

SALE OF DAUGHTERS IN NEPAL

DURGA DINGARI

Being born in poor families is no fun. We have seen so many kids suffering to feed their families they take responsibilities like elders and work in hazardous conditions to earn money or to pay back the debt their families has taken to survive, to buy a cow, for the marriage of the daughter etc. These young girls who are supposed to go to school to learn, play with their age friends, have fun etc don't get to do any of these things in their lives.

Few months back on PBS, NOW program exposed the problem of selling the girl children to do the domestic work in the rich and middle class families in Nepal. The program not only showed the problem it also showed how the people are taking steps to end this problem. The ethnic groups called Tharu, in Western Nepal, are a group of sharecroppers who are on the low end of the country's caste system, dependent on local landlords for their farmland. If the family has a girl, when they reach the age of 7 to 8 years some middle men come to take them to the other villages or cities where these girls have never gone leaving their parents. They offer around \$60 to \$70 which will be close to Rs.3000 and helps the family to survive for a year without starving. Even if the mother doesn't want to send her daughter and the daughter doesn't like to go, they convince them by saying that the masters will send her to school after the chores are done which makes the girl looking forward to something she likes.

It is such a great pressure for the girls to go far away from home and live in strangers' house. The girls are still so young who yearn for parents love, to play with siblings and want to be safe in the house they were born. Once they enter these houses where they are treated as domestic servants or slaves won't get a minute to rest and they get scraps of food instead of good meals as promised. They are malnourished and doing hard work on top of that makes them develop health problems. They are not only malnourished also denied the love of their parents which can create so many psychological problems for them as they grow. They develop low self-esteem as the master, his wife and everyone keep yelling and abusing her picking on her showing all the time all her faults. Not once do they appreciate her work which is so important for the healthy physical and emotional growth of the children. A kind of insecurity haunts them as long as they are leading that kind of life unless someone rescues them and sends them back home where they get love of their parents and the Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation sends them to school which is so important for the growth of their minds.

Olga Murray who came to Nepal as a tourist after retirement decided to stay and help these girls who are sold as slaves to work as domestic servants, in restaurants, hotels and some of them are forced into the child prostitution. She said, "I have never seen such poor kids anywhere in the world. When I realized that these kids doesn't have any chance of going to schools I decided that this is what I'm going to do with the rest of my life." She started Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation whose ambition is to rescue these girls from slavery, send them to school.

NYOF came up with a plan to rescue the kids from slavery, send them to school and pay the parents the money that they were getting by selling their girls. But the women weren't satisfied with the payment of money because their husbands may spend the whole money on alcohol. So, they said, instead of giving them money they asked for the 'piglet' whom they'll take care of and raise it and when it becomes big they can sell the pig for good amount of money which will help them to raise the kids. So, NYOF agreed to that and they are giving them piglets instead of money.

Shanti was sold as a slave to the masters in the city. But before they took her, Shanti's mother requested them to send her daughter to school, even if she doesn't learn too much at least she should be able to write her name and the village name. They promised her that they'll send Shanti to school. But they never send her to school.

She asked them and reminded them but they always used to keep her busy in the chores of the house and never raised the topic of sending her to school. After she has been rescued she said she wants to go to school and also work as the volunteer to NYOF. The girls who are rescued form into groups and they do the street plays singing songs, portraying the girl slaves suffering, how they were abused and never treated with respect. They were beaten and try to molest them and sometimes the landlords do rape them. Rajkumari used to sleep in a place which was like a ware house. One day the landlord came and touched her, she just closed her eyes tight and he asked her are you sleeping, she said, of course I'm sleeping that night he left. She had to stay in that home for two months always frightened when he is going to come and rape her. When she came home she heard about NYOF and went walking an hour to their office and enrolled her name. Now she is going to school, she wants to become an artist. She is also volunteering for NYOF. The villagers are awakening and accepting the fact that poverty is bad but there are other ways than selling their own daughters.

Olga Murray wants to spread this movement to other villages and communities and wants to see all the girls in schools. When she was asked how much time that will take, she says, 'Maybe in 5yrs. We not only want to stop selling the girls but to put an end to the system.'

Aren't these girl slaves similar to our domestic servants who spend their lives in the cleaning, washing, taking care of the kids of the employer never getting chance to go to school, play, get the love of their parents as they are busy in working to provide at least one day food for the kids. Sometimes the fathers spend their earnings on alcohol and come home, beat the wife and children and take their earnings also to spend on gambling and alcohol. Of course there are organizations that are working towards the rescuing kids from their bonded labor in villages and send them to schools, give them professional trainings so that they can get jobs after their education. But India is such a big country and few organizations working to eliminate the Child labor is not enough, the change in the attitude of educated housewives who should take responsibility of not employing the kids as the servants instead try to send them to school, make sure they complete their education, get jobs to stand on their feet before they get married and have their own kids.

We have so much work to do in this matter, right! We have to try to convince our families, relatives and friends in India. The excuse of staying here doesn't help to do anything for them is not going to work.

Each and every one of us should try to do this I am sure at least few of them will get convinced to send them to schools and not employ them as servants.

Come on guys, why wait; let's start working towards this goal.

The end,

No, no, it's

The new beginning!