

Sex Work in India: An Analysis

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Man is different from animal in many ways. The main thing which distinguishes man from animal is the moral value or morality. If he is devoid of morality, he will submerge to the unfathomable depths of vices and sins and cannot be retrieved. Almost all the religions and ideologies propound morality and the moral well being of the human kind. If morality is wiped out from the world, sustenance will be impossible. Chaos and mishaps will rule the world and the values will diminish from the world. The world had witnessed chaos when the people moved away from the moral and spiritual values. The ideas which propagated immorality and aimed at the enjoyment of human being perished and met their tragic end. They degraded themselves and those who supported these ideologies.

The menace of sex work is an immoral activity which degrades man and ditches his value below that of animals. The aggression in sexual work is evident even from the ancient times. The evil had roots in the ancient times and it developed to the present condition when time passed. It got inspiration from the ancient period and the modern sex work is associated with the development of science and technology. In various names prostitution existed in the ancient period for the enjoyment of the higher class of the society. "Commercial sex work has a long history in India with a very wide range of manifestations" (Verma 328). In ancient India there were *Nagaravadhus* or brides of the town which is the sex worker of the modern world. The misinterpretation of the religious scriptures by the fraud apostles of religion created a group called Devadasis or the temple prostitutes. The Devadasis were exploited by the society and they were the victims of superstitions. The emperors and kings, with the help of higher clergy exploited the women folk for their sexual fulfillment. They employed Dasis for their pleasure in their palaces. The palaces of the Mughal emperors and the provincial kings were having prostitutes named as Dasis to serve them. Ministers and higher officials of the kingdom also employed their respective Dasis in their palaces. Most of them visited brothels which were exclusive for the higher class.

Even in the colonial period in India, the British officers established and visited brothels. In Goa the Portuguese colony, during the 16th and 17th centuries, there was a community of Japanese slaves, who were usually young Japanese women and girls, bought or captured as sexual slaves by Portuguese traders or crewmembers from Japan. Indian landlords and provincial leaders arranged prostitutes for the higher officials of the colonial rule, to please them for their personal benefits. This included the exploitation of Indian lower class women for the good will of the British rulers.

Sex work in contemporary India has attained many manifestations. "The sex industry exists all over the world and has a huge variety of forms :..." (Bindman 66). It acquired many names in order to escape from the ill will of the society. Though sex work is not legally prohibited, the service for sex work is strictly prohibited by legitimating. The services include soliciting sex in public places, kerb crawling, keeping brothels and pimping. In spite of the stringent measures and laws, the number of prostitutes and brothels are increasing in the country. In 2007, the Ministry of Women and Child Development reported that there are about 2.8 million sex workers in India, with 35.47 percent of them entering the trade under the age of 18 years. Though commercialization of sex work is illegal in India, many places are notorious for sex work and are considered as red light areas. It is estimated that in Bombay alone the number of sex workers exceeds 200000. Sex work has developed to an industry in major cities like Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi. The largest and best-known red light districts in India are Sonagachi and Lachipur in Kolkata, Kamathipura in Mumbai, GB road in New Delhi, Reshampura in Gwalior and Budhwar Peth in Pune, which hosts thousands of sex workers. In recent years the famous red light areas across various parts of India are centers of international sex tourism. Earlier, there were other centers in Dal Mandi in Varanasi, Naqqasa bazaar in Saharanpur, Chathurbuj Sthan in Muzzafarpur, Peddapuram and Gudivada in Andhra Pradesh. Kabadi bazaar in Meerut is strange place where public life goes normally with brothels quietly working on the roofs of the busy markets.

The Immoral Traffic Suppression Act of 1956 allows prostitutes to privately practice their trade but they cannot seduce the customers in public. The law forbids the sex worker to carry her profession within 200 yards from the public place. The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act also puts curbs on the sex workers by crimes such as public indecency and public nuisance. In spite of the stringent measures and strict laws the number of sex workers is increasing in the country. There are many factors which generates the sex workers. The poor economic status is the main factor which forces them to work as a sex worker. The women in search of livelihood or to support the family and their children depend on sex work and select it as a profession. The financial condition compels them to sex work. The moral and spiritual values, which impedes the people from the evil succumbs before the poverty and miseries. They never care the dignity of the work and the degradation of the social status. All before them is the well being of their family and their children. The lack of support from the society to find a job and lead their life also influences them. So, for the welfare of the family and to alleviate the hunger and miseries, they deliberately partake in the sex market. The

breakup of marriages makes the women devoid of support to lead their life which compels them to prostitution. Death and inactive family members may also lead them to prostitution. In several parts of India bonded sex workers are forced to work as prostitutes to repay the debts. It is called the Chukri system. When the client fails to repay the debts the women are forced to work under the money lender for food and clothes until the money is repaid or the service equivalent to the money. Thus, debts also force the women folk to work as a sex worker. The exploitation extends as long as the money lender is satisfied in repaying the amount. The government, realizing the pathetic condition of the bonded sex workers, provides financial grants to release the women from the trade. But in most cases the grants never reaches the client.

Compulsion is another factor which leads women to work in the trade. Agents and middlemen force them to work under the brothel worker and pimps. There may be compulsion from the neighbors, relatives, aged sex workers, parents, husband, both married and unmarried. The victims, knowingly or unknowingly, engages in the trade and they are trapped in the trade for ever. They are forced to work as long as the brothel owner earns from them. Caged sex workers are also present in the brothels where they are discarded with fundamental rights for education and freedom. They are considered as a commodity from which the brothel owners can earn as much as possible. They are treated as inferior creatures without food and proper facilities. It is a fact that most of the pimps and brothel workers are from the women folk. Some husbands cheat the wives and sell them to brothel plucking them from their family. The number of men who uses their wives as prostitutes for the benefits in business and to acquire high post in job and promotion is an increasing phenomenon in the big cities. Employed women, who fall in prostitution to please their higher authorities, are also evident in Indian society. The wives whose husbands are working in foreign countries also engage in sexual work. Rape also forces women to sex work as they are labeled as sex worker in the society. The betrayal from love affairs leads women either to suicide or to prostitution as they lose everything in the affair. When the love marriages shatters, the girl will be deserted from the family and there is a greater chance for the girls to fall in prostitution. Social evils

like night clubs, pubs and dance bars encourages prostitution. The matter of heredity in sex work is a major concern. The trade passes from the parent to the children and they are compelled to be sex workers even in the early age. The children will be unable to relieve from the clutches of prostitution as they have to live in the adverse conditions.

The main consequence of the prostitution is the growing number of STD patients. HIV and AIDS patients are mounting in the society. It is estimated that about 50 percent of the sex workers in Mumbai is having HIV and other STDs. Despite the instructions from the authorities to use safety measures like condoms, the number of AIDS patients is rocketing. Since most of the prostitutes are addicted to drugs and alcohol there is chance for spreading of the diseases through infected syringes. The ailments like AIDS pass from parents to children at the time of pregnancy, there by spoils the future generations also. Though prostitution is an immoral and wretched practice, steps must be taken to wipe out the evil from the nation. Rehabilitation of the sex workers is a major concern. NGOs, administrators and social activists must come forward for the proper rehabilitation and welfare of the sex workers. The authorities must take necessary measures to eradicate the inhuman activities in sex work. The fundamental need for education, freedom, food and clothes must be ensured for the sex workers. Those who are trapped must be saved from the mishap and must be given employment to lead a peaceful life. Brothels, pubs, night clubs and dance bars must be scrutinized to block prostitution. Religious and spiritual leaders must organize themselves to arouse awareness in the society about the defects of prostitution. Parents and teachers must observe the children to keep them away from the immoral activities.

There are many organizations in India who work for the welfare and rehabilitation of the sex workers like Navajeevan centre, CCDT, Oasis India, Jyothi Kailash, Sai, Teen Challenge, Salvation Army, Apne Aap, etc. The conjoined effort of these organizations, parents, teachers, and administrators, religious and spiritual leaders can only find a solution to curb prostitution in the society. Then only we can dream of a prosperous and splendorous nation.

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