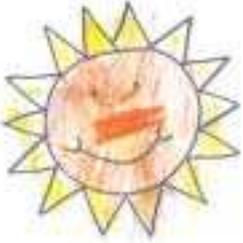


Unholy Nexus

Male child sexual exploitation in
Pilgrim tourism sites in India

ANDHRA PRADESH, KERALA, AND ORISSA

Research study reveals sexual abuse of male children is an increasing problem in pilgrim tourist destinations in India.



Situating Child Sexual Exploitation in Tourism in India

Tourism is the world's fastest growing industry and has come to play an increasingly dominant role in the economies of developing countries. In India, like in many other parts of the developing world, tourism is viewed and promoted as a development tool to stimulate economic growth in local economies. In India, pilgrim centres draw visitors mainly from within the country but also from the wide diaspora of non-resident Indians, as well as foreign tourists.

Public awareness in India is on the rise about child sexual exploitation by tourists. In most reported cases the persons involved in sexual exploitation have been men. It is assumed therefore that their victims are either women or girls. However the victims are often male children. The double standards that society has about homosexuality and the fact that it is still criminalised in India, makes the problem less visible.

EQUATIONS along with local network partners conducted a research study in 2008 aimed at investigating the extent and nature of child sexual exploitation in select pilgrim tourist sites. This was done through case studies in three important pilgrim sites in India – Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh), Puri (Orissa) and Guruvayoor (Kerala). The study also identified key actors who are involved in and/or facilitate prostitution of male children. The research methods included interviews, focus group discussions with the children themselves, government officials, community members, teachers and NGOs. The study documents the causes, circumstances, locations and profile of these children and the context in which such sexual exploitation continues unchecked. The impact on children's physical, psychological, emotional and economic condition is also documented through these case studies.

Case TIRUPATI (ANDHRA PRADESH)

Tirupati, is well known for the temple of Lord Sri Venkateswara on the Tirumala Hills. One of the most visited religious sites in the world, in 2007 the temple drew

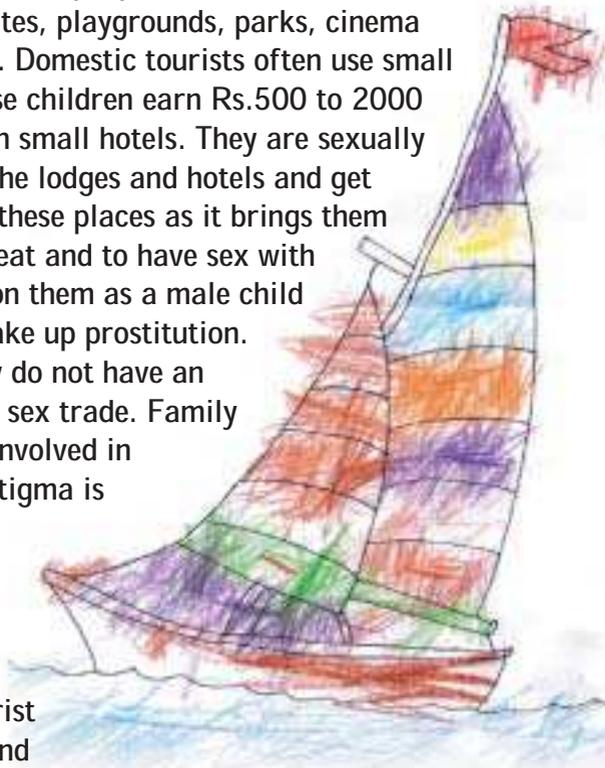
over 20 million visitors mostly domestic and non-resident Indians. Very few foreign tourists come to Tirupati. For this case study we interviewed nine children, with ages ranging from eight to eighteen.

The children spoke of domestic tourists who visit them regularly for sex. A few of these tourists prefer to have the same child during their next visit to Tirupati as well. This is done by contacting the child through phone, or by e-mail (which the children use in cyber cafés) to fix a place and date to meet. There are no middle men for mediating with the clients. Some of the children were abused when they were as young as six to ten years old. By age fifteen they were engaged in prostitution catering mainly to domestic tourists as well as local people. Sexual abuse takes place in hotels, lodges, deserted construction sites, playgrounds, parks, cinema theatres, railway stations, stadia, cemetery etc. Domestic tourists often use small lodges and rooms in bars for this purpose. These children earn Rs.500 to 2000 per day. A few of the children work part-time in small hotels. They are sexually exploited by the seniors working with them in the lodges and hotels and get poorly paid. However they continue to work in these places as it brings them into contact with customers who come both to eat and to have sex with hotel boys. The children spoke of the pressure on them as a male child to earn a living for the family, as a reason to take up prostitution. They felt that while it is often humiliating, they do not have an option to disassociate themselves now from the sex trade. Family members see less risk when male children are involved in selling sex as compared to girls, as the social stigma is less and fear of pregnancy does not exist.

Case PURI (ORISSA)

Puri is the site of the 12th-century temple of Lord Jagannatha. The number of domestic tourist arrivals in Puri in 2007 was nearly 6 million and foreign tourist arrivals around 42000. We also investigated Pentakota, a fishing village near Puri consisting of fishing families who migrated from Andhra Pradesh. Their source of livelihood is fishing. We interviewed thirteen male children, eight from Pentakota and five from the Puri beach area. They were between the ages of six and eighteen and all were affected by sexual exploitation.

The children mentioned the building relationships with foreign tourists was more "profitable" than domestic tourists as foreign tourists provided them with toys, chocolates, cycles, nice dresses and sometimes even money to renovate or build houses. Sexual abuse takes place in railway stations, hotels, small local food joints (called





dhabas), lodges, on the beach, massage parlours and local prostitution houses. Most foreign tourists use hotels while domestic tourists use small lodges and rooms in the bars for this purpose. A number of massage parlours and health clubs have mushroomed in Puri that primarily cater to foreign and domestic tourists, where prostitution takes place involving both adults and children (both male and female children). Some foreign tourists stay in hotels near slum and poor localities. They walk into the slums and poor families feel gratified at a foreigner visiting their home. They then take the children out and start abusing them, some times using force. In some cases the children do not say anything because they are scared. They feel that if they refuse they will miss the opportunity of enjoying their life. The children said that in exchange for sex they get what they wanted such as good clothes, food, going around to new places, movies, money, and sometimes even satisfying family needs. Most of the children had sex with a wide range of tourists, some who pay Rs. 50 while others pay Rs. 200 per day, and the rates differ from day to day.

Case GURUVAYOOR (KERALA)

Guruvayoor the site of the famous Sree Krishna temple also is a popular domestic tourist destination. In 2006, over one million domestic tourists and about 1500 foreign tourists visited Guruvayoor.

In Guruvayoor the issue of child sexual abuse is less visible. Unlike Tirupati and Puri, children were not seen living on the streets. The ban on child labour being enforced by officials in Kerala resulted in the department's jeeps prowling the district, and any homeless child seen on the street being picked up. As a result, child abuse cases have become even more hidden and covert.

However in discussions with community members in the surrounding villages, anganwadi teachers and workers, it emerged that it was common knowledge that male children are abused and involved in prostitution. The stories around the prevalence of homosexuality/bisexuality abound, and there seems to be a cultural acceptance of this. In early times, trading by the sea route was common from nearby Chavakkad and Ponnani areas. When men went to sea for several days on end they took smaller boys with them for sexual servicing. In the current scenario many of the men are in the Gulf countries and their remittances back home is a backbone of the economy. When they return, they engage in the abuse of male children. Discussions with women revealed that they often felt relieved that the men were not involved in extra marital relationships or seeking women prostitutes. In Guruvayoor, though law executing bodies have heard about male child sexual exploitation they have not heard of any registered case or complaint from any one residing in the area. We could not find evidence of foreigners being involved in



child abuse in Guruvayoor. It seemed from the discussions and opinions of community members that tourists who were involved in such abuse were primarily from within Kerala.

How can this be tackled?

The government at the state level and the centre must acknowledge that child sexual exploitation in tourism is a real and serious issue.

In the legal arena, the absence of appropriate law, as well as the lack of a system of awareness building and information analysis results in a paltry response from the legal system to this crime. Extradition laws must ensure that foreign perpetrators of crimes are brought to justice and ensure that no foreigner escapes punishment by simply leaving the country.

National and State Tourism Policies must acknowledge the role of tourism in exploiting children, clearly denounce sexual exploitation of children, and commit that tourism and tourist destinations will be child exploitation free zones.

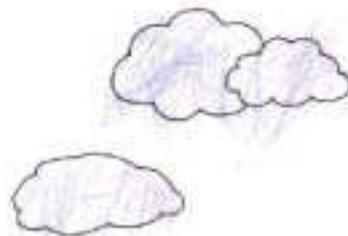
The Ministry of Tourism (MoT) must evolve and develop a "National Plan of Action to Counter Child Abuse in Tourism" by involving all the stakeholders such as industry, tour operators, travel agents, hotels local authorities, the judiciary, the police, child rights and other civil society organisations and communities for the protection and combating child abuse. Departments of Tourism at the centre and state levels must declare in their Annual Report the incidents uncovered of child sex tourism, the efforts they have taken to combat this, and their commitment to make India free from Child Sex tourism.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD) should come up with a comprehensive Act so that sexual abuse and exploitation of children is considered a very serious crime and to impose very severe punishment to the offenders. Policies must explicitly recognise 'children' does not mean only the female child; male children are equally vulnerable and also subject to sexual exploitation.

The tourism industry must acknowledge their collective responsibility for the continuance of this shameful activity under the banner of tourism. Industry associations must work actively and visibly with stakeholders of various kinds to encourage more information and stringent measures to weed this out.

This is time for concerted and decisive action. How many more of our children will we destroy?

Please contact EQUATIONS or ECPAT International for the full report. (Full report – 84 pages , 2008)



Are you interested in knowing more about the impacts of tourism on the child, write to us at info@equitabletourism.org or info@ecpat.net.

EQUATIONS

EQUATIONS is a research, advocacy, campaigning organisation charged with the vision of democratizing tourism in India. We study the social, cultural, economic and environmental impact of tourism on local communities. A key area of our work is on the impact of tourism on children. We are alarmed at the growing links between tourism and the abuse of children-in the forms of child labour, sexual exploitation and trafficking. We actively work with local communities, concerned groups, government, the tourism industry and other players to devise strategies so as to ensure that tourism is not based on the exploitation of children.

ECPAT INTERNATIONAL

ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Child pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purpose) is a network of organisations and individuals working together to eliminate the commercial sexual exploitation of children. ECPAT seeks to encourage the world community to ensure that children everywhere enjoy their fundamental rights free from all forms of commercial sexual exploitation.



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