

New Delhi Television Limited (NDTV)

WWW.NDTV.COM

KHUNTI, JHARKHAND: Jharkhand has emerged as India's trafficking hub with thousands of tribal boys and girls, particularly minor girls being trafficked out of the state each year to Delhi and beyond. More than 4000 children went missing from the state in the last 10 years, and over 1000 are yet to be traced. Most of the missing children are from tribal communities, particularly minor girls who are trafficked to Delhi and beyond.

While most of these girls go out for work, there has been a rise in the case of sex trafficking in the state too. Take the case of a 14 year old girl, trafficked from Khunti in Jharkhand to Sangrur in Punjab this January, and sold for Rs. 1 lakh to a 55-year-old man, as a child bride. She had been kidnapped after she was taken on an outing by a woman from her village, who has since been arrested along with four men.

"He used to put *sindoor* on me by force. I used to cry and tell them I want to study, let me go", says the girl, recounting her horror.

Another couple from Khunti haven't heard from their 12-year-old daughter since last November last, when she vanished from their home while here parents were out. The alleged trafficker has been arrested, but there is no trace yet of the girl. "Maybe someday my daughter will realise this is home and make noise, who knows", says the emotional mother, who works at a stone crushing unit.

Activists say the number of trafficked children is hugely under reported, and that the actual figures could be in lakhs. Rishi Kant, who runs Shakti Vahini, says "Delhi has emerged as a major destination for these girls. Most of them are taken there to placement agencies with no registration, etc."

There is some good news too. Sub inspector Aradhana Singh has been in charge of Khunti's child trafficking unit since 2014. Her catch in the last year was 20 big traffickers, including the biggest of them all, Panna Lal Mahto, who in the last decade could be responsible for the trafficking of over 20,000 girls. "I don't think just his arrest makes any difference. He has a network of agents we need to break", says Sub Inspector Singh.

Story First Published: March 23, 2015 09:57 IST