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## A GYNO-CENTRIC STUDY ON SEX WORKERS IN INDIA AND THEIR RIGHTS

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**Abstract:** This study deals with the problem of fallen women and their problems. The condition of sex workers in India is very pathetic and in this paper some remedies are suggested to tackle their problem and to provide them a better work place.

**Keywords:** Fallen women, problems, protection, rights.

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**Introduction :** This research paper deals with the problem of fallen women—a problem which has assumed great dimensions and proportions in recent times. The problem of prostitution has a very long history, which can be traced back to the early days of humanity. Prostitution has been defined as “practice of habitual or intermittent sexual union or less promiscuous or mercenary inducement” (Bhatia 5). Family is the universal and basic institution which provides for sexual gratification of men and women in a socially accepted way. However, the institution of family could not fully meet the needs and demands of all. So there was made a class of women who catered the needs of such men. The *Vedas*, the earliest of the known Indian literature, considers prostitution as an organised and established institution. If marriage or family is a product of civilization, prostitution is only its by-product. Prostitution is not exempted in any country or society, though it has been controlled through *Devadasi*, now refers to a woman prostituting in the name of religious tradition. Sacred prostitutes are usually known under the name of *Kudikkar*, *Bevaratial*, *Murah*, *Basavi*, *Bavinand Naiken*. The prostitution that existed in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century falls under two categories:

- (1) Indian prostitution
- (2) European prostitution

European prostitution which had gradually developed in the maritime cities of India spread after the opening of Suez canal in 1869. It is an open secret that Karol-Bagh area in New Delhi is the focal point of sex workers from Russia and Eastern Europe. We have often heard in Indian films ‘naughty’ characters mentioning the thrill of a joust with blue-eyed, blond sex goddesses. The pattern of operation of these sex workers is that they smuggle goods into India, work as high class call girls while in India, and then smuggle Indian goods and narcotics when going back. One can only wonder who their clients are since their evening charges are higher than the monthly salary of 99 per cent of Indians. Unfortunately lack of political will and corruption is preventing adequate intervention. Monogamy still remains the ideal in all civilized societies. Chastity was the ideal form in all ages. But in spite of this,

legislation and social customs. The Greek ‘*Hetaerae*’ and the Japanese ‘*Geishas*’ and those barren women in southern sealands who are expelled into the woods at the service of any man, testifies the antiquity and ubiquity of this institution. In India, prostitution had assumed the status of a ritual as *Devadasi* system. The term *Devadasi* literally means servant of God and perhaps originally a devoted class of women who gave themselves to a life of religious service and austerities. The custom of dedicating girls to Hindu temples, came into practice, during the *Vedic* era. The significance of dedicating women as objects of sexual pleasures was to offer such pleasures to the presiding deity of the temple to invoke blessings. Hence they are not expected to marry. But their innermost urges and desires remained unfulfilled which tempted them to resort to it as an accepted way of life for them. Thus the term lost its original meaning.

deviation from the accepted norm was not uncommon. The sanctity and stability of marriage and dignity of chastity has been disturbed by the immoral traffic in women, which was facilitated through the institution of prostitution. This has led to the belief that prostitution is a necessary evil and it cannot be eradicated.

Prostitution today is more of an economic institution based on the principle of demand and supply. Commercialization of sexual relationships leads to the creation of various sub-systems of brothel, pimp, *kakkiman* and such other middle men who are involved in the entire organisational structure. Licensing of brothels implies a legal sanctioning of prostitutes and therefore of trafficking in women as well, because the brothels are to be kept supplied with women. Once she is registered in this, she is always branded as a prostitute. But then her self-esteem is destroyed and normal relationship with society is thwarted. Therefore rehabilitation of the prostitute must be in a manner that no social stigma is attached to them. Prostitution actually destroys the stability and chastity of marriage. It threatens the very existence of family relationship. It has a disintegrating effect upon both individual and society. It had carried with it, its own problems of

diseases, such as syphilis, gonorrhoea etc. The prostitute is still a big source of venereal disease infection in our country. There are 50 million who fall victims of this dreaded infection.

Once a girl enters a brothel, she accepts the life of prostitute, without much emotional strain, as they are seeing many women indulging in it. Naturally the feeling of shame and guilt disappears and they easily get adjusted to the new ways of life. They usually feel encouraged by other sex workers and they consider it as a trade and no more as an anti-social behaviour. It is a truth that modern sex workers never consider their work as an anti-social behaviour instead they are proud to say that they sell their body to feed their family. It is the society which calls it 'anti-social'. A woman's decency is important to a man's reputation and masculine status. It is partly his responsibility to assure that her decency is maintained, if the woman in question is his wife, sister, daughter or mother. And it is quite interesting that a man needs 'indecent' women in order to display his virility and seduction skills. But the entire world of questions changes when the woman focused, is a sex worker.

There is always an aura of mystery woven by the public around prostitutes. Many myths and beliefs are still working upon their body. For example some religious groups in Kerala believe that it is a good omen seeing a sex worker early in the morning or before beginning a new venture. This gives us clear evidence that in olden times they were not a down trodden group of people. Many people believe that prostitution is something which happens only in brothels. But the fact is many girls and women directly experience sexual slavery in their home itself. For them home replaces brothel, they are wives or daughters who are the victims of husbands or fathers instead of pimps. Just as in other occupation, prostitutes vary in social status from street prostitutes to the high priced call girl. Condition of girls in Indian brothels are so pathetic and I was shocked to hear from one pimp that young sex workers of the brothel must serve at least 10-15 customers each day. It is common practice among prostitutes in brothels to take steroids like oradexon, a steroid used by farmers to fatten their cattle's. It increases appetite, making them gain weight rapidly and giving the appearance that poorly nourished teens are in fact healthy and fat, attracting clients who prefer girls with "curves". I remember one of the educated sex workers words who told me "I am not selling my body but the weakness of men"! Sex is also a basic need like food and shelter and there are many protests and strikes throughout history for food and shelter but there comes a pindrop silence while talking about physical and psychological needs and public often call them 'vulgar' or 'taboo'. Notorious red light areas of India include GB road in Delhi, Sonagachi in

Kolkata, Kamathipura in Mumbai, Budhwar path in Pune and Reshampura in Gwalior. There are around 3.8 million sex workers in the country and their number is increasing, as informed by official statistics. Most of the young girls are brought from Nepal and Bangladesh. Young girls are trafficked from Nepal to brothels in Mumbai and Kolkata at an average age of twelve. They are trapped into the vicious cycle of prostitution, debt and slavery. By the time they are in their mid-twenties, they are at the dead end. In modern India different kinds of prostitution are prevailing apart from prostitutes in brothel. They are street sex workers, call girls, religious sex workers, escort girls, child sex workers, bar dancers, road side brothel, gimmick sex workers, beat sex workers etc. According to studies conducted by social welfare department every hour, four women in India enter prostitution, three of them against their will. Prostitution is a problem in itself and child prostitution is making it more complex. The nature and origin of prostitution may due to natural events, unsatisfactory economic condition, unhealthy family relations, psychological and social causes like bad influence, deception and environmental influence.

Many people believe that being a soldier or dupe in action films or working in mines etc are some of the most dangerous professions in the world. We often forget to place a sex worker in that category. She has to suffer much from the clients, some clients may be psychos, rapists or sex maniacs with dangerous sexual behaviours. She cannot raise complaints against anyone, there lies the risk and the hidden danger of this job. Politicians, Policemen, Middlemen, Pimps and the entire society use her in a brutal manner. At night she is a 55kg flesh to them and in day time they throw stone at her. Legalizing prostitution will help sex workers, who live life on the edge everywhere to gain access to medical facilities, which can control the spreading of venerable diseases. Not only this there are many other benefits in legalizing prostitution. Some of them are as follows.

- (1) Legalization of prostitution and the sex industry will stop sex trafficking.
- (2) Legalization of sex work will control sex industry.
- (3) Legalization will decrease clandestine, hidden, illegal and street sex work.
- (4) Legalization of sex work will protect women in prostitution as they will have rights. Thus either India shall Thus either India shall legalize prostitution
- (5) Legalization of sex work will promote women's health as they can have easy access to medical facilities which they don't have when it is legal.
- (6) Recognizing sex work as an economic activity, would enable women in India to obtain working permits as 'sex workers'.

Thus India shall legalize sex work that can be taken or shall make such deterrent laws as to erase the problem of prostitution. Laws should not be such as to just remove the sex workers but also to change the

mentality of people who are interested in paid sex by punishing them in such a manner that people of the same mentality will not dare to indulge themselves in similar activities.

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