



CHAPTER I

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1.1 Background of the Study

Selling sexual services for money is a multifaceted topic that has to do with social pressures, money problems, and moral arguments. One immediately associates prostitution with the exploitation of vulnerable groups in society, particularly women and children, who may be coerced, denied, or driven into this line of work by severe financial difficulties. The absence of viable economic options, limited educational opportunities, and profound gender disparities tend to drive individuals to prostitution as a survival mechanism. Most prostitution participants have economically poor backgrounds, where sheer financial desperation requires making tough choices. In the absence of adequate social support systems, these become easy targets of exploitation by individuals and organized networks that capitalize on their desperate situations. Furthermore, the social dynamics that accompany this type of work exacerbate the isolation associated with participation in this practice, making it more difficult for participants to seek help or quit their work. Prostitution is practiced in many aspects of society and encompasses access to healthcare, law, and fundamental human rights. Prostitutes are frequently caught in a web of exploitation, whether it is financial dependence (Sunil, 2022), emotional manipulation (Khan, 2023), or physical violence (Rambe, 2017). The involvement of human traffickers, as well as corrupt government officials, greatly aggravates the pain of victims since they are often denied basic rights and legal protections. Such human trafficking networks exploit vulnerable people by luring them with prospects of employment opportunities; however, they end up subjecting them to prostitution under humiliating conditions. In some cases, corrupt government officials either ignore such abuses or get involved in the exploitation, thereby frustrating the attempts of victims to seek justice. To remedy this issue necessitates comprehensive solutions, including more economic opportunities, improved access to education, and the

provision of legal protection to the vulnerable. Short of the fundamental systemic changes, prostitution will remain a manifestation of more profound societal inequalities and injustices.

Prostitution and literacy may seem like two unrelated concepts, but upon closer examination, a significant connection exists between them, particularly in terms of education, social awareness, and access to information. Literacy, which encompasses the ability to read, write, and comprehend information effectively, plays a crucial role in shaping a person's awareness of various social issues, including prostitution. Many people fall into the world of prostitution due to a lack of education and understanding of their rights. Low literacy levels can cause women to be vulnerable to exploitation. "While female literacy has dropped over the previous century, the number of illiterate women rose with time" (Sharma, 2017). Literacy will lead to better job opportunities, as well as a long-term impact of the work. On the other hand, people with low literacy levels tend to more easily accept or even ignore the existence of prostitution as something normal, without understanding the root of the problem, such as poverty, gender inequality, or human exploitation. In addition, literacy also plays a role in helping individuals who want to get out of the world of prostitution by providing them with access to information about alternative economic opportunities, skills training programs, and laws that protect them from exploitation. By increasing literacy, both formally and through social education, society can be more critical in viewing the phenomenon of prostitution, understand the factors behind it, and find more humane and sustainable solutions to overcome it. Therefore, literacy is not just the ability to read and write, but also a tool to empower individuals to make better decisions about their lives and their future. With literacy, prostitutes have the opportunity to leave the job. "Poverty and financial demands drove prostitution to thrive at this period as well" (Sharma, 2017).

Under the pretense of work or improved living conditions, traffickers, exploiters, and those operating illicit businesses may entice people into prostitution only to treat them cruelly and inhumanely. This same thing is also taken from (Vienna, 2020) "Traffickers often prey on individuals' vulnerabilities, offering false promises of employment, education, or a

better life, only to exploit them once they are under their control.” People from all walks of life are impacted by this pervasive problem, which has broad societal ramifications since it frequently feeds cycles of emotional trauma, abuse, and poverty. Prostitution can also put people at risk for stigma, legal issues, and health concerns, which makes it more difficult for them to leave. Through laws, assistance programs, and public awareness campaigns, numerous groups and governments attempt to address the underlying causes and effects of prostitution by offering victims safe support networks, economic opportunities, and education. It is a known truth that investing in women's education is one of the best investments we can make for our future; as a result, more educated women will have better employment, be healthier, and have children (Mill, 2017).

Patricia McCormick's tragedy novel *“Sold”* tells the story of a teenage Nepalese girl who is sold to an Indian brothel. Olivia Lacni lives in a small Nepalese hamlet and comes from a low-income household. She was taken from her family's financial troubles by a compassionate woman who promised her a job in the city. However, when she arrives in the city, Lakshmi realizes. She has been sold to a brothel. In this novel, Patricia McCormick vividly describes the life of Lakshmi, from sexual exploitation to the harsh life in the brothel. She comes across different characters, her workers, and one woman tries to help Lakshmi. The novel has highlighted some major issues, which include human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and social injustice. Yet, it has shown the power and determination of a little girl fighting for her life and freedom. *Sold* reveals how Lakshmi finds her strength and dignity within the unjust situation. More interestingly, this novel also depicts how much Lakshmi's struggle to escape from the brothel is different from the other novels of their type. This novel tells a cruel story about human trafficking, especially sex trafficking, which still is so much present in Nepal. McCormick highlights how these con artists use their resources based on poverty, gender inequality, and false promises to trap their victims; one of those victims is the main character of the story, Lakshmi. Lakshmi is from a small village in Nepal, and the decision of her family to sell her to a brothel in India has much to do with their social and economic condition. Poor families

from rural areas often have very poor economic prospects, which provide a fertile ground for exploitation. Much of the story takes place within the brothel to which Lakshmi is sold and forced into prostitution. The author has portrayed how oppressive and dehumanizing the environment of the brothel is through the alienating experience of victims of trafficking. The resoluteness and struggle become important facets in telling the story of Lakshmi. Her battle is one against all odds: struggles for survival in inhuman conditions and the struggle to retain human dignity.

The synopsis of the novel *Sold* by Patricia McCormick narrates the plight of a young Nepalese girl, Lakshmi, who is trafficked to a brothel in India. She comes from a poor family in a small Nepalese village and was promised a job in the city by a kind woman. It was in India that Lakshmi realized she had been sold into sex slavery. The condition and dehumanization of Lakshmi and other victims of human trafficking are well reflected in the novel. Lakshmi showed grit and courage to survive and fight for freedom despite extremely difficult conditions. *Sold* addresses the important issue of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. It also addresses things like poverty, gender inequality, and false beliefs often used by human traffickers.

One way Lakshmi survives and looks for a way out is by literacy. This is something uncommon in novels with similar themes because these skills give Lakshmi the opportunity to become independent and achieve freedom, an aspect that is still highly relevant today in the context of human trafficking and exploitation. With this approach, McCormick manages to expose not only the plight of the victims but also stresses what practical skills can play a vital role in letting someone come out of their vicious circle of oppression and exploitation. The novel further won several awards, such as a Finalist for the National Book Award for Young People's Literature in 2006, American Library Association Top Ten Best Books for Young Adults in 2006, and Publishers Weekly selected *Sold* as one of the 100 Best Books of 2007.

Several studies have analyzed this novel from various perspectives (Oktarny Kristami, 2022). She said that “she is focused on the forms of oppression experienced by Lakshmi using Irish Marion Young's five faces of oppression theory”, (Sunil, 2022) highlighting that “the socio-

economic and cultural factors contributing to child sex trafficking in Nepal and India”. Other studies, such as (Khan, 2023), that he is delve into “Gender inequality and patriarchal dominance, which portray women as commodities” (Rambe, 2017). On the other hand, she takes “a comparative approach to human trafficking in *Sold* and *The Kinanthi Galaxy*. These studies primarily examine oppression, human trafficking, and gender inequality”. However, none of the studies explicitly address how literacy skills can act as tools to escape exploitation and achieve independence, as seen in Lakshmi’s character arc. This gap highlights the need to explore how educational empowerment can offer practical solutions for victims of trafficking, both within the narrative and in real-world contexts. This research aims to fill that void by focusing on the transformative role of literacy in breaking free from cycles of exploitation, as portrayed in *Sold*.

Literacy in literary works is the same as literacy as a social practice; it extends beyond simple literacy to include the power to mold people and affect their interactions in society. Literacy appears as a potent instrument in *Sold*, not only as a mere skill but also as an empowerment that helps people negotiate social systems and oppose injustice. In the book, literacy is not only a tool for learning but also a means of survival and opposition against systematic inequalities. The ability of Lakshmi to read, write, understand, and communicate with the immediate environment becomes transformational when viewed through the prism of new literacy as simple reading and writing. This ability allows Lakshmi to understand her circumstances, get help, and ultimately struggle for her freedom. This kind of viewpoint underscores the realization that literacy is not merely a static skill but a dynamic and developing practice that can transform lives and oppose oppressive structures.

1.2 Statement of The Problem

The study's issues are based on the stated background mentioned:

1.2 How are Lakshmi’s experiences with literacy in *Sold*?

- 1.2 In what ways are the literacy practices used as tools for Lakshmi's empowerment in *Sold*?

1.3 Object of The Study

The research purposes are aligned with the research questions and are as follows:

- 1.3 To examine how Lakshmi's experiences with literacies are portrayed in *Sold*, focusing on the ways these experiences contribute to her understanding and interactions within her environment.
- 1.3 To analyze how literacy practices function as tools for Lakshmi's empowerment in the novel, particularly in enabling her to overcome exploitation and achieve independence.

1.4 Significance of The Study

1. Researcher
This study discusses Lakshmi in *Sold* by Patricia McCormick. concentrated on how her character illustrates the intersection of sex work and literacy. Literacy is shown in the book not only as an instrument of personal empowerment but also as a limited means of resistance to patriarchal oppression. From Lakshmi's experience, the work promotes, albeit within certain limitations, educational equality as an escape from sexual exploitation.
2. Readers
This research offers readers a new perspective on how basic skills, such as literacy skills, have a major impact in protecting individuals from exploitation and manipulation by understanding the importance of education in empowering marginalized communities.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of The Study

1.5 Scope

This study discusses the images of Lakshmi in *Sold* by Patricia McCormick. It is limited to examining the literacy skills necessary to escape exploitation.

1.5 Limitation

This study focuses solely on the role of literacy skills in helping Lakshmi escape exploitation, without addressing other aspects such as social values, cultural background.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1. **Exploitation:** The unfair treatment of another person for one's benefit, frequently incorporating the misuse of authority, like making someone work or exploiting their weakness. Any given situation in which 'A' objectively exploits 'B' or stands in the way of his and her quest for self-affirmation as a responsible human being is a situation of oppression. Such a situation itself is violent, even if camouflaged by false generosity, for it frustrates the individual's ontological and historical vocation to become more fully human (Freire, 2005:55).
2. **Independence:** The capacity to live freely and make decisions on one's own without assistance or control from others, particularly when it comes to one's personal or financial autonomy. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man, nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion (Freire, 2005:47).

3. **Literacy:** The person's ability to read, write, understand, and use information in various forms, both written and visual text. In everyday use, literacy is taken to mean the capacity for reading and writing and was 'constructed as an antithesis to illiteracy' in 1883 (OED department, 1980). More recently, literacy has been characterized as a social practice. The concept of a literacy practice suggests patterned and conventional uses of written language that are shaped by culture and governed by social institutions. (Janks, 2010:1).
4. **Empowerment:** Processes enable a person or group of people to make decisions and act. Liberation is a way of thinking and acting that people use to change the world around them (Freire, 2005:79).
5. **Social Practice:** The activity or habit carried out by individuals or groups in everyday life, which is influenced by norms, values, and culture in society. An event occurs at a particular time and place, and it can be observed. A literacy practice, however, is a concept that explains the concealed, structured, and culture-dependent means by which people utilize literacy. They are shaped by cultural and social habits and the locations in which they take place (Janks, 2010:118)