

**Vulnerable Children Evolve into Disposable Goods: Child Trafficking
in the Lens of Social Criticism with Special Reference to Patricia
McCormick's *Sold* and Corban Addison's *A Walk across the Sun*.**

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Abstract

Human trafficking, one of the transnational crimes with superfast growth worldwide, has different forms including, sex and labor trafficking. Children, being the most vulnerable community of this rapidly developing world, are considered to be the effortless investments of the traffickers. Though the governing bodies strengthen the law to protect the victims and prevent the traffickers, various factors like supply and demand, globalization, increased migration, internet help the traffickers flourish. Along with the legal professionals, literati also stand together to fight against this international injustice against the vulnerable community. Two such writers are Patricia McCormick and Corban Addison, through their novels on human trafficking, they exhibit the feelings of the victims and make the readers aware of this illicit trade. Social criticism focuses on the prevailing

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injustices and the power relations in a society. Revolutionary writers use their language and creativity to expose the flaws of a social structure and also shoulder the responsibility of providing a therapy to all the social maladies. This paper focuses on the victimization of the characters in the selected novels through social criticism.

Keywords: Human trafficking, Child trafficking, social criticism, Exploitation, Literature.

Kimberly A. McCabe, a professor of Criminology and the author of *Sex Trafficking: A Global Perspective*, in her *Common Forms: Sex Trafficking*, defines human trafficking, “victims of human trafficking include men, women and children. These victims are deceived, coerced, and abused – all for profit.” (133) It includes three important components: recruitment of the vulnerable, movement of the victim and finally, forcible exploitation in variety of patterns. Being one of the most commercial venture next to trafficking of drugs and the trafficking of firearms, creates a ravaging effect on its victims and the society. The present world conditions promote both the supply and demand for traffickers and victims. The traffickers effortlessly choose to trade in humans because human beings possess an advantage: they can be exploited again and again. McCabe says,

In many countries, women and children are seen as property and disposable. It is these persons who will be recruited for human trafficking. In many cases, even women who enter the sex industry as strippers may become victims of sex trafficking by being prostituted against their will. Thus, one cannot discount the link between prostitution and sex trafficking when attempting to explain human trafficking. (139)

Human trafficking leads to exploitation through a variety of ways: bonded labour, chattel slavery, early and forced marriage, forced labour, involuntary domestic servitude, sex trafficking, slavery by descent, child trafficking, crudest forms of child labour, child soldiering. The basic trait of

these forms remain the same: one person, the trafficker, exercising fear and coercion, at times, over the other, the victim, for economic gain. Children, being the most vulnerable community of this rapidly developing world, are considered to be the effortless investments of the traffickers. *Save the Children*, a non – profit organization, started in the year 1919, is India’s outstanding, freewheeling NGO for child rights, defines child trafficking,

United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) defines child trafficking as recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receiving of any person below 18 years of age for the purpose of exploitation, either within or outside the country. India too witnesses large-scale child trafficking with children being trafficked and pushed into labour, begging and sexual exploitation. Because of the nature of this crime, it is difficult to keep an accurate track of the number of children getting trafficked. Several instances of children getting trafficked from neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Nepal into India have also been recorded. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) estimates that around 40,000 children are abducted every year out of which, 11,000 remain untraced. (Save the Children India)

Literature, being the cynosure of all civilizations, lead the way toward civilizations and eventually allow the readers to transcend all real life troubles. Discourses that encourage the readers to focus on a particular social malady and voice against all the atrocities that are associated with it is often termed as ‘Protest Literature’. It is the tendency of every civilization to protest against the contemporary vulgarities. Through Protest Literature writers strife to incorporate social criticism in their works. The roots of human trafficking can be traced to chattel slavery i.e domination of one class or group by the other. The beginning of slave trade contributed to the economic growth of the society but gradually enforced poverty and degradation to one class and conspired to oppress the

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same. Social criticism focuses on such differences in power relations and points out the vengeful nature of human society, evaluates various functions, McCormick's *Sold* and Addison's *A Walk Across the Sun* explain the ways through which children, the vulnerable community worldwide, are exposed to violence, physical and mental abuse in the hands of traffickers with the help of materialization and globalization.

Patricia McCormick, an American journalist and writer, twice National Book Award finalist, author of several novels with renowned themes – *Never Fall Down* (2012), *Purple Heart* (2009), *Cut* (2000) and also the co – author of the influential autobiography of Malala Yousafzai, *I am Malala: The Story of the Girl who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban* (2013). McCormick's *Sold* (2006) meticulously recorded the heartrending account of sex trafficking through the character of Lakshmi, a thirteen – year old girl from a small hut on a secluded mountain in Nepal. McCormick explains her source of inspiration to write this story of sex trafficking, in an interview,

In the past few years, the trafficking of children has gotten a good deal of media attention. But eight years ago, when I had a chance meeting with a photographer who was working undercover to document the presence of young girls in brothels overseas, I knew immediately that I wanted to do what no one else had done so far: tell this heartbreaking story from the point of view of one individual girl. I believe that young adults want to know what's happening to their peers on the other side of the world, but that media accounts, by their very nature, cannot usually go beyond the surface. To me, there is nothing more powerful— or permanent—than the impact of a book. (web source)

Poverty is always said to be the main cause for child trafficking, poor families find it easy to abandon their children instead of bringing them up. Lack of education also adds to the cause. Children

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are easy target and become vulnerable commodities in poverty stricken families. This novel displays the economic realities of people at all levels. McCabe, in the article, *Common Forms: Sex Trafficking*, says,

Just as a family member often perpetuates the abuse of a child, a family member is often responsible for a women or child involved in sex trafficking. In exchange for money or even a television set, a family member will sell or trade their loved – one into the world of sex trafficking. (139)

Lakshmi's step - father sells her into prostitution for eight hundred rupees and a bottle of Coca - Cola, to a local trafficker. Lakshmi says,

It is a rich and happy day for our family, an 800 – rupee day, a festive and auspicious day, and so I add one more thing for Ama: a costly treat only the headman's wife can afford – a bottle of Coca – Cola, the sweet drink that people say is like having tiny fireworks in your mouth. (McCormick 60)

Children are usually trafficked, basically for two purposes: labor and commercial sex. McCabe explains,

In sex trafficking, it is recognized that individuals are victimized through their forced participation in the sex industry. Sex trafficking is not simply pornography or simply prostitution. It involves traffickers, victims, and clients. For clarity, the United Nations has recognized the distinction between sex trafficking and prostitution and advanced the notion of participant – victim by their extension of the definition of sex trafficking to include payments or benefits to a person with control over another person for the

purpose of exploitation; thus, recognizing the role of the trafficker in human trafficking. (McCabe 135)

Corban Addison, an attorney, a human rights' activist, an internationally bestselling American author of *The Garden of Burning Sand*, *The Tears of Dark Water* and *A Harvest of Thorns*, writes a promising novel on the illicit human trade worldwide, *A Walk Across the Sun* (2011). His passionate narration focuses on the abolition of modern slavery, world cultures, violence based on gender and injustice to children at the global level. His novel, *A Walk Across the Sun* directs the readers into the heartrending disclosure of Mumbai's underworld and the travel of two parentless girl children into international sex trade. Addison says,

I knew that to write a novel on global human trafficking I would need the help of people in places of influence and danger; I would need time to research and write; and I would need resources to travel. In the end, however, I could neither ignore the idea's attractiveness nor deny its moral imperative. I was not in a position to rescue girls from brothels, but I could tell a story that would bring trafficking alive for readers just as a film brought it alive for me. I could lend my voice to the raising chorus of abolitionists saying: "Not in my generation." (Addison)

According to Addison, "*A Walk Across the Sun* is a story of hope" (Addison) which involves three continents and two cultures and addresses the sensitive issues like sex and labour trafficking through the lives of seventeen year old, AhalyaGhai and fifteen year old, children orphaned because of natural disaster, tsunami. They become extremely vulnerable to trafficking, soon abducted by local traffickers, reach Mumbai's brothel to begin their painful journey as victims of child trafficking. Mary C. Burke, Professor of Psychology at Carlow University in Pittsburgh, writes about several

reasons that promote human trafficking, in her *Introduction to Human Trafficking: Definitions and Prevalence*, she says,

Another situation that promotes trafficking is that of natural disaster. Natural disasters can destroy communities in a matter of minutes and create physical and economic insecurity. Children can be separated from their caregivers, making them prim targets for traffickers. The December 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and ensuing tsunami is an example of one such natural disaster, where the lives close to a million children were in jeopardy. In this situation, seemingly for the first time, a concerted effort was made to stop human trafficking before it could begin. (Burke 10)

Addison, in *A Walk Across the Sun*, includes three major forms of child trafficking: sex trafficking, labour trafficking and pediatric body packing in which a child's body is used as an illicit vehicle to transfer drugs worldwide. Body packing is explained through SitaGhai, carrying heroin in condom – encased pellets, from India to France, as a *wife* to her trafficker, Navin. Addison writes,

Navin spoke with brutal honesty. “If a condom ruptures, the heroin will send your body into shock and you could die. To avoid this, you must remain as still as possible and not eat or drink anything until we reach our destination. Do not make any sudden moves. Do not compress your stomach. Do exactly as I say and everything will go well for you. (AWAS151)

Addison identifies himself as a humanitarian by balancing between the atrocities of human trafficking and the tireless efforts of the volunteers against this illicit trade. He empathizes with the vulnerable community, analyzes the social psychology of the traffickers, in the article entitled *Violence Against Women: A Global Plague*, he writes,

What we need is a renaissance of empathy. We need to place ourselves in the shoes of these women, to hold their suffering in our hearts, and to grasp (as much as we are able) how terrible it feels to be cornered, to have no way out.

The truth is that all gender violence is driven by an imbalance of power. Sometimes the imbalance expresses itself in acts of profound misogyny—gang rape, child sexual assault, genital mutilation, honor killing, and (as I recently learned) revenge porn. Typically, it shows up in subtler ways—in an occasional slap, a stream of belittling words, rough sex between intimate partners, sexual harassment in the workplace, or a date that starts with fun and ends with force. In every case, the male perpetrators believe either that they are morally entitled to their misbehavior or immune from punishment. They are convinced they have the upper hand. (“Violence Against Women”)

The reason for the vulnerability of girl children may be the idea that women can be used to advance a family’s financial strength. In many societies female members of the family are being sold off to repay a family’s loan or provide money for medical exigency. Without the support of their families, some become victims of labour and sex trafficking. The Revolutionary writers such as Patricia McCormick and Corban Addison sensibly deal with all the significant ways in the victimization of children in human trafficking and they, both in practice and through their novels, actively encourage counter – trafficking through non – governmental organizations and the national and multi – national level legislations. These writers project their characters as properties who are disposed after extreme exploitation through the process of human trafficking.

Abbreviation

AWAS – *A Walk Across the Sun*

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