiting the underside of our world may not articulate these discourses, even to themselves, but they do embody them. And such is the drive for human dignity that its embodied forms will find ways to express themselves in the public realm, albeit in disguised forms.

This research centres on the dignity, agency and the knowledge of vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women and affirms what West describes: "Dignity is agentive; dignity is more a verb than a noun" (West 2015: 89). Emphasizing on the need to identify the agency of the "organized poor", he invites socially engaged biblical scholars to offer their resources to 'read' the Bible with the poor and oppressed populations by placing the Scriptures in context with their own lived experiences and struggles. He suggests that these embodied experiences, their interpretations and analysis would be a process and resource for Biblical hermeneutics of liberation locating dignity at the centre. West affirms that there cannot be any prophetic theology without a people's theology, which is present in the dignity discourse.

Workers' Theology" (1996)e, "Work, the Bible, Workers, and Theologians: Elements of a Workers' Theology" (1996), has emphasized the need for the development of a genuine theology of work by the workers themselves, a process undertaken in the interest of the workers who share their own experiences of work, struggles, faith and interpret the Bible from their own lens with the assistance from technical experts who have not had similar

experience of oppression. He asserts that, “the primary purpose of a theology of work must be to deepen and clarify the faith of workers”. The primary objective of this study is to engage with and create spaces for a discourse on embodied dignity in the context of trafficking, migration and women’s labour by reading the Bible with women who have been vulnerable to trafficking while migrating out for work and how women of faith have navigated this trajectory of liberation. In *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics*, Marcella Althaus-Reid (2000) brings to dialogue voices of marginalised women from their everyday life experiences including sexual experiences, using economic and political tools of analysis. Althaus-Reid argues that the starting point for a process of doing contextual theology begins with the everyday lives of people in the midst of their misery. She connects poverty and sensuality that has been marginalized from theology. Althaus-Reid argues for a “See-Judge-Act’ analysis in theology as a material act of grounding Christianity in [sexual] reality.

Avaren Ipsen, in her book titled “*Sex Working and the Bible*” (2009) challenges the patriarchal construction of sexual morality that not only controls behaviour of women but silences the voice of in/decent women. Ipsen highlights that both liberation and feminist frameworks have failed to take an option for sex workers due to the patriarchal constructions of sexual morality. She further highlights that feminist biblical interpretations have chosen to read the Bible from their abolitionist position. She therefore reads the Bible with sex workers to have a view of them on the decriminalization of sex work, by providing a preferential option to sex workers with the aim to emphasize on the liberation of sex workers. She calls for liberation-oriented scholars to engage in further dialogue for purposes of creating solidarity.

In her article titled “Faith on the Edge: Religion and Women in the Context of Migration”, Gemma Tulud Cruz (2006) explored three concrete faith-based ways of surviving common to migrant women with experiences of trafficking on their courageous hope, creative resistance, and steadfast faith. Cruz posits that creative resistance can come in unusual forms, like jokes, language manipulation, resistance songs, worship, community gathering etc. Cruz asserts that in the multi-dimensional forms of oppression migrant women’s resistance is often in the name of survival to preserve the life and integrity of self, family, and community. She invites

serious theological reflection on women's experiences on courageous hope, creative resistance, and steadfast faith.

In her PhD dissertation titled "African Women's Theologies of Survival: Intersecting Faith, Feminisms, and Development", Beverley Haddad (2000 :245-248) citing Dellores Williams' book titled, "*Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-talk*" (1993) draws attention towards biblical survival tradition. Haddad highlights that the struggle for survival and quality of life are inseparable. Both are associated with God's presence in/with the community. She mentions that various biblical narratives speak of survival traditions. While she does not equate it with liberation, she maintains this is Scripture based. While expounding the story of Hagar, Williams has related it to the survival strategies of the Black community, particularly Black women, that they have passed on to generations to enable them to help themselves, their families, and their communities in order to survive their various oppressions in the past and even until today. Haddad posits that for feminist theorising and women's theology within the liberation framework, the survival strategies and struggles of poor and oppressed women must be understood and analysed taking along their faith dimensions. She emphasizes on the fact that when women live in life-threatening situations, it is their everyday lived experiences and faith journey that gives them the strength to survive and resist oppression.

I concur with these liberation, contextual and feminist theologians, who have paved path for including marginalised women and workers in the liberation discourse. Drawing ideological thoughts and insights from these theologians, I have grounded my work from the theological and methodological principles from the extensive work of Gerald West. He emphasizes on identifying the agency of the "organized poor" while socially engaged biblical scholars engage and read the Bible with them (West 1995, 2013). Therefore, the interpretations and analysis of women's embodied experiences, is a process and resource for a biblical hermeneutics of liberation in the context of vulnerabilities, trafficking, migration and labour, locating dignity at the centre of all ideological, philosophical, theological and methodological processes.

In his article, "Liberation Hermeneutics", West (2013: 513, 514) mentions that the biblical hermeneutics of liberation involves an interpretation strategy of "reading with" the poor and oppressed populations. The purpose of Biblical hermeneutics is not just limited to the

interpretation of the Bible but to work towards a process of social transformation through a See-Judge-Act process which begins with the social analysis of the context of struggle (See). This is followed by an engagement in dialogue between the text and context (Judge) which paves way for a community-controlled action (Act). Ordinary readers of the Bible have remained at the edge in biblical studies. However, within biblical liberation hermeneutics, and more specifically in what has evolved to be called 'Contextual Bible Studies', West (2014) posits that ordinary readers of the Bible have a central place in academic biblical studies. Contextual Bible Study is a South African contribution to the trajectory of biblical liberation hermeneutics (2014:1). West (2011: 162) explains that the process of doing Contextual Bible Studies is an inclusive method where the views and biblical interpretations of each participant about the biblical text from the perspective of their own context are considered as a resource for constructing theology. The articulation of the local, embodied discourses, West (2015: 89) suggests are the raw materials of theology, even though not fully-fledged formal theology; they are inchoate and incipient and will take on theological form as they engage with public forms of theology (West 2011: 162). There cannot be any prophetic theology without a people's theology, which is present in the dignity discourse of the dominated.

West (2014:1) further explains:

People's theology includes the embodied and variously expressed forms of the theology of organised marginalised communities. Prophetic theology includes the more systematic forms that theology constructed on the base of people's theology, 'renovating and making "critical" an already existing activity' (to use the formulation of Antonio Gramsci 1971:330–331, Q11 §12). Liberation hermeneutics in general and Contextual Bible Study as a specific form locates itself with this nexus, serving the dialogical movement from people's theology to prophetic theology.

A liberative praxis working towards liberation and restoration of justice and dignity of women in the margins is central to this research. In a world of injustice and inequality, where systemic oppression of the poor is accepted as a norm and makes women in the margins more vulnerable, how would liberation take place in the context of oppression? Although, as many have argued, Liberation Theology has ignored the presence of women in the struggle against oppression (Althaus-Reid 2000, Ipsen 2009), I engage in doing a form of Liberation Theology

with an emphasis on the 'theological process'. The process includes reading the Bible with women, doing Contextual Bible Study, which is a form of Liberation Hermeneutics. The process is dialogical and follows the contours of the See-Judge-Act method (West 2014:2). The purpose is to explore how a hermeneutics of Liberation Theology takes place in the context of oppression and exploitation and how women negotiate to establish a relationship amongst themselves to work towards a liberation praxis. I explore how women relate the narrative context of the Scriptures to their own context of struggle for liberation, empowerment, dignity and solidarity. While reading the book of Ruth together with women, is a time of exploring how vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women interpret and engage with the Biblical texts to fight against contemporary forms of exploitation and oppression that come with the neo-liberal market economy. How do they relate with the way capitalism exploits the poor and working class? How do they utilise their agency to resist and challenge systems and practices of oppression?

West (2013: 514) further explains,

Having analysed contextual realities, having judged these realities against the shape of God's redemptive projects, liberation hermeneutics then moves to work toward the "kin-dom" of God (i.e. a less hierarchical "kingdom") "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6: 10). Biblical liberation hermeneutics is not primarily about biblical interpretation, but about social transformation. Indeed, as the See-Judge-Act process demonstrates, biblical interpretation is merely one moment of a larger process, albeit a pivotal moment.

With this theological underpinning, I bring to dialogue the voices of workers (Nolan 1996), of migrant women workers whose work is unjustifiably criminalised and stigmatised (Ipsen 2009), of women who have embodied experiences of indecent marginalisation (Althaus-Reid 2000) and those who struggle to survive on a daily basis (Haddad 2000, Cruz 2006) within their everyday life experiences. This is the starting point of doing theology within the 'See-Judge-Act' framework of doing theology and theological analysis. The purpose is to produce an incipient, embodied and prophetic theological resource to inform public theology in this direction.



### 4.3 Conclusion

A historical background and contextual analysis on the subject of this research based on the literature review has been presented in the previous chapters. This chapter delved into the theoretical and theological foundations of this research which is grounded on the notion that the oppressed have access to knowledge and must be given an epistemic advantage, as they have more intimate and integral knowledge and consciousness of their context. The intersectional experiences of women and their perspective is central to this research. This is sought by establishing an epistemological relationship with them to draw their knowledge and understanding of their contextual realities and their strategies of resilience, courage, hope, empowerment, affirmation of dignity and solidarity. The engagement with women in the research process is aimed to bring the perspective and insight of women.

Women with embodied experiences of trafficking contribute to this body of knowledge. I do not have first-hand experience of trafficking, neither have I been violated, exploited and deceived the way they have been. Therefore, their contribution to the body of knowledge in this domain is vital. In this research, I facilitated the research process to listen to their subjugated knowledge based on their lived experiences. The analysis of their contributions brought in together their notions of trafficking, victimhood, coercion and consent, indecency, dignity, agency, empowerment and solidarity in the context of trafficking and economic migration. Through this research, I have attempted to examine the theological and religious dimensions of dignity from the perspective of the vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women from a gendered lens and within a human rights framework. I hope that the methodological and analytical contributions and can be a resource for emerging scholars in this discipline. The embodied theologies, I hope can be utilised as raw materials for public theology and biblical scholarship.

I approached this research by seeking the voices and knowledge of women who have moved from one place to another in search of work and a better life. I collaborated with women from the north-eastern States of India who live and work in the city of Bangalore in the unorganised informal labour sector. In this research, I have explored the factors, both micro and macro, that makes women vulnerable to trafficking from the perspective of women themselves. Why do women migrate and what are the challenges they face when they migrate? If trafficked or

working in exploitative working conditions, what do women do to resist these challenges? How do they utilise their agency to liberate themselves from the shackles of modern-day slavery? How do they form networks of collective solidarity for liberation from exploitative life and work situations in the informal economy? How can they from the knowledge gained through their lived experiences enrich the academia, religious/ theological centres of education and inform policy makers, practitioners, all concerned stakeholders and the wider community to work with and for them in their struggle for a life of dignity.

To work towards developing a theology for the trafficked dignity and (in)-decent work, this research explores the experiences of trafficked and vulnerable women by doing Contextual Bible Study workshop and draws from resources generated from other research methods such as Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions. By listening to their lived experiences this dissertation connects with the key concepts of the study, such as dignity, agency, empowerment, transformative praxis and solidarity. I have adapted the principles of Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) by establishing collaborative relationship with the research participants, who transition as my research collaborators, to have their perspective and knowledge for this dissertation. A critical discourse and analysis on trafficking representation to inform policy, praxis, academic and theological systems uncover the realities of women not being heard and the need to engage with women to listen to draw insight from women's perspectives. The next three chapters delves of the research paradigm and analysis of this dissertation. Chapter five presents the research paradigm, where I lay the foundations for Critical Social Research within a feminist framework. Chapter six describes the research process and chapter seven presents a thematic analysis of women's articulations.

## Chapter 5:

### Transformative Power of Knowledge Production: A Critical Research Paradigm

#### 5.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I laid the theoretical and theological foundations of this research which emphasises that the oppressed have the knowledge and consciousness to understand and engage with sociology and theology as it relates with their context and experiences. Therefore, this research is designed to listen to the lived experiences of trafficked and migrant working women as a starting point of inquiry. Their standpoint and voices that comes from their knowledge as the 'outsider-within' is critical in shaping a theology for the human dignity of the trafficked and migrant working women. A creative, interactive and participatory engagement is therefore conceived as best suited for this research. I have argued in the previous chapters that women in the margins are the best agents of knowledge about their context. Therefore, giving epistemic advantage to them is not only empowering to them who contribute to the process of knowledge production, but also prudent and critical for those interested in this subject of study, such as researchers, sociologists, theologians, biblical scholars, practitioners and policy makers. Having delved into the theoretical framework and theological underpinnings of this research, this chapter focusses on the research paradigm, and its related research process.

In this chapter, I begin with sharing in the first section insights on the politics and transformative power of knowledge production, highlighting who benefits from the knowledge produced and how. In the second section, I introduce the research paradigm. I lay out the foundations of Critical Social Research and then I argue why a Qualitative Feminist Research paradigm is necessary for this research. Thereafter, in the third section, I explain the research design and methodology adapted for this research. This section includes research design, research questions and ethics. In the next chapter, I describe the research process, which is the heart and soul of this research, the most important aspect for a Qualitative Feminist and Critical Social Research.

I believe that the complexities of the intersecting experiences of the vulnerable, trafficked and migrant people cannot be understood without listening to and understanding their lived experiences from a human rights perspective, not just the dehumanising experiences but also

the agentive, empowering and life-affirming lived experiences. This is best done by using empowering participatory processes that uphold the dignity and agency of the participants, who become my research collaborators contributing immensely to the process and outcome of this research. By giving an epistemic privilege and advantage to these diasporic<sup>71</sup> women who are in the margins of knowledge production systems – both in sociology and theology – I attempt to develop a theology for trafficked dignity and (in)-decent work. This I do first by listening to individual experiences of women through Feminist Interviews (FI) followed by Informal Encounters (IE) in and around their workplaces, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study (CBS). In the CBS workshop, we reflected upon the book of Ruth using a collaborative and participatory process.

### **5.1 Politics and Power of Knowledge Production**

The transformative power of learning and knowledge has best been described by some key philosophers from the twentieth century including Althusser, Foucault and Bourdieu. The phrase ‘Scientia potentia est’, meaning ‘knowledge is power’, is a Latin aphorism commonly attributed to sixteenth-century English philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon (Sharapov et al. 2019:1). While the power of knowledge production is widely acknowledged, it is important to be clear on - who produces the knowledge and why?; who controls, manipulates or facilitates knowledge production?; for whom is knowledge produced and who will benefit from it?; and most importantly whose knowledge matters? There is a political nature to every research (Jenkins et al. 2019: 415, 416), and it is important to be aware of it before one starts with the details of the research design and process.

The purpose of research is dependent on whose interest it is meant to serve. There are different actors in research, namely the producer, controller and consumer. At the outset of any research it is critical to be aware of the political interest/s of the producer/s of a research (e.g. the researcher, research team or research centre), controller/s (e.g. political systems,

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<sup>71</sup> I address my research collaborators alternatively as diasporic women and as vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women. The term "diasporas" has no set definition, and its meaning has changed significantly over time, which makes it very difficult to measure. IOM defines diasporas as “migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background.” [IOM Glossary on Migration, 2019, https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/diasporas accessed on 31/01/2021.](https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/diasporas)

research grant committees, interest groups, review committees of professional journals and publishing houses) and consumer/s (e.g. business organizations, government departments and interest groups) of the outcome of the research, as they play an important role in the design of the research paradigm. Critical social researchers contend that social research should have political goals and aim to bring about social changes in the society for its betterment (Henn et al. 2009: 27).

Keeping all of these in mind and considering my personal and academic motivations for this research, I worked on the research paradigm and design for this study under the able guidance of my Supervisor, Prof. Gerald O. West. This research is an academic pursuit for me with a moral-political-ideological commitment for the rights of women from the Global South who in search of a better life and work could be vulnerable to trafficking and face exploitation as workers in the unorganised informal economy, yet they find ways to affirm their rights and dignity and work towards improving their quality of lives. These women despite their vulnerabilities do have the benefit of conceiving new identities that come with a freedom for self-exploration. The conflicting subjectivities of freedom and subjugation is important to explore, not only the experiences of subjugation as widely done in the popular trafficking domain but exploring how women conceive new identities and move beyond the fixed definitions of femininity (Pande 2018: v) is critical to this research.

Having worked on this issue as a development practitioner for several years, my desire to advance my learnings through academic work was obvious. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the role of vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women in shaping programs and policies is absent or limited, not only in India but across the globe. Keeping in line with my moral-political-ideological commitment, I have undertaken this academic research with a keen interest to learn from trafficked and migrant working women what it means to utilise their 'power-within' to uphold their own dignity, rights and agency and to work towards a just-oriented social transformative praxis.

I recognise and affirm the inherent dignity of all individuals and groups, especially the vulnerable, marginalised, oppressed, alienated, dominated and exploited women. Likewise, I affirm the rights and dignity of women who in their daily lives struggle and fight to affirm their dignity and to work towards fulfilment of their aspirations. I believe that every member in our

societies and the world we live in have inalienable rights for freedom, equality and access to services as any other privileged member of our society. I have a deep commitment for social, economic and political justice. With this commitment, I lay the foundations for a sociological and theological discourse on human dignity with women who struggle to affirm their dignity in their daily lives. Their embodied experiences of reclaiming their personhood in the midst of marginalisation, exclusion, dehumanisation, social, cultural and gendered violations is central to this research. During the research process, I ensured creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and solidarity. I acknowledge their knowledge contribution to this research and to the larger body of knowledge which comes from their lived experiences and standpoint. This subjugated knowledge, I hope will pave ways for marginalised knowledge systems and theological discourse to centre women's standpoint in any scholarly discourse and in the doing of theology.

Jeorg Rieger, in his book *God and the Excluded: Visions and Blindspots in Contemporary Theology*, draws attention to the tensions of everyday life and emphasises on the need to develop sensitivity to do theology, with people who live on the underside of history. Rieger (2001: 2, 3) notes that,

Theological thought is often shaped by what its practitioners barely notice, including political and economic structures...Theology that develops resistance to the powers of exclusion may help to develop new models that prove useful in restructuring not only the process of theological reflection but also the church and, ultimately, even society at large.

In this research, I explore a broader and inclusive concept of intersectionality. I emphasise how women utilise their 'power-within' for agentive, liberative and transformative purpose in the context of oppression, within the societal framework, in the knowledge systems and in the very places where they struggle to affirm their dignity and position themselves as human beings. These are women who have the rights to be treated with fairness and justice in places and systems where they are excluded and dehumanised, including the academia and theological systems and structures. The emphasis is on their experiences of affirming their dignity as they navigate gendered, racial, social, political and economic oppression at different levels in their everyday lives.

The purpose is to study alternative ways that internal diasporic working women engaged in 'indecent' work adapt to reject "a definition of power of the masculine type" and subvert the phallocratic order while still working in phallocratic cultures (Irigaray 1985: 81). These are women who have been vulnerable or trafficked and yet struggle and redefine their 'power-within' for their liberation, empowerment and transformation in the context of systemic, structural and patriarchal forms of domination that they experience in their daily lives. Together with them, this research aims to develop a theology for trafficked dignity and (in)-decent work, by utilising their epistemological insights from their lived experiences and realities, to understand factors that impedes or empowers them to live a life of dignity. Knowledge produced together with them is central to this research with a hope that it can contribute as a prophetic voice to the Church and to the knowledge systems in academia and policy circles.

## **5.2 Introduction to the Research Paradigm**

In the previous section, I explained why the knowledge of those for whom this research is done is important. Utilising their knowledge and having them as research collaborators is central to this research. By inviting them to be active contributors to the knowledge production process, the deliberations have a clear bias for the dominated women, with experiences of trafficking, vulnerability and exploitation in their migration stories. Women are given epistemic advantage to share their intersectional experiences of marginalisation, domination, exploitation and how they forge bonds of solidarity to liberate and empower themselves to affirm their dignity and to assert their rights. The lived realities of women's lives are the sites of inquiry. In this section, I lay the foundations of Social Research and foreground my reasoning of why a Qualitative Feminist Research paradigm is necessary for this study.

This study, being undertaken 'about' women with experiences of trafficking, vulnerability and exploitation in their migration trajectories, I collaborated with women who have moved from smaller towns and rural areas in India to urban cities within the country in search of livelihood and for a better life. These are internal migrant working women from Manipur, a State in the northeast of India. They now live and work in the Indian city of Bangalore, which is one of the

fastest-growing major metropolis in India.<sup>72</sup> They work in the beauty industry that provides cosmetic, skin, hair and spa treatments. Since this research is undertaken within a human-rights framework, the research tools were designed keeping the dignity of women at the centre of all discourse, engagement and in the process of knowledge production. In the first sub-section, I lay the foundations of a Critical Social Research within a feminist paradigm. Thereafter, I explain the reason for choosing and designing the research methodology and tools for this study and how it has been appropriated for this research. In the second sub-section, I lay the foundations of a Qualitative Research paradigm and further explain why it is necessary for this study. In the third sub-section I describe the significance of Feminist Research and mention about the importance for women from the Global South to be active participants and collaborators in the knowledge production process in Feminist Research.

A research paradigm is described by T. S. Kuhn as “the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientist about how problems should be understood and addressed” (Kuhn 1970: 43-51). The research design and methodology are determined by the nature and purpose of the study which interrogates the lived and intersectional experiences of vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women. By giving a preferential option to the research collaborators this research privileges and gives epistemic advantage to them whose knowledge and lived experiences have been historically subjugated and marginalised. Throughout the research process, I was cautious of not keeping their voices in the margins, rather I facilitated participation and contribution of all, especially the quieter ones in the group. I made conscious and deliberate attempts to have them take active part as collaborators in this research. Women’s empowerment, agency and dignity is at the centre of the entire research process.

One of the main principles and objectives of this research is to listen to women as ‘active agents’ and for them to represent themselves rather than following the stereotypical representation and image of vulnerable and migrant working women as being ‘victims’ only in their trafficking and migration pathways. Women’s agency gets over-shadowed in the presence of a hyper-ventilated saviour complex of the ‘Heroes’ in the anti-trafficking domain. The focus is to transform the narrative and rhetoric by redefining ‘representation’ and by

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<sup>72</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangalore>



adapting methodological tools and processes that unearths their resources and agency. This empowering and liberating process, I believe is transformative for the researched, researcher and those who engage with the dissertation.

On the risks of omitting or undermining the experiences of migrant women, Amba Pande (2018: v) emphasises the need to listen to voices and experiences of migrant women not under homogenised perceptions along with the migration experiences of men, but to understand their critical role in the unnoticed and unmapped success stories of the diasporic community. Pande (2018: v) shares that,

Feminist epistemological interventions in diaspora and migration studies made gender fundamental to the critical understanding of migration and settlement processes and the ongoing course of identity formation in a foreign setting. However, the centrality of gender still revolved around the 'victimhood' or 'passive agents' paradigm, particularly with regard to women from the Third World. The feminist and subaltern scholarship did take note of this stereotypical representation and started articulating the voice of the 'other' woman in the receiving societies. The increasing feminisation of international migration from and among the developing societies further made the incorporation of the sociocultural moorings of the women from these societies an imperative. As the diasporas are embedded in both host and homelands simultaneously, the natural corollary is that factors from both the host land and the homeland—including gender relations and gender hierarchies—have an impact on diasporic women. Feminist inquiries suggest that migration and diasporic conditions, on the one hand, can be liberating, bringing more egalitarianism in the family and opening avenues for women to strengthen their agency and create new opportunities for themselves.

I agree with Pande that even though gender hierarchy exists both in the homeland and in the host land, and most often more rigid, complicit, traditional and oppressive in the host land, Indian women experience conflicting subjectivities of freedom and subjugation.

Pande (2018: v) posits that,

Although standing ‘in-between’ the two worlds—with complex realities of unequal power dynamics of the homeland and stereotypical spaces of the host land—Indian women tend to experience conflicting subjectivities of freedom and subjugation, yet they do find a freedom for self-exploration and deliberation to conceive new identities and move beyond the fixed definitions of femininity.

In order to work towards developing a theology for the trafficked dignity and (in)-decent work, this research therefore explores the intersectional experiences of vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women by facilitating a process of active listening to women’s lived experiences. The methods used to produce knowledge are Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study. I used a qualitative and critical research paradigm to explore participant experiences and views on their trajectories of empowerment, agency and dignity. I have approached this study from a critical research paradigm as it is largely used by feminists to appropriate their work. Since critical research aims at facilitating critique of social realities and suggests possible solutions to the social problems to empower, liberate and emancipate people from oppressive and exploitative social structures, I make use of Qualitative Research methodology within a critical research paradigm.

I have employed participatory tools which are dialogical and empowering by creating safe, secure, sacred and enabling spaces to listen to the voices of my research participants whom I address as my partners and collaborators for this research. The purpose of adapting a participatory approach is to have the active participation of my dialogue partners and research collaborators and for them to own the process and outcome of the research. I hope that they will continue with the spirit of collaboration and togetherness in times to come, where they are able to take informed and collective decisions for themselves and contribute as key influencers in different forums and spaces.

### **5.2.1 Foundations of Critical Social Research**

In this section, I describe the foundations of Critical Social Research and why a critical approach to social research is suitable for this research. Social research is conducted by

students, university academics, research practitioners as well as action researchers. These studies are conducted to gain knowledge about aspects of social life that students and academicians are interested in. Research practitioners inform policy makers on the impact or effectiveness of programs and policies through social research. Action researchers conduct social research to solve on-going problems within an organisational setting (Henn et. al. 2009 :7,8,9).

Critical Social Research is adapted by various political organisations and social movements associated with Conflict Theory, Feminist Research and Radical Psychotherapy. The theoretical framework for Critical Social Research was developed by thinkers within the Frankfurt School of Social Research (Crotty 1998 in Henn et. al. 2009 :28). They argued for a Marxist view of society in social enquiry and analysis, one that has a bias for the dominated and does not benefit the ruling capitalist class. Neuman (2000: 76 cited in Henn et. al. 2009: 29.) defines it as,

A critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves.

With a strong bias for the dominated migrant working women in the informal economy who have the experiences of vulnerability to trafficking and labour exploitation, a critical research paradigm is best suited for this research. This study examines the concept of ‘false consciousness’ and explores society not as it seems but uncovers deep structures and unobservable mechanisms that maintain and perpetuate unequal power and resource distribution (Henn et. al. 2009: 29). In this study, I engage with subordinated trafficked, vulnerable and migrant working women to learn how they embody the ideologies and practices of the ruling class and the employers in an established environment of cultural hegemony while also affirming their agency, rights and dignity.

The purpose of social research is to generate knowledge that challenges unequal power relations by asking critical questions with a view to change the society for the better (Henn et. al. 2009: 28). By facilitating a critique of the social reality of the subject, Critical Social Research empowers and liberates people to change their social contexts by suggesting possible solutions to social problems. Since critiquing the social realities empowers people to

be active participants in the process of their emancipation from oppressive and exploitative structures that exists in capitalistic societies, I have adapted the principles of Critical Social Research and appropriated it to this study within a human rights framework.

### **5.2.2 Qualitative Research Paradigm**

In this sub-section, I lay the foundations of a Qualitative Research paradigm and explain why it is necessary for this study. Qualitative Research is used in social sciences to explore the perspectives, experiences, feelings, thoughts, behaviours, perceptions or interpretations of meaning and process of individuals and communities (Jameel et al. 2018: 1). It refers to the “meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things” (Bergs 2001:3). It is very useful to explore complex phenomena and is carried out “to enhance understanding of individuals’ cultures, beliefs and values, human experiences and situations, as well as to develop theories that describe these experiences” (Kalu and Balya 2017: 43, 44). It generates and documents “the narratives, of individuals and groups by interacting with them, observing their behaviour, and consider how the nuances of a context may influence their perspectives and experiences. This paradigm of research may be employed to explore the expressed needs of certain communities or ethnic groups, clarify the perspectives of individuals about a specific event or idea...” (Jameel et al. 2018: 1). By trying to get to the heart of what and how things happened to the participating individuals, Qualitative Research helps to understand what led them to the decisions and choices made by them in those given situations (Curry et al., 2009; Yin 2015 cited in Kalu and Bwalya 2017: 44).

Since Qualitative Research is exploratory in nature (Henn et al. 2009: 37), I am interested in exploring areas of study that are under-researched. To explore the embodied experiences of my research collaborators, I ask critical questions by engaging in powerful discourse with them. The advantage of doing Qualitative Research is to have a greater depth of understanding by making use of qualitative procedures. Since, Qualitative Research allows the researchers to seek answers to questions like ‘why’ and ‘how’ individuals and communities interpret their experiences and narratives in their socio-economic and geo-political context (Berg 2001:2), I engage with my collaborators to understand how they interpret and make sense of their lived experiences and social contexts.

In their book, *A Critical Introduction to Social Research*, Matt Henn, Mark Weinstein, Nick Foard, describe qualitative approaches in Social Research and elaborate on how it can be conducted. They expound Qualitative Research by mentioning that (Henn et al. 2009: 149),

The qualitative research style is more often than not associated with an interpretive perspective in social research, in which the logic of research is not so much to test out given theories about what guides human behaviour, but instead to develop an appreciation of the underlying motivations that people have for doing what they do. Underlying the qualitative research style then is the assumption that in order to understand human behaviour, a researcher must first understand the meanings that people have of the world around them, because these meanings tend to govern their actions. The emphasis given by qualitative researchers to their studies therefore involves an examination of the perspectives of the people or groups that are of interest to them – their ideas, attitudes, motives, and intentions.

In this research, I explored what sense women have of the world around them, their perspectives and ideas of migration, work, vulnerability, agency, empowerment and dignity. Since the notion of quality is essential to the nature of things in qualitative approaches (Dabbs 1982 : 32), the questions used for discussions in the Feminist Narrative Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study have been open ended to understand women's own contextual narratives of what, how, when, and where life changing experiences have taken places in their lives and how they refer to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things (Bergs 2001: 2,3).

In his book, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, Bruce Lawrence Berg (2001: 6,7) elucidates Qualitative Research as,

Qualitative research properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings. Qualitative researchers, then, are most interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth.

Qualitative approaches include interacting with the participants and communities and observing them by employing and adapting different methods relevant and suitable for the participants to contribute to the process of knowledge production. The authors note that (Henn et al. 2009: 37),

In qualitative research, there is a closer degree of involvement with those who participate in the research, and consequently a greater sensitivity to the rights of participants as people, rather than as objects of research.

Therefore, I first met with the research participants individually to establish personal rapport with them and to explain the purpose of my research. I then invited them to collaborate with my research and contribute to knowledge production through individual Feminist Interviews, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study. For ethical purpose, I gave them time to think, decide and give their informed consent if they were willing to participate and collaborate with me for this research. I have in the next chapter described in detail the research process that was undertaken to keep it participatory, flexible and adaptive to best fit the context of the participants.

Sarantakos (2005:46) describes Qualitative Research approach as a paradigm that,

sets the researchers close to reality, studies reality from the inside, uses open methods of data collection, employs a flexible research design, captures the world in action, employs naturalistic methods, analyses data during and after collection, chooses methods before/during the study, produces most useful qualitative data.

By adapting a Qualitative Research paradigm, I was able to get closer to the realities of the lives of women I collaborated with for this research. The flexible research paradigm that Qualitative Research offers, enables both the researcher and the research collaborators to together create comfortable, enabling and safe spaces of dialogical discourse who are able to share a relationship of almost equal status that allows openness in sharing of experiences, thoughts and knowledge with mutual respect and dignity. Informal Encounters was not in the initial research design. It emerged as a need during the research process which I explain in detail in the next chapter.

### **5.2.3 The Argument for and Significance of Feminist Research**

In the previous sub-sections, I introduced the research paradigm and explained why qualitative Critical Social Research is important for this research. I mentioned that this research is undertaken within a feminist framework. In this sub-section I describe the significance of Feminist Research and why it is important for women from the Global South, especially those living in the margins of the economy and academia, to engage in Feminist Research and to produce knowledge that benefits not only them but all knowledge producing systems including researchers, theologians, academicians, influencers, lobbyists, policy makers and law makers. This research is feminist because it explores the intersections of gender with different forms of oppressions, such as race, ethnicity, class, labour and nationality by engaging with women's everyday world and experiences. It further explores how women utilise their agency to liberate and empower themselves from systems and structures that systematically dominates them within the patriarchal framework. These are women who have been excluded from access to systems such as education, health care and job opportunities to live a life with dignity. This research explores women's trajectories to create pathways of claiming justice, affirming their dignity and how they navigate their lives to move from the periphery towards the centre. It aims at promoting social and economic justice for women.

This research adapts a participatory and feminist approach to seek insight into the alternate strategies adapted by poor, oppressed and marginalised women to survive and aspire to thrive and live a life of dignity. I believe that they themselves have knowledge about their lives, therefore their active participation and contribution in research where their lives are the subject of a study is important. Therefore, this study is not just about women, but for and with women from Global South. This research is informed by the experiences of women who identify themselves as formerly trafficked and migrant working women. These women have experiences of trafficking and labour exploitation. They have subjective experiences both of vulnerability and empowerment. With this as a starting point, this research draws out individual and collective knowledge to generate new understandings of existing gender inequality in our world and empowering strategies adapted by women in the margins from the Global South.

Feminism, being a large movement, lacks a single definition and therefore there is no single way of doing Feminist Research (Reinharz 1992: 244). However, there is one common understanding amongst feminists, their research is informed by the oppressions and struggles of women and

adheres to feminist values and beliefs. Feminism as a movement seeks to change the lives of women for better, asserting their social and political rights, recognising the necessity for long term social changes (Lerner 1986: 236-237 cited in Procter -Smith 1990: 9). While liberal feminism is concerned with equality of civil rights for women that prohibits any discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation or gender identity at work, in housing, in access to educational and professional opportunities, in programs and facilities that receives public funding and equal pay for comparable work, Marxist feminism is concerned with and struggles for economic autonomy (Procter-Smith 1990: 1). In this research, I have explored both aspects of women's experience and struggles for economic autonomy and social justice. This research explores women's challenges in accessing opportunities for education and development, access to decent work, parity in pay, housing in host communities, access to government and civil society support systems including the church and faith communities in host communities. I agree with sociologist Shulamit Reinharz opinion, who in her book titled, *Feminist Methods in Research*, emphasises that while feminists views on the rights of women range from different historical backgrounds, current contexts and ideological roots, for all feminists, whether from the North or the South, women's lives are important, and they need to be studied by engaging and examining "women as an individual and as a social category, when their lives are interwoven with one another through common experiences" (Reinharz 1992: 240). Therefore, the methods employed for this research, Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study have obtained women's individual and collective perspectives as a social category.

On the need for an inclusive role of women in the knowledge production process, Dorothy Smith (1987: 17,18) rightly points out that,

Being excluded, as women have been, from the making of ideology, of knowledge, and of culture means that our experience, our interests, our ways of knowing the world have not been represented in the organization of our ruling nor in the systematically developed knowledge that has entered into it.

Similarly, Judith Butler (2011: 46) emphasises the importance of decolonising epistemological strategies and resist masculine power that operates within patriarchal framework to subordinate



women in their contribution to knowledge production:

As feminism has sought to become integrally related to struggles against racial and colonialist oppression, it has become increasingly important to resist the colonizing epistemological strategy that would subordinate different configurations of domination under the rubric of a transcultural notion of patriarchy. The articulation of the law of patriarchy as a repressive and regulatory structure also requires reconsideration from this critical perspective. The feminist recourse to an imaginary past need to be cautious not to promote a politically problematic reification of women's experience in the course of debunking the self-reifying claims of masculinist power.

Smith (1987: 18) opines that in the development of a capitalist mode of production, women's work has been thought of as a different kind and location. Women have always been excluded in the formation of thought and knowledge systems. Therefore, she posits that it is necessary for women to listen to one another, to form a circle, and to articulate through oral and written text what is relevant, necessary and significant for them. Feminists, sociologists and gender theorists like Dorothy Smith, Shulamit Reinharz and Judith Butler argue that the decolonising production of knowledge is not only for women to produce knowledge but for women to write about themselves. Therefore, the embodied experiences of women from the Global South are central in this Feminist Research which aims at producing embodied theology of women's dignity and solidarity at the intersection of women's migration, trafficking, labour, class, agency and empowerment. During this research process, many women did not speak initially, as traditional culture has taught them, but they did speak once a relationship of trust and comfort was established. I created safe and comfortable spaces for them to articulate and contribute in ways that they preferred. Women got to represent themselves and brought in resources of their ideas, thoughts and perspectives. Therefore, as with all Critical Social Feminist Research, this research is a moral-political activity. I recognise and acknowledge my humanity and feminist values. With emancipatory goals, I do view this research as an honest politics (Henn et al. 2009 :31, 32). I take sides and give epistemic advantage to women by valuing their experiences and knowledge.

Since this research studies vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women through a gendered lens, I have placed high value on research methods by engaging women as active

agents in the research process. The embodied experiences of women are the starting point of research. This research attempts to create social and theological consciousness about women utilising the resources and knowledge that they have contributed. This research also attempts to decolonise knowledge produced by 'experts' who seem to know what is best for young vulnerable women in the margins without having them to contribute to the research and decision-making processes that is meant for their benefit. I have chosen social research within a feminist framework as the purpose is agentive and emancipatory for the subjects of the study. I believe that they are the main actors in taking charge of these liberative and transformative processes in research as it is their lives that are entrenched in oppressive and exclusive systems.

### **5.3 Research Design and Methodology**

Qualitative Research is an interesting and engaging process. It is process directed. It takes time, first in designing the research methods, sequence and stages, followed by it and then figuring out what works and what does not. It offers flexibility. It adapts to the context of the participants and the communities. It is not just about collecting data and information from the participants and communities to feed into a computer program for analysing data (Berg 2001:2). It gives importance to the people and communities being researched, subjects that are under-researched, and makes them active participants in the research process. The purpose is to facilitate a process that enables and empowers them to own the process and outcome of the research. The knowledge production process (more commonly called data collection), being an engaging and empowering process paves way for them to continue the collaboration amongst themselves and others for their mutual benefit for a longer time (Henn et al. 2009:31, 149-151).

This is the primary reason why I chose to do Qualitative Research within a feminist framework adapting a critical social paradigm. From the very beginning, I interacted with the research participants with respect by explaining the purpose of the research and the process. I informed them that their experiences and knowledge is a key resource for this research. I treated them with dignity and did not push them to provide any information that they were not comfortable with. They were free to draw boundaries when they wanted to and had no pressure to respond to any question that they were asked during the individual interviews

and the group exercises. From the beginning of the research process, they had the liberty to guide the research process to their convenience, including the place and time of meeting. By establishing a relationship of trust and partnership, I invited them to be my research collaborators to understand together what the experiences and perceptions of women in India are who migrate from one part of the country to another and beyond. These are women who migrate for work within a patriarchal framework and cultural considerations. They have had experiences of vulnerability, exploitation and trafficking in their journey of looking for opportunities to assert their autonomy, agency and economic self-reliance, to redefine their roles and perceptions of the self. It is critical to understand these experiences and perceptions as Amba Pande (2018: 1, 2) argues,

While many of the problems, women in the Indian Diaspora face, arise out of patriarchal structures besides foreign settings, one can find innumerable instances of their struggles and triumphs over adversities and hostile situations. Standing 'in-between' the two worlds, with complex realities of unequal power dynamics of the homeland and stereotypical spaces of the host land, women tend to experience conflicting subjectivities of freedom and subjugation. The space of the 'hyphen' often gives them a freedom for self-exploration and deliberation to conceive new identities and move beyond the fixed definitions of femininity.

The conflicting experiences of subjectivities and subjugation, of agency and oppression along with strategies of empowerment, self-exploration and the conception of new identities of Indian diasporic women is critical to this study. Therefore, the research design and methodology were designed keeping the sensitivity of the research subject. A carefully planned research design is necessary to conduct research like this. I kept these suggestions in consideration while working on the research design as Punch (1998: 66 cited in Henn et al. 2009: 37) puts it,

Research design situates the researcher in the empirical world, and connects the research questions to data ... [It] is the basic plan for a piece of research and includes four main ideas. The first is the strategy. The second is the conceptual framework. The third is the question of who or what will be studied. The fourth concerns the tools and procedures to be used for collecting and analysing empirical materials.

Research design thus deals with four main questions, corresponding to these ideas: the data will be collected (and analysed) following what strategy? Within what framework? From whom? How?

I will elaborate in detail how the research design is manifested in the research process in the next section and in the following two chapters. The idea is not to limit the research process in seeking answers to the research questions but in laying emphasis on the process itself, in how the research methods can be flexible and adapt to the context of those whose knowledge matters, i.e., the research collaborators. Since the research design in Qualitative Research remains flexible both before and throughout the actual research (Marshall & Rossman 2011 cited in Taylor et al. 2016: 29), I was able to adapt the research methods to the context of the research collaborators which is detailed in the next chapter on research process.

In their book, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods*, Steven J. Taylor Robert Bogdan, Marjorie L. DeVault describe the methodological principles and approaches in Qualitative Research (Taylor et al. 2016: 29, 30),

Although qualitative researchers have a methodology to follow and perhaps some general research interests, the specifics of their approach evolve as they proceed. Until we enter the field, we do not know what questions to ask or how to ask them. In other words, the preconceived image we have of the settings and people we intend to study may be naive, misleading, or downright false. Most qualitative researchers attempt to enter the field without specific hypotheses or preconceptions.

The underlying values and ideologies of the researcher holds an important place in the research. The tools and techniques used for collecting information and for producing knowledge is vital for this research. With emancipation of women as the goal of research, many feminists have argued for a specifically feminist methodology, that which respects personal experience as against scientific method and rejects 'hierarchical' forms of research. (Hammersley 1995 cited in Henn et al. 2009: 63). Keeping these aspects in mind, the research design was prepared, tested and executed. This section describes and states the research design, research questions, ethics, confidentiality and informed consent practiced in this research.

### 5.3.1 Research Design

The purpose of this research is to understand the conceptual components of embodied dignity within the contexts of trafficking and to develop a theology of trafficked dignity. In the context of this study, the women who have experienced trafficking or have been vulnerable to it at the intersections of migration, labour, gender and class take on a primary role in the construction of a theology of trafficked dignity and (in)-decent work. I do not have first-hand experience of vulnerabilities to trafficking, I have not been violated, exploited and deceived the way they have been, nor have I had to fight odds like them for a life of survival and dignity. Therefore, they are the ones who contribute to the knowledge production process as research collaborators as their lived experiences and knowledge are critical to this research.

The issues of migrant women, women working in the informal economy<sup>73</sup> (informal sector or grey economy or shadow economy), who lack social protection<sup>74</sup> and have been victims of

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<sup>73</sup> “An informal economy (informal sector or grey economy) is the part of any economy that is neither taxed nor monitored by any form of government. Although the informal sector makes up a significant portion of the economies in developing countries, it is sometimes stigmatized as troublesome and unmanageable. However, the informal sector provides critical economic opportunities for the poor and has been expanding rapidly since the 1960s. Integrating the informal economy into the formal sector is an important policy challenge.” - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Informal\\_economy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Informal_economy) (Source: Calbreath, Dean (2010-05-30). “Hidden economy a hidden danger”. Union–Tribune San Diego.; Economics focus: In the shadows”, The Economist.; “The Informal Economy: Fact Finding Study”, Department for Infrastructure and Economic Cooperation.; “Women and Men in the Informal Economy, International Labour Organisation. 2002; Carr, Marilyn and Martha A. Chen. 2001. "Globalization and the Informal Economy: How Global Trade and Investment Impact on the Working Poor". Background paper commissioned by the ILO Task Force on the Informal Economy. Geneva, Switzerland: International Labour Office.)

<sup>74</sup> Social protection, as defined by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, is concerned with preventing, managing, and overcoming situations that adversely affect people's well-being. Social protection consists of policies and programs designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labour markets, diminishing people's exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to manage economic and social risks, such as unemployment, exclusion, sickness, disability and old age. It is one of the targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 10 aimed at promoting greater equality.

The most common types of social protection:

- Labor market interventions are policies and programs designed to promote employment, the efficient operation of labor markets, and the protection of workers.
- Social insurance mitigates risks associated with unemployment, ill-health, disability, work-related injury, and old age, such as health insurance or unemployment insurance.

structural and systemic failures, emerged as the issues of concern and interest in this research. These are issues that make women vulnerable to and victims of trafficking. Therefore, a broader perspective to the issues of migrant working women from the Global South who contribute to the informal economy seemed appropriate to broaden the scope of this research. These women and their families do benefit from the expanding economic opportunities even as they strive to affirm their dignity in exploitative or oppressive working conditions.

The research design was prepared keeping in mind the sensitivity around the issue of trafficking and the stigma associated with the labour of migrant working women. The conflation of trafficking with prostitution and sex work makes it a difficult proposition to reach such hidden populations. However, considering the challenge ahead in finding and engaging with a difficult to reach and yet rich source of knowledge contributors, I treated the initial phase of field work that includes sampling, rapport and trust building process with sensitivity and patience. The research process is described in detail in the next chapter. Women's experiences of trafficking, being a highly sensitive and potentially disturbing phenomenon to study, the research design was prepared and implemented in a manner that would not cause them any harm but rather facilitate an empowering process by engaging with them not as mere informants but as research collaborators and knowledge partners. Therefore, a qualitative critical feminist paradigm best suited to this study.

This research was designed to involve two major steps, listening to the personal narratives and lived experiences of women through Feminist Interviews and to listen to them in groups through Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study. During the research process,

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- Social assistance is when resources, either cash or in-kind, are transferred to vulnerable individuals or households with no other means of adequate support, including single parents, the homeless, or the physically or mentally challenged.

(Source -

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_protection#:~:text=Social%20protection%20consists%20of%20policies,%2C%20disability%2C%20and%20old%20age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_protection#:~:text=Social%20protection%20consists%20of%20policies,%2C%20disability%2C%20and%20old%20age;).; United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). 2010. Combating Poverty and Inequality: Structural Change, Social Policy and Politics.; World Bank. 2001. Social Protection Sector Strategy Paper: From Safety Net to Springboard. Washington DC, USA.; "Goal 10 targets". UNDP.)

emerged a new and unplanned method of data collection, Informal Encounters that took place within women's real-life settings such as their workplace. Detailed description of the Research Process is provided in the next chapter.

Feminist interviewing is a profound and widely accepted feminist method of knowledge production. This method is used to explore women's experiences and the context from where these experiences emerge. Feminist interviewing is argued to be a powerful tool because it engages with the perspectives of the researchers, participants and the readers. This apparatus of knowledge production is considered creative and critical feminist work. It is a practice that embodies feminist values to promote justice for women (DeVault and Gross 2012: 174, 192; DeVault 1999: 30; DeVault & Gross 2012: 175, 176. I created safe and sacred spaces for women to share their stories, experiences and knowledge during the in-depth Feminist Interviews. The interview questions are open-ended being informed by principles of feminist interviewing. Much care was taken to reduce hierarchy between the researcher and the participants. They were provided with information about the research purpose, research process and the flexibility for them to choose their responses, at the onset of the interview. An ethically sound, safe and comfortable space was provided to each participant during the in-depth Feminist Interviews. I interviewed 13 women for this research.

The next method of data collection, Informal Encounters in Women's Real-Life Work Settings, emerged during the Feminist Interviews. Individual interactions during the interviews were successful from the research point of view. The participants opened up and shared well in the interviews. However, I felt the need to listen to them more, and they too were interested to share much more individually. Therefore, in consultation with my Supervisor I engaged with the participants on a deeper level at their work settings. I visited their Salons and Spas as a client, which not only provided dignity to their work from a research point of view, but it strengthened the relationship between the researched and researcher, as research collaborators. It affirmed their right to work on their workdays even as they participated in the research process. Women in informal work sector, have no right to claim weekly off days. They are required to work even on the weekly off days if there is increased clientele demand at the Spas and Salon. Hence, by engaging with them at their workplace I was not only able to have an insider perspective, but I was able to compensate their time with work and service fees. During the Informal Encounters, the interactions on the massage bed and in the beauty

salons were deeper. This creative addition to the research design brought in profound insights into their lived realities. As the subject of this research deals with sensitive issues surrounded by the stereotypical and sexualised image of women's work, that challenges women's autonomy to work and movement, the decision to meet them at their work locations provided valuable resources for this research. Since Qualitative Research allows diverse and flexible methods of collecting information, this addition to the research design maximised my own understanding of the lived realities of women's work, dignity and solidarity. I met five women for Informal Encounters.

Focus Group research is a powerful method of collecting useful information in a small setting of people focussed on a particular topic and related issues (Wilkinson 2004: 177). It encourages creating enabling and safe spaces for participants to articulate their perspectives, experiences, ideas, perception, thoughts, notions, and opinion in an enabling and safe environment (Krueger & Casey 2000; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub 1996). In Participatory Research and Action, focus groups are accepted as a less threatening, participant friendly, conducive environment for open discussions where participants feel embraced with a sense of belonging and cohesiveness (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub 1996, Peters, 1993). It facilitates creating a space where participants feel free to articulate personal problems and provide possible solutions (Duggleby 2005). This method seemed appropriate to be a method for collecting information from the research collaborators who could engage in conversation with one another in a small group and in a safe and secure environment. Soon after having articulated their personal thoughts, perspectives and experiences at an individual level during the Feminist Interviews and Informal Encounters, it seemed appropriate for them to come together for broader engagement and interaction in small groups on sensitive issues and to create a relationship of trust and solidarity amongst the research collaborators. These small groups are a way of creating foundations of mutual respect, solidarity, belongingness, cohesiveness and alignment as a preparation for the next method of data collection, Contextual Bible Study. I met 13 women in 3 small groups in different locations for the Focus Group Discussions.

Contextual Bible Study (CBS) is a resource, practice, and method within the trajectory of biblical liberation hermeneutics (West 2014: 2) that brings together biblical scholars and ordinary readers into a partnership of reading the Bible and reflecting on what God speaks to



them through a collaborative reading of social context and biblical text (West & Zondi-Mabizela 2004: 9). As the name suggests, Context is an important aspect of CBS (West 2015: 241). It focusses on the systemic and structural dimensions of the reality of people with whom we dialogue. CBS offers resource and forum to analyse the different dimensions of context – socio-economic, religious, cultural, and geo-political. Context, having an important place in theology, gives priority to the economically disadvantaged, oppressed, and marginalised. It recognises the intersectional oppression of the poor, that includes gender, race/caste, class and sexuality (West 2015: 241). CBS is based on the See-Judge-Act process (West 1995: 188-1893, West 2015: 243). The interpretative process moves from the social analysis (See) to biblical reflection (Judge) to social action (Act). CBS gives epistemic privilege to the ordinary readers of the Bible by engaging with them and including their wisdom and knowledge in theology. Developed by Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal over a period of more than thirty years of community-based work, CBS inhabits a collaborative nexus, that facilitates building a collaborative relationship between the epistemology of the poor and marginalised and the critical capacities of socially engaged biblical scholars for collaborative biblical reading, interpretation and collaborative ‘doing’ of theology (West 2014 :1, 2, West 2015: 242). It facilitates the threefold movement from embodied theology to people’s theology to prophetic theology (West 2015: 242, 243). CBS is dialogical. The process brings the context and the text into dialogue, focussing on a particular aspect of lived context (West 2014: 2). The emphasis in CBS is reading the Bible ‘with’ the study participants (local communities), who interpret the text within their socio-cultural-economic contexts (West 2015: 245). The process works towards transformation in the lives of the participants as individuals and as a collective/ community.

For the purpose of this research, CBS was designed to collaborate with migrant and working women with experiences of trafficking and vulnerability to it, who are given epistemic privilege to articulate their unheard and suppressed voices. Drawing from their lived experiences of vulnerability, exploitation and agency, the CBS workshop is meant to facilitate a process where women co-create theological knowledge and contribute to the formation of redemptive communities, where they have life in abundance (John 10.10) and live and thrive with dignity (West 2015: 238, 239). CBS is an appropriate method for this research as it enables facilitating women’s embodied experiences to become women’s theology. As a

researcher, I bring in resources of the contextual realities of vulnerable, trafficked, and migrant working women from the Literature Reviews, Feminist Interviews and Informal Encounters to the CBS along with theological resources for discussion in the CBS workshop. 13 women participated in the CBS workshop.

In this sub-section I described the research design and added in brief how they were implemented. In the next chapter, I have explained in detail a conceptual understanding and principles of methods employed in this research, Feminist Interviewing, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussion and Contextual Bible Study. I briefly describe the importance of these methods and how it coheres into this critical participatory feminist approach. I explain how each of them fit into the research paradigm and how the sequence of movement from one to the other fits well in the overall research design. The research process, which is a significant aspect and contribution of this research, is detailed in the next chapter.

### **5.3.2 Research Questions**

The research questions, within each of the research methods, are framed based on the objective of this research, the context of the research collaborators and the broader issues that affects the lives of diasporic women from the Global South, who have the experiences of trafficking and vulnerability to it. The purpose of this research is to understand the conceptual components of embodied dignity within the context of trafficking, migration and labour. It explores aspects of what it means for vulnerable migrant working women in the informal economy to affirm their agency and dignity. In the context of the public perception of women engaged in indecent work, that dehumanises their work and life, how do women survive and thrive making the best use of their working and living conditions in host communities? What do conflicting experiences of subjugation and freedom mean to them, and how do they move from situations of subjugation to freedom and how do they address both experiences in their daily lives?

To utilise women's experiences as empirical, theoretical and theological sources with a commitment to advance benefit of migrant women working in informal economy, the research questions were framed in line with the research problem, research objectives and theoretical and theological foundations. In the next chapter, I explain in detail how feminist theory and the practice of feminist narrative method shape these questions. I detail how the

religious/ theological aspects are woven into the shape of these questions. The key research question and questions for Feminist Interviews and Contextual Bible Study can be found in the Appendix I, II and III respectively.

### **5.3.3 Ethics, Confidentiality and Informed Consent**

In this section, I describe the ethical and methodological principles undertaken in this study. I have followed the ethics clearance process as required by the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I have acknowledged other people's work and avoided any form of plagiarism. To the best of my knowledge, I have ensured that the research process is done with integrity and honesty. Much care and emphasis are given to ensure that women find the Interview to be a helpful, supportive and an insightful experience. I have to the best of my knowledge, utilised my skills and training as a facilitator and counsellor to sensitively deal with their experience of sharing pain and suffering. I kept the well-being of each participant at the centre of all interviews. The interviews were facilitated to listen to positive experiences of empowerment and strategies of survival. The participants had the choices to decline sharing any negative experience if they felt that reliving those experiences would cause them harm or discomfort. This gives informed choice and freedom to the interviewees to share their experiences with trust and dignity.

At the very outset, I shared with each participants the purpose and process of the research and emphasised their role not just as informants but as research collaborators. After completing the interviews, I shared with them the next stage of the research, the Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study workshop. I assured them that these workshops would be done keeping the dignity of the participants at the centre of all discourse and research engagement. Informed consent of all participants was taken before the Interviews, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study workshop. The Informal Encounters, that emerged during the research process, was carried out with participants that wanted to engage at a deeper level in their work settings.

Several studies have also examined whether victims of violence experience any benefits from participating in trauma research—something positive, above and beyond the absence of distress. In qualitative studies, victims of violence report that participating in research yields positive outcomes as it provides them with the opportunity to talk about their traumatic experiences with an interested listener (Bergen 1993, 1996; Draucker 1999; DuMont &

Stermac 1996; Martin et al., 1999). Victims find it helpful to talk about their victimization and be heard and validated (Becker-Blease & Freyd, 2006; Hutchinson, Wilson, & Wilson, 1994). I believe that besides sharing the lived experiences of challenges faced, the sharing of positive experiences is empowering and liberative and hence I have given careful attention of listening to both conflicting experiences of subjugation and empowerment, of domination and freedom. I have employed open-ended questions for them to have the power to decide what they would like to share. The open-ended questions are followed by prompting questions, yet much care is given to be sensitive enough not to probe too deep into experiences that they are not comfortable to share.

Some researchers who have drawn upon feminist interviewing techniques have reported positive interview experiences among their participants (Bergen, 1993, 1996; Renzetti, 1997). I have to the best of my knowledge effectively used this technique both for the benefit of the research as well as those interviewed. The feedback I received from the interviewed, affirmed that the process was done in their best interest. In order to, ensure positive outcome experiences of the participants and merit explicit empirical examination, I took conscious efforts to reduce the hierarchy in the researcher and the researched relationship by engaging in mutual consultation, dialogue and disclosure (Acker, Barry, & Esseveld 1983). Much effort has been taken to equalise the power imbalance between me and the research collaborators. Therefore, I did not just ask questions, but made every effort to make myself known and visible to them. They were given space to ask questions about me so as to allow participants to see into the world of the researcher, both personally and professionally (Bergen 1993). After the initial introduction of the researcher and after sharing the purpose of the research with women, I gave some time and space for them to reflect and ask any question on the research. I have made conscious efforts to give substantive control to the participants, which was intended to be particularly impactful for trauma survivors and those in margins because reinstating control is fundamental to the recovery process (Oakley 1988, Herman 1992) and beneficial for the purpose of the research. This research gives as much importance to the process as to the outcome, since the outcome is not the end, but a beginning for a liberatory feminist theological discourse.

Feminist interviewers should provide information to their participants and help normalize their experiences (Campbell, Adams, Wasco, and Sefl 2010). A great deal of feminist

scholarship focuses on oppressive experiences in women's lives and their social and cultural isolation. Therefore, women often want to know if what they are experiencing is 'normal' (Gorelick 1996; Vaughan 1986). For each participant to trust in the research process, I allowed them to narrate their experiences in their comfortable pace and flow, rather than moving to the next questions after they answered to my research questions. This made them feel comfortable and at ease. I avoided focussing too much attention on too many details and requirements of the research while they were speaking in the interviews. The probing questions were asked as deemed necessary. This helped them feel less isolated and uncomfortable. Gorelick notes that such interactions help reveal "the pathology of the normal" (1996: 27), which may be particularly beneficial for trauma survivors bogged down in self-doubt and self-blame.

I kept myself prepared in case of any situation in which any participant might become angry, confused or possibly break down while sharing their stories, as feminist interviewing attunes to the emotionality of women's lived experiences (Devault 1996, 1997; Fonow & Cook 1991; Jaggard 1989). My previous professional experiences as a facilitator of workshops, and my personal engagement especially with vulnerable children, women and communities in the margins, helped me engage with much sensitivity and care. Being a trained therapeutic Counsellor, I have the skills to manage people who have experienced trauma. These skills and experiences added value in this academic Participatory Research. Therefore, I was prepared and found myself in a relatively comfortable position to use my counselling skills if needed. None of the participants during the Feminist Interviews showed any form of extreme emotions, as I was cautious to give them the space to articulate and express in the flow they were comfortable in. The process was not rigid, we had casual conversations and had tea in between questions and turned off the tape when they did not want their interviews to be audio recorded. This not only made them feel comfortable but also gave them time to reflect before moving to the next questions. A space of respect, value and dignity is of utmost importance during personal interviews, as this builds the trust between the interviewer and the interviewed. The relationship established during the interviews became the foundation for the next research processes, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study. The same principles were followed for the entire research process.

For the Contextual Bible Study workshop, I engaged in pre-consultation meetings with the collaborators to ensure their collaboration in true spirit of the word. The Focus Group Discussions and the Informal Encounters, as I detail out in the next chapter, enabled us to strengthen our research relationships as collaborators. By adapting a feminist approach in this research, I recognised and validated women's individual and collective experiences. Each one of them had unique experiences and yet each one of them had diverse intersectional experiences of gender, class, ethnicity and labour, that brought them together in solidarity with one another. A feminist approach in a Contextual Bible Study workshop meant breaking down all barriers to women's participation in the research, including the existence of any power imbalance between the researcher and the collaborators. This was achieved by facilitating a process where ground rules were established to listen, respect and value each one's contribution to knowledge production and to the doing of theology. A collaborative effort means each collaborator contributes and their contributions are valued.

Feminist Research differs from traditional research. It begins with the standpoints and experiences of women. Feminist methods are employed to best fit the purpose of the research and the context of the collaborators. Therefore, Contextual Bible Study workshop was guided by the context and purpose of the research. Since, there is no one single method or strategy of doing Feminist Research, the methodological choices and strategies were flexible in this research. By considering the context, preferences and sensitivity of the collaborators (Greaves et al., 1995: 334), I engaged in pre-workshop (CBS) consultations with the research collaborators. The Contextual Bible Study brought together the women who have participated in the Feminist Interviews and Focus Group Discussions, some of whom had participated in the Informal Encounters. Their collective knowledge and wisdom are critical to this research. This research does not claim to speak for all diasporic or trafficked women but can claim that it is grounded in the realities of these particular women's individual and collective experiences. The coming together and reflecting on the book of Ruth in the Contextual Bible Study workshop itself turned out to be a powerful and engaging process. The ownership of the process began with them getting involved in the decision-making process, beginning with their inputs on how and where the workshop should be conducted. This sharing of power and decision-making reinforced their role as collaborators of the research. In the next chapter on the Research Process, I elaborate on how they collectively engaged,

participated and contributed to the Contextual Bible Study and how this research is grounded by feminist principles.

I utilised the principles of Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) for the Contextual Bible Study workshop. I worked on establishing new forms of collaborative relationships with the participants to break down power imbalances, to empower them and to amplify their voice. With a firm belief that women must have agency to share their wisdom and knowledge that comes from their lived experiences, I engaged with them to get their expertise to contribute to the production of knowledge and theology. This is a moral, ideological and political choice and the collaborators are informed about this from the outset of the research. They experience their 'power-within' during the research process as their voices get amplified and their agency fostered. By not limiting their role as informants and subjects, the collaborators themselves set the agenda, guide the process and control the outcomes of the research together with the researcher. They were given the space to direct the flow of the research, as I kept facilitating the process keeping the purpose of the research at the centre all along.

By taking an intersectional approach to locate their identity and experiences of exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation, the research process affirms their dignity and agency in sharing their diverse and conflicting experiences of subjugation and freedom. Since, this research aims to build the capacity of women to foster solidarity and collective action, the collective exercises such as in the Focus Group Discussions and CBS workshop consciously worked on shifting power from the researcher to the collaborator (subject). The collaborators co-owned, co-managed and co-controlled the process and outcome of the research in safe and sacred spaces that fostered a bond of sisterhood, solidarity and community.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

The transformative power of knowledge production is demonstrated in and through the research process (Cook & Fonow 1986: 24). Feminist methodologies lay emphasis on processes that create alternative to oppression. It is agentive, liberative and empowering. Feminist sociologists engage in feminist methodologies to discover more about the nature of women's lives that are usually hidden or unheard. As Cook & Fonow (1986:12) expound,

Feminism is a vision of freedom as future intention, and this vision must indicate which facts from the present are necessary knowledge for liberation. Description without an eye for transformation is inherently conservative and portrays the subject as acted-upon rather than as an actor or potential actor.

By placing women at the centre of inquiry and by collaborating with them to learn, this Critical Social Research within a feminist paradigm utilises the everyday life experiences of women that has been marginalised by traditional systems of knowledge production, in sociology and theology. The research methodologies utilised in this research has engaged with 'notions of consciousness', 'feminist consciousness', 'consciousness raising' and group solidarity (Cook & Fonow 1986: 22,23)

Judith Cook and Mary Fonow (1986: 22-23) reinforce the feminist notions of inquiry and its potential for bringing about social change:

Acknowledging the pervasive significance of gender entails several ideas, and the most uniquely feminist of these notions is that women are placed in the center of inquiry. Moreover, attending to the basic significance of gender involves accounting for the everyday life experiences of women which have been neglected by traditional sociology. Feminist sociologists are creating an understanding of the taken-for-granted, mundane aspects of social reality that oppress women and the daily occurrences which reinforce male domination .... The emphasis on consciousness-raising is related to its ability to uncover aspects of social reality that were not previously visible, tying in with feminist methodology's focus on the taken-for-granted. However, another reason for the concern with consciousness-raising is its potential for stimulating social change, relating it to yet another feminist epistemological notion. Finally, the idea of a feminist consciousness which sees both "apparent reality" and the contradictions underlying it stems from the experiences of feminist investigators who are continually forced to confront their own double consciousness in the process of conducting research.

The research design and the research process have stretched the boundaries of what constitutes traditional, rigid and objective research. By engaging in more than one method of



knowledge production and by adapting flexible tools for listening to their narratives of lived experiences, this research is self-reflexive, collaborative and committed to a research process which is empowering. It is designed for women rather than limited for the purpose of the research itself. It is broad and flexible and not limited in its approach. The articulation of voices is sequentially developed through a process, and their knowledge utilised by engaging in participative dialogical and critical analytical processes. I have learned extensively from the contributions of my research collaborators who have deepened my knowledge in how research within a feminist paradigm must be practiced and how knowledge must be produced utilising their lived experiences, their skills, resources and knowledge.

The next chapter delves into the research process in more detail, elaborating on the knowledge production process through Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study. I begin by introducing the research collaborators and the sampling process, the role of the gatekeeper and the reason for changing the strategy of selection of participants. Thereafter, I describe the principles of research methods and share how they were applied in the research process.

## Chapter 6

### Research Process: The Realities of Doing Critical Feminist Research

#### 6.0 Introduction

The previous chapter focussed on the politics and transformative power of knowledge production. Thereafter, I introduced the research paradigm, laying the foundations of Critical Social Research, Qualitative Research and Feminist Research that are adapted for this research. I argued why each of these tenets are important for this research. This section was followed by a section on the research design and methodology used for this research.

In this chapter, I describe the realities of doing this research and mention how the research process coheres with the research design. Again, I foreground process. I begin by presenting how the research process is embedded and practiced with feminist values and principles. Drawing from feminist epistemology there are key aspects of the research process that I highlight in this chapter. Research process is an important aspect in Feminist Qualitative Research. I am committed as much to the process as to the outcome of this research, which is both aspirational and challenging. By embedding feminist values in the research process, I lay emphasis on an ethically sound approach that collaborates with women whose experiences of migration, trafficking, vulnerability, exploitation and work are in-dignified and sensitive issues for discussion. Thereafter, I describe how the sampling of the research participants was done. The process of identifying the research participants and building epistemological relationship with the knowledge contributors and dialogue partners required investing quality time to engage with them and to develop mutual trust and respect. It included finding creative ways of working and engaging with women, some planned while others were spontaneous and evolving. It also meant investing additional time and resources that were not planned initially. This was done to make women comfortable to understand the importance of this research and their contribution to it. To build horizontal collaborations, it meant valuing relationships and decentralising power to have informed and active participation of women. The processes of inclusivity, contextualising, learning together, discovering meanings, sharing identities and being responsive to each other, is a conscious effort I adapted to put strong feminist values, principles and politics into the research practice. I took efforts to break power and hierarchies in research relationship between the

researched and researcher. The research participants gracefully transformed to being research collaborators during these processes. I describe these processes specifically in the first three sections of this chapter where I describe how I adapt an ethical, empowering and participatory research process to listen to and engage with the dialogue partners, unpacking the binaries of objectivity and subjectivity.

In the fourth section, I draw attention to how the conversations with the knowledge and dialogue partners were hosted and harvested using the research methods of Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study. This important section delves deep into the methods engaged in gathering resources and constructing knowledge along with the research collaborators. I describe how each of the research components align with the research design and the logic behind the sequence of the research process. Thereafter, I describe the process of working with the research collaborators. I elaborate on the role of the research collaborators and the researcher in the planning, organising, and producing of knowledge required for this research. Since this research deals with women on a sensitive issue, maximising their participation at all levels is very important for them to own the process and outcome of this research.

### **6.1 Research Process: Embedding Feminist Values and Principles in the Research Process**

This research, being inspired by Critical Social Research, aims to facilitate a process of change within the society for the betterment and emancipation of those that the research is focussed on (Henn et al. 2009: 27). By taking a critical approach to social research, this research adapts a research process that reflects feminist values and principles. It empowers women to contribute to knowledge production. By incorporating feminist values, thoughts and epistemology, this research is inclusive in nature and brings the standpoint of oppressed women to the centre of all discourse and analysis. This is done by inviting the research participants to be the collaborators and dialogue partners in the research, using participatory tools for learning, sharing and knowledge production. The agency of women is practiced and determined here by creating an enabling and empowering space that respects their autonomy, choice, knowledge and meaningful engagement.

In their article, "Introduction: Feminist Values in Research", Katy Jenkins, Lata Narayanaswamy and Caroline Sweetman emphasise on the importance of infusing feminist

values within research processes where women have a central role in providing evidence of marginalisation and power inequalities and contribute towards decision making to address these engrained inequalities. They assert that a research process that empowers all those who participate in it reflects feminist values (Jenkins et al., 2019: 415) therefore they opine that,

To ensure international development supports women's rights and gender equality, it is essential that feminist values infuse and underpin every aspect of research. Feminist values in research may be understood in a variety of ways. The overarching goal is to create spaces and opportunities to reveal lived realities of power inequalities and difference and provide evidence that can be deployed in working towards addressing these engrained inequalities. Feminist values are most often deployed to challenge the continued marginalisation of poor women and girls from decision-making, resources, and opportunities in a range of contexts.

With the aim to understand the issues that make women vulnerable to trafficking while seeking work and a better life in cities, for this research I collaborated with women who have had experiences of trafficking, marginalisation and exploitation and who now work in the informal economy, in Massage Parlours, Spas and Beauty Salons. Women working in the informal economy from the Global South remain vulnerable not only to trafficking but also to other forms of labour exploitation, including systemic and structural failures that are essential for workers protection and rights. This research explores how women utilise their agency, faith and collective solidarity to overcome barriers of exploitation, coercion and deception towards their emancipation and empowerment. It examines how the most marginalised, vulnerable and trafficked migrant women find opportunities to create spaces for resistance, as individuals and together as friends. It investigates how they organise as small groups or as a collective to resist and utilise their power-within and agency to negotiate with those who assert power over them. Therefore, this research explores the empowering strategies and resources of the vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women. It studies their individual and collective resistance strategies and social solidarities. It explores how they form solidarity groups (unstructured and loose) to face challenges and to empower themselves as a

collective. It also examines how women challenge the in-built patriarchal norms and practices that demean their human dignity and worth.

The research attempts, as mentioned earlier in the previous chapters, to have an insider perspective from the women themselves, instead of following the stereotypical infantilised image of women trafficked, tortured, and exploited in the brothels or in the massage parlours (Kempadoo 2015: 13). The broader aim is to influence public perception and inform policy, praxis, research, advocacy and theology. The stereotypical sensational image most often tends to influence policy and praxis from a narrow victim-centred approach, which is necessary, but I argue here that an over-emphasis on victim-centred approach takes away the larger focus of addressing the structural and causal factors that push women to migrate out of their homelands and move to the network of a globalised order, what Saskia Sassen (2002: 503-524) calls the “counter-geographies of globalisation”. It also overlooks the protection and promotion of human rights of trafficked people and the labour rights of people working in the informal economy, especially women working in the already hyper-sexualised industry like Massage Parlours and Spas. I argue that aspects of equity, social security and protection, just and favourable working conditions, fair remuneration and decent work cannot be undermined while working on addressing women’s vulnerabilities to trafficking.

The research design has thus been prepared considering the factors contributing to trafficking in women, especially those who work in the shadow economy. The unorganised nature of this work force and the organised criminal network of human trafficking makes women vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. In this research, emphasis is given to explore the strategies of empowerment and utilisation of agency that women employ to break free from barriers that subordinate them and how they work towards fulfilling their aspirations for a better life. Therefore, embedding feminist values and principles in the research process is an important aspect of knowledge production.

## **6.2 Sampling: Identifying Research Participants**

In this section, I delve into the process of the selection of research participants, the role of gatekeeper and researcher. Arber (1993 :73) states that in Qualitative Research, the primary goal for the researcher is to understand the social processes rather than obtaining a

representative sample. According to Berg (2001: 30), the logic of using a sample of subjects in research is “to make inferences about some larger population from a smaller one - the sample”. I identified migrant working women, with previous experiences of vulnerability and exploitation to trafficking, who now live in the city of Bangalore, India and work in Massage Parlours and Spas.

Sampling is a strategic choice as it has a vital role in the research. It is a necessary step in terms of who to choose for the purpose of the research. Tracey (2013: 134) mentions that a sampling plan is a design that requires choosing people to interview who can contribute to the emerging research goals. However, identifying participants that have in-depth knowledge and experience to contribute to this research was not an easy process. The research topic is a sensitive one and the populations are difficult to reach. It was a challenging and time-consuming process. Having the right sample that would align with the emerging research goals also meant choosing location for the study, finding participants who would be available for an intensive qualitative process and who would articulate their thoughts and knowledge. English was the language of preference. The plan was to identify 8-12 women participants who have experienced vulnerabilities and exploitation of trafficking and migration. I identified 13 women who actively participated and contributed to this research process. This process is affirmed by Steven Taylor, Robert Bogdan and Marjorie DeVault in their book, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource*, who explain that ((Steven et al., 2016: 31),

Just as qualitative researchers begin a study with general research questions and interests, they usually do not have a rigid plan regarding nature and number of cases— settings or informants to be studied...Although qualitative researchers typically start with a general idea of how many settings or people they intend to study, they define their samples on an ongoing basis as the studies progress.

In this study, I used non-probability sampling and applied purposeful and snowball sampling to identify research participants. Sampling in Qualitative Research proceeds differently in contrast to quantitative research due to the difference in its purpose and approach (Newman 2014:247). Using the word ‘sampling’ can create confusion in Qualitative Research due to the same reason (Luker 2008:101). The research participants for this study are not just samples

for collecting data. They provide insight and understanding about the social world that they inhabit, the challenges they face in their everyday lives and the strategies they adapt to address those challenges. They deepen our understanding of the processes they adapt both to resiliently inhabit and liberate themselves from situations and systems that oppress and exploit them. They inform about their strategies of empowerment that enable them to strive for a life that they aspire to.

In this research, women transition from being research participants to research collaborators as their level of engagement, participation and contribution becomes increasingly intense within the research process. In Qualitative Research, the selection of the participants is based on their relevance to the research topic rather than mere representation (Flick 1998: 41). They provide clarity, insight, valuable information and new aspects about issues or relationships in their social world. They provide deeper understanding of larger processes in complex situations, events, or relationships. They “shine light into” key dimensions or processes in a complex social life (Newman 2014: 247).

Non-probability sampling tends to be the norm from the perspective of Qualitative Research. Non-probability samples “offers the benefits of not requiring a list of all possible elements in a full population, and the ability to access otherwise highly sensitive or difficult to research study populations” (Berg 2001: 32). Trafficked and migrant women working in Spas and Massage Parlours, are a vulnerable population. The experiences of trafficking and the nature of work in massage parlours are both associated with shame and stigma, with the assumption that women have been subject to sexual exploitation, which is a taboo subject. The stigmatised notion of women as “vagrants” (Sanghera 2005: 3-11; Desyllas 2007: 57-62), who are understood to be co-conspirators and willing collaborators in their trafficking and exploitation, is not an understatement. The hypersexualised image of trafficked women or of women working in Massage Parlours also contributes to the vulnerable nature of the population.

Purposeful sampling is commonly used in Qualitative Research. It helped me to identify and select research participants that have rich-information, experience, and knowledge on the research topic (Patton 2002; Cresswell & Plano Clark 2011). Tracey (2013: 134) mentions that good qualitative researchers “engage in purposeful sampling, which means that they

purposefully choose data that fit the parameters of the project's research questions, goals, and purposes". The purpose of this research is to understand the lived experiences of women who have been vulnerable to trafficking and have been in situations of exploitation due to trafficking and/ or for labour migration.

As I detail the process of finalising the participants, later in this section, I concur with Berg (2001: 32) that using my discernment as a researcher to purposefully chose who I would collaborate with for this research proved beneficial, rather than just working with participants, for example, that were being identified by the gatekeeper. I discerned that some of the identified participants would not be able to effectively contribute to the research, not because they lacked knowledge or articulation skills, but because as new migrants they were fearful and under constant surveillance of their employer. To this effect, Berg (2001: 32) points out that purposeful sampling, which is sometimes called judgemental sampling, allows researchers to "use their special knowledge or expertise about some group to select subjects who represent this population". He further adds that,

In some instances, purposive samples are selected after field investigations on some group, in order to ensure that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study.

Purposive sampling is a non-random judgemental sampling type best suited for specific situation and purpose. It helped me to select cases within a highly specific and difficult-to reach population (Newman 2014: 273). Purposive sampling enabled me to identify women who would not otherwise be available in sufficient numbers to be meaningful under more traditional random techniques (Glassner et al., 1983). The experiences, insights, and contribution of these women to the phenomenon of this study has been remarkable due to purposive sampling. I now elaborate the rigour in the selection process of the sample that was done purposefully.



My gatekeeper<sup>75</sup> works with trafficked and migrant women and men from the North-Eastern States of India when they report harassment and exploitation as migrants. The work focuses on responding to immediate crisis. Therefore, to identify women who have had experiences of vulnerability to trafficking was not an easy task. The survivors of violence that she had worked with had moved on and were not in contact with her. For this research, I wanted to work with women who were not currently in trafficked situations. The research purpose is to understand the lived experiences and journeys of women who have utilised their agency in situations of vulnerabilities and exploitation and have journeyed towards living a life with dignity. Therefore, there was a deliberate shift in the process of selecting the research participants when I observed this gap in the research site.

My gatekeeper first introduced me to the owner of a Beauty and Massage Parlour who was hesitant to let her employees participate in the research process in any space outside of her surveillance. We spent some time with her first in her Beauty and Massage Parlour. We then went in for a foot massage and pedicure in order to look for opportunities for casual conversations and rapport building with her employees. Most of them seemed new to the city, less than a year, and lacked the freedom to speak in front of their employer. They lived in accommodation arranged by their employer. They were conscious of being under surveillance and hence spoke little. Their silence, facial and eye expressions, spoke volumes. We knew that even on their off-days (if they had off-days) they would not be able to give time to the research process without the approval of the employer. The first learning from this visit was to purposefully find, engage and work with women who are not similarly constrained and who were able to take decisions for themselves, who would be willing and able to freely participate in the research process. I was purposefully looking for women with whom I could establish contact outside the direct control and surveillance of their employers.

A week passed and we did not find any contacts who could find the kind of participants required for the purpose of this research. I began feeling frustrated and therefore took an appointment in the Spa of a reputed hotel in Bangalore for a body massage. Karen (pseudonym/ name changed), a cheerful young woman, was my therapist. We spoke during

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the session, she shared about herself, and I shared about the purpose of my visit to Bangalore. Karen understood the purpose and process of my research. After extensive conversation, Karen took an interest for participating in the research. Despite her very demanding work schedule Karen not only confirmed her participation but later she brought along a friend of hers, Cynthia (pseudonym/ name changed), to be a research participant who further brought in Hannah (pseudonym/ name changed).

A week after, my gatekeeper introduced me to the Pastor of a Church in Koramangla, in the suburbs of Bangalore. He has communicants in his congregation who fitted well into the category necessary to be participants for this research. Initially, he thought that I was from a funding agency who could support his work amongst the migrant women and children. I briefed him about my research. Later, he arranged for five women from his congregation to be the research participants: Esther, Allana, Monica, Joanna and Susanna (pseudonyms/ names changed).

A few days after, I met Martha (pseudonym/ name changed) in a shopping mall. She works as a store manager of a cosmetic company. We had a casual conversation as she showed me the products she had. She is from Manipur and had been in the city of Bangalore for a few years. I mentioned to her my purpose for being in Bangalore. She showed her interest in being a part of the research. A former Spa therapist with experiences of vulnerability, courage, resilience and agency, I was glad to have her consent, as she is a very articulate and well-informed research participant.

After a few days, one of my gatekeeper's team members located a former contact of theirs whom they had helped earlier. Mary (pseudonym/ name changed) worked in a Spa as a hair stylist and massage therapist. Mary introduced Achui (pseudonym/ name changed) and then they introduced two more friends of theirs, Stella and Salome (pseudonyms/ names changed). As I have demonstrated, purposive sampling was appropriate for the purpose of this research which paved way for snowball sampling.

I used snowball sampling in this research. Snowball sampling is another form of non-probability sampling, and sometimes the best way "to locate subjects with certain attributes or characteristics necessary in research" (Berg 2001: 33). Since the research topic is a sensitive one, it was difficult to get participants best suited for this research. Snowball sampling is a

method that gives access to difficult-to-access or hidden populations. This type of sampling helps working with marginalised and sensitive populations (Tracy 2013 :136). Snowball sampling helped me to have access to some more of the difficult to reach populations. They were comfortable to be part of a research process in which their friends had become interested in as research participants. The sample/ research participants identified earlier, brought in their friends, colleagues and acquaintances and snowballed from a few participants to a few more who were relevant for this research.

Snowball sampling, Henn et al., (2009: 157) suggest is used where,

there is no obvious list to refer to in order to generate a participant base for a study. It relies on the researcher obtaining a strategically important contact who can recommend other possible participants who might be approached to take part in the study.

Since this research required working with women, some of whom had experienced trafficking, and all of whom are now engaged in some type of 'indecent work', having participants who had been referred by a friend and who were known to each other made good sense. Some of them lived in nearby localities or worked in the same Spa which was helpful for me to have small focus groups.

I had Informal Encounters with five women in their natural work settings. The Informal Encounters evolved with time and were not part of the research design. However, these intense encounters proved beneficial for the research. During the individual Feminist Interviews, I met with each of them in a setting in which they felt comfortable. For the Focus Group Discussions, I clustered them into three small groups in the localities that were nearer to their workplaces. I then had one full day of doing a Contextual Bible Study workshop with them all in a central location. I worked with the same participants throughout the research as they engaged as research collaborators providing in-depth knowledge to the research. In total, I have 13 women between the age of 25- 35 years, who participated in Feminist Interviews, Focus Groups and Contextual Bible Study. Out of the 13 women, I had Informal Encounters with 5 women. They were articulate, available, expressive and reflective.

From the outset, I explained to each of them the purpose and process of the research and invited them to be my research collaborators. All the research participants and collaborators had the following in common: they are not new migrants into the city. Each one of them had experiences of vulnerability and exploitation as trafficked and/ or as migrant women working in the informal economy. They also had positive experiences of utilising their agency to affirm their rights and dignity to fulfil their aspirations for a better life and secured future. A list of research collaborators with their names (pseudonym) and description of work is available in Appendix IV.

### **6.3 Adapting an Ethical, Empowering, and Participatory Research Process**

I begin this section by highlighting the importance of adapting an ethical, empowering, and participatory research process, which includes building epistemological research relationship with the research collaborators. I elaborate on the knowledge production process with my dialogue partners and research collaborators and describe the benefits of taking conscious effort to empower women in the research process. Getting them involved in the planning process itself meant giving them the power to plan and contribute to the research not as mere objects of the research but as active participants and contributors to the knowledge produced. Thereafter, I share the benefits of using participatory approach and tools for this research, the importance of creating safe and sacred spaces, the importance of facilitation and listening in the knowledge production process, which is not just a means of collecting data but with a clear intent to change power relations and inequality to establish collaborative research relations. My role as a facilitator has been in creating safe, secured, sacred, enabling and empowering spaces where they are able to comfortably articulate their lived experiences in a non-judgemental environment. These are spaces for articulation, sharing, dialogue and listening to one another for building empathy and solidarity for collective action and just praxis.

Vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women are the focus of this research. By locating the case for a Feminist Methodology within the tradition of Critical Social Research, this study is foregrounded on Feminist Standpoint Theory as postulated by scholars like Dorothy Smith (1987) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 2000). This study is rooted on the ideological position that women in the margins have knowledge to contribute from their lived experiences. This

research process challenges male hegemony and the intellect of the elite by empowering women from the margins to be collaborators in knowledge production. The process of inquiry is reflexive, political and begins with their experiences and standpoint (Smith 1992: 94). The feminist standpoint epistemology emphasises bringing the excluded voices and views of the oppressed to the centre of discourse and analysis. By starting critical enquiry from the lived experiences of trafficked and migrant working women, I invite them to collaborate with me in doing theology and producing knowledge together with me by adapting an ethical, empowering, and emancipatory research process. From my first meeting with the research participants, I informed them about the purpose and process of this research. I discussed with them how their voices, experiences and their standpoint would be utilised.

I assured them of maintaining anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy. The research participants remain anonymous in this thesis. I have assured them that I will never name them in any other publication either. To ensure that they are unidentifiable and protected from any harm, I have used pseudonyms. I have avoided naming exact locations of their residences, names of workplaces, or shelter homes where some of them have stayed after being rescued from trafficked situations. To keep this research ethically sound and to maintain accountability towards the participants, I have assured them to maintain a high degree of confidentiality. Some of the participants shared sensitive personal experiences during the Interviews and upon their request I have withheld what they shared in such instances, not using them in this thesis. I recognise and respect maintaining confidentiality as an active attempt to remove from the research any record that identifies the research participants. Maintaining confidentiality means that the researcher must hold the data in confidence and keep it from public consumption (Henn et al. 2009 :85, 86).

I have made conscious efforts to make them feel respected and valued, especially with respect to their sense of privacy, dignity and resources that they bring from their embodied experiences. I encouraged them to make suggestions and to voice their concerns and dissent during the research process, whenever they felt the need to. It is important to value them as resourceful contributors and collaborators to this research and not just objects of measurement.

Ruebhausen and Brim (1966: 432) acknowledge participant's right to privacy, which according to them involves the

freedom of the individual to pick and choose for themselves the time and circumstances under which, and the extent to which, their attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and opinions are to be shared with, or withheld from others.

At the heart of this research, I have practiced and maintained research ethics which respect the right of everyone who has participated and contributed to this research. From the start of the research process, I made efforts to establish an ethically sound relationship with each of the participants, which was reciprocated by them in the course of time. A reciprocal relationship of trust, individual value, respect, and dignity enabled breaking several barriers between the researcher and the research collaborators.

Their participation in this research is voluntary. I made them aware of why they were specifically chosen to be part of this research. After clarifying the objectives of the research, the sampling techniques, and expectation from them which includes their participation and contribution to knowledge production, I took their informed consent. They were encouraged and given space to ask questions or make their suggestions anytime during the research process. They were informed that they should feel free to withdraw from the research process at any time if they would like to. I informed them about their privilege and freedom to withdraw consent.

I have tried my best to keep this research process ethically sound and respectful to each of the participating women. In fact, I was grateful to receive their willing participation. They were excited to be part of this research. I was cautious not to infringe into areas that were sensitive to their culture and emotions. They spoke and shared their context and lived experiences out of their own sense of agency and discernment. Each time I met with them, I facilitated a process beginning with an introductory note or a lead question and gave them space to articulate their experience. The method of inquiry and participation was built around mutual trust, respect and dignity throughout the research process, specifically during the Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study workshop.

Research on a sensitive topic like this one can harm individuals in various ways, such as physically, psychologically, legally, and professionally. The SRA's (Social Research Association) Research Ethics Guidance maintain that (2021: 22),

Researchers should discuss and address potential harm to participants at the design/inception stage and include the outcome of these discussions in the research proposal/brief. However, not all risks can be anticipated. So, a vital part of mitigating harm is to be aware of this throughout the research process. It may not be possible to avoid harm entirely, but it is possible to minimise it by being aware of the potential, by careful planning, and by responding promptly in the event of harm.

Therefore, even after having obtained informed and free consent from each woman participating in this research, it became my responsibility as a researcher to be sensitive and sensible towards any potential harm or discomfort of the participants. I was mindful and prepared to address any potentially harmful consequences, especially physical, psychological, social, or professional harm, that may have arisen from the research process. I was particularly sensitive to protecting them from any potential psychological harm associated with women speaking about their traumatic past. My training in Therapeutic Counselling and my skills and experience of facilitating several participatory processes and individual interviews on sensitive topics like this one was useful during this research process. With a "Do No Harm"<sup>76</sup> approach, I ensured that this research would draw on an ethically sound research approach by placing the rights, dignity, well-being, safety, security and best interests of the women during all discourse and engagement, including the choice of location of study.

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<sup>76</sup> Do No Harm is a leading tool for the application of conflict sensitivity. Conflict sensitivity recognizes that aid, whether development, peacebuilding, or humanitarian assistance, has the potential to support either conflict or peace. Practicing conflict sensitivity enables an organization to: Understand the context in which it is operating; Understand the interaction between the intervention and the context, and Act upon that understanding, to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts on the conflict. Conflict sensitivity does not require that all organizations focus on conflict and peace issues. Rather, it insists that all organizations and actors consider the unintended consequences of their programs on the relationships between groups of people in the context, and act to address those consequences.

Definition adapted from International Alert et al. (2004), *Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Peacebuilding: A Resource Pack*

<https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Do-No-Harm-A-Brief-Introduction-from-CDA.pdf>

The location for each meeting was fixed in consultation with women, spaces that they were comfortable for them to meet in. To respect their time, I ensured that they did not have to travel long distances for the meetings. Therefore, all the Formal Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions sites were selected closer to their residences or workplaces. The location for the Contextual Bible Study workshop was fixed in a central location that was convenient for all. I gave them travel allowances to avoid any financial demands being made on them, as indicated in the SRA's (Social Research Association) Research Ethics Guidance (2021: 23).

### **6.3.1 Building Research Relationship with the Research Participants**

To have a more comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of the research participants, I tried to capture their insights, knowledge and understanding of their real-world experiences and concerns by adapting different methods and ways of knowing the world that they inhabit that best suit their context. Having identified my research participants, often through individual informal encounters, I approached the study first by doing formal Feminist Interviews (FI) with each of the participants individually. This was followed by Informal Encounters (IE), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Contextual Bible Study (CBS).

After the initial time spent with the participants during the Interviews, there was a felt need to meet a few of them informally to have a deeper insight into their embodied experiences and perspectives. This was not a planned process of learning in the research design, but it evolved during the research process. For example, at the end of Formal Feminist Interview with one of the first participants, I felt the need to meet her another time. I began with exploring a meeting at her workplace to have a deeper insight into her work life. Soon after, I scheduled a few more appointments with other participants. I had five Informal Encounters that helped me meet women in their work settings. The Informal Encounters turned out to be an important aspect of the research. It helped me to strengthen the research relationship and to delve deeper into their lived experiences.

To build a just, feminist and effective epistemological relationship with the knowledge contributors and dialogue partners, I focussed on certain aspects throughout the research process. The key areas that have been carefully planned and implemented during the



research process include aspects of building rapport and relationship between the researcher and researched; inviting and empowering them to contribute and work together as research collaborators and not just be research participants; engaging in participatory methods of information gathering and knowledge construction; conscious efforts to break potential tension in power and hierarchies in research relationship while unpacking the binaries of objectivity and subjectivity.

In my first meeting with the research participants, I began with introducing myself to them. Thereafter, I shared my commitment to this academic research, the purpose of the research and the research design. Keeping in mind the political goals of feminism specifically in Qualitative Research, I tried to minimise the power imbalance between myself and the research collaborators. I shared with them my academic and theological experience and my professional and activist experience of working in the field of human trafficking, migration, labour and gender transformative programming, research, advocacy, program development and management. I acknowledged women as knowers and contributors to the knowledge production process and invited them to be collaborators in this research. I encouraged them to offer their resources from their lived experiences and knowledge gained from the analysis of their experiences.

The purpose of this first meeting was not limited to breaking barriers in hierarchical research relationships, but to value them as the major contributors and resources to this study. A combination of resources of the researched and the researcher enabled developing “collaborative knowledge-construction process” (Romm 1997: 6.4). By establishing “authentic relations” (Reinharz 1983: 186) with the research collaborators, I adapted an “interactive methodology” (Gelsthorpe 1992: 192) for knowledge production. By imbibing feminist principles, this research approach engaged with women as people and did not exploit them as “information giving beings” (Henn et al. 2009: 35) like traditional social research.

Harding (1987:8) suggests that the researcher be placed “in the same critical plane as the overt subject matter”. This helps the researcher to comprehend the experiences of the research participants while the researcher recognises their “own personal, cultural, political, and social biography” (Henn et al. 2009: 36), and its role in shaping the research. This research is about women who have been vulnerable to trafficking and now work as migrant women

working in the informal economy. I have no such experiences, though I have the experience of migration for work, as a researcher, social developmental professional and activist, but not as a worker in the informal economy. To set the tone and to initiate a conversation<sup>77</sup>, I shared with the participants my personal experiences of living and working as a woman in different cities. While I recognise that my lived experiences of migration and work in a world dominated by men and patriarchal mindsets may be very different than theirs, as I come from a relatively privileged background, I related to their experiences. I too have faced the challenges of working in male dominated and paternalistic circles. In my work in the humanitarian and social development sector, I have travelled to unfamiliar and sometimes dangerous areas, including extremely volatile and conflict-ridden places. I have experienced working in disaster affected areas getting relief work done and planning for long-term rehabilitation work in extremely difficult and remote locations. I have worked with vulnerable and excluded populations in places where the rate of crime against women is very high. I shared with them my fears, anxieties, vulnerabilities and challenges during such work travels and how I have faced those challenges and struggles. I mentioned to them that these lived experiences of mine have given me the strength, courage and confidence to take up my role as a social development practitioner and peace maker, sojourning with and working for vulnerable people and communities for transformational development and just praxis. Such work has often moved me out of my comfort zone, as I worked on issues that are attached with stigma and shame, such as HIV/AIDS and working with and for sex workers and their children for over more than two decades.

Exploring and sharing my experiences with my research collaborators enabled us to come to a common understanding of women's vulnerabilities in challenging situations. It created a relationship of trust and mutual respect. They were able to know me and understand the genuine approach that I was adapting for this research. By beginning with the sharing of my experiences of vulnerabilities, resilience, and agency, I opened spaces for comfortable

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<sup>77</sup> Finding the hidden population to speak and participate and speak in research like this was tough. Human Trafficking and women's experiences of working in Spas and Massage Parlours are stigmatized. Hence, there was a need to ease out tensions and barriers during the introductory session. Breaking boundaries that can possibly restrict women's articulation is essential to facilitate the process of them sharing their lived experiences.

articulation of insights and knowledge by the participants. I prioritised building a rapport and relationship of trust and congeniality. This was one of the initial steps of breaking barriers and hierarchy between the researcher and the researched. It facilitated building a foundation for a strong relationship between us and paved the way for articulation of nuanced and sensitive experiences and thoughts. They unfolded and shared many of their private experiences as the boundaries and hierarchy between me and them gradually reduced with time. A feminist approach is not just about breaking hierarchy in research relationships, it is also bringing their own (researchers) lives into the research process (Henn et al. 2009: 35, 36), enabling the researcher to “comprehend the experiences of their research participants, while sharing their own feelings and experiences.”

### **6.3.2 Unpacking the Binaries of Objectivity and Subjectivity**

Feminist researchers reject the “objectivist” stance of traditional research by recognising and appreciating that the cultural beliefs and practices of the researcher which must be visible and clearly articulated. They contend that the emancipatory goals of the researcher and their explicit subjective expression of their goals and practice makes the research an “honest politics” (Henn et al 2009: 32). This, they argue, increases the objectivity of the research. Mies (1993: 68) posits that feminist objectivity is akin to a “conscious partiality”. Reinharz (1992: 263) elaborates and challenges the impartial value of researchers,

I for one, feel most satisfied by a stance that acknowledges the researcher’s position right up front, and that does not think of objectivity and subjectivity as warring with each other. I have feminist distrust for research reports that include no statement about the researcher’s experience. Reading such reports, I feel that the researcher is hiding from me or does not know how important personal experience is. Such reports seem woefully incomplete and even dishonest.

Feminists (Millen 1997, Kelly et al. 1994) have drawn attention towards the differences between the researched and researcher, even in a less hierarchical relationship. To be seen as different is a given in research of this kind. Henn et al. (2009: 38) argue that,

given that social researchers are part of an academic community, with very highly developed knowledge and skills, while they may not be superior to their research

participants, they will always be seen as different. It is an illusion to think that ... participants can have anything approaching 'equal' knowledge to the researcher.

The relationship established during the research process was collaborative. The participants valued my role as a practitioner, activist and an academic researcher, who despite not being one of them, had a moral political commitment for the advancement and pursuit of their rights and dignity. They appreciated my research approach and the way I established a collaborative relationship with them. They were clearly able to see and understand the nature of investment I was making as a researcher, in them as people with knowledge and not just as sources of data collection and information gathering. They appreciated that every time I met with them formally and causally, I came prepared with how to approach the sessions and interactions. Yet I was not rigid about gathering information in a prescribed format. I was flexible and followed their flow and pace, listening and making space for them in their presence and articulations. Adapting to their context and comfort was key to exploring and understanding their lives. I attempted to find a balance between building rapport and the research relationship, believing that in Feminist Research being too personal and over familiar with research participants/ interviewees/ collaborators can be exploitative and harmful. Instead, a relationship of mutual trust and respect based on providing truthful information about the research purpose and process was non-negotiable. However, I gave them the space to crack jokes and present their experiences with fun as they recalled even frightful experiences and the way they approached those situations. Not following an order for articulation, brought in different and interesting ways of women's articulations. As a researcher, I experienced having control over when to speak and when not to is important so that each one of them takes their pace to speak, especially in the narrative interviews.

In Qualitative Research, with a closer degree of engagement with the research participants, sensitivity to the rights of the participants as people is ensured, not as objects of research, but as collaborators (Henn et al. 2009: 37). While traditional research separates the value of the researcher from the objectives of the research, as a Feminist Researcher I consciously adapted political research goals and acknowledged the intrinsically subjective character of all knowledge creation. Henn et al. (2009:31) recognise that feminists' and critical social researchers' way of knowing is "to look from somewhere and not from nowhere". They posit

that the research of feminist and critical social researchers is a moral-political activity where the researcher commits to a value position and is not value free.

### **6.3.3 Listening as a Strategy to Empower Women to Speak and their Voices Heard**

To me, this research is an academic pursuit with a deep moral-political commitment to utilise my experience, knowledge and skills to participate and learn from the struggles of vulnerable women, who while aspiring for a better life, tend to be victims of underlying structures that “maintain and perpetuate an unequal distribution of resources and power, resulting in the exploitation and oppression of the majority by an elite minority” (Henn et al. 2009: 29). I have used my skills of working with people, especially women, in the process of knowledge creation. Henn et al (2009:29) note that “the researcher’s skills in the field of knowledge creation should be used to advance political goals”. I believe that listening to those, for and with whom we work, is essential for any Critical Social and Feminist Research. It is important ‘to understand the world in order to change it’ (Humphries 1997: 2.6), which is possible only when we listen actively to the voices of people we engage with.

I engaged in purposeful conversation with my research collaborators and listened to their voices and lived experiences. I believe that women are the best knowers of their lived realities and their context. Listening to their subjugated voices and bringing those voices to a larger forum is the responsibility of a committed researcher and advocate. Listening to their individual and collective experiences and insights helped me to clarify various aspects of the research problem and to look at the interconnections with various pathways for social and economic justice, development and transformation.

I believe that listening to women’s experiences means listening to their experiences not just of trafficking, migration or exploitation, but also their experiences of resilience, agency, courage, power and resourcefulness. The negative experiences must be articulated and heard, but not forced to be spoken for the sake of it, because forced articulations can be very harmful for the interviewed. Listening to their painful and horrendous experiences is a necessary component, but just harping on those narratives to create a sensational image and narrative of women as victims and the activist researcher as saviour takes away the privilege of us knowing these women as resourceful agents of strength, courage and power in their emancipatory and transformative journey. It would limit our own understanding of their

resources and skills in how they negotiate complex lived experiences towards achieving positive outcomes in their daily lives to fulfil their aspirations and dreams for a better life.

Listening as a key strategy to bring the voices of the oppressed to the centre enabled me to bring together their perspectives, experiences, knowledge, recommendations, aspirations, desires and hope. A collaborative listening and learning process helped both the researcher and researched to gain deeper insights into their lives. As women shared very personal experiences, it was important for me to be sensitive to their articulations of feelings as I facilitated the conversations in the personal interactions in Feminist Interviews and Informal Encounters. Active listening helped create an environment of respect, valuing their views and voice as resources in this research. Active listening helps to de-colonise the dominant perspectives. The practice to listen deeply is a decolonising research practice and a radical act of transformation and liberation (De Vault and Gross 2007:182). The Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study embodied the principle of active listening to one another as a group.

Several elements of fun, laughter, games, worship were included to break the monotony of serious discussions which encouraged women to feel comfortable and involved. The process of facilitation ensured active participation of women, with key components of active listening, sharing, deliberating, dialoguing and mutual learning, enabling women to contribute extensively to knowledge construction, analysis and the doing of theology. Women informed that they had never experienced this kind of space to articulate their experiences and perspectives, not even in their friend circle. They shared that this process helped them to discover and analyse their lived realities and experience like never before. I believe that such sacred spaces are enriching and therapeutic for women as much as they are spaces of knowledge production.

#### **6.3.4 Practicing Participatory Learning Approaches to Engage with the Dialogue Partners**

To build an epistemological relationship with the research collaborators, I invited the research participants to be research collaborators and dialogue partners for this research, which meant that they had a voice in the planning and organisation of the research process and were not limited to being information bearers. By engaging in collaborative learning and knowledge production processes, this research placed women at the centre of the research process,

adopting Franco's (2006:814) definition of dialogue, which is to "jointly create meaning and shared understanding" through conversation. This research process is not about using methods to collect data and information, but also to empower women to speak, articulate, participate, dialogue, deliberate, reflect, co-produce knowledge and own the processes and outcomes.

In my previous work as a development practitioner, strategic program planner and researcher, I have made use of different participatory tools for data collection and for generating community resources and knowledge. I have extensively engaged with communities to garner their knowledge about their lived realities and contexts using Participatory approaches such as Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), Feminist Participatory Action and Research (FPAR) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI). For a comprehensive and diverse understanding of the social processes and real-world problems, I integrated some of these approaches and facilitated Participatory Processes and Dialogues during the Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study, which I describe in the next section. Appreciating different epistemologies helped me to bring in diverse perspectives, understandings and standpoints. Gathering diverse perspectives is built upon different techniques of dialogue with the purpose of jointly creating meaning and shared understanding through conversation.

I entered their space with a commitment to understand their reality from them, to listen to them and to let them unveil their world. Entering a space of dialogue with them created a dialectical unity of producing knowledge. As Freire rightly puts it, "Subjectivity and objectivity thus join in a dialectical unity producing knowledge in solidarity with action, and vice versa" (Freire 1996: 38). In dialectic thought, reflection is an important aspect (Freire 1996: 53). I engaged in creative ways of listening to and dialoguing with women about the actions and strategies that they adapt for their liberation, empowerment and affirmation of their dignity and rights. I created spaces for critical reflection and active participation, enabling the collaborators to reflect and contribute to the understanding of their real world and the praxis that they are committed to for negotiating and transforming their lives. Each woman showed signs of agency; they understood the research project; they were good communicators; and they did not display any sign of a subordinate relationship with the researcher during the research. As a researcher and facilitator, I made conscious efforts to make them feel

comfortable and to be attentive to any barriers of hierarchy or class. Creating an enabling environment for safe articulation of their voices and lived experiences was key to creating an atmosphere of trust, mutual respect and solidarity. The initial phase of rapport building which was so central to the research process made a significant contribution to easing discomfort, to bridging the gap between researcher and researched, and to establish a bond of trust. This careful process helped in not only generating rich information, but also in creating a strong foundation of respect and dignity.

A feminist and transformative methodology not only enabled women to contribute their knowledge and lived experience but got them engaged in the planning and organising of the research process. They identified themselves as part of the research process and not separate from it. Practicing feminist methodology required taking utmost care to plan and execute the research process along with them. Decolonising traditional methodologies empowered women to be research collaborators and not just participants. The perspectives, standpoints, insights and theological reflections of these women are the foundation and resources of the knowledge produced through this research. The contribution of the researcher is in identifying resourceful participants, transforming them to collaborators and facilitating a deeper understanding of their context, faith and action.

This research process, as will become evident, enabled women to look forward, redefining themselves and their collective. They shared aspirations for positive changes in their lives which would give them more power to not only define themselves but to define and empower their community. They were able to reflect on their lives and appreciate the positive changes in them, of transitioning from positions/ situations of vulnerabilities and victimhood to that of empowered decision makers; from dependants in the families to providers for the families; from being labelled as vagrants and non-conformists to being change agents within their communities; from being dreamers and aspirants for a better life to being achievers who have worked hard to make their dreams come true, to being those who might inspire the younger generations to have faith in their dreams and aspirations and to work hard to make those dreams real. Women demonstrated their power-within in different ways during the research process, each one bringing their unique and sometimes similar ways of negotiating with their lived realities.



## **6.4 Research Process: Hosting and Harvesting Conversations**

A flexible research design was prepared keeping in mind the context of the knowledge of the contributors of this research and the sensitivity around the subject owing to the conflation of trafficking with sex work. For this research, my source of data collection for knowledge production was employed through Feminist Interviews, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study. This was the iterative process intended at the onset of the study. However, as the fieldwork started, I used another informal method, Informal Encounters within their real-life work settings. In this section, I describe how each of the methods were employed and how they cohere within the research design.

The purpose of knowledge production for this research is to learn from vulnerable and trafficked migrant working women how they enable, empower and organise themselves in their journey of liberation from systems and people who dominate over them and exploit them for profits and benefits. I offered them my analysis and critique of the social context as a background for the research process. I also brought in my skills of facilitation to the formal Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study, creating safe and sacred spaces for them to articulate their lived experiences, their insights on their social contexts and realities and their notions of dignity in the context of oppression.

### **6.4.1 Introduction to Feminist Interviews**

This research utilises the standard feminist methods of knowledge production, such as in-depth interviews with distinctive feminist insights. In Feminist Research, Feminist Interviewing is a widely accepted approach and a powerful research tool for feminist researchers interested in exploring women's experiences and the contexts that organize their experiences. DeVault and Gross (2012: 174, 192) assert that interviewing is a powerful tool because it involves direct exchanges of views and perspectives among researchers, participants and readers. DeVault (1999: 30) affirms the significance of interviewing as creative, critical feminist work. Interview research is part of an "apparatus of knowledge production," a site where women's oppression is not only "constructed and sustained," but also resisted. In-depth interviews are a feminist practice that embodies feminist thoughts, values, and beliefs to promote justice and well-being of women in the margins, the sub-altern,

vulnerable, trafficked, migrant working women in this context. Interviews involve producing knowledge through structured encounters where participants tell their stories (DeVault & Gross 2012: 175, 176).

Research interviews have been traditionally linked to social justice concerns with the aim of social reform by bringing forward people's experiences and neglected voices to be visible and heard in public discussions. Such traditions are important for feminist projects (DeVault & Gross 2012: 175, 176). Since feminist qualitative interviewing is a method used to produce knowledge in ethically responsive ways and is non-exploitative in nature, I have used storytelling and participatory tools to listen to the experiences of women (Maynard 2004:133). It reaffirms the views of feminists who argue that men have told women's stories for a long time and women need to tell and write their own experiences (Smith 1987: 18; Procter-Smith 1990:1,2). Moreover, feminist interviewing is considered as an appropriate strategy in critical research for engaging participants to reflect on their reality and giving them a voice (Reinharz 1992: 18). To acknowledge, record and process the voices of women, special attention is given to process the content of their conversations and experience sharing. Giving a 'human face' through narrative research, which is storytelling research, adds to the epistemological value of feminist thinking (Nadar 2014: 20). These interviews contain open-ended, free response section and a selection of close-ended questions. The implementation of the interviews is informed by principles of feminist interviewing with an emphasis to reduce hierarchy between the interviewer and interviewee, providing information and resources, and creating an emotionally supportive and compassionate setting. Special care is given to build rapport and establish confidence between the researcher and the interviewee.

In this research, the dialogue partners and research collaborators have experiences of exploitation in the context of trafficking and migration. At the time of the interviews, I ensured that I worked with women who have moved forward from extreme forms of exploitation, to listen to their experiences of vulnerability and exploitation as well as their experiences of resilience, empowerment and affirmation of their rights and dignity. My role as a facilitator has been in creating safe, secured, sacred, comfortable, enabling and empowering spaces where women can share their life narratives, experiences and knowledge without any fear of being judged, violated or controlled in the knowledge production process.

#### **6.4.2 Feminist Interviewing: Listening to the Spoken and Unspoken Voice**

In this sub-section, I first describe the pre-interview preparations, which included preparing the interview questions (Appendix II). I then elaborate on the process that I adapted to conduct Feminist Interviews. To highlight the important discussions that took place in interviews as it relates to this research, I share an example of how I conducted an interview with one of the participants (Appendix V).

The pre-interview preparations included preparing questions for the interview along with probing questions and guidance notes. I prepared notes on how to introduce myself and how to introduce the purpose and process of the research. However, during the interviews I was mindful not to refer too much into these notes, in order to maintain a sense of conversation. I paid attention to the participants, speaking with them and listening to them. The conversation was kept open, meaningful and purposeful.

The planning of conducting the interviews included finding the right location for formal, individual interviews that would provide comfortable physical and mental space for the participants to speak and for me to listen without unnecessary distractions. I arranged for a safe and secure place for the interviews in the Centre where I was staying during the time of my field work. However, I had to change plans as soon as I realised that the location was not suitable for the participants. Some of them were hesitant to be seen within the premises of a Centre, The United Theological College, Bangalore, which was a familiar place for most of them. This campus has a Chapel where some of them come for Sunday worship. The college has students and teachers many of whom belong to the home state of the participants. Participants did not initially verbalise the reasons for their hesitation concerning the venue for interviews, but I was able to sense their apprehension and checked with them. I contend that it is critical for a feminist interviewer to be sensitive enough to understand the unspoken apprehensions and fear of the Interview participants. An interview that covers a sensitive and inappropriately sensationalised topic, like trafficking in women, needs to cautiously address the concerns of the participants. As feminist interviewers, it is our responsibility to be flexible and address any challenges, to protect such sensitive concerns of the participants. Therefore, I spoke to each one of them over phone before the interview and took their suggestions for locations convenient to them for the interviews. A flexible and respectful approach towards

the participants required careful planning with each one of them. Participant friendly settings and locations were chosen for each one of them for the individual Feminist Interviews. This was not easy or inexpensive but was not impossible either. It had a consequence and required substantial investment in terms of time and resources for me, but I was convinced that having come thus far it was necessary even if I had to use my personal financial resources to invest for the purpose. I began with hosting these interviews in quiet Cafes, some in the premises of high-end hotels. It helped some of the hidden populations, who did not want to be seen in familiar spaces as trafficked victims or vulnerable populations, engaging with a researcher working on a sensitive issue. This strategy helped me to get quality and effective participation from women. They appreciated that their concerns were valued.

I believe it is important for a feminist researcher to move out of their comfort spaces and travel to places nearer to the participants place of work, residence or any other location that works well for them. The participation of those who contribute to the knowledge production of any research should not get affected because they must travel long distances for interviews. They must not feel obliged to fit into the researcher's space, the opposite is important. With this change, I was able to address concerns of hierarchy and power relations between the researcher and the interview participants right from the beginning of the research process. Keeping the interest of the participants at the centre helped build a comfortable relationship from the start.

I met them in different locations, such as quiet cafeterias within the premises of five-star hotels, in Cafés closer to their workplace, or near their place of residence. One interview session was problematic. Hannah (pseudonym) had long working hours and I was informed that she did not have much time available. She was the niece of a Pastor with whom she lived. I had no direct contact with her. I was introduced to the Pastor by my gatekeeper. He invited me to his home for the interview. There was a discomfort initially. I asked them if we could have a separate room for the interview. Hannah provided a substantive interview, yet her conversation was guarded. I had a feeling that she would be able to speak better in a free space, outside the confines of a home. Her conversation was measured. She seemed to be cautious of the walls having ears. There were some aspects that she shared softly. I thought it would be interesting to listen to her in an open space. After the interview, I checked with her if she was open to meet outside for coffee or at her workplace. Negotiating an informal

encounter was helpful. Hannah opened up more in an informal space, a space without the protective surveillance of family. Her participation and contributions later in the CBS were remarkable. She got motivated to take a day off and participated well in the CBS workshop.

I have 13 women who participated in the Feminist Interviews. All 13 women participated in the Contextual Bible Study, demonstrating their sense of being a part of the research process. Each interview took around 60 - 90 minutes, a few stayed longer for casual conversation either by the poolside of the hotel or taking a stroll in the streets.<sup>78</sup> I first began with introducing myself. I then shared about the research purpose and process. I checked with them if they had any concerns and questions. I took time to clarify their questions and responded to their apprehensions and anxieties, if any. Before beginning with the actual interview conversation, I checked with them if they are comfortable with the process. I obtained their consent for recording the interview using audio recorder. I arranged for tea/ coffee/ refreshment to be served to them. I took notes when necessary. After every interview, I referred to my notes and the recording and then prepared a journal. Reflecting on the journals helped me to improvise the next interviews. I looked at aspects that went missing in the previous interviews (Hesse-Biber 2007:145).

As a feminist interviewer, I am interested in getting at the subjugated knowledge of the diversity of women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated. I asked questions and explored issues that are of particular concern to women's lives. I am interested in issues of social change and social justice for women that they would like to be heard and acted upon. I am cognizant of being both 'insider' and 'outsider', 'insider' as a woman having worked in difficult areas and 'outsider' for never having inhabited a life as a trafficked person nor as a woman working in the informal economy. As a researcher, I inhabit an entirely different world from them, yet I am aware of the nuances of working with and for trafficked and migrant women in my work with I/NGOs. I am a woman from the Global South, and I have the experiences of working and engaging with women from the Global South.

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<sup>78</sup> It was necessary to build a relationship of trust with women who were taking time to engage in a conversation that involved sharing about their life experiences as women with experiences of trafficking and/ or unsafe migration and/ or work that is labelled and stigmatized as indecent. Therefore, before entering into CBS workshop, it was necessary for women to feel safe and comfortable with the researcher/ facilitator along with other women participants some of whom they did not know from before.

During the interview, I was clear about my research purpose. As much as I keep women and their concerns at the centre of all discourse, I keep the research purpose visible. This helped me to be focussed on the research objectives. I began the interviews by inviting them to introduce themselves and then I led them to describe their lives before moving to Bangalore. Beginning with a general opening question helped most of the interviewees to be spontaneous in their response, though some of them had to be prompted to speak. The opening question gave me an opportunity to explore factors that contributed to the vulnerabilities of women and girls<sup>79</sup> who migrate for work and factors that made them vulnerable to trafficking.

I moved on to asking them to describe their journey into the city. This question was to explore their conditions and experiences of movement, trafficked, forced, or voluntary migration. Prompting questions included: how, with whom and what for did you move into the city and what were the immediate experiences after coming here. The purpose here was to explore their motivations and purposes for moving out of their homes and into an unknown city. Understanding the push and pull factors of trafficking and migration helped to examine the systemic, structural, religious, cultural, and socio-economic factors that impede or enable women at risk regarding a un/safe passage into a new city. If the motivation was for work, I explored further into their recruitment process. I also explored if they had an easy or difficult path, who were their support systems or violators. I probed whether their journey was smooth or included any form of coercion, deception, or fraud in the workplace or by the placement agency. Those trafficked shared about their trafficking experiences. They spoke about their experiences of getting out of trafficked situations and their journey to liberation. Those who had their support systems through friends and the Church shared their positive experiences and enabling factors that contributed to their successful migration stories.

I explored their everyday lives and work in the city. They were encouraged to share about the nature of work, workplace environment, working conditions and work culture. Probing into aspects of safe/ unsafe sites of work and living conditions helped identify their struggles and strategies to overcome those challenges. Each participant told their story in their own unique way. The 'shape' of how they told their story is as significant to the analysis as the content.

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<sup>79</sup> I mention girls here as some of them were trafficked at a younger age.

Towards the end of the interview conversations, we were together<sup>80</sup> able to explore their experiences and notions of agency, empowerment, faith, dignity, and liberation. These discourses generated contributions to academic feminism, where women contribute raw materials for theorising and theologising their experiences. Exploring their conceptualisation of God, amidst vulnerabilities, exploitation and oppression, is a key resource for doing theology (West 2014:16.17). They describe how their faith, the Bible, Church and the community becomes a site of redemption or struggle.

The practice of open-ended, semi-structured interviewing favoured this research. The individual interview questions were framed to be open-ended. A flexible, loosely structured research design and interview schedule enabled participants to articulate without much constraint. It provided them space to speak and take charge of the flow. I did not follow a pattern or order of asking questions. Though I did ask questions where needed. Having understood the purpose of the research, women were able to speak and articulate themselves clearly. I minimised control over the conversation and probed only when it was required. Allowing them to choose a path of how they share their stories, helped me to gather a wide range of information. The questions I asked during the interviews were based on what they were sharing. Spontaneity in interview conversations is helpful. I believe that knowing what to ask, when to ask, what not to ask, when not to ask, when to control the conversation, how much or how less to control the interview process, these are judgements, discernments and decisions that an interviewer can take in that very moment. Each interview participant and their stories are unique and must be told and listened in ways that they would like to tell. There is no single pattern of telling stories and that is what makes each interview interesting and unique. My role primarily was to facilitate, guide and steer the process by giving them the power to choose what they discerned to share. Even though I opened the conversations, I invited them to take charge of sharing their stories. I encouraged them to choose what and how they share and to trust in the process.

It may be argued that giving power to the researched and getting close to them may pose a risk for the research outcome and it may lack scientific rigour. I was mindful of this aspect. I occasionally probed when necessary. In places where I needed to, I would after a pause go

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<sup>80</sup> Both the interviewer and interviewee.

back to what they shared, paraphrase and check with them if I understood what they had shared. I checked with them if they wanted to add anything more. I gave epistemic privilege and advantage to the participating women during the entire interview process. I was mindful of when to move from an informal and exploratory conversation to a formal, in-depth yet less structured one to fulfil the objectives of my research.

The very purpose of research like this is to explore the 'power-within' and the 'resources' of the researched and to have them as research collaborators. Therefore, it was essential for them to make informed choices, to take charge of the interview sharing and to contribute to knowledge construction. They had the freedom to pull out of the conversation if they felt like and to not respond to any question if they did not want to. A Feminist Interview cannot engage in forced conversations. Oakley (1981:40) contends that the primary objective of feminist interviewers is "towards the validation of woman's subjective experiences as women and as people" (Oakley 1981: 30). Interview process is not about extracting information, "what is good for interviewers is not necessarily good for interviewees" (Oakley 1981: 30). Therefore, by the end of each interview, I attempted to define a common purpose for myself and each of the participants towards this research. It was important for me that they own the research process, as I intended to have them actively participate in the Focus Group Discussions and the Contextual Bible Study workshop. The thrust was on collaborative research, therefore having them as partners was essential for me. Even though each interview respondent had unique experiences to share, they had many commonalities. These common factors helped them to relate with one another when they came together as a group in the next stages of the research - Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study.

The personal interaction with each woman through Feminist Interviews helped me to develop a relationship of trust and respect. At the close of the Feminist Interviews, I explored with them the next step of hosting small focus groups. The Focus Group Discussions helped align the research methods as a continuous process from the Feminist Interviews to the Contextual Bible Study and beyond. Building small groups helped us to later meet as a bigger group for the CBS workshop. Each one of them was informed about each of the research methods and processes and how they cohered. Their bonding and togetherness made them confident about the research process within their smaller bubbles. Sensitive research such as this ought to be attentive to the concerns and anxieties of the knowledge contributors. During each step,



I introduced them to the next step in the research process. Keeping them informed of each step of the research process enabled them to come to each stage of the process prepared.

### **6.4.3 Informal Encounters in Real Life Settings**

A flexible, loosely structured research design and interview schedule enabled participants to articulate without much constraint. They were able to guide and lead the conversation having well understood the purpose of the research. However, there was more to be heard. After the formal interview with one of the first participants, Achui (Pseudonym), I asked her if we could meet another time, at her workplace. She was delighted to give her consent.<sup>81</sup> The Informal Encounters were not part of the initial research design, but since Qualitative Research is flexible and allows exploration of the lives of people in their lived realities (Henn et al. 2009:37), I had the approval of my Supervisor at this stage.

This helped me redesign my research with the guidance of my Supervisor, to incorporate Informal Encounters as another method of gathering information and deeper insight into the lived realities of the research participants. Since this is Qualitative Research, it was possible for me to be flexible and use diverse forms of gathering information. This process maximised my own understanding of women's lives, beliefs, challenges, opportunities and strengths. This research process enabled me to explore "the interior of women's lives, focusing on the meanings and interpretations of those being researched" (Maynard 1998: 128). Qualitative Research involves a very intensive and engaging process of data collection and is not a one-off meeting (Henn et al. 2009: 156). Since this research engages very sensitive issues, where the life and work of women is sexualised, infantilised, in-dignified and subject to negative stereotyping, the decision to meet them in different contexts, specially at their work sites, provided vital inputs and resources for this research.

Qualitative Research is carried out in 'real-life' settings that help the researcher understand how people experience the world around them and what influences or informs their behaviour. Without disturbing the participant's daily lives, the researcher attempts to study the participant and talks naturally to them, to understand their 'real' views and 'real' behaviour in their natural settings (Henn et al. 2009: 150, 152). To have an insider perspective

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<sup>81</sup> I have shared about my conversations with Achui to indicate the nature of the research process I undertook. An example of this encounter is shared in Appendix V.

and with the purpose to take note of their actions and behaviours in their workplaces, and to listen to their thoughts, perspective and knowledge, I met them in their work settings, sometimes for a pedicure, manicure, facial, body massage, hair cut or hair spa. I was able to observe their workplace, interact with their employers and co-workers and built a deeper relationship with them while respecting their work and work schedule. Utilising their time at work ensured that they are being paid for the time they invested with me for the purpose of research and that they did not lose their wages or free time for this purpose. Spending time with them at their workplaces and participating in their work as a client assured them that their work and workplace was being viewed with dignity and respect by the researcher. I made it evident to them that I had deep respect and appreciation of their work and their services. As they mentioned in the interviews, people judge them for their 'indecent' work and for staying away from the protection of home and families. Women shared about clients, both female and male, ask ignorant and offensive questions to them. My taking services from them meant making them feel valued for the work that they do and for the time that they invest in the research process. I had Informal Encounters with 5 women.

Informal Encounters helped strengthen the relationship between the researched and researcher, and gave me an opportunity to respect their workplace, work, time and skills. It helped me to understand their work life and work environment. Visiting their work sites helped me to delve deeper into the lack of protection and social in-security of employment in the 'unorganised sector', how these experiences not only break their trust in people but also break them down completely, and the economic strife that follows when they lose their jobs without notice. For example, one of the participants, Mary (pseudonym) lost her job during the research process. After the Formal Interview with her, I took services from her twice, once for a haircut and the next time for a hair Spa. She is a well-known hair stylist and therapist who was one of the highest paid staff in the Salon and Spa where she was working. The sudden overnight loss of job in the pretext of the Salon not being able to pay her huge salary, not only broke her down but disturbed her close friend and co-worker who is one of the research collaborators here. Mary felt betrayed and hurt and struggled with getting another job immediately. The loss of income meant she would struggle paying her rent and fees for her husband who was taking an advanced certificate course in his line of profession. This setback slowed the research process. I had to wait for her to get work and for things to

settle down with her before we could move into the Contextual Bible Study workshop. Mary is a very diligent and insightful young woman whose wisdom, perspectives and knowledge has contributed richly to this research.

The Informal Encounters at the Salon and Spa where she worked was enriching to the research process. The reality of highly proficient women working in an insecure sector, where they can lose jobs without notice or good reason, can be extremely disturbing and traumatising for them. Such realities may disturb the plan of the research process; however, a flexible approach helps to adapt to the context of the researched. The postponement of the CBS workshop to a time when she was ready to participate, meant valuing each one's contribution as collaborators and respecting their challenges was important to this Feminist Research. It meant that I had to spend more days in the city which consumed my time and finance. However, it meant that journeying with economic migrants cannot be structured and time-specific in substantive Qualitative Research.

Casual conversations during the Informal Encounters at workplace helped them to open much more than they did during the Formal Interviews. These conversations were like a continued conversation after the interviews, as they had much more to share with me than in those 60-90 min interview times. The fact that these conversations were not structured or recorded enabled women to speak with a greater degree of comfort. The advantage of a flexible approach in Qualitative Research added value to my research process and findings. This is where I listened deeply to their "hidden transcript" (Scott 1990: xii). The conversations that took place on a massage bed for a full body massage or a facial, or while they worked on my feet for a pedicure, added much value to the research. The closed rooms are settings and spaces where they feel safe, secure and free from any fear of surveillance of the dominant groups, such as their managers, supervisors or employers. These informal conversations after the formal interviews enabled them to immerse themselves into the research process. They were excited about their contribution to the research as collaborators. Informal interaction opened diverse ways of understanding issues of concern which were not in the initial plan for information gathering. Such flexible, diverse and unstructured ways of gathering information are beneficial for research of this kind. Regular field notes written up after such informal conversations, including reflections on unforeseen situations or unintended information,

helped me to document all relevant information, the relevance of which emerged during the research process.

Informal conversations in their workplaces gave epistemic privilege and advantage to the participating women as my research collaborators. This component of the research process and knowledge production utilised and adapted feminist method with a distinctive feminist focus. In *Feminist Research*, I argue that a flexible approach is a powerful research practice for feminist researchers who are interested in exploring women's experiences and the contexts that organize their experiences.

#### **6.4.4 Focus Group Discussions: Hosting and Harvesting Conversations through small Focus Groups**

Focus group research is "a way of collecting qualitative data, which - essentially - involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions), 'focused' around a particular topic or set of issues" (Wilkinson 2004: 177). It creates an enabling environment which enables participants to articulate their experiences, ideas, perception, thoughts, notions, and opinion in an enabling and safe environment (Krueger & Casey 2000).

There are several benefits of focus groups. They are an efficient method for obtaining data from multiple participants (Krueger & Casey 2000). It creates a safe space for participants to share their concerns and provide information for research (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub 1996). The information flow between participants in an environment where they feel a sense of belonging and cohesiveness (Peters, 1993) can yield important data (Morgan 1988). This paves way to creating a setting where participants can feel safe and comfortable to discuss personal problems and provide possible solutions (Duggleby 2005).

Focus Group Discussions is a popular and widely accepted tool for Participatory Research and Action. It is widely used in Qualitative Research by social science researchers. A small group discussion is less threatening and participant friendly. It embraces and gives space for adapting different procedures while facilitating the formation of a group with different kinds of participants. The participants enter into a conversation with each other in a safe and secure setting where all group members are given the opportunity to speak, engage and participate in the discussion with a clear purpose to share their personal and sensitive concerns. The environment of trust and mutual respect for the views of one another despite any differences

makes it a sound method for obtaining data and information from multiple participants like the ones for this study. It creates the foundations of trust, solidarity, belongingness and cohesiveness. In focus groups discussions the interactions between participants yields rich, diverse and valuable information (Peters 1993; Krueger & Casey 2000; Morgan 1988; Duggleby 2005; Onwuegbuzie et al 2009).

With these benefits and characteristics of Focus Group Discussions, it is an appropriate, effective, and efficient method of collecting information, resource and knowledge for this research. Krueger endorses the use of very small focus groups which he terms “mini-focus groups” (Krueger 1994 :17). These mini groups can constitute 3-4 participants who have common experiences and knowledge to discuss and share their personal experiences, beliefs, thoughts, perspectives and opinions with the group (Morgan 1997; Onwuegbuzie et. al. 2009). A focus group is defined as, 'a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research' (Powell and Single 1996: 499).

The primary objective of having focus groups in this research was to listen to the perspectives and standpoints of the women in a small and safe group setting. The idea was to bring together the narratives shared in the individual interviews and to add more value and substance to it as a small group. Focus Group Discussions helped gather a wealth of deep insight into their lived realities and experiences as they shared their thoughts, beliefs and standpoints in a small group. This was done by creating an enabling environment for articulation of thoughts, perspectives and opinions to add meaning of what was being said. A safe and secure environment, grounded with the basic principles of mutual trust and respect, were the enabling factors that contributed to constructive discussion on a sensitive research topic like this one.

The Focus Group Discussions took place after the individual Feminist Interviews and Informal Encounters. This was a time for women’s collective talk, reflection and analysis in small groups. It helped generate consciousness within the groups regarding their shared and collective concerns. This research has embedded feminist principles and values by placing the interests of trafficked and migrant working women as research collaborators throughout the research process. The practice of feminist methodology embodied feminist thought and well-being of women to promote intersectional social and economic justice and to affirm their

dignity (DeVault and Gross 2012: 174). Focus Group Discussions were a space for critical thinking, reflection and for strengthening collective solidarity. I approached this research practice and methodology as a feminist collective practice with women. The participating women are diversely situated in similar contexts under the rulings of a capitalistic and patriarchal society. The Focus Group Discussions gave an opportunity for them together to create their own identities based on their intersectional experiences with race, class, gender, location, labour, ability and skills. The Focus Group Discussions further gave them the opportunity to reject imposed indecent identities. In their everyday lives as they struggle to manage work-life balance, women informed that they did not have much time for critical reflections like this, but they do meet as friends and discuss issues of concern when needed, while sometime celebrating life, sharing their ethnic food and having fun, jokes and lighter moments.

The Focus Group Discussions questions were aligned to the research question and the interview questions and responses. The idea of having small focus groups was to listen to their lived experiences together in small groups. They had shared their narratives in the individual interviews and had a time of personal reflection on it before coming together for the focus groups. This meant they were more prepared to articulate and build upon from where we had left off in the interviews or the Informal Encounters. This was a time to reflect collectively on the individual experiences shared. The idea was to stimulate discussion and to bring to the surface responses that needed attention. This meant having discussions to identify shared positions (Henn et al. 2009: 164) and challenge opinions brought by others (representation by media, NGOs, policy makers, religious groups, home and host communities, etc). It generated fresh discussions of vulnerabilities and resilience. It strengthened the role of the research collaborators as agents of the research process. The plan of the Focus Group Discussion was to bring them together in small groups to deliberate on their experience, perspectives and standpoints and to prepare them for the Contextual Bible Study workshop.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> After the Feminist Interviews and Informal Encounters, I met women in small groups for Focus Group Discussions. During these Focus Group Discussion meetings, I recapped what women had shared during the FI and IE (without naming the person). In addition to that, I shared a brief from my literature review as shared in Chapter 2 and 3. Thereafter, I again shared with them the objective of my research. CBS, an initiative of the Ujamaa Centre at the University of Kwa Zulu Natal in South Africa, was used as one of the methodologies in this research. During the Focus Groups, I briefed the participants about how the CBS workshop will be done. I advised them to read Ruth, keeping their

To have an effective and productive focus group required good planning and preparation. I planned for three FGDs. The first one was in Indira Nagar with four participants, the second one was in Kothanur with four participants, and the third one also had four participants in Koramangla. The participant from Vasanth Nagar worked in the Spa of a luxurious hotel and had a very demanding work life due to which she was unable to join any of these focus group meetings. I met her separately at her convenient time nearby her apartment for separate discussion, sharing with her the focus groups discussions and having her insights.

We had the Focus Group Discussions in locations suggested by the participants and in spaces that were comfortable for them. I met the first group in a laid-back Café, the second one in a church facility, and the third group in a park. After the participants arrived and were comfortably seated, I shared some beverage and refreshment and then began with our conversation. I laid down the objectives of the FGDs first. Thereafter, together we laid down some ground rules for the discussions, which was primarily to co-create safe, secure and sacred spaces of conversation, respecting each other's views and listening to one another. With safe, friendly, collaborative and comfortable space created for the discussions, an environment of trust and mutual respect was established. The discussions were moderated/facilitated by me at the participants' pace. Being overworked and exhausted, some participants found this space and time to be a relaxed one, where they could speak without any surveillance or fear. They were at ease and were comfortable shedding their inhibitions as they spoke. We had some lighter moments as they shared jokes during the conversations, engaging with each other on, for example, how they navigated particularly weird clients, both male and female, in their workplaces. They spoke about their employers and management and their experiences of working in different places.

As the facilitator of the FGDs, I listened to them and encouraged each one to speak. I took down notes of the discussions. I have audio taped the conversations. To maintain confidentiality, I have only used study participants' pseudonyms. I am committed to keep all individual experiences from the individual Feminist Interviews confidential and anonymous. In preparation, I had highlighted some of the concerns that came up in the interviews. I used

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lived experiences in mind. I encouraged them to read Ruth keeping in mind the context of human trafficking, migration and work, as discussed during the Focus Group meeting.

flash cards to share those highlights. The flash cards had one word each (eg., accommodation, wages, workplace, city life, trafficking, migration, agency, empowerment, dignity, faith, church, scriptures, vulnerability, marginalisation, solidarity, community, etc.). On the other side of the flash cards, I had written down a few short sentences (2-3 bullet points) of what was shared by participants in the interviews on those topics. I assembled drawings, art works and newspaper cuttings that depicted aspects of their stories. These materials were the starting points of discussions for the FGDs. They were invited to choose five topics that they prioritised to discuss. The visual aids were helpful to engage in interesting, engaging and interactive conversation. This was a time for them to reflect, analyse and clarify their views collectively as a small group. Critical reflection helped them to elaborate and validate data that was produced during the Feminist Interviews and Informal Encounters. This was done discursively and dialogically. Since the groups were relatively small, they were engaging and resourceful.

By the end of the Focus Group Discussions, we (myself and the research collaborators) did a systematic and thematic analysis of all inputs received to ensure that as a collective we brought forward important aspects from the voices heard for further reflection in the Contextual Bible Study workshop. This is where women make sense of their experiences and the 'personal' takes the form of 'political' and a process of transformation begins. They not only 'tell' their stories but 'represent' themselves in this process. Women informants are no more an object of the researcher's gaze (Oakley 1981) but they collaborate with the researcher based on feminist values and principles. The interactions and sharing of knowledge with one another based on their experiences was possible because they willingly and actively participated in the research process. The discourses at play during the Focus Group Discussions were important. It was clear that what was important was not so much the experiences shared, rather how those experiences shaped them and what that meant to them in their current socio-religious and geo-political contexts. The embodied experiences shared in the Feminist Interviews and Informal Encounters were reflected discursively in the Focus Group Discussions, which in turn became collectively embodied by the group (Scott 1990:223-224).

These discussions are then taken forward as a resource (Contextual Analysis) for critical reflection and further discussion in the Contextual Bible Study workshop. At the end of the



Focus Group Discussions, I shared with them about the process and content of the CBS workshop, so that they could come prepared having read and reflected on the book of Ruth in advance. We discussed about the dates and location for the CBS. By this time, they were comfortable and excited to meet as one big group in a common place that was convenient for all.

From the Focus Group Discussions, I collated critical elements for further discussions in the Contextual Bible Study. The analysis was done based on my notes and listening to the audio tapes. I referred to the research questions while analysing my notes and the transcription, ensuring that my focus remained on the research questions, the phenomenon of interest (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, and Zoran, 2009). Names of study participants are not used in both data capturing and analysis; instead, codes have been used to uphold anonymity and confidentiality of study participants.

#### **6.4.5 Introduction to Contextual Bible Study**

As indicated, Contextual Bible Study (CBS) is a form of liberation hermeneutics that emerged in South Africa in the 1980s (West 2015: 2). Developed by Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal over a period of more than thirty years of community-based work, CBS is a resource, practice and method within the trajectory of biblical liberation hermeneutics (West 2014: 2). CBS is a form of Bible Study which brings together biblical scholars and ordinary readers into a partnership of reading the Bible and reflecting on what God speaks to them through a collaborative reading of social context and biblical text (West & Zondi-Mabizela 2004: 9). This is framed within the See-Judge-Act process of biblical liberation hermeneutics (West 2014 :1). CBS gives epistemic privilege to the ordinary readers of the Bible by engaging with them and including their wisdom and knowledge in theology.

CBS is a collaborative work with communities in the margins, who enter into a collaborative relationship with socially engaged biblical scholars for collaborative biblical interpretation and collaborative 'doing' of theology. West (2015: 242) mentions that Contextual Bible Study inhabits a collaborative nexus, between the epistemology of the poor and marginalised and the critical capacities of socially engaged biblical scholarship. It facilitates threefold movement from embodied theology to people's theology to prophetic theology (West 2015:

242, 243). As this research is a collaborative work with women in the margins which gives epistemic privilege to vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women to articulate their unheard, unarticulated and suppressed voices, CBS is an appropriate method for facilitating women's experience becoming women's theology. It facilitates a process where women co-create theological knowledge and contribute to the academia and other stakeholders such as the Church.

Community is the fabric of CBS, the beginning and goal. The organised poor, working class and marginalised groups are the starting point of CBS, which contributes to the formation of redemptive communities, where they have life in abundance and live and thrive with dignity (West 2015: 238, 239). A community of loosely organised migrant working women are the fabric of this CBS. The starting point of the CBS is the embodied experiences of vulnerability, exploitation and systemic violence and marginalisation along with the empowering experiences of conceiving new identities that come with a freedom for self-exploration and self-determination. These women, despite their vulnerabilities, do have the capacity of conceiving new identities that come with a freedom for self-exploration. I believe that the conflicting subjectivities of freedom and subjugation is important to explore, not only the experiences of subjugation as popularly done in the trafficking rhetoric. In theological terms, CBS is incarnational, requiring real bodies as its social location, with the community as the 'subject' of biblical interpretation (West 2015: 239). The CBS workshop explores how women conceive new identities and move beyond the fixed definitions of femininity, and what being a woman means in their given context. The CBS questions are presented in Appendix III.

As the name suggests, Context is an important aspect of CBS based on the See-Judge-Act process (West 1995: 188-1893, West 2015: 243). The interpretative process moves from the social analysis (See) to biblical reflection (Judge) to social action (Act). The social analysis and social action are in the hands of the community of women here. The biblical reflection is drawn from the resources that I bring in as a socially engaged biblical scholar to prepare the ground for collaborative engagement with the community (West 2015: 2). As a Researcher, I bring in resources of the Contextual Realities of vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women from the literature reviews, Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions to the CBS workshop. West (2015: 241) elucidates that CBS is embedded in the many layers of context. It focusses on the systemic and structural dimensions of the

reality of people with whom we dialogue. CBS offers resource and forum to analyse the different dimensions of context – socio-economic, religious, cultural and geo-political. Context, having an important place in theology, gives priority to the economically disadvantaged, oppressed and marginalised. It recognises the intersectional oppression of the poor, that includes gender, race/caste, ethnicity, class and sexuality (West 2015: 241).

CBS is dialogical. It provides space for the ordinary readers and biblical scholars to read the Bible together. The process brings the context and the text into dialogue, focussing on a particular aspect of lived context (West 2014: 2). The emphasis in CBS is reading the Bible ‘with’ the study participants (local communities), who interpret the text within their socio-cultural-economic contexts (West 2015: 245). The process works towards transformation in the lives of the participants as individuals and as a collective/ community. In this research, as I have indicated earlier, I entered into a dialogical relationship with women as subjects, right from the start of the research process. Dialogical conversation is a core component in this research, from the Feminist Interviews, through the Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions to the CBS. Bringing in the voice and agency of the research collaborators is an important aspect of this research, which is characterised by creating a space for honest articulation of experiences, thoughts, ideas, perspectives and opinions. By co-creating knowledge through dialogue, the learning process is meant to adhere to the principle of mutual respect, learning and sharing. The process of sharing and learning, listening and speaking is a process where we bring together each ones’ unique contribution to the CBS.

Freire (1996:88, 89) rightly puts it,

If it is in the speaking of their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world, which is to be transformed and humanised, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s ‘depositing’ ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’, by the discussants.

It is here, during the CBS workshop, where theological dialogue as an encounter between women takes place, between those who want to name the world and those who have been

denied the right to speak (Freire 1996:88). With this act of co-creating knowledge, women reclaim their right to speak their word about the world they inhabit to prevent the aggression of dehumanisation and indignity of their personhood. This is an act and site of reclaiming their dignity and personhood.

#### **6.4.6 The CBS Workshop: Hosting and Harvesting Contextual Bible Study Conversations and Dialogues**

The participants of the CBS are the same as the participants of the Feminist Interviews and Focus Group Discussions. This research is a collaborative work. Hence, having the same research participants for the Contextual Bible Study workshop, who participated in the Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions was a deliberate choice. They transformed from being research participants to research collaborators during the research process and made substantial contributions to this research. This was meant to be a continual process to uncover the multiple layers of individual and collective subjugated knowledge from their lived and embodied experiences over a period of time and through different engagements with them.

By the time we gathered as a group for the Contextual Bible Study workshop, the participants were not only familiar with the purpose of the research but also with me, the researcher and facilitator of the CBS workshop. This newly formed relationship of trust, comfort, mutual respect, sisterhood and solidarity with one another (researcher and participants) is beneficial for dialogical relationships. This familiarity made immense contribution to having an enabling and conducive environment for the Contextual Bible Study workshop.

By sharing their lived realities, experiences and perspectives during the Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions, women had begun sharing their “hidden transcripts”. Their unheard voices were constructing a platform for articulation and joint ownership of that articulation. These are women who have braved many challenging situations in their lives as vulnerable and trafficked women and had embodied experiences of oppression and exploitation as migrant working women. By the time we gathered for the CBS workshop, women had become comfortable coming together in small groups. I believe that setting these strong foundations is essential before bringing women in a bigger group for discussions on sensitive issues based on their personal experiences. They continue, of course,

to be vulnerable to the insensitivities around them that in-dignifies their embodied beings. In my experience of working with women, even empowered women like the ones participating in this research, they tend to be defensive in order to protect themselves from any further harm (including psychological and emotional harm) from the world outside of them. Therefore, engaging with the same participants made much sense and added value to the research process and outcome. It also established a spirit of collaboration and solidarity.

Bringing all the participants in one place for a CBS workshop was a challenge. These young women live and work in different parts of the city, that stretch from one end to the other. It takes around 1- 2 hours of travel time for them to reach to a central location. Their work schedules are demanding. They work for more than 10 hours every day. Most of the Salons and Spas are open all seven days a week. Their weekly day offs are not fixed on any specific day of the week. It keeps changing. They are required to work on their off days if they have clients coming in on those days. The rush increases during holidays, festive seasons and during conventions and conferences in the city. Sometimes, they are called from home to report for work.

A day off on a Sunday is a blessing to them that they always look forward to. Bangalore hosts fellowships and Churches for different tribes from Northeast India. The Naga, Meitei and Kuki tribes have church services in their native languages such as Rongmei, Poumei, Tankhul, Zeme, Liangmei, Manipuri and Kuki. The Sunday services for these women and other migrants are beyond sermons and worships. These are days of celebrating life together in a city far away from home, celebrating their home culture, food, clothes, language, songs, stories, friendship and much more. Their common faith and tribe brings them together as a community.

The challenge before me was to get all of them together at one place and on one day given this context. The recognition of their lived reality was important for me. I decided to address this challenge and make it feasible without pushing them into what could dangerously seem to be my 'agenda'. In participatory exercises, there is always a thin line between facilitation and manipulation. The tendency to 'facipulate'<sup>83</sup> can be harmful and must be avoided.

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<sup>83</sup> Facipulate: This word, a combination of facilitate and manipulate, means to facilitate in a manipulative manner. It highlights the power of facilitators to potentially dominate participatory

Participants in Participatory Research can sense when they are being facilitated, which has a direct impact on their contributions to the study. The ownership and participation of the group that I worked with was critical for a meaningful and result-oriented engagement. I recognised the importance of a process driven action-oriented research, where knowledge is not extracted but co-produced. Therefore, in consultation with each one of them, we decided on a plan to have the Contextual Study workshop. The date, location and timings were all decided after having their consent.

Preparation for the CBS workshop included identifying and discerning a biblical text that aligns with the research purpose. My Supervisor, Prof. Gerald O. West, guided me through identifying and studying the book of Ruth for the Contextual Bible Study. I reviewed and studied theological articles written on Ruth. I worked on identifying the potential lines of connection between the women's contexts and the textual context of the book of Ruth. The book of Ruth was then finalised for reflection to understand how it relates with the context of the diasporic women in current times. West (2015) emphasises that a biblical hermeneutics of liberation engages an interpretation strategy of reading with the marginalised, which is an appropriate process for this study. The subjugated knowledge is utilised to produce vital and useful results, being undertaken within the discipline of biblical interpretation. West (2011) describes the process of doing Contextual Bible Studies, where every participant, their views and interpretations about the biblical text are considered as a resource for constructing a local theology. The embodied knowledge is the raw material for embodied theology, even though it is "inchoate" and "incipient" (Cochrane 1999 cited in West 2011). The idea is to explore and see how "the Bible may play a quiet direct role in the process of enabling an articulation of embodied theologies so that they may be mainstreamed or incorporated in the public theology of the Church" (West 2005 :26).

West (2005: 27) emphasises that,

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processes by setting agendas, steering discussions, framing analysis and summarising conclusions.

<https://www.participatorymethods.org/glossary/facipulate>

Participatory Methods website, managed by the [Participation, Inclusion and Social Change Cluster at the Institute of Development Studies](#). This site provides resources to generate ideas and action for inclusive development and social change.

what all these approaches have in common is the construction of a safe and secure site in which all forms of discourse that are usually disguised or hidden may be articulated and owned, the sharing of local and academic resources for accessing and articulating embodied theologies, and an animation/ facilitating process that allows for the articulation and owning of local, embodied theologies.

Thereafter, I began formulating questions for the CBS linking text and context within the framework of the objectives and the key research questions of this study. In line with the research questions and following the CBS guiding principles, I prepared the CBS questions in consultation with my Supervisor (Appendix: III; CBS Questions). Context being pivotal to the Contextual Bible Studies, critical contextual questions form the basis of the CBS questions. The CBS questionnaire begins and ends with contextual questions that form the basis of the study. In CBS, these questions are called 'community consciousness questions' that draw resources from the participants and communities critical resources based on their lived experiences and their embodied theologies. The textual questions in CBS, also called the 'critical consciousness questions', are meant to enable participants to engage with the critical detail of the biblical text and relate it with their own context (West 2015: 244). This is a three-step process, which begins with an initial contextual reading of the text, then a slower and more careful re-reading of the text via text-oriented questions, and then moving back to the lived context, appropriating resources from the biblical text for the specific context.

My role as a facilitator, researcher and socially engaged biblical scholar is an important one here, enabling this threefold movement. The critical capacity of the biblical scholar is pivotal, enabling a re-reading of often domesticated biblical texts, using the decolonising epistemic resources of the poor and marginalised by facilitating the articulation of voices of those in margins (West 2015: 243). It is here, in their engagement with a critically re-read biblical text, where their embodied theology takes form.

I prepared the venue before the arrival of the research participants/ collaborators. I used flip charts, chart papers and flash cards to display the resources and the voices/ standpoint of the women (anonymous) as recorded in the Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions. They were literally surrounded by familiar resources and expressions of their voices. I facilitated all the workshop sessions adapting participatory practices. The first CBS workshop session was an introductory session. We began the workshop with prayer and

a song, led by the participants. I introduced the purpose and process of the CBS workshop through a power point presentation. Thereafter, we had a time of introduction which I facilitated with an icebreaker. We set ground rules for the workshop as a group. The participants had time to ask questions and share their expectations. I recorded all of these on flip charts.

The second session focussed on their Context (See). I presented an overview of the status of women in India who are vulnerable to trafficking and the realities of trafficked and migrant working women. The first part of the presentation was based on my literature review the second part was based on the findings of the Formal Interview, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions. I opened a time of reflection and discussion for them to contribute. An in-depth analysis of context enabled the research collaborators to recognise and analyse their lived realities from their individual and collective experiences of the world that they inhabit. The discussions and analysis of their context is elaborated in the next chapter.

The third session was the Contextual Bible Study (Judge). This was an intensive session. The participants were divided into three groups for a time of critical feminist reading and interpretation of the book of Ruth based on the CBS questions. They articulated their theological understanding on the book of Ruth and how it relates to their context and lived realities. It is here where their embodied theologies begin taking form. This was followed by a Plenary, where all three groups brought their critical insights and reflection from the small groups into dialogue. This is detailed and analysed in the next chapter. They brought their voices in different forms to the Plenary, through visual representations, such as drawings on chart papers and role-plays. The discussions, reflections and interpretations of the Contextual Bible Study is detailed in the next chapter.

The concluding session was The Way Forward session (Act), a time where they worked on dreaming and designing an Action Plan. The purpose of this session was to prepare a plan that prepares a pathway for working towards bringing transformative changes to their lived realities and works towards affirming their dignity and towards a life in fullness. In this session, the participants were divided into small groups to Dream and Design plans as a way forward for individual and collective action. I adapted and applied the principles of



Appreciative Inquiry<sup>84</sup> to facilitate this process. The participants prepared their Dream Statements and planned how they would actualise their dreams. They identified their allies and partners who would contribute to fulfilment of their dreams. The plans were consolidated in the Plenary. This session helped them to have a clear purpose of coming together as a group in solidarity with one another and many other women like them who struggle to thrive and live a life of dignity. The doing of theology led to preparation of an Action Plan for a movement meant to affirm their rights and dignity. The next chapter will have the outcomes of this session.

As already indicated, the CBS workshop was a process that embedded the components of See-Judge-Act methodology. The Context (See) is the starting point for doing theology. The analysis of their reality brings their reality into dialogue with the prophetic voices from the Bible, engaging the “God of life” to address (Judge) and intervene into their lived realities (West 2015: 243, 244). True dialogue enables the participants to engage in critical thinking (Freire 1996: 69) which facilitates the process of planning a series of transformative actions (Act). I adapted this praxis-oriented methodology for in-depth contextual analysis, theological articulation and reflection to work towards creating a movement of solidarity and action. The articulation of their lived contexts and the ownership of their embodied theologies was done by careful facilitation of creating safe spaces for critical dialogue. The guiding principles of the CBS workshop was to ensure active participation and contribution by each research participants/collaborators, where each one listens to one another with respect and discerns together how God intends to transform their lived realities. By wrestling with the Scriptures, they offered their insight and resources for doing theology for the vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women.

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<sup>84</sup> Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a way to engage groups of people in self-determined change. It focusses on what’s working, rather than what’s not working, and leads people to co-design their future. It is being increasingly used as a problem-solving mechanism to fix what is wrong. It is a strengths-based or affirmative approach that helps identify strengths and resources of communities to fix broken systems. AI is being used favourably used in the social development sector to work with communities where they identify their strengths and resources to address systemic and structural challenges.

(Source : <https://positivepsychology.com/appreciative-inquiry/>, <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/learn/appreciative-inquiry-introduction/>, Macpherson, Alice. (2015). Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry.)

By bringing marginalised voices to the centre of discourse and in producing knowledge, this research process challenges dominant theologies which have for too long marginalised their voices and concerns. By the end of the CBS workshop, the participants/ research collaborators felt recognised, valued and included in the entire process. Their insight and knowledge gained from the sharing of their lived experiences along with their critical reading and interpretations of the Scriptures not only empowered them but made an immense contribution to this research.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

The notion of 'experience' is central to this research, which was captured through the Formal Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study. A lot of qualitative time was invested in feminist thinking during the research process. The conversations were hosted and facilitated in ways that enabled them to share their lived experiences and made conscious efforts to mitigate "discursive colonisation" (Mohanty 1991, DeVault & Gross 2012: 176). This was done by establishing a relationship of trust, mutual respect accountability and facilitating a process of active and meaningful participation. They respected the purpose and process of this research, and I respected each word that they spoke, without any prejudice, except the bias of solidarity.

Knowledge produced in this research has been done through structured and loose encounters listening to women's experiences, where women chose 'how', 'what', 'when' and 'where' to share their narratives and embodied experiences. The conversations unfold a collaborative effort of constructing knowledge together, of making meaning out of embodied experiences, through active listening and dialogical engagement. Through reflexive conversations and dialogues, I engaged in opening discussions on the cultural constructions of identities that had a negative impact on their well-being. A reflexive approach helped me to understand the deeper impact of negative labels and stigma attached to their experiences and nature of work which is considered 'indecent'. In this chapter, I have presented a detailed account of the research process and the feminist practice of knowledge production through a critical research paradigm. I presented why and how I conducted the Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study. The research collaborators identified themselves as Christian migrant working women, from the North-Eastern State of Manipur, making it appropriate to complete the research process with CBS. I have detailed

the formation of collaborative relationship between the researched and the researcher, and how they identify and construct their self-identities and utilise their agency during this research process. I have shared my location as a researcher and how I offer my reflexivity to the research, the ethical standards maintained during the research to produce a reliable, rigorous and valid research finding. Women's active participation and ownership of the research is itself an empowering and transformative process for all.

In the next chapter, I will share the thematic analysis of inputs from the Formal Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions all of which becomes a resource for the Contextual Bible Study workshop. The chapter delves into the deliberations from the Contextual Bible Study workshop. This research involves knowledge production and doing theology with marginalised women, with the pre-supposition that marginalised, vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women have important subjugated knowledge that deserves articulation, theoretical attention and theological construction. This subjugated knowledge can produce interesting and vital results when undertaken within the discipline of biblical interpretation and liberation hermeneutics. In the next chapter, I explore if the Bible has a liberating word or message for those whose bodies have been a site of struggle or is at an edge of constant risk of being violated, what would be that word that would liberate women from being in-dignified from those negative experiences and anxieties? What would liberation mean to those people whose labour is cheap and disposable under the current economic and political systems of capitalism where workers live in anxiety of being disposed and replaced and where their humanity is in-dignified frequently. If Liberation Theology takes a 'preference for the poor', why does it exclude poor women and their struggles for decent work and better life. I therefore attempt to explore the theological/ religious dimensions of dignity in the embodied experiences of the vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Amplifying the Voices of Women in Margins:**

#### **Reflecting and Shaping Women's Articulations and Discourses**

##### **7.0 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I detailed the research process. I described how the research participants were identified, how they transformed to research collaborators and how each one of them contributed to knowledge produced for this research based on their embodied experiences and perspective. The methodology used in this research has utilised feminist principles and values to have the perspective of vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women from their lived experiences. They provide their insight and perspectives through individual articulation in the Formal Feminist Interviews and Informal Encounters and through a collective engagement and dialogue in the Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study Workshop. The Focus Group Discussions were conducted in small groups while the Contextual Bible Study Workshop brought together all the participating research collaborators in one place.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, this research process has embedded feminist values and principles in the research process. From the time women were identified to participate in this research, I invested my time with them sharing about the research objectives and process, which included my expectation from them to participate, collaborate and own the research process and to contribute to knowledge production. Building an honest and open research relationship with the research participants/ collaborators enabled me to create an inclusive and respectful environment for experience and knowledge sharing, dialogue and for critical reflections. By adapting an ethical, empowering and participatory research process, I was able to build an epistemological research relationship with them. This is an important aspect in this research as it involves women sharing and discussing sensitive issues that are associated with trafficking, labour migration and indecent work for women. Stigma attached to trafficked women and the stereotypical images of women working in an already hypersexualised sector marginalises women in the society, let alone having them as knowledge contributors in academia and theology which has historically marginalised women's knowledge and embodied experiences with dignity. I made conscious effort to avoid

tokenism of women's participation in this research. The existing power inequities between the researcher and researched was narrowed by embracing them with dignity as people with resource and knowledge and by being honest and transparent about the research with them. Having their trust and participation has made enormous contribution to this research.

My contribution as a facilitator was to create a space of trust and a spirit of collaboration. Making conscious efforts to empower women participants as collaborators for this research was mutually beneficial, as they began owning the research purpose and process and contributed with reflexivity. This approach is rooted in my ideology, politics and ethics as a feminist, activist, practitioner, researcher, socially engaged biblical scholar and advocate for the rights and dignity of women. I have used my skills of working with people in margins, especially with vulnerable and trafficked women, in the process of knowledge creation. To understand their world and their perspective, I created safe, sacred, enabling and empowering spaces for articulation of their lived experiences. I listened to them very carefully, with utmost respect and empathy. The embodied experiences shared in the Formal Interviews and Informal Encounters were reflected discursively in the Focus Group Discussions, which in turn became collectively embodied by the group (Scott 1990:223-224). From the Focus Group Discussions, I collated critical elements for further discussions and reflection in the Contextual Bible Study Workshop.

As a researcher, I brought in my knowledge from the literature review, analysis from the Feminist Formal Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions as resource for the Contextual Bible Study workshop. As a socially engaged biblical scholar, I studied theology from a liberation and feminist perspective. I spent much time reading on Contextual Bible Study and reflected on various theological articles written on the biblical narrative of Ruth. The identification and discernment on the biblical text was guided by my Supervisor, Prof. Gerald O. West. I worked on identifying the potential lines of connection between the women's contexts and the textual context of the book of Ruth. The CBS questions were then formulated by me under the guidance of my Supervisor linking the text and context within the framework of the research objectives and the key research questions of this study. I followed and adapted the methodology of doing Contextual Bible Studies developed by Prof. Gerald O. West and the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal over a period of more than thirty years of community-based work

as a resource, practice, and method within the trajectory of biblical liberation hermeneutics (West 2014: 2; West 2015: 2).

Context being pivotal in CBS, I prepared my notes before the CBS workshop on the Context, drawn from the literature reviews and the sharing of women's experiences in the interviews and interactions earlier. In the CBS Workshop, I presented an overview of the status of women in India who are vulnerable to trafficking and the realities of trafficked and migrant working women. The first part of the presentation was based on my literature review and the second part was based on the findings of the Formal Feminist Interview, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions. The thematic analysis and context were put on chart papers across the walls in the CBS workshop room. We (research collaborators and I) spent time reflecting on those aspects during the CBS workshop. I offered them my analysis and critique of the social context as a background for the CBS. Women contributed their perspectives and resources in addition to what was mentioned on the flip chart and chart papers as I opened a time of reflection and discussion for them to contribute. This Context setting was the 'See' part of the See-Judge-Act, a component embedded in CBS methodology. The Context (Seeing) is the starting point for doing theology. The analysis of their reality brings their reality into dialogue with the prophetic voices from the Bible, engaging the "God of life" to address (Judge) and intervene into their lived realities (West 2015: 243,244). The session on 'Judge' was an intensive process of critical feminist reading and reflection on the book of Ruth by participants who were divided in three small groups. They discussed the CBS questions and reported back to the Plenary their theological understanding on those issues as it relates with their contextual realities and embodied experiences. The 'Act' session was a time of dreaming and designing an Action Plan for all stakeholders to work together with an effort to bring transformative changes in the lives of people vulnerable to trafficking, indignity, and indecent marginalisation as migrant workers.

By adapting liberation biblical hermeneutics in the form of Contextual Bible Study, the reading of the book of Ruth in the Contextual Bible Study (CBS) workshop explored their struggle for liberation, hope and path towards "life in abundance" (John 10:10).<sup>85</sup> The See-Judge-Act

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<sup>85</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full (John 10.10).

framework<sup>86</sup> within the CBS draws from the knowledge of vulnerable, trafficked, and migrant working women and from the academic resources available. The 'See-ing' process helped in the social and economic analysis of the context, which was done by listening to the women and through social and development studies. The 'Judge' process enabled us to engage with the book of Ruth as a biblical resource to reflect and interpret the context and experiences of Ruth and how it resonates with their contextual realities and embodied experiences.

With the biblical interpretation of Ruth, women reflected on their faith within their contextual realities. They articulated their embodied theologies within their lived realities. These collective voices articulated during the CBS are at the heart and soul of embodied "incipient theology",<sup>87</sup> which forms the basis of "people's theology", as mentioned in the *Kairos Document*.<sup>88</sup> The people's theology forms the basis for a public theology that can be a rich resource for influencing social change and transformational development (West et al., 2020: 6). These processes then bring us to formulate and propose different actions required from

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<sup>86</sup> West, Gerald & Haddad, Beverley, Boaz as 'sugar-daddy': Re-reading Ruth in the Context of HIV in Southern Africa. (*Journal of theology for Southern Africa*, 2016), 137-156. Within the overall cycle of praxis, Contextual Bible study (as a particular methodology within liberation hermeneutics) operates within the See-Judge-Act framework. See-Judge-Act is a process formed in the worker priest movement in Europe in the 1930-40s, which was taken up and elaborated in the liberation struggles of South Africa, Latin America, and the Philippines (among other contexts of struggle). The 'See' moment of this process focusses on social analysis, drawing both on the knowledge of the marginalised sector/s concerned and on the social sciences .... We then go to the 'Judge' or engage with this reality from the prophetic trajectories of the Bible, using the biblical book of Ruth as a resource. And finally, we formulate preliminary forms of action ('Act') that emerge from the 'See' and 'Judge' moments (West & Haddad 2016:139).

<sup>87</sup> James R. Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 21-39.; cited in West, Gerald & Haddad, Beverley. Boaz as 'sugar-daddy': Re-reading Ruth in the Context of HIV in Southern Africa. (*Journal of theology for Southern Africa*, 2016), 149 – "James Cochrane, makes a similar argument, but uses theological language, when he describes the 'incipient theology' of marginalised sectors as residing in the continuum between the conscious and the unconscious, 'the realm of partial recognition, of inchoate awareness, of ambiguous perception, and, sometimes of creative tension : the liminal space of human experience in which people discern acts and facts but cannot or do not order them into narrative descriptions or even into articulate conceptions of the world'".

<sup>88</sup> Theologians Kairos, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa*, Revised Second Edition (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1986), 34-35, note 15.

different actors to “Act” towards establishing a just world for women to live and work with dignity.

Women’s individual and corporate articulation and reflections on their embodied experiences provides a deep insight into the social, economic and contextual analysis of the situation of trafficked and migrant working women in the informal economy from the Global South. The epistemological framework and knowledge production is based upon the social analysis and biblical interpretation by vulnerable and trafficked migrant working women who affirm their agency and subjectivity despite being poor, excluded and marginalised, socially, economically as well as in social sciences and theology. Women with experiences of intersectional oppressions articulate their lived experiences of journey towards economic empowerment and towards a ‘life in abundance’. The economic analysis adapts a Marxist mode of analysis to capture the perspectives and experiences of trafficked and migrant working women from the Global South in the context of globalisation and neo-liberalism.

In this chapter, I present the research findings from the fieldwork, drawing from women’s articulations and insights in the research process. I present a thematic analysis of their individual and collective discourse. I have captured their discussions and then categorised their ideas based on the research objectives. I begin with presenting a cumulative analysis of women’s voices from the FI, IE, FG and CBS. The analysis of the knowledge produced is the outcome of rich deliberations and articulations of women’s voices and standpoint based on their embodied experiences during the Formal Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study workshop. The analysis presented in this chapter is based on summative reporting from the FI, IE, FGD and CBS where relevant. I have used the CBS to shape the reporting and analysis, drawing in from the FI, IE and FGD. The research process had an intentional and logical sequence of engaging with and listening to women’s embodied experiences. The individual and personal interactions with women during the Formal Interviews brought in information that led to deeper and engaging discussions in the Informal Encounters. The knowledge and resources gathered from the Formal Interviews and Informal Encounters were resources for collective discussions in the Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study workshop. The questions for each research method are aligned to the research objectives. Hence, the reporting and analysis format presented in this chapter is summative and feeds into the CBS. The purpose of having CBS as the basis of



reporting and analysis, and incorporating vital inputs from the FI, IE and FGD, is because the purpose of this research is to work towards developing a theology for trafficked dignity and to affirm the rights and dignity of migrant women workers. Hence, CBS is the culmination of the process, drawing together in the bodies of the women a cumulative articulation.

I present a comparative analysis between the narrative of Ruth and the experiences of vulnerable, trafficked, and migrant working women who collaborated for this research. The analysis is categorised into thematic areas such as, i) the context of trafficking and migration: a gendered perspective; ii) consequence of trafficking and migration for women in the margins and the shadow economy; iii) lived experiences of women in the host community; iv) strategy of women's survival and empowerment in host cities; v) working in the darkness of the night at the threshing floor: relating with Ruth, negotiating for a secured future?; vi) envisioning and imagining a just future; vii) reshaping public perception for a life of dignity and viii) forging bonds of solidarity: a call for just praxis and advocacy for economic justice. Sub-sections 7.1.1 to 7.1.5 describe the trajectories of women's journey as trafficked and migrant working women in the host cities as they negotiate for a secured future and how their experiences resonate with the biblical character of Ruth and how they respond to similar situations in their contemporary context. Sub-sections 7.1.6-7.1.8 present women's expression of demands from the larger community to be in just solidarity with them. They envision a just future for themselves, where their identities are constructed not by the rhetoric's of the dominant public discourse but when their voices and perspective are included and represented in the re-shaping of public perception, policy, praxis and theology that affirms the dignity of women in traffic<sup>89</sup> who are indecently marginalised.

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<sup>89</sup> I use the phrase 'women in traffic' to draw attention towards the panic regarding women's movement, in stark contrast to their male counterpart, especially in the context of human trafficking and transnational migration. In this dissertation, I have argued for a need to normalise women's autonomy and mobility. I advocate for women's right to decent work and migration, which includes domestic migration and transnational migration.

## **7.1 Comparative Analysis between the Biblical Narrative of Ruth and the Lived Experiences of Contemporary Trafficked and Migrant Working Women**

This section primarily captures women's views from the contextual reading of the book of Ruth. They share how this story resonates with their lived experiences as migrant working women, some of whom have experiences of trafficking. Contextual Bible Study as a research method, forms the basis of the reporting and analysis, drawing from information, knowledge and resources gathered from the other research methods utilised in this research such as the Formal Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions. CBS is used to shape the summative reporting and analysis, drawing in from their individual and collective articulations in groups, as relevant.

As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the participants of the CBS are the same as the participants of the Feminist Formal Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions. Since this research is a collaborative work, having the same research participants was a deliberate choice. They got more aware and engaged with each research process. By the time we had the CBS Workshop, they became active collaborators in the research process. When the participants came together for the Contextual Bible Study Workshop, they had already done a detailed reading of the book of Ruth in advance as I had shared with them in my previous interactions during the Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions. Women had come prepared to reflect together though they were not used to a participatory and Contextual Bible Study of this nature. However, setting the tone on the purpose of the workshop and reflecting on the book of Ruth was not difficult since the participants turned research collaborators were familiar with the purpose and process of the research, and they had started thinking on the lines of the research purpose.

In this section, which is categorised into eight sub-sections, I present a culmination of their inputs and articulations based on the most important themes identified from the book of Ruth and how it resonates with their embodied experiences and contextual realities. The response to the first community consciousness raising question of the CBS helped identify the themes for discussion and for this dissertation. In the second session of the CBS workshop, I made a presentation using a flip chart that captured their voices as shared in FI, IE, FGDs along with materials from my literature review. With this resource in the background, the CBS questions were discussed. The questions of the CBS were broadly aligned to the questions in the FI and

other methods used. Based on the CBS questions and the text, we (the group and me) identified the context of Ruth's migration trajectory as the starting point of discussions and how it relates to their own migration and trafficking experiences. I captured their thoughts and wrote them on the flip chart. This helped us all to visually have all thoughts articulated in one place and then categorised the themes.

The first theme identified is *Context of Migration and Trafficking (backstories) from a Gendered Lens*. This is a response to the first CBS question: 1) What are the most important themes emerging from the book, in your opinion? The purpose of the opening question is to draw knowledge from the community and to stir 'community consciousness'. The purpose of the 'in front of the text mode of reading question is to draw participants own understanding of what the text projects towards them or is telling them directly' (West 1991:104-141,161-163). In this chapter, I detail the CBS and FI questions and women's responses in the sub-sections which are categorised into different thematic areas as they emerged from the discourse.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> CBS questions focus on the literary world of the text, ie., 'on-the-text'. It is an interpretative process of moving into 'critical consciousness'. The 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> questions elicit moving back to "community consciousness". The responses to these questions are facilitated by creating safe and sacred spaces to enter the world of the participants that enables uncovering of their own subjugated knowledge with questions invoking their complex realities and lived experiences. The last question, the 8<sup>th</sup>, is a transitional one, that moves the CBS process into the 'Act' moment. The CBS questions can be found in Appendix III and are shared in the following sub-sections.

Collective reflection brought in community knowledge which generated collective community consciousness. A comparative analysis between the lives of Ruth and contemporary 'women in traffic' ie., trafficked and migrant working women brings to attention similarities in the context, experiences and strategies adapted for liberation by the biblical woman and the contemporary women from the margins. It is here we move focussing on the literary world of the text, 'on-the-text', which is an interpretative process of moving into 'critical consciousness' (West 1991:104-141,161-163). Women began taking leadership in organising the discourse and engaging in deeper biblical reflection in small group discussions and in the plenary session.

The second theme, *Consequences of Migration and Trafficking*, emerged in response to the second question: 2) What do you think about Ruth's migration to an unknown land with her mother-in law? What risks do you think she could have undertaken while migrating to an unknown and foreign land? Do you think she had aspirations and/ or responsibilities while making a conscious choice of moving out from her homeland? It highlights the positive and negative experiences, and the risks encountered during this phase, both in the biblical character of Ruth as well as theirs in the current context. Two themes emerged in the discussion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> question: 3) Ruth chooses to take up work that is available for her, what are your first thoughts about working in an unknown and foreign land, in your own context? What are your notions of dignity in the context of any work that is available even if it involves risk of exploitation or personal harm? Two themes emerged from the discussions on these questions: *Lived Experiences of Women in the Host Community*, and *Strategy of Survival and Empowerment in Host Cities*.

The discussions from the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> questions elucidated the next theme, *Working in the Darkness of the Night at the Threshing Floor: Negotiating for a Secured Future?* 4) Naomi encourages Ruth to have a sexual relationship with Boaz, hoping for economic and social security. What concerns do you think Ruth had when she followed Naomi's instruction instead of choosing to romantically engage with and settle down with someone her own age? 5) Was Ruth compelled or vulnerable while moving ahead to engage in a sexual relationship with Boaz? Share your opinion. What risks do you think she was taking to seek long term benefits?

The 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> questions seek answers to what women's responses would have been if they were in Ruth's position and how the story resonates with their life experiences. 6) What in this story resonates with your lived experiences? 7) If you were Ruth, then how would you have responded to a situation like this? Re-tell the story in your own context. The eighth question sought to draw insight from women's expectation from theological systems and structures contribution and engagement to address issues of women's agency and dignity to ensure decent work for women. 8) In your opinion, what social and theological structures must we engage with in order to address issues of Agency and Dignity in the context of in/decent work available for vulnerable/ trafficked/ migrant women – women across the globe? The groups responses have been incorporated in the identified theme: *Envisioning and Imagining a Just Future*. This sub-section highlights their opinion on what social and

theological structures we must engage with in order to address issues of agency and dignity in the context of in/decent work available for vulnerable/ trafficked/ migrant working women across the globe.

The CBS workshop was the culmination of several weeks of engagement with the research participants/ collaborators. The CBS workshop was participatory and reflective. As indicated in the previous chapter, I facilitated the CBS workshop in which I invited them to share responsibilities during the workshop processes as leaders, enablers and facilitators in the small group discussions and exercises. As described earlier, I used flip charts, chart papers and flash cards in the CBS workshop to display the resources and the voices/ standpoint of women (anonymous) as recorded in the Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions. These were posted on the walls surrounding them in the workshop room. Flash cards were used in the group work. After the introductory session in the CBS workshop, they were invited to ask questions, share expectations and make suggestions. I recorded all of these on flip charts.

The second session of the CBS workshop focussed on their Context (See). I first presented an overview of the status of women in India who are vulnerable to trafficking based on my literature review. Thereafter, I presented the realities of trafficked and migrant working women based on women's own inputs during the Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions. The input of this session was largely shaped by women's own contributions from their extensive sharing of their lived realities during the research process. My analysis of the findings from the research processes and the overview presented in the CBS workshop is shaped by what I was able to discern about their realities. Therefore, it is worth mentioning here that in the real sense my input for this session was shaped by their deep sharing's of their lived realities and perspectives during the research process. This session was facilitated in a way that women could articulate their experience and perspectives with ease and comfort in a larger group. This session was purposeful, since speaking on sensitive issues on a topic like this is not normal for them in Bible studies.

The CBS workshop was intense. The participants were divided into three small groups intended for intensive small group discussions. The selection of participant for each group was random based on number count of one, two and three, which meant that the small groups were not the same as the Focus Groups members that had met in small groups earlier.

The intention was to broaden the circles of solidarity and friendship with women they did not know earlier. These three small groups were given CBS questions to reflect and discuss. Questions 1 and 8 were discussed by each group. Each group was given two more questions to reflect upon. The first group discussed on question 2 and 3, the second group delved on question 4 and 5 and the third group dealt with discussing question 6 and 7. I encouraged them to take time for a critical feminist reading and interpretation of the book of Ruth based on the CBS questions (Judge).

After the small group discussions, we had a Plenary session. Each group brought their critical insights and reflection from the small group discussions into dialogue with the larger group. I encouraged creative modes of expressing their views in the Plenary. It generated excitement for them to present small group discussions in the Plenary. They articulated their theological understanding on the book of Ruth and how it relates to their context and lived realities with drawings, role-plays, anecdotes and jokes (through jokes they presented sarcastic views of ways how the world around them treats them or speaks with them) and presented their discussions at length. I had kept chart papers and marker pens for them to take notes, draw and write in ways they wanted to express themselves. As their embodied theologies began taking form and as they expressed their views in the Plenary, I noted down their articulations on flip charts. This helped them see what they shared. They added more points or corrected some, as they reflected further.

In the concluding session (Act), they shared their dreams on how they imagine a better world and how transformative actions can change their lived realities. As a way forward for individual and collective action, I adapted and applied the principles of Appreciative Inquiry<sup>90</sup> to facilitate this process. They identified the power of collective solidarity and their possible

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<sup>90</sup> Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a way to engage groups of people in self-determined change. It focusses on what's working, rather than what's not working, and leads people to co-design their future. It is being increasingly used as a problem-solving mechanism to fix what is wrong. It is a strengths-based or affirmative approach that helps identify strengths and resources of communities to fix broken systems. AI is being favourably used in the social development sector to work with communities where they identify their strengths and resources to address systemic and structural challenges.

(Source : <https://positivepsychology.com/appreciative-inquiry/>, <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/learn/appreciative-inquiry-introduction/>, Macpherson, Alice. (2015). Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry.)

allies and partners who would contribute to fulfilment of their dreams. The CBS workshop was a process that embedded the components of See-Judge-Act methodology. I have followed the CBS principles in the workshop as shared in the previous chapter. My background reading and their contributions in the Formal Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions that was presented as a resource at the Introduction was briefly shared at the Plenary to re-emphasise and paraphrase the outcomes of the research as it emerged in each stage and add new insights that emerged at the Plenary. This helped to maintain a clarity on the purpose and outcomes of the research.

This was the first time women participated in a participatory Bible study of this kind. Contextual Bible Study was new for them, but they got engaged in discussing their views and opinions as it related well to their context. Furthermore, the research process itself had got them to understand the importance of knowledge making in a participatory approach. Having a Biblical discussions or engaging in a discussion on a question like question 8, was totally a surprise element for them. They took time to comprehend that their views can be of importance to contribute to a question like, “In your opinion, what social and theological structures must we engage with in order to address issues of Agency and Dignity in the context of in/decent work available for vulnerable/ trafficked/ migrant women across the globe?”.

In the small group discussions and at the Plenary, women discussed how they have and would have responded to similar situations like Ruth in their present-day contexts. They shared their perspectives on the context and consequences of trafficking and migration and the strategies they adapt for their survival, empowerment, security and hope for a better future. In the CBS Workshop, women compared Ruth’s and their own strategies of survival, empowerment and assertion of dignity in host communities. They mentioned the common factors that push or motivates women to move to the cities in search of work and better life. Women mentioned that they may be tricked, deceived, or coerced to move or their movement could be voluntary. Trafficked or not, they now identify themselves as migrant working women.

They discussed macro issues of poverty, deprivation, marginalisation and exclusion that need to be addressed. During the discussions, women highlighted structural and systemic failures that disempower people from impoverished communities, with girls and women being visible at higher risk. They shared their personal experiences with the prevalence of traditional socio-

cultural norms that perpetuates gender-based violence which needs to be addressed systematically at all levels. As mentioned in-depth in the previous chapters, I argue that the nuanced differences and commonalities between human trafficking and migration of women must be explored and understood from the perspective of women themselves, as these complex issues cannot be boxed inside the categories of 'perfect victims of trafficking' and 'voluntary migrants' in the context of a neo liberalised economy.

Women articulated about their faith and their perception of God, the Church and the larger community in the context of their struggles, challenges, dreams and successes. They reflected on how faith traditions become a site of struggle, that not only submit to systems of oppression, but often becomes oppressive systems by themselves. They spoke of how common socio-cultural and religious backgrounds brought them together in their struggle and enabled them to forge bonds of solidarity. They shared personal narratives during the small group discussions.

In her article "Women's Spiritualities: Resource for Mission", Monica J. Melancthon (2009: 303) notes that,

"Yet many women, through the centuries of patriarchal control, have negotiated many layers and levels of existence, working out forms of resistance, that are often unnoticed and subtle, subliminal and powerfully effective. Though women's articulation is often at odds with the dominant male voice, women have been and are speaking in their own way, defining their own truths, in voices that seek to alter the society and polity, relationships and religion, and challenge forms of structure of discrimination in society and church."

When one woman (formerly trafficked) shared how alone and isolated, she felt in a new city in a hostage like situation, she described her anger towards God, her daily fights with God through prayers and her continued cry for help. Throughout that phase in her life, when she had no one to turn to, she found the Bible to be the most important thing she had. Despite her mixed feelings of remorse, anger, guilt, shame and hopelessness, she knew deep within that she could turn to God in prayer and supplication. She further mentioned that much after she was rescued, she found the comfort of being part of her community who stood with her in solidarity, who helped her to find a decent job and assisted her by training her



into work. She found a place to stay that was initially provided to her. She now lives in a rented house, has a job and income to her satisfaction and strives to do better in life, so much so that she can gain respect back in the home community. She mentioned that she has not given up on God, because God did not give up on her and gave her a new life that she must live well, for herself, her family and friends and for God.

Another woman shared why she cut off her ties with the home Church and community. She asked, "Is God a conservative God in my home Church and a more embracing one in the city?" She is angry with the community back home as she believes that they despise her because she is doing well in her life, because she has fashionable clothes to wear and a better lifestyle than them. She feels women gossip about her when she visits home and attend Church. She rarely visits home these days, and when she does, she refrains from attending the Church.

Yet, another woman shared how she was discriminated and looked down upon by clients and how she has learned to control her anger and emotions at the workplace. She shared about one incident when a female client, supposedly an educated and well-placed one, asked her questions like, do tribal people like her wear leaves or clothes, do they live in jungles or do they have thatched houses, are there schools in their villages, etc. Others shared about how difficult it is to find a house to rent in the host city because they look different and come from outside. Some shared how difficult it is to walk in the street, and how at times they face eve-teasing or sexual assault, simply because they look different or work late in the night.

Women emphasized on the need to empower themselves individually and collectively in solidarity with one another. Economic independence and self-reliance being the key indicator for their confidence, sense of self-worth and dignity. The spirit of solidarity and community for them is greater than being part of a typical conservative, alienating and discriminatory Church. However, most of them found that community through a Church, church-group or a student-workers network in the host city.

Through the CBS workshop, women tried to seek answers to the core theological question: is God is on their side, especially in times of extreme alienation, exploitation and harm inflicted upon them? They ask why is it that women who believe in God have been trafficked and

experience shame, discrimination, stigma, alienation and exclusion? Why are women who move out of their homelands, whether through force or deceit (trafficked) or who migrate voluntarily with the desire to get decent work, indecently marginalised not just by those who exploit and traffic them but the unjust practices by employers but and unfair treatment by the larger community?

I have collated their articulations and put them together in the thematic sub-sections below. At the end of each sub-section, I present my interpretations and analysis from the Formal Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and the Contextual Bible Study workshop, along with resources from my literature review.

### **7.1.1 The Context of Trafficking and Migration**

The first question of the Feminist Interview: 1) Introduce yourself. Describe your life before coming to Bangalore, is the starting point of this research. This is a general opening question where women spoke with spontaneity. I probed them with some questions in between to explore factors that contribute to the vulnerabilities of young women who migrate for work or for better life and are therefore vulnerable to trafficking. I probed them with questions on their intersectional experiences of gender, caste, class, ethnicity, socio-economic, cultural and religious backgrounds in the context of trafficking and migration for work. Women have backstories in their migration and trafficking trajectories that contribute the major factors for their movement. Despite the risks that they may encounter in this journey, they step out. They look forward with a hope for a better quality of life for themselves and their families. They have responsibilities to fulfil and dreams to meet.

In response to the first question of CBS, women shared their views on the themes that emerged from the book of Ruth. As a background preparation for this question, I posted a flip chart on the white board with their responses from the first question from the Feminist Interviews. The first question of FI had elucidated responses on their lives in their home communities before their migration/ trafficking. I had posted some media reports and articles on trafficking and migration on the walls of the room. These responses and articles were posted on the sides of the wall, which came as a reminder of the context of migration and trafficking. When women discussed the CBS questions and shared their perspectives, they had these visual posts around them that helped them to return to their contexts and lived

experiences even as they read about the biblical character Ruth and her life experiences. The CBS Workshop elucidates many aspects of women's own experiences and how the life of Ruth resonates with theirs. As I facilitated them for critical reflection and analysis, women engaged in provocative discussions in the small group discussions and at the Plenary of the CBS workshop. Women brought forward their views and made challenging suggestions for changes that needs to be brought in gender discourse, to shift gender norms and to bring positive changes in systems and structures that impedes women's representation and participation in the society and economy.

The book of Ruth begins with a context – a famine that has compelled a Judean family to migrate from their homeland to a foreign country for survival and in search of food and better life during times of food scarcity. Women described compelling factors that push them to move out from their homeland, which was similar to that of Elimelech and his family migrating to Moab due to famine. People migrate to places where there are resources and opportunities with the hope for a better life. From lack of formal employment opportunities, especially for women who lack formal skills, vocational training, and educational degrees, to the dire necessity of sending remittance back home, women shared several reasons for their decisions to move to the cities in search of decent work and for a better life. Women mentioned taking up the role as providers and supporters to their families, like Ruth was for Naomi. Some migrate to take care of a health crisis of a parent, while some to support the educational fees of their younger siblings. They explore work opportunities in bigger cities with a hope for a better life and secured future. They risk their lives to different challenges on their way including the risk of exploitation and trafficking.

Five out of thirteen participating women in this research have had experiences of trafficking and unsafe migration. However, at a time when the system today fails to support women from historically marginalised sections of the society to progress, we have women in this research who have taken the challenge to succeed in navigating their career path. Their determination to fulfil their dreams and aspirations gives them the strength and courage to survive and thrive in a society that never fails to discourage them. By migrating for work, they are making a career of their own.<sup>91</sup> It not only helps them to secure their future through hard

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<sup>91</sup> Women today comprise about half of the global migrant population. International migration has become increasingly feminised as more women are migrating on their own account rather than as

work but also to create an identity of their own. Three out of thirteen women participants are now entrepreneurs. They have their own Salons and Beauty Parlours. On their path towards empowerment, women informed that sometimes they fail and fall but never do they fail to rise again. They take up newer challenges to fulfil their aspirations for a fuller and abundant life. They struggle to be self-reliant and independent. They are determined to break the generational cycles of gender stereotypes. They succeed together as they forge bonds of solidarity. They are occupying the centre stage and taking charge of their lives before their lives come to a dead end, unlike that of how Naomi describes hers to be (1.13.b).

In her article, “Diving Ruth for International Relations”, Musa W. Dube (2001: 68) mentions that,

Ruth, like any other text, is like a mine or mosaic of social relations, where readers go to make their picks. We find female to male, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, mother to son, daughter to mother, wife to husband, woman to woman, master to servant, friendship, widowhood, courtship, neighborliness, migrant labor, and international (Moab and Israel) relationships in the book. These social relationships are a magnetic force drawing many readers precisely because they see and relate these social relations to their own social relationships. The book, in other words, divines its readers, confirming or confirming or confronting their various social relationships and offering alternatives.

In her article, “Ruth: The Power of Discourse and the Discourse of Power”, Ilona Rashkow (1993:26) notes that the Hebrew Bible portrays women as secondary or inferior to men as the biblical source is largely a product of patriarchal societies. Men dominated if not monopolised public discourse and the civil and religious bureaucracies. The death of Elimelech and his sons creates a situation extremely unusual in Hebrew narrative: women, not men, occupy centre

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dependant family members. In moving for work abroad, many women gain opportunities they would not have home and are thus economically empowered by migration, enabling them to make constructive contribution to destination countries as well as to their families in countries of origin. Women are particularly at risk of discrimination, abuse and exploitative treatment when they are migrant workers. (p-31): Migration, human rights and governance: Handbook for Parliamentarians N° 24, © Inter-Parliamentary Union 2015; Inter-Parliamentary Union, the International Labour Organization, and the United Nations (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights)

stage. The book of Ruth describes the life and determination of a woman to survive and thrive in a patriarchal society, and to care, provide and protect her family (the mother-in-law in this narrative). It is after the death of the men that women get the centre stage in this story. The narrative describes the process of empowerment in the life of Ruth in a foreign land. It describes how she takes up challenges to affirm her dignity and secure her future and that of her family, which is Naomi. The story revolves around Ruth and Naomi and their path of turning their disadvantageous socio-economic situation to a story of empowerment of the weak and powerless women who utilise their strength and wisdom to secure their future and position themselves as women of dignity and worth in the society.

Contemporary women at the margins relate with the experiences of Ruth in the way she occupies the centre stage in this narrative. Ruth is not portrayed as a weak woman, but a woman of strength, character, purpose and determination. Studies indicate that trafficking and voluntary migration both have common causal factors for people who move out of their homelands. At a time, when young women are reminded to conform to the traditional gender norms of being homemakers, to stay inside the boundaries of their homes, to get married and produce babies, contemporary women are breaking that cycle. They migrate for work, to provide for themselves and their families.<sup>92</sup> India tops as the country of origin for

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<sup>92</sup> In most discussions on migration, the starting point is usually numbers. Understanding changes in scale, emerging trends and shifting demographics related to global social and economic transformations, such as migration, help us make sense of the changing world we live in and plan for the future. The current global estimate is that there were around 272 million international migrants in the world in 2019, which equates to 3.5 per cent of the global population. A first important point to note is that this is a very small minority of the world's population, meaning that staying within one's country of birth overwhelmingly remains the norm. The great majority of people do not migrate across borders; much larger numbers migrate within countries (an estimated 740 million internal migrants in 2009). That said, the increase in international migrants has been evident over time – both numerically and proportionally – and at a slightly faster rate than previously anticipated. The overwhelming majority of people migrate internationally for reasons related to work, family and study – involving migration processes that largely occur without fundamentally challenging either migrants or the countries they enter. In contrast, other people leave their homes and countries for a range of compelling and sometimes tragic reasons, such as conflict, persecution and disaster. While those who have been displaced, such as refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), comprise a relatively small percentage of all migrants, they are often the most in need of assistance and support.

(Source: World Migration Report, 2020 :19 (IOM, UN Migration))

international migration and has a huge share of internal migration (Khan & Arokkiaraj 2021: 1),<sup>93</sup> many of whom fall in the trafficking nexus.<sup>94</sup>

### **7.1.2 Consequences of Trafficking and Migration for Women in Margins**

This sub-section captures women's responses to the 2<sup>nd</sup> question in the Feminist Interview that helps describe their journey into the city and adds to women's imagination of Ruth's migration to an unknown land with her mother-in-law in response to the 2<sup>nd</sup> question of CBS. In the Feminist Interview and Informal Encounters, women had shared their experiences of migration and trafficking, the risks that they took, the challenges that they faced and their motivation to move out of their homelands. Women had shared their stories, their embodied experiences and their contextual realities during the FI, IE and FGDs that became a basis for discussion of Ruth's experiences in the CBS Workshop. They shared about their faith or lack of it in God, during the most challenging experiences of their lives. After a deeper reflection on Ruth's story on migration, they shared about their perspective on Ruth and how they have or would have responded to similar situation. Like Ruth, many of them are providers and carers for their family, by compulsion or by choice.

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<sup>93</sup> India has a predominant share of internal migration and is also the top origin country of international migrants (De,2019; UNDESA, 2020). The Indian Census (2011) data calculated the total number of internal migrants accounting for inter and intra-state movement to be 450 million, an increase of 45% since the Census 2001 (De,2019). The Economic Survey of India 2017 estimated the inter-state migrant population as 60 million and the average annual flow of migrants between states was calculated at 9 million between 2011 and 2016 (Sharma,2017). India has the largest diaspora (18 million) (Ministry of External Affairs,2021; UNDESA,2020). India is also amongst the largest recipient of remittances at USD 78.6 billion (International Organisation for Migration,2020). Poor wage rates in less prosperous states, persistent wage inequalities between regular and casual workers and lack of formal employment opportunities leads to low-skilled and semi-skilled workers migrate overseas to enhance their economic well-being (Karan & Selvaraj, 2008; Sasikumar & Timothy, 2015). Migration thus gives an optimistic livelihood strategy for migrant workers and their families, contributes to the economic growth of the destination state/country, while the origin state/country benefits from the remittances and the skills acquired during their migration (Khan & Arokkiaraj 2021: 1,2).

<sup>94</sup> For every 10 victims detected globally, five are adult women and two are girls. Migrants account for a significant share of the detected victims in most regions. Traffickers prey upon the marginalized and impoverished. Cases examined by UNODC found that at least half involved victims who were targeted because of economic need. (p.4)

-Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020, UNODC, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Vienna

CBS questions 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> focus on the literary world of the text, 'on-the-text', the responses and discussions of which is an interpretative process of moving into 'critical consciousness'. This sub-section emerges from discussions on Question 2, which begins with a shift to critical consciousness, by focussing on the detail of the text. In response to the 2<sup>nd</sup> question, women shared their thoughts about Ruth's migration to an unknown land with her mother-in law. They discussed about the risks that Ruth might have encountered while migrating to an unknown and foreign land. This was followed by discussions on the motivating factors for Ruth's decision to move out of her homeland. Was it an informed decision, or did she feel compelled to take responsibility of Naomi? Women shared their thoughts on what could have been Ruth's compulsions despite her aspirations and dreams for her life. While reading the biblical text of Ruth, I facilitated women to visit their lives and then re-visit that of Ruth. The readings and reflections were based on their lived experiences and perspectives. During the CBS workshop, I offered my resources from my background readings both at the beginning of the sessions and towards the end at the Plenary. When participants struggled in their small group discussions, I sat down with them and facilitated their small group discussions with a probing question or by taking forward their discussions.

The book of Ruth mentions that when Naomi embarked on her journey back to Bethlehem, she urged her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth to return to their "mother's house" with a wish and prayer for them, "May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." (1:8). Naomi's command to her daughters-in-law may be full of good intent, to return to their mother's house, get married and settle down in life. However, Rashkow (1993: 29) notes that in the male oriented Hebrew Bible, widows normally return to their "father's house". Naomi's discourse was unusual. I provoked women to probe deeper and share their thoughts about Naomi. Was Naomi manipulating her daughters-in-law to choose between their "mother's house" and "mother-in-law's" house in her desperation and anxiety of being left alone, bitter as she was with loss of life of all men in her life? The narrative is clear that whatever may have been the intent of Naomi's speech here, the outcome was beneficial towards Naomi. While Orpah returned to her people, Ruth accompanied Naomi in her journey to her land and her people. Naomi got a young companion for herself who would not only accompany her in her journey back home but would look after her all her life.

Ruth makes an informed choice to migrate to a foreign land with her mother-in-law even if she was manipulated. She clearly asserts her position by telling Naomi, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you.’ (1:16). Ruth powerfully expressed her solidarity and allegiance to Naomi. Ruth seems to be a responsible woman who felt protective towards a grieving and bitter Naomi. She was determined not to leave Naomi alone in her journey back to her homeland and to be her companion, provider, and caregiver all her life (1:17- “... death will separate me from you”). In return, she claims, “your people are my people; your God is my God” (1:16). Rashkow (1993: 32), citing Phyllis Trible (*God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 1978) mentions that Ruth has broken her relationship with her family, country and faith. Ruth disavowed the solidarity of her family and the possibility of marriage and children. By abandoning her identity as a Moabite, she renounced her native religious affiliation.

Contemporary women’s lives, like those participating in the CBS workshop, are relatable with that of Ruth. Most women migrate from their homes to support and provide for their families back home. They risk moving to a new city or country, that is completely alien to them. Their love and commitment towards their families is as deep as that of Ruth. In response to the 2<sup>nd</sup> question of the Feminist Interviews, which was their sharing of the description of their journey from their homes and into the city, women had shared similar stories about themselves. There were exceptional narratives in the interview. Some migrated because they felt violated back in the homes. Gender-based violence emerged as one of the reasons why women not just escape violence but take a step of faith to assert their rights for an identity, sense of self-worth and freedom that every woman deserves to experience. Therefore, they migrated with a hope to live and work for their present day and for their future. However, most of them shared that by taking responsibility for themselves, they felt stronger and empowered despite fear and negative experiences that they have encountered during their migration/ trafficking trajectory. Most of them chose or feel compelled to migrate for work to provide for their impoverished families. In situations of poverty and desperation, families do tend to manipulate their own children. Women shared their views on sometimes feeling that pressure from family while taking a decision to migrate to a new place all by themselves. Women shared their experiences of how in desperate situations they have, like Ruth, committed themselves for the wellbeing of their families despite the risks and uncertainties of stepping out of their homes. Mary (pseudonym/ name changed) expressed her anger



openly because of the manipulation she experienced by her family. She later cut off her ties with them because she felt deceived. In recent times, Mary shared that she has begun calling her family over phone to talk to them but does not feel motivated to visit them.

Women reiterated in the CBS what they had said in the FI, IE and FGD. Some of the detailed examples shared in this chapter have been extracted from FI and IE and are presented here together with the CBS discussions. There is a connect between the responses in the FI and IE which were personal but came naturally into the CBS discussions as broader issues for deliberations. Women went back and forth to the current context of migrant and trafficked women as they discussed about Ruth.

Salome (pseudonym/ name changed) migrated to take care of the medical expenses of her father's sickness but got trapped in the trafficking nexus. Despite the risk implications of migration, women do move and embark on a journey to an unknown land, few of whom get trafficked somewhere in the journey.<sup>95</sup> Stella (pseudonym/ name changed) was encouraged by her mother to migrate to the city for work. Being the eldest daughter of the family, Stella took upon herself to work and provide for her family, and to educate her younger siblings. Stella acknowledges feeling manipulated by her mother, but she also felt responsible towards her family for whom she only has immense love. She said, "I think my mother did not exactly know what was going to happen to me in Delhi. She trusted my aunt. I was afraid to get out of the village. My mother coaxed me to travel with my aunt for work. My aunt was very good to me until she handed me over to a pimp. I cried for days and nights in that dungeon. I was but a child and could not escape. They beat me up a lot. I was raped first by the pimp and his friends until I got fed up and gave in to the clients. They drugged me. I did not even know what was happening with me, or how many men came to me. It was a hellish experience for me until and much after I got out of that place. I don't like talking much about it as it still hurts a lot." Traffickers disguise themselves to be the most well-meaning people for their victims.

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<sup>95</sup> Female victims continue to be particularly affected by trafficking in persons. In 2018, for every 10 victims detected globally, about five were adult women and two were girls. About one third of the overall detected victims were children, both girls (19 per cent) and boys (15 per cent), while 20 per cent were adult men. Traffickers target victims who are marginalized or in difficult circumstances. (p.9)

- Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020, UNODC, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Vienna

Studies suggests that traffickers are known to their victims, sometimes they deceive them as lovers or well-wishers of the family. They are usually someone close to the family or from their community that the victim or their family knows.<sup>96</sup> Stella was trafficked by her mother's sister. She was sold into a brothel when she was too young to comprehend what was happening with her. She had happily travelled with her aunt to Delhi for a better life. Her aunt sold her to a pimp. It was after a long time of being in a brothel that Stella befriended a client to escape from there. We wondered with Stella that Naomi must be examined at this point in the narrative in her role of trafficking Ruth, manipulating Ruth to leave Moab with her to travel back to Bethlehem. Naomi can be perceived as a shrewd manipulator who due to her own situation of poverty and widowhood talks sweet to trap the daughters-in-law to travel with her back to Bethlehem. Ruth seems to be someone that contemporary trafficked or migrant women relate with, who was possibly tricked to move with Naomi from her homeland to Naomi's. Women, leave behind their homes and people to demonstrate their solidarity with their families and to provide for them even if it meant risking their lives to the sinister plans of traffickers and their network.

Even if Naomi was a trafficker due to her own aggrieved context, like the mother or aunt of Stella, it would be important to study why women or men from poor and disadvantaged communities traffic people (especially vulnerable women and children) who are known to them. What are the compulsive factors that compels traffickers from poor and marginalised communities to traffic one of their own?

Ruth is like most of the participating women in this research, who decided to migrate to cities for work and better life. Some of them got into the trap of traffickers while others found their way to a world of informal, indecent and exploitative labour. While Ruth, like most of them, can be labelled as a victim of trafficking or a co-conspirator in her trafficking and migration story, as represented in the modern-day slavery rhetoric (Andrijasevic and Mai, 2016:1-10), I

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<sup>96</sup> While many traffickers have criminal backgrounds and use trafficking as a direct source of income, there are also business owners, intimate partners and other family members involved in human trafficking. Court cases reveal instances of parents facilitating the sexual exploitation of their children or forcing them into street begging. Other cases involve business owners exploiting victims into forced labour. (p.13)

-Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020, UNODC, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Vienna

argue that these complex realities must be understood through their perspectives instead of labelling or categorising them as ‘trafficked victims’ or as ‘vagrant’ or ‘naïve’ migrant women.

### **7.1.3 Lived Experiences of Women in the Host Community**

This sub-section and the following sub-sections (7.1.3 & 7.1.4) capture responses primarily from the third, fourth, fifth and sixth questions of the FI and the third question of CBS. The third question of FI was women’s sharing of a description of their everyday life and work in the host city. This question helped explore their nature of work, workplace environments, vulnerabilities and violations they face living and working in the city. It focussed on their everyday challenges and struggles with housing, transportation and life in general living in the city. It explored their faith life, the opportunities and benefits of going to the Church and being part of a faith community or the disadvantages thereof. It examined their social life in the host community, their solidarity and support groups. In response to the fourth question of the FI, women shared their best experiences of living and working in the city. The fifth question delved into the challenges that they face in their everyday lives and how they navigate through challenging situations. The sixth question explored women’s notion of dignity and agency in their own context. It investigated women’s strategies to empower and liberate themselves from adverse situations. It explored women’s experiences of individual and collective actions for affirming dignity in the host cities.

These questions were open ended and hence brought in varied and similar responses of their experiences of marginalization or life affirming attributes of urban life for migrant women. The third question of the CBS is aligned with these three FI questions, dealing with life and work of a woman in a foreign land. It explores women’s thoughts on Ruth’s life post migration, the choices she made and the risks she undertook, and how it relates with their own lived experiences. It further explored women’s notions of dignity in the context of any work that is available to migrant women even if it involves risk of exploitation or personal harm.

Ruth chose to take up work that was available for her to take care of the immediate needs of Naomi and herself. The responses to these questions are shared in two sub-sections below: Lived experiences of women in the host communities, and strategy of survival and empowerment in host cities. In these sub-sections, I bring together the discussions from the CBS and the FI, where they had in their responses shared about their everyday life and work

experiences in the city, positive and challenging situations, and how they addressed those situations. They shared about their notions of dignity and agency in these contexts. Their contribution to the knowledge production process based on their lived experiences and from their reflection on the life of Ruth was for women to understand that they can empower and liberate themselves as agents in their own life stories. Affirming dignity in host communities, they reflected, is a process, individual and collective. They shared about the power and strength of solidarity networks.

Upon their arrival in Bethlehem, Naomi centres the conversation with the women from her community towards herself (1.19,20); “the Almighty has made my life very bitter”, “I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty”, “The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me”. By focussing on the loss and grief that she experienced towards herself, she fails to recognise the presence and sacrifice of Ruth in her life, who despite her own loss and grief at a young age, is committed towards the wellbeing of Naomi until the end of her life (1.17). Tribble (1978) suggests that the elderly widow is “overpowered” by her sense of divinely inspired calamity (cited in Rashkow 1993: 33). While both Naomi and Ruth suffered grief and loss being widowed, Ruth embodies empathy, love, solidarity and loyalty towards Naomi and remained true to her words all her life (1.16).

Naomi’s treatment towards Ruth soon after reaching her own homeland does not express her love and solidarity towards Ruth. She did not express her gratitude towards Ruth for her sacrifices and commitment for Naomi. When the Bethlehem women were making a great fuss over Naomi, a widow without hope, Naomi does not refer or introduce Ruth to them, also a widow, who remained with her as a present or future means of consolation and change (Brenner 1993: 71). Her immediate treatment towards Ruth seems disrespectful, hostile and unempathetic. Was Naomi too overwhelmed with the grief of losing her husband and two sons that she was unable to recognise the grief of a young widow who has left her people and land to be with Naomi all her life? Or was Naomi embarrassed to introduce her son’s widow who was a foreigner, a Moabite? In India, inter-religious and inter-caste marriages do not have much social sanction to this day (Narzary and Ladusingh 2019: 588). Besides, as traditional norms prevail even in contemporary societies, women and in particular daughters-in-laws, continue to have a secondary position in families and communities. Even daughters

who sacrifice their well-being and dignity for their families do not secure a safe and dignified place at home unlike sons, like Stella, one of the research collaborators.

In the CBS workshop we discussed and wondered, if Ruth who sacrificed her identity, family, faith, gods, and homeland was alienated, ignored and unacknowledged by Naomi in front of her community women? What were Ruth's feelings when Naomi turned hostile towards her soon after reaching her homeland? Did Ruth feel unacknowledged, vulnerable and unembraced by Naomi soon after arriving in a foreign land that she willingly pledged to embrace? Was Ruth able to speak and share her feelings with anyone? Was she able to make friends in a foreign land among strangers?

Women shared their negative and positive experiences after reaching a new city. The negative experiences included feeling alone and isolated in a new environment, unable to speak the language of people in the host city which made communication difficult, not finding a decent place to live and work as they lacked the skills and training for any kind of work. Some described difficulty in commuting in the new city which was overwhelming to them having come out of small villages. Hannah shared how timid she felt when she missed her bus stop once on her way back from her workplace to the place where she lived. These were the initial days of her moving into Bangalore. It was nighttime and dark. She got down from the bus and did not know which way to go. Few men saw her and tried taking advantage of the situation. She was scared and somehow managed to hide in some corner until the men were gone. After a long time, Hannah mustered courage and found a way to call her distant-relative who then came and picked her up. While some felt betrayed and lost in the initial days and years of living and working in a new city, some found kind people whose support and guidance helped them to sustain their lives in an alien world. Women shared feeling strong and encouraged when they were heard and embraced in host cities. To be able to speak and share their thoughts and experiences brought them together in solidarity with one another. These solidarity networks have over the years enabled them to thrive and support new migrants and the trafficked.

In the book of Ruth, while we do not get to hear Ruth's experiences and her perspectives, we do find her as an insightful woman who is wise and strategic to find ways to get food for herself and Naomi. She finds ways to protect herself from any harm in the field and secures a position for herself at her workplace and in the host community as a woman of respect,

despite being a foreigner. The story of Ruth has had an immeasurable impact on its listeners and readers over time, so that it has secured a place in the Scriptures. She has not only been mentioned in the Bible, which is dominated by stories of men, but a whole book is dedicated to her. Ruth, a young widow, a willing migrant, perhaps trafficked portrays the life of women at the margins in contemporary times. As a diligent, strong, faithful and empowered woman Ruth creates a position for herself in a patriarchal society.

#### **7.1.4 Strategy of Survival and Empowerment in Host Cities**

As mentioned in the previous sub-section, this is a theme that came out of discussion from the third to sixth questions of FI and the third CBS question, which I have summarised here together. The other research sites, such as the IE and FGD have contributed to this identified theme. I have put together women's perspectives here alongside the theological resources that I shared during the CBS workshop.

In the second chapter of the book of Ruth, there is a dramatic change in the situation with respect to changes in the roles played by Naomi and Ruth (Brenner 1993: 72). At a time when Ruth may quite possibly have felt alienated, she turned the narrative by acting decisively to go out and get food for both. Ruth utilises her power-within and agency to take the lead and address the issue of food scarcity. She does not ask Naomi's permission (Rashkow 1993:33), she rather informs Naomi about her plan (2.2): "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Ruth had a clear strategy to go and find food in the fields of one in whose eyes she will find "favour". Ruth took charge of the situation and instead of lamenting over the "divine affliction" like Naomi, she looked forward, and went out of the house (Rashkow 1993:33) to find ways to survive and sustain herself and Naomi.

Ruth entered the field of Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek, and began to glean behind the harvesters. After entering the field of Boaz, she approached the overseer to seek his permission to glean and collect grains from among the sheaves. Rashkow (1993: 34) notes that Ruth's action is unusual. Under the law, there is no need for the poor to ask permission to glean and collect. We discussed in the CBS workshop the challenges of being in a foreign land and how migrant women navigate their path to survival and sustenance. Ruth was surely aware of her status as a foreigner. Therefore, she engaged in this conversation with the overseer, to be heard, noticed and to be protected from any unforeseen harm that may befall

on her. She is gradually being visible and seen as a responsible, loving, dutiful and caring daughter-in-law. Therefore, when Boaz enquires about her, the overseer speaks well about Ruth in detail. In his conversation with Ruth, Boaz acknowledges hearing about Ruth's commitment towards Naomi (2.11). The good words about Ruth that Boaz heard, we wondered in our CBS discussion, if it came from Naomi or from those who watched Ruth's commitment towards Naomi. Nevertheless, good words about Ruth were spreading around and she was being spoken about well in the community and until now to this day through the Scriptures.

In contemporary times, women are not always treated with respect by their families and their communities. A discriminatory treatment between men's and women's labour marginalises women in how they view themselves. In the book of Ruth, Naomi is seen as a woman who does not appreciate or praise Ruth for all that she does for Naomi even though they do share a strong bond. The loss of the male bread winners overpowered Naomi's conversations, in contrast to the new role of Ruth as the bread winner which went unacknowledged by Naomi in her conversations with Ruth or with her women friends.

Women shared about their negative experiences back in their home community when some women look down upon them for having migrated. During the Informal Encounter, Achui shared about an aunty in the Church who asked her what kind of work she does in the city, and if it is a dirty one. Achui wondered if she, the daughter of a Pastor, can be questioned in this manner, then how many more humiliating experiences other women go through. Achui shared that she has learned how to respond to such questions keeping her sanity and dignity in place, though she feels anger towards the people who look down upon migrant women workers in the city. However, women shared that there is a change in the trend of how migrant women workers and trafficked women are viewed in their home communities because they support their families financially. While men continue to get praise and adoration for whatever they do for their families, women are creating spaces for themselves, even though less appreciated and less valued. This secondary treatment of women and the indecent marginalisation of their labour does affect them in how they self-construct their identities. Despite these challenges, they shared that they chose to remain focussed in their commitment towards their families and themselves; to fulfil the purpose they moved out of their homes.

I facilitated the CBS workshop for a deeper reflection on understanding Ruth's survival, protection, and empowerment strategies, specially at her workplace i.e., in the field. Ruth's discernment, discourse, and conversation skills are highlighted in the second chapter. In the field of Boaz, Ruth stays close to the women of Boaz to glean. She listens to Naomi's advice and uses her discernment to find ways to protect herself from any harm (2.22). By seeking the attention of Boaz, Ruth finds favour in him who offers her protection in his field from any form of sexual assault from his men (2.8,9).

So Boaz said to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. Watch the field where the men are harvesting and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled".

Speaking and articulating her requests enabled Ruth to get what she desired, a hospitable landowner in whom she finds "favour" (2.2). Ruth used her communication skills to articulate and engage in a conversation with Boaz. In her conversation with Boaz, Ruth's choice of words and articulation leads Boaz to be hospitable. She seeks his "favour" and acknowledges the attributes of Boaz who favours a foreigner. She further extends her gratitude for his kindness and grace towards a foreigner and servant by saying, "You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants" (2.13.b). Boaz takes forward the conversation and invites her to share meal with him (2.14).

The Plenary sessions in the Contextual Bible Study workshop generated questions that led to further discussions. Some of the questions were probed by me as a facilitator, based on the inputs from the small groups and in line with the main research objectives. Was it Ruth's choice of words and articulation that led and compelled Boaz to be hospitable towards Ruth or was Boaz flirtatious towards Ruth? Why was he over friendly with "a servant", offering her bread and wine vinegar to dip in? Was it common for employers and workers to share the same food in those times? For those women who have kind employers, they shared that is not a common practice to share food and sit together for a meal with their employers, unless there is a festive celebration at their workplace or if an employee holds a favourable position. There is a barrier in power relations. It takes courage for women to initiate conversations directly with the employer specially in the initial phase of recruitment. In big established Spas,



workers do not have the opportunity to speak with their employers. The smaller Salons are managed by the owners and entrepreneurs, so they have direct contact with the employees. Ruth must have been incredibly bold and courageous to be able to speak upfront with Boaz. As a group, we wondered if Boaz was inviting and flirtatious by giving space to Ruth to be communicative from the first meeting. Ruth, until now, was a woman of few words. She was precise in her speech with Naomi and spoke less with her. Both Naomi and Boaz were older than her, but with Boaz Ruth was comparatively more communicative and articulate. She engaged in conversations with Boaz. It could be perceived as her survival strategy or a comfort she felt in the presence of Boaz. Was Boaz an extra ordinary man, who was hospitable and kind to all who glean and work in his field or was this an exception?

When contemporary women arrive in a foreign land, they informed that they prefer to be focussed on their purpose of migration. They are determined to stick to their motivation despite the many challenges they face, even if they have been trafficked. The women participants shared their struggles with coping and adapting to a different culture and language. They struggle to assimilate with the local or cosmopolitan culture of the city they move into. They struggle to find a decent place to stay and work. Like Ruth, it is important for them to find a workplace which is respectful towards them. Contemporary migrant working women find difficulty in finding a decent, safe and secured workplace, especially in the initial days of their re-location. Those who have come out of trafficking situations shared their experiences of facing several obstacles before finding work. The stigma attached with trafficking adds to their vulnerability in finding a decent job. They take help from other women who have been working in the city for a longer time to locate workplaces where their humanity is not further devalued. They work hard to learn and acquire new skills to work.

Contemporary migrant women workers do want to find favour in the eyes of their employers like Ruth. They bow down and speak to those in positions of power and authority over them, just like Ruth did. They are aware of the unequal relationship that exists between the master/ employer/ manager and worker. They resort to acknowledging and exaggerating the goodness and kindness of the those in positions of power to find favour in their eyes. Their survival strategies and means of protecting their jobs are similar to that of Ruth. The smart ones survive well. Some take time to learn ways of surviving the dominating tactics of the employers. They are aware of what they need and find ways to protect their interest. They

use their communications skills to negotiate relationships with those in power. Over the years, they gain confidence and skills in their work and make a place for themselves with their good work and prefer working with dignity. Mary (name changed) said, “When I was new to this city, I was naïve and gradually learned ways to cope and be strong. I am aware of the benefits an ego massage can work on my employers and supervisors. Most of the time I am polite in my speech, but if they snub at me, I give back and protect my honour and my rights. Now they need me more than I need them because I am rated as one of the best therapist and stylist in this area. I have many clients who come to the Salon and Spa just because of me. The Salon gets good business because of my skills, services and good relationship with clients.”

In his analysis of power relations, Scott (1990:70) examines how concepts of the public and hidden transcripts can help us unpack the complex realities of false consciousness and hegemony. He examines how the dominated conform to certain expected behaviours of them, even in the absence of direct coercion. By examining what lies beneath the surface in the existing power relations, Scott believes that the patterns of domination do generate “certain rituals of affirmation, certain forms of public conflict, and, finally, certain patterns of profanation and defiance” Scott (1990:70). While the powerful do have an interest in keeping up appearances that is appropriate to their form of domination, the subordinates help to sustain those appearances by confirming and not contradicting, at least in the public domain. Scott contests the misrepresentation of social reality, where the dominant ideology is misrepresented as not excluding the interests of the subordinate groups. Scott contends that the dominant ideology operates to conceal or misrepresent aspects of social relations because it could hamper the interests of the dominant elites (1990:71). Discerning and simplifying this thick and thin versions of false consciousness is necessary, where the dominant ideology “works its magic by persuading subordinate groups to believe actively in the values that explain and justify their own subordination”, while the thin theory of false consciousness “maintains only that the dominant ideology achieves compliance by convincing subordinate groups that the social order in which they live is natural and inevitable. The thick theory claims consent: the thin theory settles for resignation. (1990:72)” It is therefore necessary for the internalization of the dominant ideology by subordinate groups (1990: 85)

and for the articulation of their collective hidden transcripts in safe spaces, as an exercise of resistance to challenge the status quo and assert their rights and liberation.

Women mentioned that they prefer to work in places where someone they know is employed. It gives them the strength to face challenges together and support one another, whenever needed. They build rapport with other co-workers and with women from their own home state to seek their support and guidance that they need as new migrants. After a while, they provide similar support to other new migrants. Together, they continue this circle and forge bonds of solidarity to build a community of support and resilience. Like Ruth, they utilise their power-within and agency to empower themselves for a secured future. They find sojourners in their journey and find ways to liberate themselves from a life of indecent marginalisation and exploitation. These solidarity networks and circles are their support groups with whom they share their challenges, and together they celebrate life, special occasions and festivals, ethnic food and culture that keeps them rooted with their culture, traditions and identity.

#### **7.1.5 Working in the Darkness of the Night at the Threshing Floor: Negotiating for a Secured Future?**

This sub-section contains responses generated by the fourth and fifth CBS questions, as well as previous responses in the other research sites, FI, IE and FGD. CBS Question four, “Naomi encourages Ruth to have a sexual relationship with Boaz, hoping for economic and social security. What concerns do you think Ruth had when she followed Naomi’s instruction instead of choosing to romantically engage with and settle down with someone her own age?”, elucidated varied responses. Question five of the CBS probed into understanding women’s perspective on the reason why Ruth went ahead to engage in a sexual relationship with Boaz. Did she feel compelled and vulnerable? What risks was she taking to seek long term benefits?

The third chapter of the book of Ruth begins with the idea of securing a home for Ruth when Naomi tells Ruth, “My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for” (3.1). Naomi presumably takes responsibility to return Ruth’s favour and begins by taking an effort to find a home for Ruth. She has a strategic plan for Ruth. She prepares Ruth to lay a trap for Boaz. Ruth, the obedient daughter-in-law and diligent woman, listens to Naomi and follows her instructions. The opening statement of Naomi implies that women cannot have a home without a man who is meant to be the provider and protector.

As I facilitated discussions on these questions, I examined women's notion of home, marriage, and security. Women deliberated on these aspects and found this verse problematic when Esther (name changed/ pseudonym) began sharing her perceptions of "marriage", "home" and "security" during the Plenary. This led to a deeper reflection on what women mean by a secured future. Most of the participating women shared about their mother's/ parents' wishes for their daughters to settle down in life by marriage, just like Naomi wished for Ruth. However, in their view marriage is not the ultimate destination in life; being self-reliant is important for them. Women shared they do understand the importance of a family life and they do desire to have a partner and children. Some of the participating women are married and have kids. However, they place emphasis on prioritising their economic independence, which is not just for survival but to assert their position and power within their families, communities and society at large. They aspire to have respect for themselves in their homes and community. They dream for a better life for themselves and for their children. They do not want to be struggling to survive all through their lives. With marriage, they expect respect and honour from their partner and his family.

Esther (name changed/pseudonym) shared her notion of marriage, as she gives priority to a relationship of respect and dignity between spouses as an important factor for consideration. "Fairy tales are not real. We must be practical. When you get married, it is not necessary that you enter a relationship of respect and love. Unless you are educated, independent, smart, strong, and confident, you have no respect at home or outside. To have respect, you need to work and earn first, secure your finances, be confident and strong and then get married. So, the guy cannot have much control over you or abuse you. I have seen wives being dishonoured and mothers being disrespected just because they are not educated or independent." Esther shared specific examples from within her circle that affirmed her determination in choosing respect in marriage, not subordination, that she believes comes with financial independence and women's autonomy.

On their notion of home, women mentioned that home is not a place where one lives and is provided for, it must be a place of mutual respect and love. For them marriage and home are what couples must make together. Being a woman is not just being a wife and producing boys; all of them emphasised this. They disapproved of Naomi's overemphasis on the need for or lack of men (husband, sons or grandsons) in her life. Just like the biblical times of Naomi and

Ruth, the preference of boys over girls has remained unchanged.<sup>97</sup> When women give birth to sons, they receive respect and adoration from people around themselves. Women disapprove of the prevailing culture of gender discrimination. They have experiences of gender-based discrimination and violence at homes and outside. Therefore, they struggle and strive to secure a position of respect for themselves at home and in the society. They recognise that unless they continue to provide for themselves, men who are conventionally the provider, will continue to dominate over women who are subjected to live at their mercy. Women recognise the secondary place that women and girls have at home, at work, in society and even in the Church. They shared their personal experiences and perspectives on home and marriage and the importance for women's economic empowerment.

For example, Esther said: "I have seen the life of my mother and my sisters, that is enough to teach me to not live that kind of life. I write my own life story; I refused to live a life of lie like my mother. She suppresses her emotions to keep peace in the family. I have seen women pretending to be happy and healthy in marriage. They suffer in silence. If we do not have respect at home, then we cannot expect respect outside too. The environment at my father's home made me feel low as a young girl. I had little respect for myself. I used to feel worthless. As I grew older, I decided to do something that I will be proud of myself. I took that challenge, even though I lacked education for a respectable job in a good office. I came here because I wanted to fulfil my dream to live with respect. I had my mother's support. I work very hard. I am making a life that I am proud of. I support my family with finance. I will get married when I meet the right person with whom I can spend the rest of my life." For women, creating their own identity and space is important to live a life of dignity.

"My parents got me married at an early age. I was naïve and did not understand how to handle the pressure of marriage. It was not a place of security but of power and control. I left that house in the middle of night, without any support", lamented Cynthia.

Women do not negate the importance of marriage and home. They believe that one needs to be prepared for it. For them, marriage is a partnership where both men and women have

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<sup>97</sup> Ufret, Samantha, "No One Wants a Baby Girl: Analyzing Gendercide in China and India, Global Majority", E-Journal, Vol. 5, No. 2 (December 2014), pp. 117-127

roles to make a home together. They look for a relationship of mutual respect and love. Women shared their positive experiences of marriage as well, as Allana said: “When I was without work, and when I was having my babies, my husband took full care of the family. It was like a cushion. We can complement our resources for the family. So, it works well for me”. Women shared positive affirmation for marriage and the experiences of negative consequences of marriage in unequal relations. They challenge the stereotypical notion where women are meant to manage a household and stay indoors. They aspire and dream of a society where men and people with a paternalistic understanding of marriage understand the harmful consequences of gender-based inequality and discrimination in families, especially in marital relationship. They prefer to have a shared understanding of each other’s experiences, expectation, and standards and reduce gender discriminatory practices within homes and in the community.

During the CBS small group discussions on Questions 4 and 5, women spent substantial time on discussing what happened in the “darkness of the night at the threshing floor” (3:5-15) and its outcome (4:9, 10, 13-16), because of Naomi’s desire and plan to secure Ruth’s future. In Chapter 3, Naomi seems to be a woman who was a strategic planner and problem solver. She guides and prepares Ruth to set a trap for Boaz. Ruth accepts her guidance and carries out her directives without a murmur (Brenner 1993: 70- 84). Was Ruth a victim in the scheme of her mother-in-law who directed her to seduce and get into a sexual relation with Boaz without a clear knowledge of its outcome? Did Ruth feel in-dignified and humiliated for having been asked to prepare herself for this act? Was Ruth attracted towards a rich older man and ready for a ‘sugar dating’ proposition? Was Boaz a victim of seduction? Was he flirtatious with Ruth from before, that then gave Ruth the comfort and courage to come to him at the threshing floor? Not much is mentioned about Boaz and his sexuality. Was he flirtatious, inviting and seductive himself, despite having addressed her as a “daughter”? If not, then how did he consent to Ruth’s ‘seduction’ in the darkness of the night and why did he feel responsible to take her as his wife in the light of the day? Was Naomi a victim of the socio-cultural practices where a widow without sons and in the absence of social security and protection system lives a life without hope and dignity? Was Naomi compelled by her socio-economic status to push Ruth towards establishing an uncertain sexual encounter with the hope of a positive outcome from this act?

It may be difficult to ascertain who played which role at what point in time in this narrative. By the end of chapter four, all the three characters seem to benefit in different ways from the plot. Boaz gets a young wife, Ruth gets a home, husband and provider for herself and Naomi which secures both of their future, and Naomi gets a grandson. Athalya Brenner, in her article, "Naomi and Ruth", describes Ruth as the "agent of redemption", but not the chief beneficiary (1993:71). In this deal, Naomi gets a son from Ruth and Boaz. Naomi's land is redeemed (Brenner 1993:72), which changes her personal fortune and position in the community (4:13-17). To explain this state of affairs, Brenner (1993 :72-73) argues that "this type of thing does happen in 'reality'. A person may either act overtly in order to further his or her aims, or he or she may choose a covert mode of behaviour, for example, to manipulate other people into doing his or her own work for him or her. In both cases, actor and acted upon, manipulator and manipulated, may derive equal or similar benefits from the results of their shared action. Hence, they may agree to exchange roles – either deliberately or spontaneously, consciously or unconsciously – for their mutual benefit." Therefore, even though Ruth plays a dominant role at different times, the chief beneficiary of this scheme seems to be Naomi.

Women noted that Ruth makes a deep impact in this narrative as she is a woman who takes risks and challenges to make a place for herself in a foreign land. She worked towards affirming her dignity and securing her future. What happened in the darkness of the night, can best be described by Ruth or Boaz. However, none of them is the writer of this story. Whatever the probability may be, Brenner (1993: 79) notes, "the 'happy ending' serves to reinforce the existing social order".

On age disparate relationships, based on the relationship that developed or rather was schemed to develop between Boaz and Ruth, we deliberated if marrying an older rich man can be the solution in life for young widows or women in need of protection and security? Is marriage based on the concept of security and protection or is it patronising the institution of marriage? Is marriage only for the purpose of economic security and social recognition and protection? Most importantly, did Ruth find a lover and partner in Boaz? Was she in love with Boaz or was she in awe of him for being kind towards her? We reflected deeper on the notion of security and marriage, the reason Naomi mentions for sending Ruth to an elderly man (3.1-4), who addresses Ruth as "daughter" (2.8, 3.10). This generated discussions on age disparate sexual relationships.

In their article, “Boaz as ‘Sugar Daddy’: Re-reading Ruth in the Context of HIV”, Gerald West and Beverly Haddad engaged in re-reading the book of Ruth in the context of age-disparate relationships, where besides other aspects, they explored if Boaz, “a prominent rich man” (2.1) was advertising himself as a potential ‘sugar daddy’ (2016: 152). They used this provocative question in an Ujamaa Centre training workshop, where they encouraged the participants to enter the terrain of what Marcella Althaus-Reid (2000) refers to as “indecent theology”, which is done by transgressing the limits of decent theology. Likewise, in response to Question four in the CBS workshop, we engaged in a discussion on the ‘critical consciousness questions’ which focussed on understanding Ruth’s perspectives while entering a sexual relationship with Boaz. Women’s reflection on these critical questions came from how they would have responded in a similar situation.

“I could have never married a man who is way older than me. Boaz addresses her as ‘Daughter’ and then gets married to her. That sounds terrible. You can have a fling with an older man because some girls can feel safe and the gifts are nice, but marriage doesn’t sound good with a man of father’s age”, said Mary in her reflection on the relationship between Ruth and Boaz and their marriage thereafter.

“I don’t think marriage as a compromise, but something to be lived and cherished forever, as partners. It is about mutual love, admiration, and partnership. I married a man who is from a different country, culture, and religion but just a few years of age gap. Both of us live for one another to make life beautiful”, Mary continued sharing from her own experience.

“A relationship is not having pity on someone and getting married. Wonder if Boaz had pity on Ruth or, was he happy to get a young woman as wife in his old age”, Monica wondered as she posed a few questions. This provoked us as a group to reflect upon Boaz’s perspective, intention, desire and compulsions in this relationship. The foundations of marriage and relationships in situations like this including age-disparate relationships was briefly deliberated upon during the Plenary.

Could Boaz have got married to Naomi if there was a responsibility to be the redeemer? Did Ruth have romantic love for Boaz or was it a compromise? With marriages deeply rooted in patriarchy, was there a possibility for Ruth to challenge this alliance? What would have been the responses of contemporary women in similar situations? These probing questions were



deliberated upon in the small group discussions. Women shared their priorities in marriage which included, love, romance, someone to make life together, having the spouse as a partner and not just as a provider or protector, someone they can have fun with, have adventures and have respect for one another.

“It is okay to flirt with an older man for benefits but taking it as far into marriage is gross, very repulsive”, Mary noted.

Though women were repulsive towards the idea of marrying older men, of their father’s age, there were discussions of young women engaging in intimate relations with older men for financial gains. Women are vulnerable to get into a relationship with older men for survival and sustenance and take it as an inroad to better life. According to a leading sugar dating website, with 338,000 sugar daddies, India tops Asia with the most sugar daddies. According to the website and app, SeekingArrangement, sugar daddies/mommies are defined as successful men and women who “enjoy attractive company by their side” and for whom money isn’t an issue. Sugar dating is an emerging phenomenon, especially in India. The website stated in the statement that inequality, high unemployment, and growing wealth of billionaires during the COVID-19 lockdown made sugar dating a popular affair in the Asian region.<sup>98</sup> A recent report titled “The Inequality Virus” by OXFAM, that was released on the opening day of the World Economic Forum’s Davos Dialogues, stated that India’s top 100 billionaires’ wealth increased to such an extent during the pandemic that if divided equally, it could translate to over Rs 94,000 each for 138 million of India’s poorest.<sup>99</sup>

After these discussions we returned back to “community consciousness”, further deepening deliberations on CBS questions six and seven. 6) What in this story resonates with your lived experiences? 7) If you were Ruth, then how would you have responded to a situation like this? Re-tell the story in your own context.

The participants (research collaborators) uncovered their own subjugated knowledge by helping one another enter their world, including the dark covered spaces. Within a safe and

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<sup>98</sup> <https://theprint.in/india/india-tops-in-asia-with-most-sugar-daddies-unemployment-inequality-cited-as-reason/601856/>

<sup>99</sup> <https://theprint.in/india/indias-top-100-billionaires-earned-rs-13-lakh-crore-despite-covid-hit-oxfam-report/590172/>

sacred space, women articulated their insights and complex realities with much ease and comfort. They continued sharing how the story of Ruth resonates with their lived experiences and if they were in Ruth's place how differently or similarly would they have responded to similar situations in their present-day context. They shared their notion of 'home', 'marriage', 'empowerment', 'secured future', 'dignity' and aspirations for a 'life in abundance'.

They argue that women can be safe and secured if they are themselves financially independent. A self-reliant and self-respecting woman is less dominated upon and suffers lesser violence and oppression in the family, community and outside. They believe that with economic independence they not only feel empowered but reclaim their honour and dignity. Women mentioned that once they are able to value themselves, they take efforts to gain respect in their communities. They are determined to challenge gender discrimination and violence, at home or outside, and charter out their own lives. They affirm that the book of Ruth resonates with many of their lived experiences. They identified contextual themes based on their community knowledge that was explored through the CBS questions. The reflections generated community consciousness on contextual themes such as contexts of trafficking and migration, economic vulnerability, the consequences of female trafficking and outcome of women's migration, gender based discrimination, resistance to patriarchy, strategy for survival and empowerment in host communities and at the workplace, notions of age appropriate and age disparate sexual relationships, marriage, home and economic security and empowerment, challenges for affirming agency and dignity, creating spaces and community for solidarity.

From a feminist lens, the book of Ruth seems to be somewhere between the story of love, solidarity, obedience, subjugation, empowerment and succumbing to traditional gender norms of womanhood within a society, through which women are guided not to challenge the status quo. However, in the last chapter, Ruth receives divine blessings. The chapter ends with the genealogy of David. Ruth holds a prominent place in the Bible. Jesus is the descendant of David (Luke 2.4). Ruth is honoured and blessed by Yahweh. One wonders, if and how contemporary trafficked and migrant working women might be blessed and given a space like this in the community and the Church, where their personhood is valued and honoured? How could we together in solidarity with women in margins envision and imagine a just future?

### 7.1.6 Re-shaping Public Perception

In the next three sub-sections, I share insights drawn from discussions generated through the transitional questions, moving the CBS to the 'Act' moment (West 2013 :46).<sup>100</sup> We deliberated on the last question of CBS, which draws insight from women's perspectives on what social and theological structures must we (civil society,<sup>101</sup> academicians, biblical scholars, and theologians) engage with in order to address issues of agency and dignity in the context of in/decent work available for vulnerable/ trafficked/ migrant working women across the globe In this section, I add their insight from the other research cites, mainly from the concluding two FI questions: 7) How do you conceptualize God in the midst of vulnerabilities, despair, oppression, exploitation, exclusion and alienation? (Exploring how does their faith, the Bible, the Church and the community become a site of redemption or struggle); and how has your faith (religion) shaped in your understanding of yourself?; and 8) How has your faith (religion) shaped in your understanding of yourself?

Women shared their vision and aspirations for a just future for trafficked and migrant working women, where they can live a life of abundance and not suffer from indecent marginalisation. The three broader recommendations that emerged are: re-shaping public perception, strengthening and expanding communities of solidarity, and working together to affirm a life of dignity for vulnerable, trafficked, and migrant working women.

In this sub-section, I present an analysis of participants standpoint on the representation of trafficked and migrant working women. They share their experiences and views on public perception and how that impacts their lives – individual, social, family and work life. They

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<sup>100</sup> "However, it is the praxis of the See-Judge-Act process, located as it is within the control of the local community, that ensures that power is present in more than one place...The 'Act' moment is perhaps the clearest indication of the local community's control, for the impact of any particular Contextual Bible Study lies in the actions that a particular community might decide to take as their response to the 'See' and 'Judge' moments of the process. And while the socially engaged biblical scholar may participate, if invited, in the community-based action, the control of the 'action-plan' is theirs."

<sup>101</sup> According to the World Bank: "Civil society ... refers to a wide array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations [NGOs], labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations." Source: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/what-is-civil-society/>

further inform on what changes they would like to see in the re-shaping of public perception, policy and practise. They believe that a positive shift in how and who represents them will change public perception, that can then uphold and affirm their rights and dignity and broaden the circle of solidarity to address both micro and macro issues concerning women at the margins.

Women's perspectives deepen at every stage of the research process, first with the inputs they received from me and from their collective sharing and reflections. As we moved from one research stage to the other, I ensured recapitulations (recaps) from previous research methods and effective facilitation of the research process drawing from the resources and knowledge provided by them and from my own literature review and biblical studies.

This sub-section focusses on understanding the standpoint of how women self-construct their identities in the context of the public perception on trafficked migrants. The research collaborators (participants) shared that their sense of self is shaped by how the larger community views and treats trafficked migrants. Women emphasised that a negative stereotypical image of trafficked migrants in the public domain has a deep impact on how they form an understanding of self. It has a negative impact on their confidence and creates self-doubt about their own worth as a human. These factors impact their perception of self and their identity. They shared their personal experiences of how the dominant public perception for trafficked and migrant women has a deep impact on their lives – individual, social, family and work life. They further inform on the changes that they would like to see in the re-shaping of public perception.

Women emphasised re-looking at the terminologies used for them. They find some labels like 'trafficked victims' problematic since trafficking is widely perceived as sex trafficking (while data confirms labour trafficking to be widespread in India and elsewhere around the world, specially from the Global South).<sup>102</sup> The stigma attached to sex trafficking acts as a barrier for

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<sup>102</sup> Traffickers exploit victims in a variety of forms and infiltrate the globalized legal economy by exploiting victims in many economic sectors. Overall, 50 per cent of detected victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation and 38 per cent for forced labour, while 6 per cent were subjected to forced criminal activity and more than one per cent to begging. Smaller numbers were trafficked for forced marriages, organ removals and other purposes. Victims of trafficking for forced labour are exploited across a range of economic sectors, including agriculture, construction, fishing industry, mining, street trading and domestic servitude. Although patterns of trafficking for forced labour vary across

them to be part of the larger community, both in their homelands and in the host cities. They believe that a positive shift in their representation and public perception will affirm their dignity and broaden the circle of solidarity. Labour migration is a human right, which women feel is looked down upon and treated with indignity. The sexualised image of the labour of women migrants and trafficked women is treated with indecency that hurts the rights and dignity of women.

Women informed that even though they are aware of the realities of their lives and the risks involved in moving out of their homelands, they take up challenges to be able to work and provide for themselves and their families. They mentioned that the negative experiences of trafficking and migration are harsh on them, but what they experience immediately after is often more painful and traumatic. Salome (pseudonym/ name changed) informed about her experiences after she was rescued from a trafficking situation. She highlighted three aspects that she wants to be deliberated upon by decision makers. Based on the initiation of this conversation, other participants contributed their perspectives, and we had in-depth discussions on these concerns. First, the environment where women are kept post-rescue needs to be a sensitive one, that not only shelters survivors but also treats them with dignity and respects. Salome acknowledges the relief she felt after being rescued from a trafficking situation, but she felt judged and offended in the institutional care as if she was responsible for having landed in a trafficking situation. Being looked down upon, made her feel worthless like a person without any honour. She felt undeserving for the care she was getting in the facility. This trauma haunts her till date. She advocates for safe spaces for women to be sheltered post rescue, where all staff must be sensitive to women rescued. Salome shared her experience first in the Feminist Interview and the discussions took place in the comfortable space of small Focus Groups where the participants knew each other and had supported Salome in her difficult times.

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economic sectors, one aspect is true for all sectors: it is generally the result of a deterioration of labour rights, such as lower salaries, longer working hours, reduced protections and informal employment.

[Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020, UNODC, pg.8]

The second aspect that Salome highlighted was the need for women's consent and participation in any decision concerning them post rescue.<sup>103</sup> Salome had to stay in the shelter for a long time, during which she was not productively employed. Staying in institutional care for a long time, deprived her from working and earning money, the reason she had moved out of her home. This situation prevented her from supporting her father's treatment, due to which he succumbed to his sickness. She recognises the benefits of being rescued and sheltered, which was initially essential for her, but to be held up in that situation for a long time cost her father's life and caused lifelong harm to her and her family. Salome points out that women should be given the right to choose what they want to do even after they are rescued from a trafficking situation. Even though Salome failed in her judgement and fell in the trap of traffickers, she believes that she can take decisions for herself. "It is human to take risks", she says, "sometimes we fail but not always". She felt punished and dehumanised for choices.

The notion that trafficked migrant women lack agency and cannot discern to take sound decisions for themselves needs to be challenged and their voices must be heard (Andrijasevic and Mai 2016: 1,2). The idea that women need to be in overprotective care and protection systems is paternalistic in nature and depletes the very nature of empowerment that they seek. Women complained feeling incarcerated, despite the fact they were provided with food and shelter. A 'victim centred approach' must centre around the consent and will of the woman, in the kind of assistance she deems fit for herself.

In this study I had five women who had trafficking experiences and shared their experiences and perspectives on rescue, rehabilitation, and re-integration during the FI and IE. Their concerns were brought in the broader discussion during the CBS workshop, by keeping their identity anonymous, unless they came up front with sharing their experiences. The small Focus Groups were safe and comfortable spaces for detailed discussions as women in these groups knew each other.

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<sup>103</sup> Laura Agustin has written extensively on the praxis of the rescue industry with regard to the sex trade, calling it "the soft side of imperialism" (Agustin, 2012, para. 6) cited in (Kempadoo 2015 :14)

The third aspect that Salome and others highlighted was the need to sensitise the communities on the issue from a gendered lens. While she was re-integrated back to her community, the word spread around that she was a trafficked victim. Her neighbours and the entire community viewed her with suspicion for being in prostitution. She was subject to harassment whenever she stepped out of her house. She preferred returning to the city with a trusted friend this time to start a fresh life without any 'labels'. Salome mentioned, "the trafficked victim label took away my dignity. People back in my village do not view me as a human being. It hurts to be viewed that way and to be treated as someone who is responsible for whatever happened to me. Home does not feel like it used to before. My family has been put to shame for what I unfortunately went through. This does not happen when men or boys get trafficked". Salome feels like a victim of the community that is not sensitive to women's dignity, especially in difficult circumstances where women are blamed for their negative experiences and the factors that harm them are overlooked.

Susanna (name changed/ pseudonym) had a different perspective and experience to share, "When I was leaving my village to work in the city, people cautioned me to think well before leaving. I think it is not the fault of the community always. They may be narrow minded, but the news creates fear in their minds. Many young girls face violence. They are genuinely worried if we are safe in the city. It is true that many people imagine us being forced into prostitution. So, my people back home worry for that too. We women face more harassment in the city, especially as new migrants".

Women challenge the unidimensional interpretation of their lived experiences by those who have not heard their voices in-depth. They argue that those who represent their lives without listening to their lived experiences cause more harm to them even if their efforts mean well to assist them. The notion that trafficked migrants are victims of sexual exploitation because they do not have the capacity to discern people (traffickers) and hence unable to take charge of their lives is a flawed approach of providing support to victim (Cojocar 2016:12-15, Andrijasevic and Mai 2016:1,2). Unless, these aspects are highlighted, women's migration and trafficking experiences will be limited to sex trafficking. A narrow conception of the issue not only harms women but will continue to affect generations. A broader understanding of such

complex realities needs to be understood and addressed at all levels, including systemic, structural, and cultural factors.

These perspectives are important while working on sensitive issues like human trafficking and migration of women in margins. For such sensitive and complex issues, interventions and advocacy must address stigma and public perception. Instead of addressing the complex realities, both systemic and structural, the narratives of trafficked women tend to be sensational in the media, fiction and films. Polemical narratives and rhetoric need to be challenged and the narratives needs to be re-written with the voice and perspective of women themselves. I believe that advocacy messaging with respect to trafficked and migrant women needs to be re-looked. Not just women and girls, but boys and men are vulnerable to trafficking and other forms of labour exploitation in host lands.<sup>104</sup>

The conversations with women brought to light women's strengths and agency, that women are proud of. Stella (name changed) pointed out, "I turned my negative experiences into my strength". Stella shared that she fought against all odds to exercise her rights and get back her dignity. Stella further mentioned that she does not forget her negative experiences, but she always remembers how she was able to handle some of the most difficult situations in her life. "That gives me strength to move on in my life". Women's agency and dignity are important aspects that must be included in public discourse and engagement.

In her article, "My Experience is Mine to Tell: Challenging the Abolitionist Framework", Claudia Cojocar, a formerly trafficked person, introduces the concept of "secondary victimisation" (2016:12-38). She mentions that "secondary victimisation" takes place where representations are framed by the interpretations of abolitionist movements who consider sex workers as victims of trafficking. Cojocar argues that these representations stigmatise and marginalises women who are already vulnerable. She challenges the intention of such representations that are framed and repackaged for the consumption of opportunistic actors.

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<sup>104</sup> Female victims continue to be particularly affected by trafficking in persons. In 2018, for every 10 victims detected globally, about five were adult women and two were girls. About one third of the overall detected victims were children, both girls (19 per cent) and boys (15 per cent), while 20 per cent were adult men.

[Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020, UNODC, Pg, 9]



She argues that the construction of victimhood in the dominant anti-trafficking discourse and movement has adapted a narrow and simplistic construction of victim typologies of women working in the sex industry. As a result of such narrow conceptualisations, the sex workers are viewed as women in need of immediate rescue. Such damaging approaches undermine the agency of women and lack empowerment strategies, placing women at high risk of discrimination and structural violence. She argues that such conflation of voluntary sex work and trafficking creates a “toxic climate of secondary exploitation” (2016:12), which contributes to the dehumanisation, stigmatisation and marginalisation of both voluntary sex workers and trafficked persons (Andrijasevic and Mai, 2016: 1-10).

The women participants (research collaborators) in this research shared similar experiences of “secondary victimisation” where a stereotypical victim image of a trafficked woman contributes to the sexual objectification of a woman who needs assistance. Women are considered to be naïve and lacking diligence and discernment. This deprives women from utilising their agency and autonomy. This dis-empowers women when the opposite of breaking the cycle of traditional gender roles is needed, where women are expected to be engaged in unpaid work by caring for their families at home and must not step out for paid work.

During the Contextual Bible Study workshop, we looked at the aspect of representation and how it has an impact on the construction of women’s identity. In all the four chapters of Ruth, the author/s of the book of Ruth clearly portray Ruth as a sincere and responsible daughter-in-law whose steadfast love for Naomi is remarkable. The author/s has/ have crafted her character as an ideal daughter-in-law, someone who is exemplary in her commitment and loyalty towards her mother-in-law. However, nothing is mentioned about Ruth’s emotions, feelings, and desires for herself. In the first chapter of Ruth, we are introduced to Ruth as someone who has lost her husband, widowed at a young age, and is childless. However, there is no mention about her grief and sorrow. In the second chapter, even though Ruth takes an active part in stepping out of the house to get food for the two, nothing is mentioned about Ruth’s feelings, fears and anxieties of living and working in a foreign land. There is no mention about Ruth missing her roots, her family, community and culture which is unusual. In the third chapter, she obliges and succumbs to Naomi’s instruction without a word or murmur by going to the threshing floor to spend the night with Boaz in secrecy and in the darkness of the night.

In the fourth and last chapter, even though Ruth gets married and has a son, not a word is written about her feelings about getting married to an older man, old enough to be her father. One can wonder about Ruth's feelings, who after getting married to Boaz entered the same traditional cycle of women's unpaid work, caring for family and being restricted within the barriers of home in accordance with the traditional cultural norm. We do not get to know whether she was happy with this scheme of finding an older husband, home, for securing her future and meeting the expectation of Naomi to have a boy child. Her emotions of marriage and motherhood have not got a place either in the narrative. Except for her expressed and demonstrated love for Naomi, Ruth's feelings for Boaz and her child are not known to us. Her social and economic aspirations and sexual desires, freedoms and autonomy are far from being mentioned by the writer/s. Ruth emerges to be an ideal woman (daughter-in-law) for other woman to emulate for generations after her. It seems the writer is not only praising her loyalty and love for Naomi, but s/he wants women to be like her, someone who embodies love, sacrifice and dedication towards her family (Naomi) and does not think about what Ruth herself would like to have in her life for herself.

Did the writer of the book of Ruth prefer women to be unselfish like Ruth, and not think about women's desires, pleasures and aspirations? How harsh can society be to judge women who transgress the limits of decency as laid down for women from historic times to be able to articulate their feelings, emotions and desires. The patriarchal and paternalistic mindset that contemporary poor, vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women have shared during their articulations in the Formal Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and the CBS are women's struggles in negotiating their identity in a world that either looks at them like a victim or as women with loose morals. Women shared their constant struggle trying not to be looked down as helpless victims all the time, but as women who have the power and agency to fight back challenging situations and live a life with dignity. They have shared about their struggles in making a place for themselves in the community where they live and work, in their community back in their homes, where they can be viewed as women with dignity.

Ruth working in the grain field or at the threshing floor in the darkness of the night has not been represented with shame, yet women today are looked down upon for working in the informal sector unlike those working in the corporate or government offices. Women shared

their regret and disappointment for not receiving the right kind of education and opportunities to get a job that qualifies to be a 'dignified' one. They emphasized the need to be provided with opportunities to live life in abundance, to be listened to and for their aspirations to be honoured. They express their desire to live life in their own terms and with dignity, instead of succumbing to the traditional gender norms for women. They emphasise the need to be heard and to share their own story rather than be a subject in a newspaper article, in a fiction or film or like that of the biblical story of Ruth whose feelings, desires, experiences and aspirations have not been heard by the writer/s, but her obedience to and love for Naomi has been glorified.

The stories and life experiences of women in the margins are not so simple, they are complex given their lived realities. Avoiding complexities within these narratives can take away their experiences of oppression, suppression and subjugation as they struggle each day to challenge gender stereotypical roles that they need to perform and face gender-based violence at homes, workplaces and the community at large. These complex realities must be examined to identify and address these challenges. It is only possible if women are given the platform to share their narratives from their perspectives, and not how others imagine their world to be. The idea is not to glorify women who sacrifice their lives and dignity for their loved ones, but to look at aspects of how these challenges can be mitigated keeping the desires, aspirations, dignity and personhood of women at the centre. It is not just about living an obedient life to suit the traditional gender norms, but to celebrate their path to radical empowerment.

On the issue of retaining their social, cultural and religious identity, we deliberated on the experiences of contemporary trafficked and migrant women and that of Ruth in the CBS workshop. I probed to get their perspective, if Ruth's decision to move with Naomi to Bethlehem was due to pure love and solidarity for Naomi or was Ruth innocently tricked into it? Did Ruth ever get to visit her family back in Moab or was she completely disconnected with them for life, as most trafficked women. Naomi clearly alienates Ruth from her conversation with her community of women soon after arriving to her homeland, which seems very similar to the experiences of trafficked women. In the Formal Feminist Interviews and the Informal Encounters, trafficked women shared their experiences of being totally disconnected and alienated from their families and the outside world when they were trapped in trafficked

situation. They mentioned that they were young and naïve during the time they were kept in captivity. They had no escape and were unable to reach out to their families. Trafficked women do suffer alienation in the host community and are being tricked to be isolated and disconnected from their families. For five long years, Stella (name changed) was unable to get in contact with her family. After her escape, she does visit them, but not as much as she would have liked to under normal circumstances. She gets the feeling that her mother is aware of her having been sold into prostitution and therefore she is ashamed of her daughter. This creates a discomfort and barrier in the mother-daughter relationship. Hence, Stella prefers not to stay for a long time in her home whenever she visits them. Some of them have reunited with their families after they were rescued, while others have not felt accepted back into their families and communities because of the stigma and shame that is attached to trafficking. This brings us to question the reasons for Ruth's complete alienation from her maternal family in the entire narrative.

Women participating in this research identified themselves as Christian women, mostly from a Baptist background, and they have no reason to leave their identity, culture and religion. Two women mentioned that they were not regular Church goers in the city. Getting a day off from work on Sunday is a challenge for them. Cynthia mentioned drifting away in her faith and relationship with God, as she did not feel God's presence in difficult times. She expressed feelings of anger and rage against God when she needed Him [sic] most. "I used to be one of the most active youths in my home Church. I was in the worship team, I attended all Bible study groups and meditated on God's word daily. I believed in a loving God, my Saviour and Redeemer. But when I needed Him most, I was left alone. I did not know what to do then. I never stopped praying though. I know He answered my prayers and lifted me up. He saw my tears and saved me. That is why I am here with you all today". She recognises the support of women in the Church and her Pastor with whose support she is healing. Others identified with her rage and shared their experiences of feeling abandoned by God and wondered where God was when it comes to the humiliation and disgrace that poor women experience in the host cities. They described feeling anger and yet clinging to God's promises as mentioned in the Scriptures, which gives them strength and power to overcome obstacles and challenging situation. Deep down, they expressed receiving strength and power when they commune with God, read the Bible, attend Church services and they keep trusting in God's love and

grace. They believe that being in touch with their community not only helps them retain their identity but creates a bond of sisterhood.

Women, therefore, wondered about the strong motivation for Ruth to abandon her people, her gods, and her culture. “I don’t think a person will abandon their family, culture, faith, God and identity so easily without any pressure. A person in captivity can be compelled or manipulated to do so, not a free person. I cannot place myself in that situation. I still go home and cherish the place and culture that I belong to. That is my identity”, said Martha emphatically. Women shared their experiences of assimilation into the culture of the host lands, yet they retain their own religion, culture, and identity. They prefer meeting people from their own community when they come together as a community, celebrating special occasions, cooking food that represents their culture and celebrating life through songs, dance, and music. They worship together in Churches and fellowships that represent their ethnic tribe and speak their native language. They mentioned that those who are trafficked live isolated from their people, religion, and culture, much like Ruth who adapted her mother-in-law’s identity, culture and God. They wondered what motivated Ruth to leave behind her identity and adapt to Naomi’s culture and worship her God. Did Naomi exert a strong influence on Ruth in this matter or had Ruth accepted and believed in Naomi’s God from before. Women mentioned that, unlike Ruth, they retain their identity, culture and faith even as they learn to assimilate with the culture of the host land. They do visit their families for festivals and special occasions. Most of them have the back of their families, especially during crisis. During the time of writing this thesis, women who participated in this research returned to their homes when the economy shut down soon after a nation-wide lockdown was announced in India because of COVID-19 in 2020.

Whatever the situation Ruth was in, we will never be able to know much of the facts without having her perspectives. How did the writer of Ruth know about what happened at the threshing floor in the darkness of the night between Ruth and Boaz? Except for Naomi, Ruth and Boaz, this act was done in the silence and secrecy of the night. Would any of them choose to share this secret with the community when Boaz himself comes forward as the Redeemer? The question that arises at this point is, if the book of Ruth was written by Ruth herself, how different would the narrative be? Would she have written her story differently? This is a question we seek to find an answer at every stage of the CBS discussions. Who wrote the book

of Ruth and what did the writer imply by writing this story? Women ask this question because they expressed their displeasure in the way their lives are portrayed in the media without women's side of the story. In the absence of women's own voices and perspectives, the sensational reporting style of news reporters and documentary film makers gets centre-stage and glory. Women feel violated by the media for not being gender sensitive and for not protecting their identity, dignity and rights.

#### **7.1.7 Forging Bonds of Solidarity: A Call for Just Praxis and Advocacy for Economic Justice**

This sub-section focuses on how women build communities of solidarities in their journey towards empowerment. The emphasis is on women's utilisation of individual and collective agency in the process of empowerment and the role of community in strengthening their capacities. Some of the key highlights from the Formal Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, Informal Encounter and the Contextual Bible Study were women's articulations on representation and its impact on the construction of their self-identity; the need and benefits of forging bonds of solidarity by coming together as a community and their aspirations for a life of dignity and abundance. Women shared powerful modes of resisting oppression and exploitation by forming bonds of solidarity and a community of care and support. The formation of solidarity groups is based on the notion of asserting rights and affirming dignity of one another.

In the context of rapid and inequitable economic growth, the workforce especially from the Global South is experiencing a steady and dangerous erosion of labour rights. While the high profit margins benefit the few who own and consume their services, it puts the workforce, especially women, at the risk of gender-based violence and discriminations. The discriminations based on gender, caste, race and ethnicity marginalises and keeps women at the bottom of the global value chains. At the same time, the decline and near collapse of rural economies, public services, health infrastructures, education systems, put the burden on women to migrate for work as their labour is cheaper than men.<sup>105</sup> This growing trend puts

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<sup>105</sup> Migration, human rights and governance: Handbook for Parliamentarians N° 24, © Inter-Parliamentary Union 2015: pg. 32)

women and young girls at risk of trafficking (GAATW 2010 :1,2).<sup>106</sup> The organising of women in small groups, provide support to one another both in home states as well as in the host cities. They provide guidance, support, and training to the new migrants. This trend is growing, and it protects many from being trafficked. In addition, these groups provide support to those in difficult situations who are new migrants or trafficked people from their homelands.

Women mentioned that they organise themselves in small groups that they identify themselves in solidarity with one another. These groups are formed amongst women who have similar lived experiences of trafficking and as migrant workers. The research participants mentioned forming groups with co-workers and with women in the Church who work in the similar work sector. They also form alliances with men from their homelands who work in the city. Women informed that, when in small groups, they feel supported and safe in the host city. They create spaces within the group to talk to one another specially when they face challenging situations. These groups create spaces where they can speak of their experiences, aspirations and desires, that they most often cannot share with their own families back home who cannot comprehend their struggles. These circles of solidarity are indeed life affirming.

Allana (pseudonym), shared about the first person who extended a hand of solidarity to her and what it meant to her. “My friend’s elder sister works here in Bangalore for many years. When I shared with her that I needed to work to support my family, she helped me a lot. I had no idea about city life. Coming from a small village, the city traffic itself was scary for me. I was unable to communicate with anybody properly. I learned speaking in Hindi and English after coming here. I did not have any formal training of working in Beauty Parlors and Spas. This sister trained me at work as her assistant. I stayed with her for many months. She is kind because when she came to work here, she did not know anyone, and she faced many problems. She understood my problems and cared for me”.

Women shared that their coming together as small solidarity groups in the host city is a spontaneous process. They provide support to those in crisis, especially the new migrants or

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<sup>106</sup> Beyond Borders: Exploring Links between Trafficking and Gender, Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women Working Papers Series 2010

trafficked women from their home States. They respond through Church groups, students' groups or as co-workers. It is through this process that they contribute to the individual and collective empowerment process. They enable one another to utilise their agency and take informed decisions to liberate themselves from oppressive situation. The exploitation of trafficked migrants is not limited to women alone, women mentioned cases of men working in oppressive environments and their human rights violated at workplaces. The racial discrimination and violence against migrants are prevailing concerns which gets escalated from time to time.<sup>107</sup>

Salome (pseudonym) mentioned the benefits of being connected with people from her own community and the Church. "While waiting for compensation and assistance post-trafficking, I had to wait long. It was traumatic for me". Salome mentioned that instead of waiting, she looked for work to sustain herself. With the support of friends from within her Church community, she managed to get a job. "They helped me with on-the-job training. Their support was immense, they even let me stay in their house for several months until I could pay my own rent". Salome elaborated her experiences of Church and community support. It is in these circumstances she realised that people with similar experiences empathised with her and did not judge her. Any form of pity and judgement from the outside world was a form of humiliation for her. However, in the presence of people in solidarity with her, she felt safe and courageous. Salome mentioned, "Now, I do not bother much what people think of me. I live my life; I work and mind my own business. I love spending time with my friends here. They understand me more than anyone else. They are my family here".

Women with experiences of trafficking shared their concerns regarding support from external stakeholders. They do appreciate the help that they receive in times of emergencies and crisis from the administration, NGOs, advocacy groups and community supporters. However, they

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<sup>107</sup> Migrants are particularly vulnerable to discrimination because their ethnicity, race or religion often differs from those of most people in the host country. Women migrants often face discrimination on multiple grounds of sex, ethnicity, religion and migratory status. There is increasing evidence of racism and xenophobia in destination countries against migrant populations who come from other cultures. (p.84) : Migration, human rights and governance : Handbook for Parliamentarians N° 24, © Inter-Parliamentary Union 2015; Inter-Parliamentary Union, the International Labour Organization, and the United Nations (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights).



are anxious and apprehensive about the interventions by stakeholders who, with all good intent of helping them, cause harm to their integrity and dignity. They shared their experiences of being looked down as women with loose morals, both in institutional care and in the communities outside of it. They expect to be treated with respect and dignity by the larger community, both in the host cities and in their homelands. Therefore, I argue that external agencies must engage with them, listen to them and be in solidarity with them before designing advocacy campaigns, writing media reports or making policies. Some of them shared their experiences of being interviewed by media, researchers and campaigners, who like to hear their stories of oppression only. A narrow single lens approach to listening to women's experiences, I argue constricts learning from women's experiences of agency, liberation and empowerment. Solidarity, and not just benevolence or tokenism, is what is required from advocacy groups, researchers and media who speak on behalf of trafficked and migrant women.

On what recommendations they would like to give to the Church, all the 13 research collaborators responded in unison that they are yet to hear a message on how well the Church can embrace women in margins with dignity. However, many of them shared their positive experiences of the support received from their Pastors and Church community in host cities during difficult times. Some of them have been helped by their Pastor in Bangalore, who raised funds for them to start their Beauty Salons and to evolve as small-scale entrepreneurs. They shared some negative experiences from the Church in their home States, where women gossip and wonder what these young women do in the cities. This has an impact on their overall well-being and identity. They stressed the need for open conversation and acceptance of the fact that women have the right to migration, work and economic empowerment. Their autonomy to mobility from rural to the urban areas or even outside the country must be understood well by the Church and larger community, both in their home States as well as in the host cities.

Participants expressed their desire on how the larger community can play a role in affirming their dignity and act in solidarity with them to affirm their rights and dignity. This raises concerns of the role of the community, government, NGOs, Media, researchers, and faith-based groups including the Church, in addressing both micro and macro concerns, from lack

of resources in their villages to the challenges that they face in the urban areas. They raised concerns about the lack of opportunities and resources in quality and accessible education in the home villages, the lack of roads, transport, and infrastructure, lack of access to higher education and to decent housing for poor migrant workers in the urban cities. Women mentioned that when families and communities support them, it has a huge impact in their lives. They gather courage to step out and face challenges that try to disempower and exploit them. It is then that they come to realise that organising in small groups helps them to resist violence and abuse.

They echoed almost in unison, “Together, we are strong, not alone, and helpless”. They struggle together and celebrate life together. As a community, they become the Church, they are the Church. They come together to worship God and celebrate life as it is. They celebrate festivals and meet one another on their off days. On special occasions they cook their own traditional food, dress up in traditional clothes, play music, dance, play games and have fun to refresh their souls. These groups take care of each other in times of need and during sickness.

I see the Church in them, vibrant, inclusive, one that celebrates the diversity in people just the way they are – these are people that survive and dream to thrive. Their struggle for affirming their personhood and dignity is a liberative and transformative process, in which their struggle liberates and paves way for others like them to be self-reliant, to live and work with dignity. Community is a place where they learn to accept and celebrate their diversities and share their common experiences, fears, apprehensions, anxieties, aspirations and power. This community turns out to be their family away from home.

The loosely organised and unstructured groups are what I would like to call ‘Solidarity Networks’ that have the capacity and potential to address issues of trafficking, unsafe migration and labour exploitation. These Solidarity Networks and Circles are support groups that are loosely organised and have the potential to come forward and organise as formal Networks, Forums and Unions to demand their rights. They need to be supported by human-rights groups, faith-based advocacy forums, civil societies and other stakeholders to support and stand with them for their cause and to strengthen their capacities. When women organise themselves as support and solidarity groups, it strengthens their capacities for collective

empowerment and solidarity. They have the potential to bring transformative changes in the community. I contend that women should be at the centre of discourse and decision making concerning their demands and rights that they seek to assert. There are many groups and stakeholders that work for them but not with them. This paradigm shift, of working with and not just working for, is necessary for our praxis and theology.

Women demand to be treated with respect and dignity, where their life and work is valued and not in-dignified or indecently marginalised, because of their experiences with trafficking and as migrant working women. They argue that the stereotypical negative images of trafficking, the hypersexualised image of their work, together with their ethnicity and gender, results in the targeting of women who migrate for work and denies or obstructs them from their right to mobility, work and life with dignity. Sharing their struggles of getting decent accommodation, to facing struggles in the streets and workplace, women shared about emerging stronger by fighting their everyday battles of discrimination, exclusion and harassment in host cities.

Women related with the story of Ruth and Naomi as a relationship of solidarity. Even though we can wonder and question Naomi's role and integrity in the life of Ruth, we acknowledge the existence of a strong interpersonal bond of solidarity shared by Ruth and Naomi. In the current context, when spatial mobility is directed by the demands of the market, women find themselves integrating with others who share common culture, ethnicity, religion, gender, work and lived experiences. Their common backgrounds and similar experiences generate solidarity. This has a positive impact on their communal and personal well-being and on the market where their services are utilised. By creating spaces to voice concerns, they articulate their demands as a group when needed. I contend, as I will elaborate in the next and concluding chapter, that expanding collective and intersectional forms of solidarity will ensure protecting the rights and affirming the dignity of women in margins.

## **7.2 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have analysed and presented the discussions from the Formal Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study workshop. Listening to the voices of trafficked and migrant women workers, some of whom have had the experiences of trafficking, sexual and gender-based discrimination and indecent

marginalisation in the host cities and at homelands, has made rich contributions to have deeper understanding on their lived realities and experiences. Women described their daily struggles to fight an unjust and unequal society that discriminates, marginalises and dehumanises them because of their gender, sexuality, class, caste, ethnicity, work and religion. Women spoke of dignity or the lack of it in different ways, using different words, while reflecting on the life of Ruth and theirs. They mentioned their desire to live in a world that acknowledges and respects them as people with dignity. It may seem foolish that poor women in the margins have dreams and aspirations of a life in abundance, of economic and social empowerment, and of dignity, but that does not deter them from working towards a life of dignity. They struggle and work hard to make a place for themselves within families, in communities and in their workplaces. Survival is not just poverty of food, but also surviving difficult situations in life, including the everyday experiences of being treated with indignity. Women mentioned that they may not articulate much through their words with people around them, but they find ways to affirm their dignity.

The questions that emerge from the articulations of the lived experiences of contemporary trafficked and migrant working women should generate broader discussions on the ideological and theological aspects of dignity of women who are traditionally, historically, and politically been excluded, marginalised, violated, unheard and silenced. When women articulate their need for equality, justice, autonomy and self-esteem, what role can academicians, theologians, social development practitioners, law makers, policy makers, governments, civil society and other agencies play to challenge the status quo and the socio-economic, cultural, and religious constructs that impedes the development of the poor towards a life of dignity? What status does 'human dignity' have in a pluralistic and polycentric world in the neo-liberal economies? How can we have an essentially profound discourse on human dignity that can translate into action? What kind of theological and philosophical discourses lay the foundations for effective praxis and engagement? Despite the many national and international declarations, dignity is denied to millions of people around the world. Therefore, as Enrique Dussel argues, dignity is discovered from its denial. It is denied when people struggling from survival are treated as things without any recognition of their dignity (Dussel 2003:124). In the struggle for a life of embodied dignity within the context of trafficking and migration, this study has tried to identify and name the 'idols of death' that do

not recognise the dignity of women in margins and impedes vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women to live a life in its fullness and abundance (John 10.10). By taking sides with the God of life and against the forces of death (West 2013: 507), forms of liberation hermeneutics are at work here to proclaim the God of life.

In the next and concluding chapter, I present a summary of the dissertation with key highlights on the conceptual, theoretical, theological and methodological contributions of this research and key recommendations thereof.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

#### 8.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented a thematic analysis of women's voices, articulations and insight together with the resources I bring to this dissertation from my literature review, analysis and critique on the subject. Women's articulations and voices is their contribution to this research as research collaborators. Women's knowledge was generated by the facilitation of women's articulation of their embodied experiences through rich deliberations, individual sharing, critical thinking and reflection in safe, secure, sacred, enabling and empowering spaces. This was done by engaging with them through in-depth Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study. This research adapted the principles of Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) to keep women's standpoint at the centre of all discourse. During the research process, women transition from research participants to research collaborators by owning the process and contributing to the body of knowledge as engaged, evolved, conscious and critical thinkers. This research is grounded by the standpoint that women are agents in their post-trafficking and migration trajectories in their path towards recovery, liberation and empowerment. I believe that every effort to support trafficked and migrant women must include their voice and participation in the decision-making process that is meant for their empowerment and development. Therefore, the participation of women in this research is grounded by the same principle and has engaged women as collaborators, and not just as participants used as a means of information or data collection.

The main research question for this study that I sought to explore was – “What are the conceptual components of embodied dignity within contexts of trafficking, female economic migration and indecent work in the informal economy?” With this as the key research question, emerged three sub-questions that I have investigated in this research: 1) What are the theological/religious dimensions of dignity in the embodied experience of those who have been or are vulnerable to being trafficked?; 2) How can these conceptual components contribute to a theology of indecent work?; 3) In what ways do notions of ‘trafficking’

reconfigure notions of 'dignity' and 'indecent work'? The purpose of this research is to work towards developing a theology of trafficked dignity.

The extensive field work was undertaken in the Indian city of Bangalore with thirteen women from March to May 2018. The research collaborators are women who currently live and work in Bangalore as migrant workers in Massage Parlours, Hair Spas and Salons. Some of the participating women are formerly trafficked victims, some of whom are entrepreneurs now who own small Spas and Salons. One of them has recently moved from a massage therapist to a marketing executive in a cosmetic company. All thirteen participating women identified themselves as Christian migrant working women from the North-Eastern State of Manipur in India. They are women with dreams and aspirations for a better quality of life and a secured future for themselves and their families who in their daily lives struggle to fight against oppressive systems, structures, gender and socio-cultural norms that dehumanises and marginalises them. Women attribute themselves as people with determination who struggle to find ways to empower themselves to assert their rights and to affirm their dignity and personhood. They do this both at an individual level and collectively, being in solidarity with one another as support groups when needed.

The previous chapter was a summation of women's voices as articulated in the Formal Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study Workshop. Women's backstories highlighted the context of trafficking and women's migration, the systemic failures and structural gaps that have kept people deprived of opportunities for growth and development. Women's embodied experiences of trafficking and migration highlighted the risks that they take and the exploitation that they suffer in their journey to the host cities. Women shared their strategies of survival and empowerment and how they utilise their power-within and their agency to negotiate for a secured work life and future. They share their strategies to support one another in times of difficulty. They shared about how they live and celebrate their lives despite challenges and how they dare to dream for a fuller and fulfilling life. By presenting women's voices and standpoint, this research affirms the dignity of women in traffic and in the shadow economy and aims to influence policy makers, academicians and theologians.

Women's reflection on the book of Ruth, as it resonates with their context, is a presentation of their embodied theology (People's Theology). "People's theology", West (2013: 1) notes,

“is foundational for ‘prophetic theology’”. In his paper titled, “People’s Theology, Prophetic Theology, and Public Theology in Post-liberation South Africa” (2013:1-16), West has argued that it is vital for the prophetic theology movements to return to people’s theology, whereby socially engaged biblical scholars and theologians enter into a collaborative work with social movements, and I add here, with people (loosely organised solidarity groups as has been done in this research) who struggle to affirm their dignity in the context of social and economic injustice. Therefore, this dissertation has the potential to influence Public Theology through Prophetic Theology foregrounding the People’s Theology which is an outcome of this research. Further, this research has laid the foundation to influence an interface between Public Policy and Public Theology.

Being in solidarity with women does not end with the research process, or with the writing of this dissertation. To me, it is a process of deep engagement with women for continuous learning from their everyday experiences and to together find ways of addressing issues of immediate concerns and advocacy. Therefore, I tried to connect with them while writing this dissertation. I had an individual virtual de-brief session with seven women who were part of this research process. This was a time to share with them highlights of my chapter on analysis and reporting of the research. This was a time to check with them if their perspectives were captured well and if it represented their voices. This was a time to check with them if the recommendations and suggestions that I present in this dissertation aligns with their views and aspirations. This was a time to demonstrate research collaboration in true spirit and humility. This was a time to connect with women at a time when COVID 19 had affected informal workers in the most disadvantaged ways than ever before. This re-connection and de-brief sessions were an effort to truly be in solidarity with the research collaborators, whose contributions to the outcome of this research is highly commended.

The debrief of the research analysis with women took place virtually during the times of Covid between January and April 2020. This was a time when women had returned to their homes due to Covid restrictions, lockdowns, loss of jobs, closure of Spas and insecurities and uncertainties that came with the pandemic. I was able to locate seven women during this challenging time. I had individual de-brief virtual session with each of them. I was unable to connect with six other women as either their phone numbers had changed, or they were in remote locations where the service networks were not reachable. This was a time when India



was going through severe cases of covid infections, sickness, loss of lives and work, besides sudden lockdowns that endangered the well-being of migrant workers. Therefore, doing the de-brief sessions individually with seven women seemed alright at that point in time.

I intend to organise a group or small group virtual sessions with them after this thesis is approved. Having all of them together on one same day at the same time may be a challenge. Therefore, I plan to let them find their convenient timings and decide when we can meet again. This work would have been incomplete without their active participation and contributions. I believe that accountability in research is important, and hence I shared with them the analysis and finding of the research as we moved from one research method to the other. The de-brief was unfortunately limited to seven women. I plan to continue journeying with this solidarity group of female economic migrants and to broaden this circle. I am in contact with some female economic migrants in my current place of residence. Women from Manipur and other countries work here as domestic helpers. I am in solidarity with a small group and engage specifically with domestic workers from Manipur whose families are displaced and affected because of the genocide and ethnic cleansing of the *Kukis* in Manipur.

In this concluding chapter, I first present a synopsis of all the chapters in the first section. In the second section, I present major conceptual, theoretical, theological and methodological contributions of this dissertation and further recommendations.

### **8.1 Synopsis of Dissertation**

The first chapter is an introduction to this dissertation. It presents the context, background, significance and motivation for this research. It introduces the research purpose, research paradigm, theoretical framework, theological foundations and research methodology. The starting point of this research is the Standpoint of women as a method of inquiry which foregrounds women's subjective experiences and voice to inform researchers, theologians, biblical scholars, practitioners and policy makers to centre their work in the domain of human trafficking and labour migration. This research draws insight and knowledge of trafficked and migrant working women based on their everyday life experiences of vulnerability, oppression, exploitation, utilisation of their agency and power-within to empower themselves and support one another through solidarity networks. By drawing from the epistemic view and knowledge of the research collaborators, this feminist and rights-based research explores the

broader context of neoliberal globalisation and its intersection with gender, trafficking, migration and labour. At the end, the chapter outlines an overview of the dissertation.

The second chapter, titled “Human Trafficking: A Contested Phenomenon”, brings to attention an overview of the trends, significance, definitions, perspective and the contestations within the human trafficking discourse. In this chapter, I have set the context and background of this research. I first describe the historical background on the emergence of human trafficking as a concern for global policy and action. I then refer to the ideological and political foundations that shape the dominant discourse on human trafficking. To have a deeper understanding of the complex realities of human trafficking, I have presented the globally accepted definition of human trafficking along with the estimated figures, causes and nature of trafficking. I note that these complex realities are premised upon intersectional experiences of those who are vulnerable to and have experiences of trafficking.

In this chapter, I have highlighted key contestations within the trafficking discourse that have strong anti-prostitution and anti-migration foundations. On these contestations, I highlight the fact that all prostitution is not necessarily the outcome of sex trafficking, neither do all trafficked women end up in prostitution or as victims of sexual slavery. While highlighting the contestations within the feminist discourse on human trafficking, I present my position. I affirm that while it is the rights of women to be protected from all forms of violence, including forced prostitution, forced labour, forced marriage and all that falls in the ambit of human trafficking and modern slavery, I stand by women who chose to work, decent or indecent, formal or informal, organised or unorganised, to make a life for themselves and their families, for their survival and for a secured future. In my opinion, the rights and dignity of sex workers and all those engaged in supposedly ‘indecent’ work must not be violated while protecting women and girls duped into sex trafficking. The notion of consent and choice needs deeper reflection in this context. In the absence of affirmative alternative models for trafficked women, I contend that if women want to remain in the work that they are engaged in they must not be forced to come out of it. Forced rescue, forced rehabilitation and forced vocation can be as harmful as being confined and exploited in a trafficked situation. Women’s autonomy to work and to make a living is their right and must be affirmed if we are to be in just solidarity with them.

The views of abolitionist feminism have a significant influence on the anti-trafficking discourse which further impacts the social conditioning and perspective about migrant women's labour in the informal economy. The 'passive victim', 'illegal migrant' and 'criminal' connotations can keep these populations hidden from the support they need in crisis. I highlight the need to support women in need of assistance without categorising them in a stereotypical paternalistic framework. Therefore, I deconstruct the notion of victim in this chapter. I emphasise the need to view both trafficked and economic migrant women as agents in their pathways towards empowerment and transformation, despite the risks and exploitations they come across.

I described how the feminisation of the image of trafficked victim, with special focus on sex trafficking and sexual exploitation in the media, has brought the issue of trafficking much attention in the public view. Since this research is utilising a gendered lens in the intersectional analysis of women's lived experiences in the context of trafficking and migration for work, I briefly explore and investigate the notions of feminisation of the image of the victims of trafficking, feminisation of survival in the counter-geographies of globalisation, feminisation of labour migration and feminisation of poverty. I have brought to attention the interlinkages of migration and human trafficking with globalisation, global capitalism in the neo-liberal economic context, and its impact on the labour market. I argued for deeper understanding of the complex realities of women, as they experience feminisation of survival under these underlying conditions which is interlinked with feminisation of poverty and feminisation of migration. Even though I fully support the immediate relief and rehabilitation efforts for trafficked women, I advocate for long term sustainable solutions to address the structural and systemic disorder that has historically been putting poor and marginalised women in the margins. Women are far from being recognised as active contributors to the economy of their host countries by sending remittances. These shadow economies exist in the counter geographies of globalisation, yet at the same time criminalises, harms and in-dignifies women labour.

To substantiate the research purpose, I brought to attention the conditions, such as the social inequities and structural gaps together with human displacement due to war, conflict, climate emergencies, natural and human caused disasters, that heighten the risk of trafficking within the larger context of migration, globalisation and global capitalism. In the ever expanding

concerns of the inter-connectedness between human trafficking with migration and global capitalism in the neo-liberal economic framework in a globalised order, I conclude this chapter by emphasising the need to deepen and strengthen critical trafficking and migration studies by centering the perspectives of trafficked and migrant women. I suggest a conscious and deliberate shift from sexual humanitarianism to social and economic justice and transformative action in policy, praxis, research and theology. In the context of these contestation in the domain of human trafficking, I situate my dissertation at the broader scholarship and activism of human trafficking, migration, gender equality and the right to decent work.

The third chapter, titled “The Anti-Trafficking Paradigm” describes the modern slavery campaign that shape perspectives, policies and action, anti-trafficking strategies, the phenomena of human trafficking in India and India’s response to combat human trafficking and the discourse and critique of the current Indian anti-trafficking bill. Alongside the anti-trafficking paradigm, the chapter presents a post-colonial critique on some of the dominant discourses that shapes the responses to trafficking in persons.

The anti-trafficking paradigm presented in this chapter is a continuation from the second chapter. It presents the anti-trafficking paradigm that focusses on strategies to prevent trafficking, rescue, rehabilitate, re-integrate/ repatriate and protect the trafficked victims, and to prosecute the traffickers. It critiques the dominant discourse on human trafficking for not being inclusive of the voices of the trafficked and vulnerable.

In this chapter, I engage with post-colonial scholars in their critique of the ideologies that shape the designing of advocacy campaigns and the framing of laws and policies. I have argued for active participation of formerly trafficked people, especially women, in the designing and shaping of the anti-trafficking paradigm and for the deconstruction of connotations used in the representation of the trafficked. I believe, that to be in just solidarity with the trafficked and migrant women, we need to engage with them and learn from their subjective experiences to address immediate relief and assistance to them and to work towards addressing social and economic inequalities.

In my critique and recommendations for the anti-trafficking efforts, I suggest keeping the best interest and dignity of the vulnerable and affected communities at the centre. On the rescue

operations, I posit that while it is necessary for women to be brought out of forced labour and sex trafficking, it is equally important to approach the rescue operations that prioritises women's dignity, consent and rights. Any procedural lapse can adversely impact the well-being and mental health of women for a long time. On the rehabilitation of women post rescue, I urge for safe spaces for women's accommodation, where women are not only provided with food and shelter in the typical welfare model, but where their rights and freedom must be affirmed. Women's experiences of incarceration and exploitation in the very Shelters that are supposed to provide protection to them must be prevented and penalised. Forced rescue and forced rehabilitation, I argue can be as harmful as the act of trafficking itself. Women must be protected from secondary victimisation and exploitation. I recommend alternative rehabilitation models which includes a community based, gender sensitive and rights-based rehabilitation and re-integration approach. I recommend including vulnerable and exploited migrant women to access anti-trafficking support and services, when required. I suggest incorporating the views and contributions from critical studies on human trafficking and migration by the mainstream anti-trafficking efforts. This will strengthen all efforts geared in the liberation and empowerment of women.

The fourth chapter, titled "Women as Agents of Knowledge: Theoretical Foundations and Theological Underpinnings - an Epistemological Privilege of Subordinate Women in the Margins", details the theoretical and theological foundations that shape the purpose and argument of this research. This research aims to explore women's knowledge from their embodied experiences of subordination, subjugation, strength and power by giving epistemic privilege to them for building this body of knowledge. I believe that the process of inclusion and active participation of marginalised women in making knowledge is transformative in research and in the doing of theology. It has the potential to pave way for being in just solidarity with women in margins and in the creation of a just and equitable world for women.

The first section of this chapter delves into the theoretical foundations of this research and the second is focussed on the theological underpinnings upon which this research is premised upon. This research is framed within the overarching theory of feminist standpoint and feminist intersectionality while engaging in dialogue with other related theories. The research is grounded on the work of Standpoint theorists Dorothy Smith and Patricia Hill Collins and has engaged with the work of Intersectional and Critical Race Theorist Kimberlé Williams

Crenshaw and Yuval Davis. The work of political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott has influenced this research. Paulo Freire's contributions on dialogical practice and liberative praxis has guided the methodological approach.

Standpoint feminism is not just a theoretical construct, but a place to begin inquiry. It is a sociology in the making that encourages feminist social scientists to base their research on the standpoint of women. It emphasises the notion that women's social location and subjective experiences best inform to the body of knowledge. Thus, understanding their world and their lived experiences can be best explored from them which is done in this research through a dialogical process beginning with women's situated knowledge and everyday life experiences. By collaborating with women, this research has given epistemic privilege to women to learn from their embodied experiences of resistance, resilience, agency, dignity and solidarity.

This research is influenced by Liberation Theology and engages with Theologies of Work, Migration, Survival, Indecency and Solidarity to contribute towards developing a theology for trafficked dignity and affirm the rights of migrant women for decent work. Liberation theologies recognise that for a theology to be liberating for the liberation of the marginalised, the knowledge of the marginalised is fundamental to the doing of theology. This research has explored both individual and collective knowledge to understand the lived experiences of women's oppression and their strategies of resistance, liberation and empowerment. I have drawn theological resources from the work of my Doctoral Supervisor, Prof. Gerald O. West, who has worked extensively on Contextual Bible Study (CBS). CBS is utilised as a research method for drawing insight and knowledge from the collaborators of this research in doing theology.

CBS brings together socially engaged biblical scholars and poor, working-class and marginalised communities to collaborate and read the Bible as a process within the biblical liberation hermeneutics with an ultimate goal of working towards social transformation. This is done through a See-Judge-Act process which begins with the social analysis of the context of struggle (See), followed by an engagement in dialogue between the text and context (Judge) which paves way for a community-controlled action (Act). By engaging with the hermeneutics of Liberation Theology in this research, I explored how women negotiate to establish a relationship amongst themselves to work towards a liberation praxis, in the

context of oppression and exploitation. I have explored how women relate with Ruth and her historical context in the Scriptures to their own context of struggle for liberation and dignity. By reading the book of Ruth with them, we explore how vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women interpret and engage with the biblical texts in those historical contexts to fight against contemporary forms of exploitation and oppression that comes with neo-liberal market economy. How do they relate with the way capitalism exploits the poor and working class? How do they utilise their agency to resist and challenge systems and practices of oppression?

The primary struggle within liberation theologies is against systems and structures that in the present-day contexts widens the gap between the rich and poor and exploits those in margins in the neo-liberal market economy. It aims to bring voices of the ordinary reader of the Bible towards the centre in biblical studies. CBS offers that space to ordinary readers of the Bible in academic biblical studies. It is an inclusive method of knowledge making and doing theology. It facilitates the production of raw materials of theology. The articulation of the local, embodied discourses, West suggests, are the raw materials of theology, even though not fully-fledged theology, it is inchoate and incipient and will take on theological forms (West 2011: 162). There cannot be any prophetic theology without a people's theology, which is present in the dignity discourse of the marginalised (West 2015: 89). With this theoretical and theological underpinning, I have brought to dialogue the voices of women, formerly trafficked and migrant workers, who in their daily lives struggle to live a life of dignity. The articulation of their intersectional experiences is a key resource to this body of knowledge.

The fifth chapter, titled "Transformative Power of Knowledge Production: A Critical Research Paradigm" begins with highlighting the politics and power of knowledge production. Keeping in mind who produces knowledge and for what purpose, this research emphasises on using feminist methodologies and participatory approaches to create alternative methods of learning from women.

This research privileges and gives epistemic advantage to women in the margins of knowledge production. The research process, besides being transformative in knowledge production, was respectful, agentic, liberative and empowering to the research collaborators to the best of my knowledge.

The research design was prepared with great sensitivity, due to the stigma associated with trafficking and migrant women's work in Massage Parlours and Spas. This study is approached from a critical research paradigm using a feminist lens to explore women's intersectional experiences of exploitation and empowerment. The practice of solidarity and their strategies of affirming their dignity as they navigate gendered, racial, social, political and economic oppressions in their lives was examined. This was done by creating safe and sacred spaces for women's articulation of their voices individually and collectively through Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study. The research design was prepared under the guidance of my Supervisor, Prof. Gerald West and the Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, keeping in consideration my academic motivations with a moral-political-ideological commitment for affirming the rights and dignity of trafficked and migrant working women from the Global South.

To better understand the conflicting subjectivities of women's experiences of subjugation and empowerment, this research explores how women conceive new identities as they move beyond the stereotypical gender norms of women's labour in the context of labour migration and trafficking. Listening to women's experiences of subjugation and empowerment alongside engaging with feminist and subaltern scholars, this research highlights the importance of learning from the 'other' women in the host cities. It helps to break the stereotypical representation of women and promotes the articulation of women's voices in research, theology, policy and praxis.

The sixth chapter titled, "Research Process: The Realities of Doing Critical Feminist Research" describes the research process, which is embedded in feminist values and principles. It adapts ethical, empowering and participatory research process where women transition from being research participants to research collaborators. In this Feminist Qualitative Research, the commitment and emphasis to research process is as much as to the outcome. From building epistemological relationship with the knowledge contributors and dialogue partners, to finding creative ways of working and engaging with women, conscious efforts were put in to build inclusive and horizontal collaborations by decentralising power during the research. I have detailed the formation of collaborative relationship between the researched and the researcher, and how they identify and construct their self-identities and utilise their agency during this research process.



In this chapter, I draw attention to how the conversations with the knowledge and dialogue partners were hosted and harvested using the research methods of Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study. The engagement with the research collaborators and dialogue partners was done by listening to women and by facilitating them to share their embodied experiences of trafficking, migration, labour in the context of marginalisation as workers in the informal economy. Their individual articulations in the Feminist Interviews and Informal Encounters provided resources of their context. Their collective inputs in the Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study Workshop generated community consciousness and resourceful insights. In this chapter I have described the role of the research collaborators and the researcher in the planning, organising, and production of knowledge required for this research. Since this research deals with women on a sensitive issue, maximising their participation at all levels is important for them to own the process and outcome of this research.

Further in this chapter, I have shared my location and contribution as a researcher. I described how I used my facilitation skills to create safe, sacred, enabling and empowering spaces for women's articulation of their embodied experiences, critical thinking and reflection. I offered my reflexivity to the research by maintaining ethical standards during the research to produce a reliable, rigorous, and valid research finding. As a researcher, I brought in my knowledge and analysis from the literature review and from women's contributions in each research method at the CBS workshop.

In the seventh chapter titled, "Amplifying the Voices of Women in Margins: Reflecting and Shaping Women's Articulations and Discourses", the research findings are presented drawing from women's individual and collective articulations. Women's insights, critical reflection and analysis of their embodied experiences and how they relate with the biblical narrative of Ruth are captured and thematically presented in line with the research objectives and questions. The chapter presents a summative report and a cumulative analysis of the rich deliberations and articulations of women's voices and standpoint based on their embodied experiences during the Formal Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study.

The analysis is categorised into thematic areas: i) the context of trafficking and migration: a gendered perspective; ii) consequence of trafficking and migration for women in the margins and the shadow economy; iii) lived experiences of women in the host community; iv) strategy of women's survival and empowerment in host cities; v) working in the darkness of the night at the threshing floor: relating with Ruth, negotiating for a secured future?; vi) envisioning and imagining a just future; vii) reshaping public perception for a life of dignity and viii) forging bonds of solidarity: a call for just praxis and advocacy for economic justice. This thematic analysis describes women's lived experiences of marginalisation in their places of origin, in their homelands and the challenges of their migration trajectory. Five women shared their experiences with trafficking. Women shared about the challenges they face in host cities and how they mitigate those adverse situations to create new identities of self-worth and dignity. They shared their vision for their future and what roles society as a whole can play to include and value them as women with dignity. Their lived experiences, standpoint, knowledge and raw embodied theologies can be a resource for public theology, public policy and action research.

## **8.2 Research Contributions and Recommendations: Conceptual, Theoretical, Theological, Methodological**

This research sought to examine the conceptual components of embodied dignity within the contexts of trafficking and indecent work. It explored the theological/religious dimensions of dignity in the embodied experience of trafficked and migrant working women. It examined how women utilise their agency, faith and collective solidarity to overcome barriers of exploitation. It explored women's trajectory towards their emancipation and empowerment. It analysed women's notions of trafficking, and how it reconfigures with their notions of dignity and indecent work. It explored how these conceptual components can contribute to a theology of trafficked dignity. With a theoretical and theological framing of giving epistemological privilege to women, who have been historically marginalised in academia, theology and policy circles, this research has centred women's inclusion and active participation. This section reflects on the conceptual, theoretical, theological and methodological contributions of this research and makes recommendation for further research. It provides resources for policy makers and planners to consider from the standpoint of women. It provides raw materials in the form of embodied theology and

analysis for biblical scholars and theologians.

### **8.2.1 Conceptual Contribution**

Human trafficking is a highly contested phenomenon globally. Therefore, the prevalence of a narrow conceptual understanding of the issue which is largely based on media reports, documentaries and advocacy campaigns by governments, I/NGOs and agencies working on this issue. This dissertation brought in conflicting discourses from within feminist circles, scholars and activists. Chapter two presents a historical background of the emergence of human trafficking as a concern for global policy and action and situates the debates that this dissertation has focussed on. The third chapter details the anti-trafficking paradigm with special reference to the Indian context. It highlights major concerns in the anti-trafficking paradigm. For this purpose, I have engaged with the scholarly works of critical antiracist and transnational feminist work on human trafficking, migration and labour such as Kamala Kempadoo, Jyoti Sanghera, Bandana Pattanaik, Melissa Ditmore, Julia O'Connell Davidson and Sasia Sasken.

Two major debates have been situated in this dissertation. First, the conflation between human trafficking and slavery. A conflicted notion of human trafficking leads to the conflations between sexual slavery and sex work. Therefore, terms such as sexual slavery, sex work, prostitution and human trafficking are used interchangeably. The anti-trafficking paradigm therefore views human trafficking from a single axis lens as a crime against women. I have argued for addressing the macro along with micro factors that not only puts women at risk but endangers their right to decent work.

The second debate that has been situated in this dissertation is in the context of neo-liberal globalisation. It is challenging the notion of women as victims of human trafficking instead of women with agency and aspirations as migrants in search of work and quality of life. This is presented by situating the interlinkages of migration and human trafficking with globalisation, global capitalism and its impact on the labour market. I have argued for deconstructing the politics of female victims and the feminised image of trafficked victims in the context of women's migration and work in global and national policy and praxis. I have argued for broadening the anti-trafficking paradigm and providing assistance to all trafficked victims that must include voluntary migrants that end up trafficked.

I now briefly present here the dominant discourses and counterarguments to further clarify the notions of human trafficking and to bring in conceptual clarity on the subject of this research. The discourse on abolitionism and decriminalisation has given rise to two conflicting groups. In the dominant trafficking discourse are the abolitionists who argue for the abolition of prostitution. They consider all prostitution as violence against women. With the assumption that most trafficking takes place for the purpose of prostitution, policy, action and advocacy lean heavily in this direction. Most anti-trafficking response is centred around raid, rescue, rehabilitation and repatriation of girls and women from brothel-based prostitution (Sanghera 2005: 16) which thereby excludes or limits assistance to other trafficked victims.

On the other side is the counterargument on decriminalising sex work, where scholars and activists from rights-based feminist foundations lobby for women's autonomy for work and movement. They advocate for women's rights to work, safe workspace, social entitlement schemes, health care, social security and public safety. With the conflation of human trafficking and sex work, research on the interconnectedness between the two has a risk of being flawed which has a direct impact on how policies are made, and strategic programs designed and implemented. The categorisation and criminalising of women in sex work and bringing them within the ambit of sex trafficking in the anti-trafficking paradigm, puts both women in sex work and the sex trafficked at risk because of the nature of assistance provided. In this dissertation, I have argued for developing analysis and conceptualisation based on the subjective experience and knowledge of both trafficked and migrant women workers with an emphasis on women from the Global South.

In the above-mentioned background, this research makes two specific conceptual contributions to clarify and demystify the notion of human trafficking. These views are not new, but an over-emphasis on sex trafficking in media, advocacy campaigns, policy and action blurs public perception and policy on the issue. Therefore, clarifying these conceptions through facts, reports, scholarly research and historical background of the emergence of human trafficking as a concern for global attention with reference to women's migration was necessary for this dissertation.

First, human trafficking is not limited to sex trafficking. Advocacy campaigns, media reports, films and documentaries have for long sensationalised the issue of human trafficking as sex

trafficking and infantilised the image of the trafficked as bodies enslaved in horrific situations. This has shaped public perception and has been the basis for policy and praxis to what is termed as combatting human trafficking. The conflation of human trafficking with sexual slavery, makes the notion of trafficking ambiguous. Furthermore, human trafficking is not synonymous with prostitution. Forced labour, forced marriages, debt bondage, organ trafficking, domestic servitude, child soldiering, all fall in the ambit of human trafficking. The sexualised and feminised images of women and girls who are sex trafficked stigmatises trafficked women for life. While women in sex work may have been trafficked at some point in time, all sex workers are not victims of trafficking.

Second, human trafficking is a global phenomenon that must be viewed in the context of global capitalism and neo-liberal globalisation. This dissertation draws attention toward women's resourcefulness in sending remittances back home who with their labour, support the economies of their host and home countries and their families. What goes missing is the protection and provision of labour rights of female economic migrants, where women's exploitation at workplaces go unnoticed and goes without impunity, because those who profit from their labour control and manage the markets. The second conceptual contribution of this research begins by interlinking migration and human trafficking with globalisation, global capitalism, and its impact on the labour market. This conceptual understanding is necessary for discourse within the academia. I engaged with the scholarly work of Saskia Sassen and Kamala Kempadoo and have argued for taking up the cause of the rights of labour migrants from the Global South, who like in the case of the research participants, are vulnerable to trafficking and various forms of marginalisation and exploitation. I have unpacked the strong anti-migration foundations present in the anti-trafficking discourse, policy and praxis that puts restriction on women's autonomy, mobility, labour and sexual freedoms. This research has expanded the horizon of the dominant anti-trafficking paradigm by delving deeper in understanding human trafficking from a rights framework. This is done by exploring the broader context of neoliberal globalisation and its intersections with human trafficking, migration, labour and gender. I have drawn attention to the feminisation of labour in the context of feminisation of poverty and survival and its impact on vulnerable, trafficked and migrant working women from the Global South in the globalised world. Women are increasingly the economic providers for their families. A stereotypical image of passive

trafficked victim or a co-conspirator of 'illegal' migration in the case of cross border migration, victimises both the trafficked and the female economic migrant. The trafficked are considered to be passive and lacking agency, while the 'illegal' connotation pushes the economic migrant on the ambiguous sidelines of the trafficking ambit. This approach deprives them from receiving assistance if they are deceived, or in forced labour, violated or at risk in the host countries. The narratives of trafficking as a criminal activity infringes women's right to work with dignity, in what is considered indecent work. This dehumanisation and secondary treatment of women's labour has long term implications in the lives of women and their families.

This dissertation has brought in the views of strong anti-prostitution and anti-migration foundations that dominate the human trafficking discourse. The outcome of these lobbies infringes women agency and dignity to migrate for work, drawing from the binaries of decency and indecency. Therefore, in this dissertation I have argued for intersectional analysis of the embodied experiences of trafficked and migrant women workers and address systems and structures that oppresses and violates their bodies, labour, rights and dignity. By drawing women's insights and perspectives, this research has produced knowledge utilising women's lived experiences and embodied theology. I posit, that 'indecent' is the world that women in margins inhabit which dehumanises them and their labour. With limited livelihood options and skills, women take up work that is available for them, decent or not. I have further argued for being in just solidarity with women in margins, which is not limited to immediate provision of charity, relief and assistance but to work on addressing structural gaps that marginalises women from living "life in abundance" (John 10.10b), where their children and communities can live and prosper in "New Heavens and a New Earth" (Isaiah 65:17-25).

In conclusion, human trafficking, being a global phenomenon needs to be conceptually viewed in the broader context of global capitalism and neo-liberal globalisation where erosion of labour rights, specially of migrant workers are normalised, and their rights and dignity not affirmed. Human trafficking is not just crime against women. I posit that, trafficking is a violation of human rights of those whom systems and policies have systematically failed. In their attempt to move out of their homes for work and better lives, people, specifically vulnerable women and children, are at risk for being trafficked. Prosecuting small time operators does not resolve the problem, they often come from the same conditions as the

trafficked. Addressing structural and systemic gaps that keeps the poor and vulnerable in the margins, is most important. I have argued for trafficked and migrant women to be viewed as women with agency, whose contributions to the economies of the host and sending countries must be recognised and their rights as workers to be asserted. What is necessary is regulating the labour market and protecting the rights and dignity of migrant workers working in the informal economy. I have further argued for inclusion of women's viewpoints and knowledge in programs and policies that are meant to assist trafficked women and to prevent human trafficking.

I acknowledge and support women's right to work, migration and economic freedom. In this research I have collaborated with vulnerable, trafficked and economic migrant women. These are women, who in their journey for decent work, better life and aspirations for a secured future, take the risk to move out of their homelands to explore new avenues. The conceptual contribution from this research has been learning from women how they self-construct their identities in the context of these conflicting discourses on human trafficking, migration and labour. This research has brought forward women's notion on liberation, empowerment, dignity and solidarity. By exploring women's strategy on how they utilise their power within, resources and agency to empower themselves as individuals and as women in solidarity, this research has drawn from women's standpoint and knowledge, which can be utilised by researchers, biblical scholars, theologian and policy makers.

Within these conceptual understandings presented here, I make seven specific recommendations. First, I recommend for investment in scientific studies to understand the impact of an anti-trafficking paradigm that is largely based on anti-prostitution foundations, such as rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration/ repatriation of the trafficked. Even though recent reports and studies by key players such as the United States Department of State and the International Labour Organisation among others mention that human trafficking takes place for sexual exploitation, forced labour and forced marriages, the large focus of work, including research, praxis and advocacy in the anti-trafficking paradigm is on sex trafficking.

The ILO in 2012 estimated that globally 20.9 million people were victims of forced labour. It estimates that for every trafficking victim subjected to forced prostitution, nine people are forced to work. With an overemphasis on sex trafficking, people who come under the ambit of other forms of trafficking, such as in forced labour, forced marriage, domestic servitude,

children recruited as soldiers, workers in sweat shops and other informal and unorganised sectors, supply chain workers such as in agriculture, fishing, factory, shipping, carpet industry, manufacturing, and construction, are discriminated and left out. Research and advocacy on a clear conceptualisation of human trafficking will help deepen understanding of the issue which will further have better influence on policy and action.

Second, I recommend for conceptual understanding about women's agency, power and resourcefulness for those who work on the issue and influence policy. I suggest women's inclusion in the decision-making processes that concerns them. This dissertation challenges the dominant rhetoric that situates women as passive and naïve victims who are considered incapable of comprehension and decision-making skills, specially while they are provided institutional assistance. In this context, I recommend moving away from the dominant rhetoric of passive victims and learning from women's lived experiences of trafficking and migration concerning their expectations of services and assistance. Taking a gendered and rights perspective, I recommend the conceptualisation of women as resourceful agents in knowledge production and for their participation in the discourse. This will prevent women from secondary exploitation and victimisation from service providers, as their participation will bring women's perspective on the nature of services they deem fit for themselves. I suggest open discourse and dialogues on these issues with those in power who take decision on behalf of the vulnerable and trafficked women. Active stakeholders' engagement that place trafficked women and their knowledge at the centre of discourse is in my opinion a feminist and human rights approach to assist trafficked women. A paternalistic and protectionist approach, I argue, denies dignity and agency of the trafficked in the anti-trafficking paradigm, specifically in the rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration models. In this research, I have brought in the standpoint and knowledge of trafficked women on the impact of rhetoric's that promote paternalistic and protectionist approaches to assist the trafficked.

Third, I recommend for purposeful discourse and dialogues between the abolitionists and migrant workers right lobbies to better understand and coherently address the issues from the perspective of the trafficked and migrant women. Conceptual clarity of the multi-layered issues that surround this subject needs to be unpacked systematically specially in the planning and provision of assistance to the trafficked. I argue for not limiting assistance to 'passive



victims' of sex trafficking, but to include people who fall in the domain of human trafficking, including those in forced labour and unassisted voluntary migrants in need of support.

Fourth, I my recommendation is for systematic planning on addressing the macro and micro factors that puts women at risk. In my opinion, the systemic, structural and causal factors of migration and trafficking are critical to any analysis and must be a part of discourse for policy planning, implementation and for richer scholarship in the academia. I argue for long term sustainable solutions and strategic planning and intervention to address the structural and causal factors that pushes women to migrate out of their homelands.

Fifth, I recommend for asserting the right of women to mobility and their right to decent work. In the presence of lucrative work options, women do risk taking unsafe passages through bogus illegal operators and move to the network of a globalised order, what Saskia Sassen (2002:503) calls the "counter-geographies of globalisation". Policies need to specifically address these rights of women.

Sixth, I suggest recognising women as resourceful agents in providing for their families. Even as households are increasingly dependent on women's income for their survival and development, women are not respectfully appreciated nor recognised as the breadwinners of their families in comparison to their male counterparts. The prevalence of social notions about women, cultural and gender norms that situates women in secondary positions within families and communities, along with the sexualised image of migrant women's labour, contributes to women's indignity within families and communities with few exceptions. It is in this context; I recommend for strategic and continued efforts on Gender and Development. Women's economic contribution is not limited to families. They contribute to the economies of the host and home countries. The home countries benefit from the accrual of remittances that are sent. The receiving of foreign currency is beneficial for the home country. Similarly, the host country enterprise benefits from the labour of migrants. The labour of women working in the margins of what Sassen describes as "licit" economy (2022:225), profits the economy of the host country as well as the enterprises that recruits and profits from their labour. None defend women's rights for decent work. While migrants contribute to these profit-making industries, the recruiters do not take the responsibility of fair wages and decent workplaces. This makes women vulnerable to indecent housing, indecent sanitation, indecent health care and indecent work. These cross-border circuits, while being a source of livelihood

for women and their families, are sites where exploitation of women's labour and trafficking takes place. These hidden populations most often are unreached from assistance because of the legal-illegal construct within the migration framework. Undocumented migrants and women in forced labour are further pushed out of assistance. Therefore, I recommend developing a broader perspective and analysis on the interconnectedness of human trafficking with migration, decent work, fair wages and dignity in labour.

Women's articulation on the micro and macro factors that contribute to increasing vulnerability to human trafficking is a significant contribution in this research as the anti-trafficking paradigm largely focusses on service delivery rather than addressing structural and systemic gaps and failures. I argue that while the provision of immediate relief is necessary, limiting policies and responses from within a narrow framework disproportionately affects people who live on the edge of existing socio-economic and geo-political context. My fourth recommendation is for systematic research on the impact of global crises such as climate change, conflicts, wars, pandemics like COVID-19, economic crisis and recession, discriminatory policies and harmful practices and systemic inequality on economic migrants who are disproportionately vulnerable to trafficking.

Last but not the least, I recommend for policy and praxis to engage with the socially excluded and marginalised groups who are embedded in a cycle of systemic cycle of discrimination and exclusion. Addressing systemic violence against women with different social identities, race, ethnicity, religion and labour is highly recommended. This is possible if the existing anti-trafficking paradigm expands its work beyond the crime against women perspective and includes a holistic and rights-based framework of working with trafficked women.

To understand these contestations and issues better, I believe that learning from women's perspective is crucial. This dissertation expands its horizon of learning by engaging with trafficked and economic migrant women to understand the systemic and structural challenges that impedes women from living a life with dignity. Vulnerable trafficked and migrant working women therefore need to occupy centre spaces in research, policy and praxis. Representation, not tokenism, is vital in these discourses for it is their subjugated knowledge that is under-utilised in the academic, theological and policy circles. I recommend for more intense research on dignity and just solidarity in sociology and theology. To create transformative pathways for a just world, I firmly believe that our collective action must be

centred towards being in active and intersectional solidarity with vulnerable and marginalised populations. To be in solidarity with the trafficked, it is pertinent to understand the issue deeper.

### **8.2.2 Theoretical Contribution**

This research is informed by Feminist Standpoint Theory. I engaged with the work of Standpoint theorists Dorothy Smith (1987, 1992, 2005, 2012), Sandra Harding (1993) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 2000, 2002, 2009). Since the research is interdisciplinary in nature, it has engaged with other theories such as Feminist Intersectionality by drawing theoretical and analytical resources from the scholarly works of Intersectional and Critical Race Theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989) and Yuval Davis (2006, 2008, 2011). I engaged with the work of Political Scientist and Anthropologist James C. Scott (1990) to draw insight on subaltern strategies of resistance to domination. Paulo Freire's (1970, 2000, 2012) contribution on dialogical practice and liberative praxis has informed the theoretical framework and methodological practice.

Standpoint Theory is rooted on the notion that the marginalised and oppressed can contribute to knowledge production. It promotes giving epistemic privilege to those in margins. Feminist Standpoint Theory has drawn insights from Hegel's account of master/slave dialectic and that of Marx and Lukacs' notion of the standpoint of the proletariat. This research is grounded in the Marxist argument that the oppressed have access to knowledge which the privileged do not have. It draws insight from Hegel's argument that a slave arrives at a state of freedom of consciousness after s/he reaches a state of self-consciousness against their master with reference to their physical labour and struggles. These standpoint theorists argued that the proletariat have an epistemic advantage, as their experiences in social relations from their position of marginality offers them double vision (Bowell 2011). With this Marxist view of standpoint of the proletariat, Sandra Harding reframed the notion of the standpoint of the proletariat and coined the term 'standpoint theory'. She argued that "Starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order" (Harding 1993: 56).

Feminist standpoint theorists Sandra Harding (2007) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 2000) posit that knowledge is socially situated among the oppressed and marginalised. They believe that the everyday experiences of women shape their epistemic view and knowledge. They have more awareness and knowledge, not only of their own social and political marginalisation, but also of the lives of those who occupy positions of power and oppress those in margins. Standpoint theory is not a theoretical construct only, it is a place to begin inquiry and is a sociology in the making (Smith 1992: 91). In contemporary capitalism, the standpoint of women is profound and relevant to make transformative changes in an unequal and unjust socio-economic order. Therefore, the “point of entry” (Smith 2005:10) of investigation for this study begins with women’s situated, everyday experiences of social and economic injustice, employment and pay inequity and struggle for a life of dignity.

Standpoint Feminist theorists emphasise giving epistemic advantage to women with the belief that because of women’s specific socio-political positions their contribution to knowledge production is necessary as their social locations can become sites of epistemic advantage and starting points of enquiry. Women, with social and political disadvantages, have better knowledge both of themselves and of those who are in positions of power and oppression over them. This research has brought in women’s insight, knowledge and feminist ways of thinking, drawing from the standpoint of women who have intersectional experiences of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, trafficking, migration and labour. With women’s experiences of vulnerability, oppression, exploitation, marginalisation and discrimination as a starting point of enquiry the research moved to learning from women’s intersectional experiences of liberation, empowerment, assertion of rights, affirmation of dignity and building solidarity. Drawing insights from Marxists views, this research examined how subjugated proletariat migrant women navigate their path from a place of subordination at homes and in communities to a position of power that comes with gainful employment, despite working in the informal economy where fair wages, job security, fair work ethics, fair working hours continue to be a challenge.

The theory of feminist intersectionality addresses epistemological debates about power dynamics and resistance and has greatly influenced feminist scholarship on women’s gender and sexuality studies in conjunction with other fields (Davis 2008: 67; McCall 2005: 1771). Understanding the organisation of power and how it how it operates is critical as oppression

and resistance are intrinsically connected and influence each other (Collins 2000: 274). Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality was introduced during a discussion on issues with the oppression of black women's employment in the US (Crenshaw 1989, Yuval Davis 2006: 193). The intersectional theory to feminism holds an important place now on issues of identity-politics and racial justice which has helped shape legal discussions in the USA (Crenshaw 1989, 2014,2017).

The concept of 'intersectionality' is important for this research as it interacts with multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination. It supports understanding women from marginalised groups who are understood in a specific socio-historical and cultural context. In this research, I have brought insight from women's strategies of how they create spaces to resist oppression and domination in their everyday lives individually and as people in solidarity with one another. I explored how women form self-definitions in their pathway from the state of internalised oppression to a liberated and conscious mind, and in doing so form collective consciousness and forge bonds of solidarity (Collins 2000: 100, 112). This body of work has worked towards a politics of empowerment. It has addressed debates around power dynamics of those in positions of power over knowledge systems and structures, including academicians, theologians and policy makers. By grounding the research on the notion that the subordinated women have the power of not only liberating themselves from situations of oppression and subjugation but have the capacity to contribute to the body of knowledge.

Historically women around the globe are dominated by hierarchical power relations and power structures, with power being understood as of "power-over" (Allen 2008). Nancy Hartsock refers to the understanding of power "as energy and competence rather than dominance" as "the feminist theory of power" (Hartsock 1983: 224 in Allen 2008). In this research I explored how women employ their 'power-within' to counter the structures and systems that dominate over them in their struggle to affirm dignity. The concept of 'power within' is used in gender analysis. It was useful for this research to draw insight on how women utilise their self-awareness and assets of strength, courage, resilience and solidarity in their path towards empowerment and transformation.

Dorothy Smith's (1987:82) notion of "bifurcation of consciousness" was brought into this research with women sharing their personal experiences of living in "two worlds", one life in

their home communities of living with family and the other as a migrant worker in the host community. Women's assimilation to a new environment in the host cities does not come easy at the beginning. Women shared their experiences of how they adapt to different culture, language, mode of living, work culture, living environment. Practicing feminist participatory research processes created safe spaces for women to speak and articulate. These modes of knowing and learning from women's embodied experiences brings us to the experiences of the subordinate groups in how they condition their views and adapt into the world of the dominant group. The assimilation to a new culture is empowering as they learn the ways of city life in which they try to fit in. They fear the risk of alienating themselves from their true identity, their culture, language and religion. They create circles of friendship with people from their communities to practice and retain their culture, religion and faith. They identify Churches in the city where people from their tribes congregate. They identify people from within their communities despite some differences in ethnicity or religion to belong to a wider network of solidarity. James Scott (1990) contests the misrepresentation of social reality. He argues that the dominant ideology is misrepresented as not excluding the interests of the subordinate groups. He posits that the dominant ideology operates to conceal or misrepresent aspects of social relations because it could hamper the interests of the dominant elites (1990:71). Discerning and simplifying this thick and thin versions of false consciousness is necessary, where the dominant ideology works towards persuading the subordinates to believe and justify their subordination and to accept the reality of their lives. Scott (1990:72) posits that,

The thin theory of false consciousness, on the other hand, maintains only that the dominant ideology achieves compliance by convincing subordinate groups that the social order in which they live is natural and inevitable. The thick theory claims consent; the thin theory settles for resignation. In its most subtle form, the thin theory is eminently plausible and, some would claim, true by definition.

It is therefore necessary for the resistance of the dominant ideology by subordinate groups, which is in the hidden transcript and for the articulation of their collective hidden transcripts in safe spaces, as an exercise of resistance to challenge the status quo and assert their rights and liberation. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) argues that women's stereotypical representation, by those who have not listened to the voices of women, are forms of psychological oppression

and self-devaluation of women in margins. Therefore, in this research, I explored how “women forge self-definitions of self-reliance and independence” (Collins 2009:1). The research methods employed in this research, Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study enabled unpack women’s own self-definitions of subjective identities and social identities such as gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and labour.

Can subaltern women speak and be agents of knowledge production? This is a question that often comes in policy circles that exclude participation of the marginalised people and communities, including women. Can women who have been vulnerable and trafficked or been exploited in their migration pathways have the capacity to contribute to decision making process for themselves? The notion that women cannot think critically, nor can they speak, is challenged by Scott (1990), who argues that among the most marginalised there are not always opportunities to speak or hear what the marginalised have within their bodies. The power relations between the dominant and oppressed does not give the oppressed an opportunity to speak. However, they speak and question their domination offstage. While the dominated accept the domination of the oppressor in public, they do question and critique their domination offstage. This “hidden transcript” (Scott 1990) is the articulation of resistance by the dominated that takes place in different forms. The theoretical contribution of this research is the knowledge drawn from subjugated women by creating safe and sacred spaces for women to articulate their embodied experiences. They critique power, decode power relations and domination, and critique systemic violence that keeps them subjugated. Creating an enabling and empowering space to speak, share, converse and dialogue enabled the researcher and the researched to understand how women navigate their path towards empowerment. They shared their hidden transcripts and strategies of resistance by sharing how they pursue opportunities for change, how they build their sense of worth and dignity, and how they transition from a position of domination to empowerment. These transformative changes take place with the recognition and exercise of their power within and as people in solidarity with one another.

### **8.2.3 Theological Contribution**

This research aimed at exploring the theological/religious dimensions of dignity in the embodied experience of women who have been vulnerable to or have experiences of

trafficking. For the purpose of this research, I have collaborated with Christian migrant working women, some of whom have had experience with trafficking. Women's articulation of their embodied experiences and biblical reflection are the raw materials and key resource for this theology generating work.

To contribute towards developing a theology of trafficked dignity, I have drawn theological resources from the works of liberation and feminist theologians and biblical scholars such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, Gerald West, Albert Nolan, Marcella Althaus-Reid, Avaren Ipsen, Gemma Tulud Cruz, Beverley Haddad and Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz. Like Standpoint Theory, Liberation Theology is based on Marxist ideology. It critiques an unjust and unequal social order and challenge systems and structures that perpetuates poverty. In the context of global capitalism, the dehumanisation, im-personalisation and alienation of migrant workers who are vulnerable to trafficking and other forms of exploitation is central in this research. Liberation Theology emphasises praxis to address structural sins and advocates for the liberation of the poor from material poverty and conditions that pushes them to be exploited. It challenges the Church to bring justice to the world, to act against poverty, and to fight against the sins that facilitates marginalisation, oppression and exploitation of the poor.

Taking sides with poor, oppressed and migrant women workers with experiences of vulnerability to trafficking, this research along with other research methods grounded its theological and methodological framework based on the work of Biblical Scholar and my Doctoral Supervisor, Prof. Gerald West. Contextual Bible Study (CBS) as a research method was employed for this research along with Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters and Focus Group Discussions. With its concern on issues of social, economic and political justice, the emphasis of this dissertation is 'theological process', rather than theological content, as is the emphasis in Liberation Theology (West 1993: 165; West 2014:2; West 2015: 89). It advocates giving epistemic privilege to the poor, without which there can be no theology that is liberating for them (West 2011). West emphasises the need to identify the agency of the organised poor, who may not even articulate these discourses to themselves, but will find ways to express in safe spaces. CBS, a reading processes within biblical liberation hermeneutics, involves reading of the Bible with the ordinary, poor and marginalised readers. It is an inclusive method where the views and biblical interpretations of each participant about the biblical text from their context and perspective are considered as a resource for



constructing theology West (2011: 162). The articulation of the local, embodied discourses are the raw materials of theology, even though not fully-fledged formal theology; they are inchoate and incipient and will take on theological form as they engage with public forms of theology (West 2011: 162). There cannot be any prophetic theology without a people's theology, which is present in the dignity discourse of the dominated (West 2015: 89). This research has generated aspects of a vibrant people's theology.

The voices of ordinary trafficked and migrant women are integral to this dissertation since the aim of this research is to bring to centre the subjugated knowledge of women in margins. To explore women's insights on the theological/religious dimensions of dignity, Contextual Bible Study along with the inputs from other research methods, generated embodied theologies from trafficked and migrant women workers. The book of Ruth was read, interpreted and analysed from the standpoint of women. This was done within a See-Judge-Act framework as is done in liberation hermeneutics (West 2013: 513; 2014: 15-17). The process began with doing contextual social analysis (See), reading the book of Ruth as it relates with women's lives as migrant workers living in a foreign land (Judge) and ending with the voices of women asking the wider community and the Church to be in just solidarity with women in margins (Act).

By bringing to dialogue the voices of marginalised women workers from their everyday life experiences including sexual experiences, using economic and political tools of analysis (Althaus-Reid 2000, Albert Nolan 1996), this research has gone a step ahead and worked with trafficked women along with migrant women workers, who in their struggle for decent work and a life of dignity challenge the patriarchal construction of sexual morality that not only controls behaviour of women but silences the voice of in/decent women, including that of women in sex work (Avaren Ipsen 2009). Even though this research has not included the voices of sex workers, it has taken sides with women in their choice of work and argued for decriminalisation of women in sex work and for the regulation of the sex industry. I recommend, liberation and biblical oriented scholars to draw resource from this body of work amongst others and to engage in further dialogue for widening the circles of solidarity.

Women's voices and articulation through a process of sharing, reflection, active participation and experiential learning in this research process brought in theological reflections of

women's faith, courageous hope, creative resistance and solidarity in their everyday struggles for survival (Tulud Cruz 2006, Maria Isasi-Diaz 1996, Haddad 2000). This research explored women's lived experiences of vulnerability and agency, their strategies of affirming their dignity and rights, their trajectory of empowerment as individuals and as groups in solidarity and their faith and conceptualisation of God in times of oppression and despair. Women's biblical interpretations, contributions and the analysis of the research is a form of people's theology. I hope the outcomes of this research to be a resource for Biblical liberation hermeneutics and public theology.

The contribution from this research is not just an academic pursuit, but like Gustavo Gutiérrez (1988: 174) has put it, the purpose of doing Liberation Theology is not for "intellectual self-satisfaction" but to "build a true human fellowship, in our historical initiatives to subvert an order of injustice - with the fullness with which Christ loved us". This is the foundation for the theological work undertaken for this research: taking a preferential option for poor trafficked and migrant working women and utilising women as a theology-generating agency in this Participatory Feminist Research, without which there will be no value in our work for the disadvantaged and marginalised women.

The individual and collective articulation and reflections in the Feminist Interviews, Informal Encounters, Focus Group Discussions and largely during the Contextual Bible Study Workshop are the raw yet key resource for an incipient theology, which forms the basis of people's theology. The people's theology forms the basis for a prophetic theology, which in turn forms the basis for a public theology that can be a rich resource for influencing social change and transformational development (West et al., 2020: 6). I recommend, biblical scholars and theologians to make use of these embodied theologies for further work, both in building appropriate Prophetic Theology and Public Theology.

Women's voices, reflection and biblical interpretations provide insight into the social, economic and contextual analysis of the situation of trafficked and migrant working women. The economic analysis adapts a Marxist mode of analysis to capture the perspectives and experiences of trafficked and migrant working women from the Global South in the context of globalisation and neo-liberalism. Women voiced their concerns on the lack of opportunities for their education, vocational trainings and non-availability of decent jobs with decent

remuneration. These structural and systemic marginalisation puts them at risk when they move out of their homes in search for work and better life. They aspire to be self-reliant, not only to provide for their families, but to have respect for themselves in their family and in the wider community. They challenge gender norms, discrimination and violence that subdues women's positions within homes and outside.

Women shared about their faith and their perception of God specially in times of despair. They shared how their faith has kept them rooted with the Church in the host communities. They seek for a community with the Church from their ethnic group. Many of the participating women shared their joy in following the traditions of their culture in their Churches. Church becomes a community of support for them. However, some shared their negative experiences when people in the home communities look down upon self-reliant women working in the cities. The sexualised image of migrant women's work and exploitation in the media contributes to this negative image about women.

In his article, "People's theology, prophetic theology, and public theology in post-liberation South Africa", Gerald West (2013: 1-16) reflects on the Kairos document in the South African context and writes about, People's Theology, Incipient theology, Church Theology and Public Theology that is pertinent to this dissertation and the way forward. Citing the Kairos Document (1985), West (2013: 2) emphasises that 'people's theology' is foundational for 'prophetic theology'. He argues that prophetic theology must return to people's theology, which is what this research offers. The re-reading of the biblical book of Ruth in this research is part of doing people's theology. The theological trajectory of this dissertation is located within the struggles and strategies of empowerment for liberation of women in margins. By engaging in a collaborative work with economic migrants and trafficked women, this dissertation has brought in women's voices and posits that an appropriate prophetic and public theology would need to have an economic analytical component. Economic domain being central to Liberation Theology (West 2013: 2), this dissertation is located within the socio-economic theological trajectory that is critical of and challenges oppressive systems and structures that marginalises women and communities to have access to opportunities for development and to live lives to the best of their potential, well-being and aspirations.

West (2013: 13, 14) has emphasised on the need to return to the organised social movements of the poor to do theology with them. Sharing the work of the Ujamaa Centre that is located within our School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics of the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal with the Abahlali baseMjondolo community, a socialist shack dwellers movement in South Africa, West describes the collaboration model that has worked for them. The Ujamaa centre extends socio-economic collaboration to theological collaboration and offers resources in terms of theological method, including the “people’s theology” process of the Kairos Document, besides others. This process facilitates working with them to bring out their “incipient” theologies of the communities.

West (2013: 14) notes,

This requires biblical scholars and theologians once again locating themselves alongside the organised social movements of our time. Drawing on the legacy of Franz Fanon, Abahlali believes with Fanon that “the role of the university-trained intellectual”, black and white, is “to be inside the struggles of the people and to be inside the discussions inside the struggles of the people”, recognising “the shack intellectuals” and debating with them “as equals”.

For it is here that the Christian prophetic sector will find the theological resources with which to engage the state (and with which to revitalise the church). If we are to resist and contest the ritualised invocations of public religion, including Bible waving politicians, we will have to relocate ourselves to where people’s theology is already being done.

In the decolonial reading of the Bible, women found liberative and empowering spaces to reflect and speak. There were outbursts of anger and hope. Anger against oppression and oppressive systems and structures, and hope for a better, equal and just world. A sincere call to dismantle patriarchy, doing away with paternalistic approaches of finding solutions and providing support. Solidarity, in the most humane and just forms, from those who understand the struggles of those who are negatively impacted by oppressive social and economic structures in particular, is what is required.

This prophetic theology, with the foundations of social analysis and a re-reading of the Bible (CBS) along with women in margins, provides an alternate way of understanding the social and economic realities of trafficked women and economic migrants. It not only brings out the realities of oppression but gives hope for a path of liberation, empowerment and human solidarity.

Albert Nolan (1994: 216) has rightly puts it this way,

Theological interpretation here means discerning what kind of time we are living in and what God is saying to us at this particular moment of time.... Still more important is the recognition that when we read the signs of the times or interpret our Kairos we are saying something about the future. Prophetic theology is concerned not only about the present but also about the future. In fact, prophetic theology can see the future, or various possible futures, in the present crisis. It can predict the future catastrophes if nothing is done now, and it can promise great blessing if the present opportunity is taken seriously.

Prophetic theology therefore calls for an action, connecting theology with praxis, engaging and participating in the struggles of people in margins and being in just solidarity with them for a future that promises hope, human dignity and creation of just, equal and transformed societies. When God takes the sides of those in margins, the people of God and the Church certainly must participate and be in solidarity in the struggles of people. This is what would mean putting our faith in action.

West (2013: 12) points to the complicity of the churches from what was referred to as the “Church Theology” in the Kairos Document. He argues that church theology must be framed within economic terms in in our current context, that is willing to engage with the State on structural matters, more specifically on economic systems. He critiques the courtship of the Church and its theology with the political elite. He posits that a systematic socio-economic analysis and theology must be the basis of this relationship that challenges the economic and political realm of the context of people. Christianity, that is focussed on the structural and not just the personal, is the way for a renewed order for “new Jerusalem”.

According to John W. de Gruchy (2003: 45-46), Public theology, within the liberation theologies, is embedded in the political struggles of people and in the life of the Church in its praxis and engagement.

Located as it was within the Church struggle against apartheid, public theology was deeply rooted in the life and witness of the churches. Those engaged in doing public theology in the academy were invariably embedded in the life of the churches. But academic reflection and teaching were not pursued in isolation from the praxis of witness. It was, rather, a theology of witness in which theology and ethics, and especially ecclesiology and social ethics, were integrated.

In his article, "The legacy of liberation theologies in South Africa, with an emphasis on biblical hermeneutics" West (2023: 1) emphasises that,

Liberation theology was to be done, within this terminology, in the context of the struggle for life in the midst of death. The determination that the notion of "struggle" (the ongoing process of God's project), rather than the notion of "liberation" (the end goal), is the appropriate emphasis in liberation theologies, was the conviction of South African forms of liberation theology (Nolan 1988; Mosala 1989). The advantage of this formulation has been that there is a place for liberation theologies after political liberation, as is the case in South Africa. As long as the God of life is engaged against the idols of death, whether these be the idols of neo-liberal capitalism in our government's macro-economic policy, or the idols of patriarchy within our cultures and religions, or the idols of moral and medical discrimination in the context of HIV and AIDS, there is a need for forms of liberation theology that work with and proclaim the God of life.

"The struggle" is not primarily an internal struggle within individuals, though it does include this; the primary struggle within liberation theologies is, to rephrase Ephesians, against systems and structures that bring death (Ephesians 6:12). The struggle is fundamentally against structural sin (West 2005b), but the nature of the structures is different, though often overlapping.

This dissertation has drawn attention towards the systems and structures that are life denying and has focussed on working against structural sins. It provides resources for churches, ecumenical and faith-based organisations to be relevant in their practice of just solidarity. This is done by bringing in the voices of women in the academic and theological systems that has for long suppressed and not heard women's voices and hidden transcripts. This socio-economic analysis within liberation hermeneutics is a way to call the Church, ecumenical and faith-based organisations to do be in just solidarity with vulnerable, trafficked and migrant women. It challenges the Church to shift from being a by-stander, compassionate and charitable in its service for women and be in just solidarity with women irrespective of their nationality, religion, ethnicity or work. It is a call to move beyond the institutional church and organisations to work together with communities and social and labour movements on socio-economic and transformational development of vulnerable, poor, marginalised and oppressed communities.

In this context, I hope that this research gives meaning to initiatives of the Church, faith-based organisations and theological spaces to build and strengthen strategies to incorporate socio-economic justice and solidarity frameworks for critical community engagement and practice, where theology is practiced within communities of resistance and resilience. Such inclusive, empowering, participatory and sacred processes will make way for creating networks of just solidarity. This is possible when we can critique the existing gaps in the theology of the Church and Institutions that incapacitates the spirit of solidarity and community within and outside of the Church. The existing theological models, engagement of the Church and ecumenical bodies must look at alternate models of hope, justice and solidarity that centres people in the margins in their social and economic analysis, in "reading the signs of the times" (Math 16:3) and in doing prophetic theology.

Doing theology, I would argue, will be incomplete if we are unable to influence macro-economic policies that is pro-people, humane and promotes human solidarity. This is possible if we join and collaborate with communities in margins, learning from them their lived realities and understanding the concerns that needs to be resolved and addressed with long term sustainable solutions. Solutions that are based on economic analysis and aims at removing the gender-based structural economic inequalities of poor communities, especially

in the Global South. To be in solidarity with oppressed and marginalised communities that struggle to work for their liberation, we need to work with and for them to influence public policies and public theologies that would affirm their dignity and rights. We need to work together as a Collective of stakeholders within and outside of the religious domain, that can work together with the State/s if we are to take active part in the immediate and long-term structural changes that are required to work towards a shared mission of a just and equal society, across borders, gender, class, caste and ethnicity. This shared mission is at the crux of being in just solidarity with communities in margins if we are to dream and work together for the creation of a “new heaven and new earth” (Isaiah 65:17-25).

To be in just solidarity with the oppressed and dominated trafficked and migrant women, I recommend for further work and preparation of resource for theological reflection to stimulate the Church and the Christian Community in the world to be radical in its faith, acts of love and hope for the dehumanised people and to actively work towards a just social and economic order. The resources that this research offers can be helpful for biblical scholars and theologians to work further in the domain of human trafficking, labour, migration, agency, empowerment, dignity and solidarity. Women’s perception of the Church and their experiences with the community of the Church as presented in this dissertation can be utilised by scholars working in Practical and Public Theology. Christian and Ecumenical agencies can utilise women’s voices and recommendations from this research in their work on human trafficking, migration, labour, poverty, gender and development. The Church can benefit from this dissertation findings on how they can utilise their pulpits and community to embrace the trafficked and migrant women. I hope that these resources may be well utilised by the Church, Christian agencies, Ecumenical organisations, students of biblical studies and theology and the wider community.

#### **8.2.4 Methodological Contribution**

With a theoretical and theological foundation of giving epistemic privilege to the very women whose voices are marginalised and unrepresented in the development of anti-trafficking policies, praxis and advocacy, this research has produced knowledge from the insights and standpoint of trafficked and migrant working women. The methodological contribution of this research is significant since the research process is given more importance than the outcome.



The emphasis in the research process was to decolonise power in producing knowledge and theology. I am sharing some specific contributions that this research process has practiced that can be useful for other emerging qualitative and feminist researchers.

**1) The identification of research participants:** This research deals with a very sensitive issue. The notion of trafficking of women generally comes with the image of women in sexual exploitation. Hence, finding trafficked survivors in the mainstream population now working as migrant workers was not easy. These hidden populations are difficult to reach. They are guarded to participate in ethnographic research. Taking time for purposeful sampling has proved beneficial for this research. I recommend every researcher working with hidden populations on sensitive topics to spend time with potential research participants, to clearly explain the purpose of the research, the process it will undertake and the expectations from each participant. I emphasise on building a relationship of trust and comfort with research participants at the onset of a research process in a Qualitative and Feminist Research. This is the time when the potential participant can decide whether they would like to be part of the research or not. An informed decision of the participant is ethical and is useful for working with the participant over a period of time. This is a good time for researcher to decide if the identified person can contribute to the research. Women who gave their consent for participation brought in their friends who they believed would contribute to this research. The snowball sampling was not just a means to get participants, because it is from this time some of the women started valuing the research process and began by inviting their friends to join. Women committed to taking the time out to contribute to this research process. The insights and contribution of women to the phenomenon of this study has been remarkable due to the discerning sampling process.

**2) Decentralising power in the research process:** This is Qualitative Research embedded in feminist values and principles. Therefore, listening to and engaging with the dialogue partners was practiced as a strategy for maximising the resources from the participating women. Considering the sensitivity around the issue, an ethical, empowering and participatory research process was adapted by creating safe, sacred,

enabling and empowering spaces. The facilitation of participatory research process enables active participation. Mindful listening and creating comfortable and non-judgemental spaces for women to speak without fear or inhibitions is a profound way of learning from women. Women are the best knowers of their lived realities and the world the surrounds them. The practice of mindful listening helped create an environment of trust and mutual respect and helped decolonise the dominant perspective. The practice to listen deeply is a decolonising research practice and a radical act of transformation and liberation (De Vault and Gross 2007:182). Listening to women's subjugated voices and bringing those articulations with a wider community is a responsibility of this researcher and advocate of women's rights. Respecting women's experiences, articulations and perspectives creates a space of dignity for women. Valuing them as resourceful contributors of knowledge, respecting their privacy and dignity, allowing space for suggestions, dissent and withdrawal are some considerations that were consciously practiced. Being listened to in this manner was a first-time experience for women. Participation and contribution to research as collaborators made them feel resourceful. CBS itself was a very engaging and profound process. Women had never experienced a bible study process such as this where their contributions would be utilised in such a profound manner. Women shared that they felt valued and safe during the process and in their contributions to this research.

Conscious effort was taken to decentralise power and hierarchies in the building of a sound epistemological relationship between the researcher and the researched. This enabled the research participants to transition from information providing research participants to knowledge contributing research collaborators. This research practice ensured that the research collaborators are not limited to data producing samples and objects of measurement. Women began owning the research process and took decisions about simple to complex issues, such as when and where to meet to taking charge over conflicting discussions in the Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Study Workshop. A process of inclusivity, learning together, discovering meanings, sharing identities, and being responsive to each other was highly beneficial and recommended. Having the same participants throughout the research process

and including these ethical values, helped build a reciprocal relationship of trust and respect between the researcher and the researched.

**3) Evolution of a new research method during the research:** Informal Encounters as a research method evolved at the end of a Feminist Interview with one participant. Discussing the requirement of the research with her, helped me and her decide that we need to meet again. There was more that she had to contribute. Therefore, meeting her at her workplace proved beneficial for this research. Unplanned as it was, this informal encounter on a massage bed was intimate and insightful. It recognised dignity of her labour and valued her time which was compensated with payment for services. After consulting with my Supervisor, I included Informal Encounter as a research method for this research and was able to meet five women during the process. It gave me an overview of their workplace and the power dynamics that exists there. Women shared how they navigate challenges that they face at workplace with their employers and clients. They shared about how they evolved as a person and worker from a new migrant and now with few years of experience at work and of living in the host city. They recognise the power of building relationships with the co-workers as support mechanisms in times of difficulties. They have acquired new skills, such as working skills from on the job trainings, language and communication skills and negotiation skills. They celebrate their confidence, identity, economic and sexual freedoms.

### **8.3 Conclusion**

This research has established that trafficked and migrant working women are resourceful agents of their liberation and empowerment. They form circles and networks of solidarity to support one another. Despite their experiences of vulnerability, exploitation and subjugation in their experiences with trafficking and in their migration pathways, they have evolved as women who affirm their dignity and assert their rights in the society, in their families and communities and in their workplaces. Women have shared their offerings in the form of their knowledge about their lives. Women expect the wider community to participate and contribute to address the socio-economic marginalisation and discrimination that they face. While these offerings can be utilised for further research and practice, their articulations leave

us with questions for consideration: how can we be in just solidarity with the trafficked and migrant working women? The notion of just solidarity is an aspect that emerged as a recommendation from this research, which encapsulates all recommendations within one framework.

My notion of just solidarity is political and invites the larger community to engage with and work for a just transformation of people and communities in margins for social and economic justice. To be in just solidarity with the oppressed and marginalised means to be aware of their context and realities. It calls for just action and just peace. Just solidarity is not a top down charity nor a short-term relief service, it is looking for long term sustainable social and economic solutions for the poor and marginalised. Just solidarity means understanding the concerns of poor and marginalised people and communities from their perspectives. It means building epistemological relationship with the poor and marginalised. It means building collaborative relationships with them to work together for a mutually empowering and transformative praxis. A just solidarity, in my opinion, is a long-term commitment and yields accountability for establishing justice, peace and a new social order. The notion of just solidarity has evolved during this research. I recommend for more research on how people, communities, Church and other faith groups can be in tangible and just solidarity with the poor and marginalised communities, grounding the production of knowledge and doing theology with the poor and marginalised.

In my opinion, just solidarity is important both for women in margins and those at the centre. Confronted by an unjust and unequal society, we cannot choose to be silent and unresponsive bystanders. Just solidarity is an invitation to participate in the re-imagination of a new world order. It is not charity or a one-off event, but a process of working together in the creation of “new heaven and a new earth” (Isaiah 65: 17-25), where justice can roll down like waters and righteousness like an over-flowing stream (Amos 5:24). Our role as a society and Church is in the re-imagination and re-creation of a world order that dismantles oppressive and unjust systems, structures and practices. Restoring the personhood and dignity of the dehumanised is a call for being in just solidarity with women in margins. The creation of new heavens and a new earth is possible when we learn from the subjugated knowledge of the oppressed, when we practice just solidarity and when we make just solidarity real.

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## Appendix I

### Key Research Question

What are the conceptual components of embodied dignity within contexts of trafficking, female economic migration and indecent work in the informal economy?

### Sub-questions

1. What are the theological/religious dimensions of dignity in the embodied experience of those who have been or are vulnerable to being trafficked?
2. How can these conceptual components contribute to a theology of indecent work?
3. In what ways do notions of 'trafficking' reconfigure notions of 'dignity' and 'indecent work'?

## Appendix II

### Questions for Feminist Interviews

1. Introduce yourself. Describe your life before coming to Bangalore.  
(This is a general opening question. Pointers to probe: Some of these elements will be offered spontaneously by the interviewee, but others need to be prompted by the interviewer. Explore factors that contribute to the vulnerabilities of women and girls who migrate for work or for better life and therefore vulnerable to trafficking. How being women, and coming from different caste, class, ethnicity, socio-economic- cultural and religious backgrounds have made them more vulnerable to trafficking).
2. Describe your journey into this city.  
(Share your experiences of coming into the city. Prompting questions include: - how, with whom and what for did you move into the city and the immediate experiences after coming here. What was your motivation/ purpose to move into this city? Was it for work? If yes, how did you find about your job? What was the recruitment process?).

Each participant is expected to tell their story in their own way. The 'shape' of how they tell their story is as significant to the analysis as the content. The religious dimension of their realities does not necessarily require specific 'religious' questions. Therefore, when these dimensions emerge, I probe in what ways has 'religion', 'faith', etc. been a part of their story. By affirming that they can talk about their faith will, I open discourse on faith reflections.

3. Describe your everyday life and work in Bangalore.  
(Explore nature of work, vulnerabilities and violations, workplace environment, safe/ unsafe sites of work and living (housing), struggles, challenges, in/dignity, opportunities to go to church, etc.)
4. Share your best experiences of living in this city?
5. Share about the challenges that you face here? How do you address challenging situations living in this city – (housing, community, work or lack of work, Church, marginalization's or life affirming attributes of urban life)?
6. What are your notions of dignity and agency in your context? How can women like yourself be empowered and liberated from adverse situations? Would you like to share some experiences?  
(Explore any experience of individual and collective action for affirming dignity in the city?)
7. How do you conceptualize God in the midst of vulnerabilities, despair, oppression, exploitation, exclusion and alienation?  
(Explore how does their faith, the Bible, the Church and the community become a site of redemption or struggle.
8. How has your faith (religion) shaped in your understanding of yourself?
9. Following the discussions, we have had is there anything you would like to share, clarify and add?

## Appendix III

### CBS Questions

#### Opening questions (community knowledge, 'community consciousness')

1. What are the most important themes emerging from the book, in your opinion?

#### Questions focussing on the literary world of the text, 'on-the-text': an interpretative process of moving into 'critical consciousness'.

2. What do you think about Ruth's migration to an unknown land with her mother-in-law? What risks do you think she could have undertaken while migrating to an unknown and foreign land? Do you think she had aspirations and/ or responsibilities while making a conscious choice of moving out from her homeland?
3. Ruth chooses to take up work that is available for her, what are your first thoughts about working in an unknown and foreign land, in your own context? What are your notions of dignity in the context of any work that is available even if it involves risk of exploitation or personal harm?
4. Naomi encourages Ruth to have a sexual relationship with Boaz, hoping for economic and social security. What concerns do you think Ruth had when she followed Naomi's instruction instead of choosing to romantically engage with and settle down with someone her own age?
5. Was Ruth compelled or vulnerable while moving ahead to engage in a sexual relationship with Boaz? Share your opinion. What risks do you think she was taking to seek long term benefits?

**Moving back to “community consciousness” by creating safe and sacred spaces to enter the world of the participants, uncovering their own subjugated knowledge with questions invoking their complex realities and lived experiences.**

6. What in this story resonates with your lived experiences?
7. If you were Ruth, then how would you have responded to a situation like this? Retell the story in your own context.

**Transitional Question: moving the CBS to the ‘ACT’ moment.**

8. In your opinion, what social and theological structures must we engage with in order to address issues of Agency and Dignity in the context of in/decent work available for vulnerable/ trafficked/ migrant women – women across the globe?

## Appendix IV

### Names of Research Participants/Collaborators (Pseudonyms)

Name (Pseudonym)	Current Work	Cluster :
Mary	Hair Stylist	Indira Nagar, Bangalore
Joanna	Beautician	Indira Nagar, Bangalore
Achui	Beautician, Massage Therapist and Nail artist	Indira Nagar, Bangalore
Salome	Beautician and Therapist	Indira Nagar, Bangalore
Martha	Beautician, Former Massage Therapist and now a Store Manager in a cosmetic company	Koramangla, , Bangalore
Karen	Spa Massage Therapist & Beautician in a reputed 4- Star Hotel	Koramangla, Bangalore
Cynthia	Massage Therapist	Koramangla, Bangalore
Hannah	Massage Therapist	Koramangla, Bangalore
Esther	Entrepreneur, Massage Therapist & Beautician	Kothanur, Bangalore
Allana	Entrepreneur, Massage Therapist & Beautician	Kothanur, Bangalore
Monica	Entrepreneur, Massage Therapist & Beautician	Kothanur, Bangalore
Stella	Massage Therapist & Beautician	Kothanur, Bangalore
Susanna	Massage Therapist & Beautician	Kothanur, Bangalore

## Appendix V

### Example of an Interview

The date, time and location were set. 5<sup>th</sup> March 2018 at One Atria Cafe. I had been to this Café earlier. I was familiar with the space. It has some quiet corners and has excellent ambience for a time of good interaction without many distractions. Achui was more than eager to come over to this Café. I reached there at 3.30 pm, half an hour before the scheduled time. I have the experience of doing interviews before as part of my professional work.

I was excited to meet with Achui and to listen to her. I occupied a table in a quiet corner. I sat facing the entrance door and prepared myself for the interview. A little after 4.15 pm I noticed a young woman walking towards the cafeteria. A young woman of around five feet two inches, white pale skin, long black straight hair, slanted eyes, smartly dressed in a great monochrome outfit, dainty footwear and carrying a stylish handbag. She walked in cautious yet confident, carrying herself with much grace and dignity. I observed her walking in and then I stood up to check if she was the one, I was waiting for. We confirmed our identities, greeted one another, and sat down. I gave her some time to relax and settle in and ordered coffee of her choice. Once comfortable, I formally introduced myself giving a brief background of who I am, what I do and the purpose of my research. I explained to her the purpose of our meeting and the process of this research. I shared my cultural, social, religious, and academic location and the motivating factors that shaped this research. I assured her that her name and identity would be kept confidential in the thesis. I explained her role in the process of knowledge production and why the standpoint of vulnerable, trafficked, migrant working women from their everyday experiences is vital for this research. I invited her to share any kind of experiences, positive or otherwise and informed her that she has the right to not answer any question that she is not comfortable with to respond. I assured her that the approach that I would adapt during the interview and throughout the research process would be one of mutual respect, trust, dignity with no space for prejudice or judgements, the ground rule being a non-negotiable space of comfort, safety, trust, and sanctity. After having her informed consent, I checked with her if she was comfortable for the interview to be audio taped. She gave her consent and

added, on her own, that she was willing to respond later if I had more questions after this session. I asked her if she had any questions for me. I mentioned to her that she should feel free to take a pause during the conversation, she should ask for any clarifications during the conversation and make any suggestions before, during or after the conversation. I informed her that my role would be mostly listening to her. Since she is aware of the research purpose, she should feel free to speak. Coffee was served, and we had some light conversation before we began with the interview.

I began the interview process by sharing my own experiences of being a diasporic woman living and working in different cities. I acknowledged that our backstories may or may not be similar, yet we might possibly have many common experiences of being a woman, challenging and courageous ones, living and working by ourselves at times, sometimes in new, challenging, or wonderful workplaces. To set the tone and to get the process started I shared a couple of my personal experiences living and working in new cities and in new work environments. I shared instances of feeling scared, anxious, happy, accomplished, gaining self-reliance and confidence and the process of empowerment. Though the interview is not about me, but I needed to get the conversation started, sharing my experiences of vulnerabilities and courage. It also gave her an opportunity to know me. It helped create a space of comfort establishing a relationship of trust and solidarity.

Achui's responses were made with much grace and dignity. Achui dreamed big, for herself, for her siblings and family. She dreamed of a decent life for herself and her family. Achui is a school dropout. She could not pass her 12<sup>th</sup> class examination. Her school was average, the teachers too. Getting extra tuition was not an option for them. The quality of education her school was not so good. The family could not afford sending her to a good school. She wanted to get some skill training, but that too was not a possibility. After having dropped out of school, she would spend most of her time at home. She realised home was not the way it should be. She desired to do something to help her mother who had to work hard on the family farm as well as at home despite her physical ailments. They could not afford a helper. Her siblings were still in school. They wanted to study and have a decent job, in the government or in some good office. Her father, a devout Christian, is the Pastor of Zeme Naga Baptist Church. The family was dependant on his meagre income to meet their daily



needs. They had a decent house and a small farm. Soon Achui realised that she needed to do something to support her family. Their present was fine, but the future looked bleak. She had to move to unknown pastures, she had to take up a challenge like many other young women do.

Achui was barely in her early twenties when she stepped out of her village to make a living in the city of Delhi. Her friend had a job in Delhi and assured her of lending support to her to find her some work and a place to stay. Her parents were concerned for her, but she had a way of assuring them that she would survive the challenges of a new life, one that would pave way for a better life for the entire family. Achui lived and worked in Delhi for three years and then moved to Bangalore with a few friends.

Achui loves living and working in Bangalore, despite the few challenges that she has learned to face. In the past seven years of living as a diasporic woman, she has adapted to the culture and language of the host community. The cultural assimilation has helped her to work better and has made her life easier. She likes the process of evolution that has taken place in her personality, in her thinking, in her professional approach towards her work. Yet, she loves her roots, her culture, and her people. She loves to participate in the Sunday Church Service in Bangalore unless she is compelled to go to work on Sunday. She worships in a Church that specially caters to the diaspora from Manipur. She is active in the worship team. Sunday is a special day for her, as she gets to meet her own people, dresses up in her traditional attire and sometimes meets up with friends at a common place to cook and share a traditional meal. She feels embraced and belongs to this group more than anywhere else in the city. When in trouble, she gets support from her friends in Church.

I turned off the audio and we finished the cookies and snacks that were ordered. We ended the conversation for the day on a great note, something made us feel good about the conversation. She mentioned that she was initially nervous about the interview but now she feels comfortable and glad that she came over for the interview. She felt proud of herself specially after sharing her narrative. I shared the Informed Consent with her, and she signed on the paper before leaving. We decided to meet again, the next time at her

workplace, for a body massage. She had more to tell. That is how the idea of having few Informal Encounters emerged.

## Appendix VI

### Example of an Informal Encounter

A week after our first meeting, I took an appointment with Achui for a full body massage. She was one of the best massage therapists in the Spa. I arrived at 4pm. I was greeted by the front office staff who asked me to wait for a while. Achui came in and made me fill in a form, as required in most Spa's. She then took me into the massage room. It was a very professional set up with a calm and relaxing ambience. Once on the massage bed, Achui made me feel very comfortable. She checked with me the pressure I preferred for the massage and the areas in my body that needed special attention. We were both quiet for some time. She poured some oil on my body and started working with her fingers. Both of us were aware about the purpose of my visit to the Spa and she made sure I had a great body massage and a deep conversation.

The conversation that took place on the massage bed with Achui remains a special, intimate and exclusive one. While working on my body, Achui was comfortable speaking about the body in general, without any discomfort or apprehension of being judged. She was able to articulate comfortably in a closed room. The aroma of lemongrass incense in the room, the effect of dim lights, the soft music and the warm body oil created an atmosphere of trust and a subtle softness. With no eye contact, she spoke softly as she poured the lavender oil on my body. For Achui, the human body is special, and she loves it. When she gives a massage to a client, she feels the connection between the body and soul. To her it is an intimate and beautiful experience, a spiritual exercise as she feels happy to make her client feel relaxed and beautiful in every part of their body, female or male.

I facilitated the conversation a bit and probed with short questions only when I needed to, though I preferred just to listen. She spoke softly, but she spoke words of wisdom. She brought in perspectives from her everyday experiences, both from her home community as well as in the host community; she spoke of the people she worked for, the people she worked with, her friends, colleagues, neighbours and even homeowners. This was a very special conversation. To me as a researcher this was an intimate and personal conversation.

## Appendix VII Ethical Clearance Letter



14 July 2016

Ms Sanjana Das 215081659  
School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Das

Protocol reference number: HSS/0666/016M

Project Title: Embodied Re-Integration?: Theorizing the re-integration of women survivors of sex trafficking in the context of socio-cultural and religious beliefs about sex in India

### Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 30 May 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

Cc Supervisor: Prof Sarojini Nadar  
Cc Academic Leader: Professor P Denis  
Cc School Administrator: Ms C Murugan

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)






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Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

## Appendix VIII Gate Keepers Letter



### United Theological College, Bangalore

Post Box. No. 4613, # 63, Millers Road, Benson Town, Bangalore - 560046, India.

Dr. Lalrinawmi Ralte, D.Th  
Professor, Women's Studies  
Chairperson, Women's Studies Department

Phone No 91-80-23330502  
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Email: riniralte2@gmail.com  
September 10, 2018.

To,  
The Ethics Body  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
Private bag X01, Scottsville  
Pietermaritzburg, 3209  
South Africa

Sub: Consent letter for Ms. Sanjana Das for her field work in North East India Solidarity Group, Bangalore, India

Respected Sir/Madam,

Greetings from the United Theological College, Bangalore.


This letter is to confirm that I have received a letter from Ms. Sanjana Das with a request to allow her to interview women from Northeast India who are either vulnerable to trafficking or have experienced trafficking. She would also like to conduct Focus Group Discussions and Contextual Bible Studies for the purpose of her study. I am a Professor teaching Feminist Theology and 8 other subjects related to women to the BD level, M.Th level and I guide 3 doctoral students in the department of Women's Studies. I also provide leadership to the Northeast Solidarity Group that works with trafficked women from Northeast states of India. Our work with the Northeast women diaspora will be a great resource for the study of Ms. Sanjana Das. We will create a team for the purpose of the study – I will be working closely with Ms. Sanjana for the planning and organizing of the process. The team will assist in identifying the participants for the study who can actively contribute to the process. We will ensure the presence of a Counselor during all group works, in case of an emotional break down of a participant. We do not anticipate such a situation as we work very closely with the women, but in order to create a safe and sacred space for the women, we will be plan the process well and be prepared if any such situation arises.

Ms. Sanjana is known to us for a long time, especially with her work on the empowerment of trafficked women. We would be delighted for her to do her fiend work with the women we work with. We will be happy to provide assistance to her through our team to conduct interviews and focus group discussions required for her Doctoral research.

I have understood her requirements during her fiend work and through this letter I give my consent for her to conduct her study with our women.

I wish her well for her research.

Regards,

  
Dr. Lalrinawmi Ralte  
Professor, United Theological College &  
President, Northeast Solidarity Group (Bangalore based)  
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## **Appendix IX Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research**

Date:

Greetings!

I am Ms. Sanjana Das Singh, PhD candidate at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. I am a student at the Department of Gender and Religion, School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics. I am conducting research as part of my doctoral studies, titled "Towards a Feminist Theology of (In)-Decent Work in the Context of Human Trafficking and Migration: Journeying with Economic Migrant Women in India in their Struggle for a Life of Dignity.

You are presented with this letter because you are invited to participate in this study. The personal interview will last for an hour or so and Contextual Bible Studies/ FGDs for about 45 minutes each session. With your permission, it will be recorded for accurate transcribed verbatim for the purpose of analysis. Upon the completion of the study the findings will be written and presented as a research study. The data collected through recording will be stored for 5 years with my Supervisor in the School and then it will be destroyed. This study will provide no direct benefits to participants, but it will help academicians, practitioners and the wider community including religious leaders and civil society to better understand the role of religion and culture in building life affirming communities where women specially who have been subject to sexual slavery can live a life of dignity.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Appointment for interview will be held at a time that suits you and every care will be taken to ensure that the study inflicts no harm to you. Your identity will remain confidential throughout the study. Names of the participants will not be mentioned in the thesis, oral presentation or publications without your permission.

If you change your mind or feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview, then please feel free to withdraw at any point of time. The researcher respects your right to do so. You will not incur any negative consequences by doing so. If you have any questions about anything that has been said about the study or written in this letter, please feel free to speak with me or with Dr. Lalrinawmi Ralte or any person in the forum that you feel comfortable with.

It is extremely important that you understand everything you have been told before you decided whether to participate in the study. This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher or the supervisor Prof. Gerald West or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the contact details provided below:

Contact details

Ms. Sanjana Das Singh  
PhD Candidate, UKZN

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Singapore - 479250

Phone: [REDACTED]

e-mail: [REDACTED]

Or

Prof. Gerald West  
Senior Professor  
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Thank you for your time. If you do wish to participate in the study, please read and sign the document below.

If you do not wish to participate in the study, please do not sign this form.

