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Media, Women And Prostitution:
A Comparative Study In South And South East Asia

By

Harji Malik
MEDIA, WOMEN AND PROSTITUTION

A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN SOUTH AND SOUTH EAST ASIA, SPONSORED BY UNESCO

[Handwritten note: Hearn, C.]
Prostitution in India has many faces. At opposite ends of the spectrum are the bestial "cages" of Bombay's red light district, where girls and women of all ages offer themselves, literally from behind iron bars symbolizing the prison of their existence, and the five star hotels in India's metropolitan cities where the "call girls" in increasing numbers operate in luxurious comfort. But both are practitioners of the oldest profession in the world, in which sex and a woman's body are commercial commodities, both are victims of a social/system which accepts an unequal status for women and men. In this system women submit to the demands of male sexuality to "safeguard" the morality of society. As in other countries, affluent or poor, prostitution in this country exists because society continues to be male dominated and has come to a unilateral decision that men are biologically different: ergo prostitution is a "necessary" evil.

The number of Indian prostitutes is increasing for reasons explained later, and along with this the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases. But even though this problem involves a broad cross-section of society, that society as a whole, remains oblivious to the serious implications of the problem, both from the point of view of health and from the emotional damage done to the fabric of that society. To say nothing of the demoralizing impact on Indian women at every economic level. While there is a growing recognition that a country's development depends on its women playing an active, contributory role, which is possible only if they are freed from the bondage of illiteracy and ignorance, there are few concerned people who recognize that prostitution is the worst form of physical and mental bondage. Because custom and tradition have relegated women to second class citizenship, exploitation of women for prostitution has met with little resistance, until very recently, and that too only in a few isolated instances.

This partially explains why a minimum of public support is extended to the authorities in dealing with the legal aspects of traffic in women, which is the life support system of Indian prostitution; why so few voluntary women's organizations are...
involved in purposeful rehabilitation programmes for those who want to escape from the profession and why existing laws are not implemented effectively. Indian society, irrespective of its economic status, would like to 'forget' about prostitution to ignore its existence. The affluent and middle classes relegate it to the sordid, 'sub-human' world where teenagers, often sub-teenaged girls, are mercilessly exploited; world, which in the perceptions of the so-called elite, is inhabited only by the lower middle-classes and the poverty stricken. The more expensive, 'sophisticated' form of prostitution where these elite function, is loftily considered another phenomenon altogether. On the other hand the majority of men who frequent the red light district consider the prostitute a commodity to be paid for and used, not a fellow human being with emotions and conflicts.

So, unlike other 'unpleasant' socio-economic problems in Indian society, which are increasingly being forced into public focus and on the social conscience, prostitution remains relatively 'invisible', even in the media. Women do not 'identify' themselves with prostitutes, men do not 'identify' their womenfolk with the objects of their exploitation. In the past few years, as a result of the attention paid in the media to women's issues, because of the International Women's Year and the UN Women's Decade, the situation of the Indian prostitute has also received greater coverage, particularly in the past four or five years. But more often from the point of view of news, often of sensational journalism, rather than of constructive, meaningful and relevant exposure of an exploitive system involving fellow-citizens.

The Historical Background.

Prostitution in India has a long and ancient history and is referred to in the earliest Hindu epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In his authoritative "Hindu Religion, Customs and Manners" P. Thomas explains how courtesans and dancing girls were treated with honour. Hindu society had one standard of morality for the higher castes, a different one for the lower, and from early times there existed certain castes where the traditional occupation for women was prostitution. Famous courtesans hailed from these castes. Centuries later, the contemporary situation in which the majority of "forced prostitutes" are of low castes, can be directly traced back to this ancient
discriminatory code of morality where marriage was a sacrament only for higher castes, and there were, therefore, no rules for others regarding chastity and fidelity.

The courtesan tradition continued throughout history and in Mauryan times in the 4th century B.C., the famous Kautilya, author of the *Arthasastra*, the textbook for statescraft for centuries, included in the text the duties of "controller of courtesans". He laid down a highly hierarchial system with strictly defined categories of courtesans, the list headed by the "Gainikas", accomplished in all the 64 arts and in literature, and paid a handsome salary by the state. Many of them were counsellors of kings. Until the end of the Mauryan period courtesans' incomes were taxed by the state, which controlled brothels with a strict code of regulations.

But in return the state protected the courtesans. The *Arthasastra* lays down death as a penalty for having intercourse with a courtesan against her will, or with a "nymphaed"! Child prostitution, one of the most shocking aspects of the Indian scene to-day, did not exist. Under Emperor Ashoka the state's duty was to look after prostitutes who could no longer earn a living. Our red light district girls have no such protection or insurance. The aging prostitute has only two alternatives, to become the madam of a brothel, if she is lucky, to recruit fresh entrants or to beg on the streets. But in Ashoka's time as historian Romilla Thapar puts it "The courtesan was a normal feature of urban life, neither romanticised nor treated with contempt."

During the Mughal years prostitutes enjoyed great prominence, but in the 16th century the emphasis was more on music and dance and famous courtesans were a feature of the Mughal court, while prostitution also flourished. The Italian "Isacello Manucci's vivid account of the Mughal court mentions 600 houses of "ill repute" in Lahore, each paying a weekly fee to the state. (To-day's harassed prostitutes pay "hafta", an illegal payment to the police for protection!) Dancing girls, beautiful, cultivated in the arts, fine musicians, singers and dancers remained a part of the elite life style until the first years of the 20th century, and even to-day, in the "kothas" of Lucknow and Delhi, there are madams of brothels who talk nostalgically of a past they vaguely remember when the aristocratic elite were the regular patrons.

Present day prostitution is also traced directly to another, very diff-
erent tradition, the ancient system of "Devadasis", maidens dedicated to God. The tradition goes back to the 3rd century A.D. and during the Pallava and Cholla dynasties in South India in the 6th and 7th centuries A.D., devadasis were held in great respect considered the guardians of music and dance in the classical tradition. The importance and wealth of the great temples was measured in part by the number of devadasis attached to them. A sense of eroticism was always present for the devadasi was considered the "courtesan of the gods", dedicated for their service, pleasure and entertainment.

In a recent study on the devadasi cult Amrit Srinivasan has pointed out that although the dedicated devadasi was not permitted to marry, she was permitted to lead a "normal" life where sex and children were concerned. Maintaining a devadasi was a matter of prestige for the wealthy and the powerful. The devadasi enjoyed a unique privilege over all other women in Hindu society, for after dedication she was considered "Aitva manushi", a woman forever free from the curse of widowhood which in that society was really a curse. As such she was an auspicious person in great demand at all important religious ceremonies. Down to the 16th century devadasis retained this status in the great Vijyanagar empire and were known for their beauty and wisdom. But in time, for reasons, the tradition fell into disrepute and devadasis were increasingly exploited by priests and others, until the destruction of the important Hindu temples by Muslim invaders closed the curtain on the original tradition.

Because devadasis were generally recruited from the ranks of prostitutes, the changeover in lifestyle was not too traumatic. Even in ancient and mediaeval India it is reported that at times of famine temple authorities "bought" attractive young girls from destitute families to bring up as devadasis, a practice which has its modern counterpart in the forced prostitution, under pretense of dedication to the goddess, of girls from the drought prone areas of Maharashtra and Karnataka. In some areas, including the famous Hindu shrine of Tirupathi, Abbe J.J. Rubois, a traveller in India, described how, in the 19th century, priests demanded beautiful girls from their parent for the "pleasure of the gods."

The city of Calcutta, the first capital of British India, has a special place in the history of prostitution in this country because, with the establishment of the East India Company, or the Hon'ble John Company as it was first known, in the
mid-13th century, commercial prostitution became a feature of Calcutta life. *Nautch* girls and dancers, musicians and singers, patronized by wealthy Bengalis had been a recognized institution, but now the indigenous traders curried favour with the British "sahibs" by entertaining them with *nautch* performances, and a handful of brothels were set up.

Still the *Paijis* of Calcutta were different from ordinary prostitutes. Traditionally Muslim, musicians and dancers, many of them kept up the tradition of the cultured, cultivated courtesan. But with the advance of industrialization, the impact of which was first felt in Calcutta, the *Paijis* began to disappear from lack of demand, and the new population of jute mill workers, sailors and others encouraged the lower class *bazaar* prostitution. The British occupation of India with the attendant increase in the number of British troops gave an important "boost" to the profession. Not only did the British make provision for supplying prostitutes to the "tommies", the all ranks soldiers, but British prostitutes were brought to India for the benefit of better class Britishers.

When Calcutta became a big allied troop base in World War Two, brothels sprouted in many residential and commercial areas to meet the requirements of foreign soldiers who injected a new element into the situation. "Empty Houses" and "Massage Baths", euphemisms for brothels, mushroomed, and "voluntary prostitution" triggered by the easy money of the troops introduced a new type of girl from the middle class into the profession. Calcutta's flesh trade received a new impetus in 1942 when destitutes fleeing the famine ravaged countryside flooded the city, with pimps and procurers ready to take advantage of the situation. Five years later, the partition of Bengal, part of the bigger partition of India, created a new set of refugees, among them uprooted girls and women, many of whom had lost their families, either in the killings, or in the panic of flight. Many fell victim to the prostitution network.

Calcutta's pioneering role in the country's industrialization, attracting workers of all kinds, most of whom left their families behind in the villages, a trend which other cities and towns in the country have since followed, also encouraged prostitution. To-day the hundreds of thousands of migrant workers in cities like Delhi keep prostitution a highly lucrative business for the organizers.
Prostitution—the Contemporary Scene

The overall contemporary picture of prostitution in India differs in important ways from the scene in other Asian countries and the countries of the West. India has no equivalent of the kind of prostitution familiar to Europeans and Americans; whether it is Hamburg's famous Reeperbahn, the world of the wealthy Rome prostitute who solicits in her expensive car, or the mink-coated streetwalkers of New York. "Prostitution Tourism", now an accepted major foreign exchange earner in some Southeast Asian countries or the tourism related to "Rest and Relaxation" near foreign troop bases in some of those countries, does not exist in this country in those forms. Both have aroused bitter opposition from women's rights supporters there, and such supporters have spoken out in the strongest terms in international meetings. A variety of prostitution tourism does exist here, but it is not organised on a mass scale, and is confined to the "Gulf connection" and the provision of "call girls" to foreign tourists in hotels in cities like Delhi and Bombay. But India does share with other Asian countries appalling conditions of forced prostitution, of sexual exploitation of the worst kind in red light areas all over the country.

India is committed to abolition of prostitution. But, under present legislation, prostitution per se is not illegal, and as Jyotsna Chatterjee of the Voluntary Women's Programme told the International Abolitionist Federation in Vienna in September 1982, the incidence of prostitution in every form is increasing in metropolitan cities, urban areas and markets and business centres. Rapidly growing urbanisation and industrialisation plus the growing permissiveness in the higher income echelons of society, along with the increase in the numbers of wealthy persons, all explain this trend.

The majority of prostitutes are "forced" into the profession by a combination of social, economic and personal pressures, plus the social mores which continue to govern Indian society. Even where girls appear to have entered the profession "voluntarily", investigation into their past often reveals that while the final step may have been voluntary, a combination of circumstances had made the so-called "choice" almost inevitable. The basic inequality between the sexes in the social pattern is the causative factor which leaves women vulnerable to sexual exploitation, particularly in the weaker sex of society where they are still regarded as the property...
of their fathers or husbands to be disposed of as they please. And women, socialize for generations in this mental environment, accept such treatment passively.

From the time she is born the girl child in India is considered a potential burden on her parents, to be married off as soon as possible, and marriage in most communities requires a dowry. Dowry is a terrible financial "onus", often a fatal one, if one studies the cases of "bride-burning" or "dowry deaths" as they are called now. The extent of the burden depends on the family's financial position, and can easily lead to indebtedness. Until marriage the girl must be protected against the risk of a sexual mishap, because, with the exception of some tribal societies, her virginity is an essential requirement for marriage. If, by mischance, a girl loses her virginity, she is out of the marriage market, a catastrophe for her family and a disgrace to the community, possibly an outcaste. If she is married safely, and then widowed at a young age, she again becomes a burden, on both her own family and her in-laws. If her marriage turns out to be unhappy and she is ill-treated by her husband and in-laws, she faces a similar situation because under Indian norms, once a girl marries, it is a disgrace for her to return to her parental home, irrespective of circumstances.

The persisting taboo on the remarriage of widows in nearly all sections of society is another related factor which contributes to forced prostitution. This can have incredibly cruel results, particularly in cases where, because of child marriages which persist in rural areas in spite of prohibitory legislation, girls are sometimes widowed even before they reach puberty, and the marriage is consummated. In child marriages contracted at an early age the girl is sent to the bridegroom's house only when she is 12 or 13. But in case the boy dies earlier she is still termed a 'widow'. Such and similar girls are often sold into prostitution by poor relatives, or, because of neglect and ill treatment, run away and fall into the hands of agents.

Poverty, illiteracy, backwardness, lack of employment opportunities and lack of employment skills together with the sexual inequality is the formidable combination on which the supply of prostitutes depends. This combination also perpetuates "hereditary" prostitution in certain communities and the "religion sanctioned" prostit
in areas where the corrupted devadasi tradition feeds the human supply line to Bombay cages.

The same combination is responsible for the vicious nexus between prostitution and bonded labour and between prostitution and rural indebtedness in certain parts of the country. This combination does not influence the actions of educated girls and women who become "call girls", although some elements are common to both groups. In the "call girl" group there are other causes: desire for the perquisites of affluence, for excitement, the result of psychological disturbances connected with family problems, rebellion against society and other related pressures. But lack of employment skills, and opportunities, sexual inequality manifested in low salaries and job insecurity, do contribute to the "call girl" system.

Kidnapping of girls for sale into prostitution is another category of causes leading to the profession. Here the girls have no choice at all. Because of the profits in the flesh trade kidnapping is a favourite method of procurement, particularly in rural areas. In an extensive study of Bombay prostitutes S.D. Punekar and Kamla Rao found that in 10 cases of kidnapping, six involved child-lifting of children between four and ten years old. These kidnapped children, brought up strictly in brothels, were introduced into the profession as soon as possible. Having known no other life they accepted prostitution as normal activity. But four girls, kidnapped after they were 16 years old, had to be forced into the trade by threats and physical violence. Village and tribal girls from remote areas are kidnapped and brought to regular counting markets, or to "wholesale" markets in cities like Agra and Bombay, to be sold and despatched to places far from home.

Punekar and Rao, who are cited in most serious works on prostitution in India, have given a detailed analysis of "contributory predisposing and direct causes" for prostitution which they divide into six groups. They conclude that there is generally a combination of causes, and although the economic factor plays a major part, poverty alone is not the sole cause in most cases. A situation which can be the sole contributory cause given the inferior status accorded to women, is the death of one or both parents, or the husband. Dependant on others for survival, a girl, particularly in the villages, has neither protection nor rights, and prostituti
can offer an escape from what amounts to slavery. Ill-treatment by the family has
driven many girls to run away from home. They often end up in brothels because of
the problems facing a young girl alone in a city or town, without money, skills, and,
above all, any assistance from social welfare or women’s organizations. The Bombay stu-
cites case histories of such girls finding themselves destitute in Bombay, ending up
in the red light district because they had nowhere else to go. Seeing their plight
some procurer, or another woman, a prostitute, is "kind" to them, offers them succour
and security, but in a brothel.

A deserted wife, a widow, an orphaned sister—all unwanted burdens on
their families because of the social mores mentioned earlier—are often at the mercy
of the procuring organisation which finds them ideal victims for exploitation. Women,
husbands are chronically unfaithful, or who have unhappy marriages, are also vulnerable
to inducements of traffickers who search out and procure "merchandise" from all over t
country. These girls are deceived by "offers of good jobs" in cities or tempted by
descriptions of the life of ease and luxury which they can enjoy, often by "friendly" o
women, belonging to the village who have become either brothel keepers or agents. Case
history after case history tells the same story.

Social workers have found that in many instances girls are sold to pimps
by their own families. Or that in order to get rid of a wife and marry another woman,
the husband himself sells his wife to another man or to a procurer. And, later, perha
sells the second wife as well. Punekar and Rao’s case histories expose the various pre
which force young women into the trade. Tara, the youngest child of a schoolmaster fath
and his favourite, was happily married to a farmer. Her parents died, and widowed at 17
with two young children, she had to live with her brother and sister-in-law who obvious
considered her a burden. As a child Tara had seen prostitutes visiting the village who
looked happy and prosperous, so she ran off to Bombay. Lings, daughter of a coolie(prot
d and a maid servant, was married at nine. Widowed at 11 years, she lived at home and work
with the family who were desperately poor. With no hope of remarriage, and with the
consent of her parents, she became a prostitute at 18 to maintain the family. Somu was
married at nine, widowed within a year, and when she was 13, her own mother arranged for
men to come to the house to buy her services. In Marium’s case her rickshaw-puller
husband, from the lowest income bracket, forced her to sleep with a man for money, took her earnings and finally sold her to a brothel.

The researchers point out that there are cases where girls are not ill-treated but just influenced by trusted friends and induced into the profession. Zubeda was one of these. She had loving but poor parents, and friends gradually convin her that sex was the "only pleasure within reach of a poor girl." Preparation for such acceptance is done subtly and tactfully by the interested inducers. Both Appi and Gul had illicit relations with men, Appi as a young widow, Gulabi as an unmarried teenager. But fearful of the community reaction both were persuaded by older prostitutes, who painted a rosy picture of the profession, to enter it and escape social condemnation.

The Joint Women's Programme has carried out studies in Calcutta which bring out another form of exploitation widespread in cities where young women working as domestic help are sexually exploited by employers. Rina, one of the "Maiden" girls, at the lower strate of prostitution, started working with her mother, a maid servant, when she was fifteen. One of her employers regularly forced her to have relations against her consent, paying her Rs.25 a month. She left to work in a small manufacturing unit with other girls and was happy to be able to take care of herself. But the unit closed and she could find no other work. Rather than go back to domestic service and further sexual exploitation, she decided to become a "Maiden" girl to earn her own living.

The story of Malati Malakar found by JWP workers in the small town of Bankura is even more pitiful. Married to a rickshaw-puller, herself the daughter of a rickshaw-puller, she was deserted after two years of marriage and returned to her father. Working as a part-time servant in three homes for a miserable pittance, she was forced to have sex with two of her employers. Finding no sympathy from her family for this situation, she went into prostitution at 20. Girls like these have told social workers that when domestic service means they are sexually exploited by employers, it is far better to go into a brothel where at least they do not have to do other work as well. For Suchma, widowed, with two children, a blind father-in-law and an invalid mother-in-law to support, prostitution was the only means to survive, and they gave her permission to enter the trade. Pranjali Bhanji, quoted in Menushi discovered a meat-packing factory complex on the outskirts of Delhi where school educated young women from rural areas, are kept...
virtually imprisoned by their employers who exploit them sexually at will. These terrorised women are raped and beaten and knowing they are dishonoured women, they feel trapped and isolated with no escape.

Such situations are repeated endlessly all over the country but rarely does the exploitation of women surface in print, although the knowledge of its existence is an accepted fact of life. Less known is the fact that economic deprivation in some parts of the country has made these areas traditional recruiting grounds for prostitutes. One such area is in Uttarkashi district, high up in the Himalayan mountains, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, where low caste, Harijan women are regularly sold as prostitutes in the plains. An Indian Administrative Service officer, serving in the area, Robin Gupta, highlighted this practice in a searching report. He exposed the vicious nexus between bonded labour based on indebtedness and prostitution which persists in this extremely poor and backward district. In Pauri, the remote area under survey, according to Gupta, constitutional guarantees for individual human rights are still unknown. Local officials and officials responsible for seeing that they are implemented and the police, who get their cut in the game, turn a blind eye.

Here, unlike the case in some other areas, there is no historical background for this practice. According to various accounts, the first woman of Pauri Block to leave her village and enter prostitution did so only in 1915. Organized trafficking started after 1940, increasing rapidly after 1947, when new roads and other development of the area, like motor transport, opened it up to officials and traders. Ironically, in this case, development introduced human exploitation. In these hills, promiscuous/behaviour is accepted in local society. But commercialized prostitution is a new phenomenon. The only saving grace in this particular situation is that because of the different social mores, and the bonded labour aspect of prostitution, some girls return from the profession after a few years and are accepted back into the village community with no stigma attached, and get married. But not all.

Before Gupta’s report a 1969 survey by another official found that over 60 per cent of the girls from this region were operating in Delhi brothels, and that with the exception of two women, they were from low caste Harijan families. About 500
families were affected by prostitution, because of extreme poverty. In this area which has a shortage of women, the custom of "bride price" exists instead of the usual dowry system which is common in most parts of the country. But just as dowry expectations encourage prostitution, so bride price plays a similar role. For, contrary to general belief, bride price here does not give women a higher status in the community. In practice a man often has to go into debt to pay for his bride, and then, to repay the debt, he turns her into a prostitute.

If a landless Harijan pays Rs. 2000 to the girl's father, a sum he can never hope to save, and takes his bride home--and girls are married at 14 or 15--he will probably have taken a loan from the local village headman or landlord, of a higher caste, at a rate of interest of about 31 per cent. To pay off the debt he and his bride work on the landlord's land. But because of the exorbitant interest, and because he has no other income, the Harijan sinks deeper into debt. In this vicious circle he is compelled to borrow more, in order to subsist. This form of bonded labour persists in many backward areas in spite of legislation which, in theory, has abolished bonded labour.

When the Harijan husband is at the end of his rope, the moneylender suggests that he can send his wife down to the plains to earn money as a prostitute to pay off the debt. (And incidentally to allow him to borrow more money.) The man sees a way out, the girl has no say in the matter, and is taken by her husband and the moneylender to the village fair or to some crowded market where the local "agent" examines her. If he approves of the goods, all four take the bus to Delhi where the girl is sold a brothel for about Rs. 3000. The husband may receive Rs. 2000 to pay off the original debt, but probably not the interest, so he remains bonded, and the agent and moneylender share the rest.

Another practises are for Rajput farmers, of higher caste, to contract so-called "marriages" with girls from different Harijan families, paying a relatively low bride price. They keep the girls at home for some days—the law decreeing monogamy has little meaning in such communities remote from the capital—then takes them to Delhi and sells them for a good profit. In other instances prostitutes from Purnia already in the trade are sent home by their brothel keepers to personally "demonstrate" their
leisurely, pleasant life in order to persuade young guillible girls to accompany them back to the city for a "brief" period, and then sell them to the brothels.

If a man wants to fight this practice and keep his wife, he is often threatened by the moneylender and even by the local revenue official, the natwari, who in such districts, acts like a dictator and may well be involved in the trade. One prostitute told Gupta that that natwari himself used to come to the brothel to collect the Purola girls' earnings. The 1969 survey showed that the majority of girls stayed in the brothels for about five years, but a few remained for longer periods.

One girl told Gupta how her first husband, deeply indebted to the local landlord, sold her to a brothel in Delhi, how she came back and married one Harijan, how, on his death three years later, with no means of survival, she had to return to the brothel. Eventually she was bought by a higher caste man, and finally bought from him by a Punjabi phatri, a man from another community, with whom she was happily settled, though very poor. But many women stay on permanently, some because they are forced to physically by the brothel madams, others because they become addicted to it.

In the adjoining Jaunsar-Bawar area, also in Uttar Pradesh but bordering on the mountain state of Himachal Pradesh, the same situation exists with the Koltas, a community, also low caste, of agricultural labourers who have only recently been allotted small land holdings. Initially monogamous, the Koltas appear to have taken polyandry in order to maintain the family on income from prostitution. While one wife is kept at home, the others are "rented out" to the brothel keeper on a system of "share cropping" called "Batai". Like the Purola girls many Kolta women who have experienced brothel life find it difficult to readjust to the very hard life of women working as agricultural labourers in this terrain. So they prefer to remain prostitutes. (In these areas women are expected to do most of the work including carrying fuel and from long distances.) This society does not consider the children of such women illegitimate, so the child's future does not act as a deterrent to the mother as it may in other cases.

Jayoti Gupta reported that Lakhamandal Village in Jaunsar-Bawar, the area covered by her report, has 44 households, out of which 19 are Koltas. Except for two families, who are better off, at least one woman from each family
had been involved in prostitution, and all of the men between the ages of 40 to 60 worked as bonded labour. In the case of one girl from this area who was taken at the age of 15 to a brothel because her husband owed Rs.1000, her years of servitude in prostitution totalled twenty-five. From the age of 15 to 40 she had never revisited her home. Her husband kept on borrowing more money to establish himself, married two other women to look after his household without her knowledge, and kept her in a brothel, coling her earnings. The survey calculated that she had paid off about Rs. 75,000. Yet when she got too old for the trade and returned home, she had no money, and was forced to live with her brother as a humiliated, penniless dependant because she had nowhere else to go.

An old Lohar woman interviewed near Purola, (Lohars are another low caste community) who had been in the profession since before the second World War, toughened and hardened by her experience, told the Gupta team that there was only one remedy for the cruel exploitation of these helpless women. She said bluntly "Buy freedom for our men, give them land, only land. It is this land, these green fields, which will contain our girls. Nothing else can!" Although many reports on the evils and persistence of bonded labour, especially over the past few years, have appeared in the press, many of them excellent investigations in depth, no reporter has exposed the element of prostitution in bonded labour, the exploitation of women who are bonded, which is perhaps the cruellest and most contemptible component in this reprehensible system.

While poverty alone is the motivating factor for prostitution only in exceptional cases, it certainly is the common factor in the vast majority of situations. If landless Harijans in Purola were not crippled by debt, the system of "sharecropping" th wives would stop. A story in a Hindi weekly, Ravival, a few years ago graphically illustrated the nexus between poverty and social mores which make prostitution socially acceptable in some poor communities. The report described "Highway tourism" in villages along the main-roads between Jaipur, Alwar, Ajmer and other Rajasthan towns where village girls catered for drivers of trucks, private cars and other vehicles. When the reporter tried to question the girls he found them evasive but they told him that they would continue this trade until they got married. After that it was unacceptable in the community. The girls themselves had little idea of what they earned, obviously little of it came into their
and they were so used to exploitation that they put up no fight for their earnings.

The exploitation of low caste women is an important aspect of "forced prostitution." When women of higher castes become prostitutes, it is usually 'voluntary.' In Uttarkashi area for example the researchers found that some higher caste families were seriously concerned about their daughters being tempted by stories of the luxurious life to be found in the city, and it appears that a few such girls had indeed become prostitutes. But the "dalits", the low castes, have no choice. Tribal or Adivasi women from remote rural areas fall into this category. From virtually every tribal area come stories of girls being kidnapped or abducted, sold in towns, and of their sexual exploitation by local officials, contractors, and other members of the power establishment.

Chumsar Udaygiri, a village of 8000 population, in a remote part of Orissa State in Eastern India, is a case in point. A reporter from a Delhi based fortnightly, India Today, investigated the situation and found that the village known cynically as "Frem Nagar", village of love, had as many as 200 abandoned wives, girls who had been bought by petty contractors and officials as "wives" for a few months.

"Hereditary" prostitution is a distinctive feature of the Indian scene. Joardar lists some of the groups, several of them Muslim, including the Nagshahiya, Chambhaliya, none of whom marry off their daughters because they expect them to go into the profession to augment the family income. The sons of families in these groups are supported by the earnings of their sisters and act as their pimps and musicians. In families a chain of rituals initiates girls into the profession from the age of eight years. The Holtas and the Naiks in Uttar Pradesh (these are the Holtas described earlier) are others whose women enter the profession automatically. Girls who try to resist are usually forced into it through physical torture, through molestation or even rape. The theory is that once a girl is dishonoured, and then ostracized by the community, she has to accept her fate. In the border areas of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh the Padras and Baradar communities do not sell their girls but daughters are hereditary prostitutes.

Exploitation and Corruption of the Devadasi Tradition.

The "devadasi" cult plays such an important role in the exploitation of women that it demands special attention in any report on prostitution. Opinions may differ on the merits and demerits of the classic devadasi tradition; Srinivasan decor
it almost as an enviable status, while Jyoti Punwani sees in it an inherent contempt for women. But there can be no controversy about the evils which have arisen from degradation of the devadasi cult in its present manifestation of commercial prostitu-

In 1982, after persistent agitation by voluntary organisations, particularly the Joint Women's Programme, the government of Karnataka, where the devadasi cult is the most active today, passed the "Karnataka Devadasi (Prohibition of Dedication) Bill 1982," forbidding the practice of devadasi. Devadasis themselves took part in the rebellion against a system which has been cynically corrupted into a supply of for brothels in Belgaum, Bombay and other cities. But in spite of this legal bar and earlier legislation like the Bombay (Devadasi Protection) Act 1934, the system persists and the law enforcing authorities in the area show little interest in implementing the law which says that anyone who performs, endorses, abets or participates in a dedication ceremony, faces three years imprisonment and a fine of Rs.3000. Social workers and journalists both report categorically that the system will continue, clandestinely to some extent, while poverty and illiteracy remain.

Writing in the Indian Express in June 1985, Chakresh Jain estimated that in the border areas of Maharashtra and Karnataka, about 4000 to 5000 girls are still dedicated annually at the Saundatti Temple and other, smaller shrines. Jain and others emphasize that there is no way to stop this practise unless the problems of the poor stricken families who dedicate these girls are tackled at the basic economic level. They point out that hardly any job opportunities exist, prostitution is the only means of survival for entire families. An investigative report by the Joint Women's Programme, which has covered the problem in detail, states bluntly that the "Devadasi system today is only prostitution with religious sanction." The JWP sees it as the "admixture of social, religious, cultural and economic exploitation of women of the weakest sect of our society."

In no way do present day devadasis resemble the classic temple dancers or musicians. To-day girls are dedicated to the goddess Yellama, the "Universal Mother" as Jyoti Punwani describes them, rather than to the "Maids of According to the common legend which goes back to Aryan days Penuka, the priest's wife of the sage Janardan, used to fetch water from a nearby river every evening. She would...
the pot from the wet sand of the riverbed and because of her chastity the unbaked pot retained water. One evening she saw reflected in the river a handsomelandshca and thought to herself how beautiful he was. Because she had "sinned", though in thought only, the sand pitcher crumbled. Realising what had happened the enraged husband ordered their 12 year old son Parushuram to cut off her head. He did so, obediently, and in reward for his obedience his father promised him a boon. He asked for his mother's life, so the sage beheaded a passing "Hetna", low caste woman, fixed her head on Renuka's body and resurrected her. He "blessed" her by saying that unmarried girls would be dedicated to her for life, would please any man who desired them, because Parushuram dwells in every man and would beg in Renuka's name every Tuesday and Friday. This "high caste" Hindu myth, Punwani states, has decided the destinies of hundreds of thousands of low caste girls over the years and ensured that the rich and powerful men of the area could always have free access to women. The myth itself, in every way, reflects the inferior status accorded to women, and the concept of a woman as objects men could do with as they please.

The majority of girls are dedicated when they are too young to know what is happening to them. Once caught in the trap, these illiterate girls—few of them are educated in this environment— have no escape. By the time they grow up they are dominated by the fear that they will incur the goddess' wrath if they fail to perform what they are brainwashed into believing is their sacred duty. The "dedication" confers a false respectability to prostitution. Blind faith, poverty and superstition keep the cult alive. The belief that unless a devadasi initiates another girl into the cult, her soul will not rest in peace, also perpetuates the practice. So the old devadasis go from village to village, playing on the fears and ignorance of families who, because they face some calamity or have some great desire, can be persuaded that if they placate the goddess by dedicating a girl, their prayers will be granted.

An unfortunate girl whose hair gets tangled—this is easily caused by not combing or washing hair, a condition common in these poor families—is said to be "marked" by the goddess as one of her own. Parents, relatives or an old devadasi wishing to dedicate a girl, find and encourage such tangles or "jat". Once such tangles appear no one tries to comb out the hair again. Those who have attended devadasi gatherings report that many girls and women have incredibly filthy, tangled hair, sometimes hanging down to
their ankles, while others carry their "jats" in cloth bags for convenience, complaining of terrible headaches and other discomfort. The 40 priests of Saundatti and other dedication shrines are interested in keeping the cult alive because dedication ceremonies mean money for them. The anti-Devadasi agitation has actually raised their rates, because of the so-called "risk" element. Many of the priests allegedly also take part in the lucrative traffic of the women.

"Mahipurnima" or "Randav Purnima", the full moon night of the prostitutes in December, is the most popular time for dedication. The ceremony resembles a marriage and now costs about Rs. 500 to 1000. In many cases the girls have not attained puberty. On the day of dedication other devadasis gather in the girl's home while she anoints her with oil. She then covers herself with leaves from the neem tree and semi-nude, walks a special well from which she draws water for her bath. After the bath she dresses herself in a yellow sari, puts on green bangles and other ornaments and is dressed and bejewelled like a bride. Five senior devadasis sing auspicious songs and sprinkle her with rice. She is then taken in procession to the Yellama Temple. The priest prays to the deity, blesses the young initiate as well as the bridal necklace, the mungal sutra, which either he or the devadasi place around her neck to signify her "married" status. The place of the bridegroom is taken by a sword in all the ceremonies. Once the dedication rites are over a devadasi hands over the "darshan" a special bead necklace to her. Those who have attended these rituals report how thrilled some young girls are by all the "bridal" trappings which for the daughters of the poor are an exciting new experience. These youngsters have no idea of what the future holds in store.

Once the girl has been formally dedicated and reaches puberty, any "patron", unless she has already been claimed by one who paid for her dedication, as is often the case, can demand her services. This man can look after her as long as he wishes, and when he leaves her, sometimes with children, who cannot claim his name or anything else from him, the girl must find another "keeper". In this way girls go from man to man for money to support themselves and their children. Agents from Bombay and other cities attend the dedication ceremonies, often accompanied by older devadasis who are prostitutes come to recruit for the brothels, and some girls are taken straight away to the cities, on payment.
Studies show that about 30 to 40 per cent of the prostitutes in Bombay's cheapest brothels are devadasis and about three fourths of them were under 14 when they entered the profession. In Pune it is estimated that 50 per cent of the prostitutes are devadasis. The JVP's findings in the devadasi areas are startling. In Bijani, Belgaum district, one of the main "transit" points in the traffic of women to Bombay, out of 800 prostitutes, 200 were devadasis. At Arhani, another transit point, out of 500 Harijan families, 98 per cent practised prostitution, although here a Harijan spokesman told social workers that whereas dedication had always just been an "excuse for prostitution", now commercial prostitution was increasing, without a religious facade. In Shankarhatti, a village with 50 Harijan families, eight to ten devadasis are dedicated every year. Bijapur, a district which suffers chronically from drought, is another prostitution centre connected with devadasi dedication.

The suffering and misery of these exploited women is dramatically revealed in case histories. "Baby", a young and pretty twenty year old mentioned by Jyoti Punwani, was dedicated before she was born. Her devadasi mother had been the mistress of a Jain, a member of a particularly strict community connected with the Hindu faith. Because there was no other way to look after the child, the mother made her a prostitute when she was only in the fourth standard. She had been in the profession 11 years. As in other poverty situations men who have no means of livelihood, encourage their sisters and even their wives to become devadasis so they can sell them to agents, and the uneducated, ignorant, helpless, oppressed women have no choice.

Change has been initiated, however, by the persistent efforts of dedicated social workers who have succeeded in an extremely difficult task, making some of the devadasis aware of the unjust exploitation they suffer, and who are helping them to find out how they can improve their situation and escape from the profession. Initially the major effort was by the Mahatma Phule Sanyab Pratishtan of Pune, which convened two largely attended conferences of devadasis in the heart of "devadasi country". The first was in September 1979 in the International Women's Year, and the second, a year later. Both conferences focused attention through the press reports on the miserable lives of these women. The conferences were addressed by "rebel" devadasis who called on their sisters to put an end to thier exploitation by unscrupulous crooks. At the same time
they assured the devadasis that they could preserve their faith in Yellamma and continue praying to her without being dedicated.

The Pratishthan put forward demands on behalf of the devadasis. These included strict implementation of anti-devadasi laws, introduction of effective rehabilitation programmes, action against exploiting agents and the recognition of their children's rights to education and professional training. Revabai Yamanavva Rambole, a devadasi, became President of the Pune Devadasi Sanghathan, founded in 1982, and this organisation is now building a hostel to allow devadasi children to grow up in a healthy environment away from the brothel life. Revabai, one of the "rebels", an ex-brothel keeper, told Imran Quereshi "Why should any god or goddess insist that anyone enter a profession like mine? ... If anyone becomes a prostitute it is only because of circumstances."

This was her message to her fellow devadasis and their families. Her Pune organisation has about 4000 members.

Other devadasis who are leading the fight against this immoral, dehumanising system are Sushila and Kamal Naik, tobacco workers from Mirpuri, in the centre of devadasi country, who are working through an institution called Sawali, a centre for rehabilitation of devadasis as well as deserted and displaced women. Sawali will also run a hostel for the children of devadasis and give "the women vocational training in order to make them self reliant, help them find jobs, fight for their rights and provide legal aid."

Karnataka Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde laid the foundation stone for the centre on June 11, 1985. In Mirpuri, worker, Professor Subhash Joshi, a dedicated social worker in the devadasi area, and also head of the tobacco and bidi workers' union, successfully persuaded 100 devadasis working in the tobacco factories, to give up prostitution by getting them better wages and offering them an alternative way to earn a living. The Pune devadasis also launched the first ever cooperative credit society of devadasis in August 1985. Two hundred of the city's estimated 5000 devadasi prostitutes joined in this effort to free themselves from moneylenders charging exorbitant rates of interest. Members will also be helped with loans to start businesses like tailoring, pickles and papad manufacture etc. to assist them economically and free them from the trade of their bodies.

The organisations working to liberate the contemporary devadasis deliberately
got the press involved and the wide media coverage of the problems raised at the 1977 and 1980 conferences of devadasis exposed the exploitation and created public awareness of its horrifying injustice. But no such information is available on the increasing number of "call girls" operating in the cities in luxury hotels and elsewhere or on the "new recruits" to the oldest profession, girls working in "massage parlours", cabarets, beauty salons, "health clubs" of doubtful reputation, dance schools, and other such "modern facilities". Except for hotel "call girls" this is not strictly speaking "Tourism prostitution" in the Southeast Asian style, because only a few of the clients are foreigners. The vast majority are Indians. But volunteer workers, reporters and medical practitioners are all agreed that this kind of prostitution is increasing rapidly, and because of its clandestine character, is largely responsible for the alarming spread of sexually transmitted diseases. The 1975 Report of the National Committee on the Status of Women in India mentions college girls in a South state who had taken to the streets to "earn their education", and to educated middle society girls entering the profession "because of the undue emphasis on the values of affluence. So this is not a new phenomenon.

Dr Premilla Nutur, reputed sociologist, has written several books on relations and has authored the only Indian work on "call girls". She was able to interview 150 girls, but admits that it is very difficult to collect information on the subject. Mrs Shakuntala Pill, General Secretary of the Association of Social Health, earlier known as the All India Association of Moral and Social Hygiene, feels that in the cities the new "voluntary" prostitution poses greater problems for than does the traditional prostitution in the red light districts. Prostitutes, in her opinion, are less in number and easier to approach than the "voluntary". She agrees that it is virtually impossible to break through the veil of secrecy covering every aspect of the call girl operations.

Association workers say that while they know that there are various categories of call girls working in Delhi, they cannot get any statistics. The "class" of the girl and her payment depends on where she works. Girls from the slum colonies are "called "guest houses" catering to lower income clients. An occasional news item exposes that...
activities. The Delhi Patriot reported in headlines "Call Girl Racket busted in Delhi Electric Supply Undertaking Guest House" and went on to describe the girls involved, one a deserted wife working in a beauty salon, the two others from lower middleclass families. But there was no follow-up story.

Girls who visit the large number of private "Guest Houses" which have sprung up all over Delhi's top residential colonies, come from a higher income bracket and their charges are allegedly commensurately higher. While the expensive, "aristocratic" call girls restrict their activities to luxury hotels with charges which are to run into four figures. But again there is little factual information available.

The procurement network for the call girls includes taxi drivers, hotel and guest house staff, travel agents, and, according to a Report, the members of the network keep a close watch for potential victims. They find out which girls have family problems, or financial constraints coupled with a love of luxury, which ones are "out for a good time" or for adventure, which girls are suffering from emotional frustration or on the rebound from unhappy love affairs. Informers, often from among the girls' own social circle, feed the information. In the case of working women living in hostels these agents lie in wait for potential victims at bus stops, strike up a casual conversation and work with great subtlety and tact. As Mrs. Ball remarks "It is difficult to know who is involved in these matters. It is not written on anyone's face!" Those are in the racket are the best informers for the network's agents who are everywhere, at university coffee shops, social gatherings etc. Recently a delegate to a meeting of a women's organisations, who was staying in a three star hotel in Delhi was astounded when a man tried to "pick her up" in the evening in the coffee shop where she was sitting alone. He apologised when he saw her reaction, saying that he had thought she was "one of those!"

Some girls are drawn into the call girl racket because, again, thanks to the unequal status of men and women in our society, a working girl, especially in small concerns, finds it difficult to resist the sexual advances of employers or senior staff. Where women government employees complain of such advances, it is easy to imagine the situation in offices where no protection exists. The dowry system is also responsible for pushing educated middle class girls into the call girl net. Families who cannot to meet dowry demands which are becoming increasingly expensive sometimes have to...
the idea of marriage for their daughters in our tradition bound society, and girls, unhappy in this situation, unable to find suitable employment, are tempted to try their luck in this activity, pushed possibly by frustration.

Call girls also operate in private houses and police raids on residences in expensive residential areas have found that these are in reality nothing but expensive and exclusive brothels. But police have also found that in many such cases, the girls as well as the clients, have high connections, politically and financially, and the whole affair is "hushed up". Even when such raids are reported in the press there is no follow-up, no revelation of names, no investigation. So the call girl racket remains clandestine, "protected", talked about knowledgeably by many, but investigated by none.

Students are deeply involved in this network, but here again an occasional tip of the iceberg surfaces accidentally and that is all. Some years ago a staff member of a leading women’s college in Delhi was asked to come and see the manager of a five star hotel. Mystified, she went along, to be informed that the hotel staff had found library cards belonging to several of the college students in some of the rooms. Not wanting a scandal they wanted to return the cards to the college and warn them of what was going on. The shocked staff member summoned the girls individually to talk to them, and found, to her greater shock, that while a couple were embarrassed at being found out, the larger number were unconcerned and treated the affair lightly, expressing no compunction. On the contrary they told her that the extra money took care of extra needs.

A research worker in another premier educational institution in the capital discovered a group of students who were call girls operating in residential areas like Golf Links and Sunder Nagar. One of them, from a remote eastern state, told her that she came from a family with very limited means, and her earnings as a "call girl" went to support the family at home. Far from home, she was at least "protected" because there was little chance that news of her activities would ever reach her people.

Talking to a meeting organised by the Association of Social Health some years ago Dr Kapur explained that call girls do not represent any particular section of society; they come from every socio-economic family background. In her view although call girls are, on the whole, more educated and sophisticated than the prostitute, even these
"Voluntary" prostitutes are in reality pushed into the profession because they too are victims of social and family pressures, of a different kind from those of the "forced" prostitute, but pressures all the same. According to Dr Kapur, these force a girl to take the final, decisive step. Coming from a broken home, discord with parents, resentment at too tight controls over her activities, lack of sympathy, an unhappy romance, an unhappy marital relationship, any of these can lead a girl into the life. Very seldom, in Dr Kapur's experience——although many may not agree with her—is a girl only tempted by a love of luxury and consumer attractions. Very few enter the call girl net because they enjoy the life. Those who disagree point out that in many cases it is just consumerism which tempts a girl, the lure of easy money.

Dr Kapur has found that the call girl network operates in very invidious ways. The meeting ground with potential clients is provided by middle aged women, or rich widows who host parties for those already in the network, for the potential victims and the clients. She feels that the racket is so entrenched in the metropolitan cities that the law can do little.

Another category of women who have entered the world of call girls are the wives of businessmen, officials, army officers and other such "successful" men. Writing for Social Welfare, Shergil reported that in raids conducted in Delhi the police found the wife of a successful out-of-station lawyer, a highly paid employee of an emporium, the employee of a state guest house, a film extra and a girl from "a very respectable" family. Probe magazine (August 1984) reported on an income tax raid on a house in Delhi Diplomatic Enclave where the Income Tax officials found a former air hostess "entertaining the owner.

The call girl spectrum is obviously broadbased and increasing in breadth. The wife of a senior scientist in government service was approached by the wife of a colleague of her husband, who suggested that while their husbands were out of town, would her friend like to join her in "entertaining" gentlemen on an occasional afternoon? Horrified, the scientist's wife said she was not interested but the other lady persisted in her efforts to persuade her, saying that there was nothing wrong in such activities, and that the extra money came in very handy.

Personal pressures may certainly have much to do with such women taking the
final step into this kind of activity but the growth of call girl operations is also
intimately connected with the growing permissiveness, plus the newfound, so called
"freedom" in Indian society, particularly in the semi-Westernized elite. That freedom
is not only connected with sexual freedom but the latter seems to be the most popular
expression of personal liberty, perhaps because in the past there were so many taboos
in the relations between men and women. It has become a "status" symbol for some sectio
of urban society to be permissive, and in that context some girls feel that to be a "call
girl" is to be "modern", to be doing the "in thing".

Tourism does play its role in this "new" prostitution. In the metropolitan
cities foreign tourists are "offered" such girls by touts in taxis, at hotels,
sometimes on the streets. But this is done on an individual basis and "tourism prostitu-
tion" with all its attendant degradation of women, on the mass organized scale as
it functions in some Asian countries is still unknown in India. The Government of India's
refusal to hand over tourism development projects for "destination tourism" or "rest and
relaxation" tourism is responsible for the absence of this demoralizing, shameful and
inhuman exploitation of women. Much of this was exposed with anger and passion at the
Vienna Conference in 1984. Social worker Ms. Yoon-ok Kim Sohn of South Korea described
the "kisaeng" tourism in her country where there are thousands of girls engaged in
entertaining foreign tourists. She quoted a Japanese magazine which, reporting in 1973,
gave a figure of 200,000 kisaeng girls. "This deliberate action of earning foreign
exchange by selling the flesh and souls of our women for sexual exploitation is strippin
women of human dignity" said Ms. Kim Sohn whose organization, the Protestant Association
World Mission is fighting for an end to the practice. From Thailand Ms. S'darat Sereewan
talked of the Phuket Fire Case in 1984 where girls forced into prostitution for tourist were
burned to death because they had been chained to their beds in the brothel.
Sister Mary Soledad Verpinan from the Philippines, representing the Third World
Movement against the Exploitation of Women deplored the organized "sex tours" from Japan
as well as the prostitution encouraged by American military bases.

India is free from this kind of exploitation but a variety of tourism
prostitution on a relatively minor scale does exist, particularly in Bombay and Hyderabad.
Men from the Gulf countries visiting India for a few days or months contract "muta
Dr. Prema Bali of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, has been a Family Counsellor for many years, with people coming to her from all strata of society. She agrees that the system of call girls extends through all of urban society and has become such an integral part of the social pattern that to dislodge it is impossible. She also agrees that it is equally impossible to break into the net for investigative purposes from the outside. But her experience has led her to some conclusions which differ from Dr. Kapur on why a girl enters this world.

Dr. Bali is of the opinion that the changed value system of society, both with regard to sexual permissiveness, especially among young people, and to the new material needs which dominate our increasingly consumer-oriented society are the responsible factors. It is this combination which produces the casual reaction of the college students who "lost" their library cards and who saw nothing wrong with having sexual relations for a little "useful" extra money. Those who feel that the call girl phenomenon is an "unhealthy" element in society are perhaps not in the value mainstream for what they call "unhealthy" is accepted by the majority in a certain section of society as "free". Therefore the social constraints, the social disapproval, do not exist.

Dr. Bali finds several distinctly different attitudes in girls involved in call girl activity. Where family pressures push a girl into such activity for economic reasons, so that her "income" helps with the family budget, the psychological impact is different from where a girl is selling her services purely for her own monetary benefit. But as far as the traumas are concerned Dr. Bali's conclusion is that these are such highly personalized effects, that no generalizations are possible. However the "voluntary" aspect of call girl prostitution certainly exists and there are many girls who are call girls purely for the excitement and gains involved. In Dr. Bali's experience many girls have confessed to her that after having the experience of sleeping with different men they feel that they will never be satisfied with the monogamous status of marriage. She also opines that because of the changed value systems in the younger generation pre-marital sex is acceptable to young men wanting to marry, unlike in the recent past when double standards regarding virginity were prevalent.
But there are still girls who are induced to enter this world by the network
of procurers and who initially resist. One case history cited by the AIIMS Family
Counsellor concerns a young woman brought to Dr Bali by a close relation. This woman
had been a call girl for several years in spite of her youth and the relation brought her
for counselling in the hope that she could be persuaded to change her life style. She
confessed to Dr Bali in the initial interview that as a youngster of fourteen she had been
deeply influenced by a neighbour, a very charming older woman, had become very friendly
with the family and in time, as she became older, was asked to accompany the older woman
to parties at friends' homes.

After several such occasions she was taken to a party where she was shocked
see her admired mentor behaving permissively with a man. Emotionally upset, she was
reassured by her friend that there was nothing wrong in this behaviour. Gradually she was
persuaded to try petting and mild flirtation herself. This was gradually and deliberately
encouraged until the girl was persuaded to try what it was like sleeping with a man. Findir
she enjoyed the experience she became a part of the group and now confessed that she enjoyed
her different experiences with different men. In spite of the relative's efforts this
young woman never returned to the counsellor. She obviously had no wish to change her
lifestyle, and the future which caused her parents great concern, caused her none.

The case of the two young girls Dr Bali met in court where she had gone to
attends the divorce proceedings of a patient, is at the other end of the call girl
spectrum. When she asked the two girls what they were doing in court they told her
they were involved in filing divorce action against their husbands, because their in-
laws had wanted them to prostitute themselves for money to finance their husbands' families
and they had refused.

The call girls are in a totally different category from the "forced"
prostitute. They inhabit a different world. The forced prostitute is, without exception, the
prisoner of her profession. The call girl, in most cases, is not. She may have economic
pressures it is true, but they are different and in the majority of cases, because she is
generally more educated and better qualified - call girls from the slum areas etc.
are the exception - she can find alternate means of survival or employment. In many, if
not most cases she does not want to be rehabilitated, because she does not feel rejected
by society. On the contrary she is very integrated into a certain section of that society.
marriages". In Bombay according to Dr. V.R. Bhalero of the K.M. Hospital who has
carried out a medical project for prostitutes in the red light district of Bombay,
these men "marry" girls from the slum areas, take them to hotels, visit them several
times, make all kinds of promises to them, and then disappear. The payment is good for
these poverty stricken girls and their families, but following the "marriage" and
disappearance of the "husband" the girl often has no alternative but the brothels.

In Hyderabad the "muta" marriage operation has been exposed in many press
reports and brought to the notice of the Governments of India and the Arab states.
A journalist, Kalyan Chander Jaiswal, related how poor Muslim families who normally must
have Rs.20,000 for a daughter's dowry before they can get ...he married, a sum many cannot
find, are delighted to find these "husbands" from the Gulf countries, who, instead of
demanding dowry, are willing to pay money to the girl's family. In many cases, however, a
fter only one "wedding night" in a hotel, the "husband" nowhere disappears, it is a
mystery for the girl. She cannot get talaq (divorce), and so cannot marry again.
If by any chance she is pregnant, life is even more difficult. In some cases the men
are considerate enough to get the ignorant girl to sign talaq papers at the wedding
itself, without her knowing what she was doing. These girls are immeasurably better
off, because they can get remarried. In many cases the husbands even get passports
prepared for the girls, take them to Bombay with a family escort, then disappear. Families
are easily tempted with promises of jobs for the men abroad and money for supporting the
family at home.

Fortunately, largely because of the uproar in the press, the Punjab Kesri of September 11, 1985 reported that such marriages were decreasing in number, not
because the two parties were reluctant, but because the Governments have taken note of
this scandalous operation. Both sides have brought in measures to discourage the practic
In inf., according to this report, while more than 1000 girls had received visas for the Gulf countries, in 1984 only 220 had applied.

But the marriages are, continuing for even though a family knows from the
experiences of others that their daughter may be deserted, the temptation of getting her
married to a wealthy man, even if he is many years older, overrides all other consider-
tions. No serious study has been carried out on the eventual fate of such "brides"
although the number of marriages is considerable. In some cases the Indian "bride" is taken to her husband's country but she finds that she is expected to work as a domestic servant, if not a slave, not be treated as a wife. For such girls there is very little hope of escape.

"Massage parlours" and "Health Clubs" which have mushroomed in cities like Bombay and Madras, have added a new dimension to the prostitution scene and created a growing problem. Two years ago India Today carried an article on the proliferation of such establishments in Madras. The reporter estimated that about 300 customers daily patronized the 60 or so massage parlours which are centrally located in the residential and commercial sections of the city, as well as in the suburbs. The report brought out the disturbing fact that the parlours were responsible for the spread of STD and several specialists confirmed that a large number of patients coming to them had confessed to picking up the disease at the parlours. The police raids have done little to stop the functioning of the parlours by invoking the SITA, the Suppression of Immoral Traffic of Women and Girls Act, although according to India Today police raid most parlours at least once a month.

"Most Thrilling CABARETS by selected sex bombs, Laila, Nazima, Sapna, Bindya, Usha, Dimple, Anita, Vinita, Vikki". "Daily thrilling CABARET by Amnika, Asha, Sapna, Honey, Lata, Priya and Baby". "Daily Hit-O-Hit CABARETS by selected beauties". These typical advertisements shriek out from Delhi's Every evening every day. When a foreign journalist visited one of these for a story on Delhi's night life, he was taken there by a taxi driver he knew. The small sleazy room on the outskirts of a vast teeming colony was jam-packed with taxi-drivers, truck-drivers and other men. Alcohol was a "must". The CABARET was loudly applauded with obvious appreciation, the scantily clad "selected beauties", somewhat shopworn and heavily made-up to hide the lack of beauty, gyrated provocatively and insinuatingly, more pathetic than anything else. There was even an attempt at strip-tease to the delight of the audience. This then is another facet of prostitution; openly advertised exploitation of women which is a common feature in cities and large towns, the "westernized", contemporary version of the nautch as degrading as the contemporary devadasi. Occasionally there is an news item on a raid on an "unauthorized cabaret". One wonders what that means because no Indian journalist seems
to have found this story worthwhile and there is no information on the Cabaret girls.

The Procurement Network.

Where do these Ashas and Sapnas and Dimples come from? How do they get to the Cabarets? To the brothels? The procurement network spreads all over the country, lucrative, organised, criminal in intent and action, and incredibly difficult to root out. Each person in the chain gets a percentage of the commission depending on the "quality" of the girl. Some agents are employed on a regular monthly salary! It is repeatedly alleged by social workers in this field that the reason why it is so difficult to break into the network is because people in high positions are deeply involved in the nationwide racket. Even when procurers are caught red-handed, few are punished, either because the law enforcement authorities themselves are involved, or because the message comes from powerful hidden controllers of the trade, frequently it is claimed connected with politically powerful elements, who order that no action shall be taken. In her paper mentioned earlier, Jyotsna Chatterjee has quoted from several press reports describing how women are openly sold in markets, and how there is a wide network of inter-state trafficking in women.

The modus operandi in most cases is similar. Local agents keep an eye open for possible "material". These are in touch with representatives of inter-state gangs who ensure that the girls, purchased or kidnapped, are despatched in top secrecy, either to their destination, always very far from their homes, or to "wholesale" markets, mandis where the brokers representing the controllers of the trade examine and buy the girls for their respective employers. The girls are then taken to wherever their new owners wish to place them. Details differ of course. In Uttarkashi a study of the trafficking in Rawain where Purola and Rajgarhi, the two centres of indebtedness based prostitution are situated found that the flesh trade was largely in the hands of local agents, most of them belonging to the same low caste as the girls. The agents, however, appear to be in the hands of the higher caste and more affluent villagers. Hasan estimated that 125 local agents were operating in Rawain, all of them Harijans except for six of other castes. The methods of procuring the girls from indebted husbands has already been described earlier in this report, in the portion on causes for prostitution.
The buying and selling of women in Madhya Pradesh, one of the most deplorable situations in the country, was dramatically exposed in a journalistic scoop by Delhi correspondent Ashwini Sarin in the Indian Express in April 1981. After several months in which he gained the confidence of the locals of Horena, a town which is the centre of this inhuman trade, Sarin actually purchased a girl called Kamla for Rs.2300 and brought her to Delhi as living evidence of the brutal practice which was going on openly.

Sarin's expose is the most detailed account of this trade so far. He described how this countrywide racket is controlled and operated from a group of small villages bordering three states, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, centering around the Rajasthani town of Dholpur, "Katas" or markets where women are sold are held in secrecy with armed guards on watch, eight times a year.

After a great deal of publicity and public interest had been generated about her and the way she had been exploited, Kamla disappeared. Ashwini Sarin returned to Horena in 1985 to try to find her again. He was unsuccessful and he found that there was no change in the situation in any way. But in May 1985 the Jaipur Branch of the Rajasthan High Court admitted a writ petition alleging that the local administration would perform its legal duties to put an end to the flesh trade in Dholpur district. The petition stated that complaints had been made that "women were sold and purchased within the district and this flesh trade was being done and protected by some influential and organized touts and politicians." The petition specifically mentioned that journalists had confirmed this inhuman treatment of innocent women, and gave the names of specific villages involved.

According to the petition an enquiry by a deputy Inspector General of Police had confirmed that women were sold in the district and the police had rescued one woman. The DDIG had listed the names of 15 influential persons in the district who were the protectors of this flourishing trade, and mentioned that these persons were themselves protected by the local administration so no legal action could be taken against them.

Traffickers are active all over the country. A few months ago the Kashmir police discovered that many girls abducted from West Bengal were being sold over and over again in Kashmir, often to disabled or aged Kashmiris in villages. These girls came from Bihar Muslim families who migrated from East Bengal following the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Later the local newspaper Times exposed the shocking state of affairs which had
been in existence for the past three years. The poor, usually illiterate girls were
kidnapped or abducted by Bengali and Kashmiri pimps, part of a well-organised operation
and brought to the Kashmir Valley. Most of the girls were from Murshidabad district
where, during the winter months about 2000 migrant Kashmiri labourers work every year,
some of whom were obviously part of the network. Press reports talked of 200 girls
having been brought to the Valley, of whom only a few had been located and rescued beca-
use of the involvement of the racket both of the local police as well as the village auth-
cities who shield the culprits.

Some villagers have accused the police station constables in villages where
the girl is hidden, of raping the girls before they are sold to the eventual customer.
Many of the girls are taken to remote villages and according to the police officer in
charge, who is responsible for having rescued the girls and arrested ten abductors,

it is difficult for men to operate without the cooperation of the local police.
This is not forthcoming.

Male procurers in the trafficking, in towns and cities are usually
rickshaw-pullers, cab drivers, taxi-drivers, small traders, paanwallas (betelnut sellers).
The females are elderly prostitutes or women involved in illicit liquor business. Where
call girls are concerned the procurement network is on a higher, more sophisticated lev-
but as well-knit and hard to crack, with much larger commissions. Blackmail can replace
physical violence but the criminality is identical. The call girl, however, the "aristo-
matric" ones in particular, usually have an easier future than their poorer counterpart.

In Tamil Nadu the JNP uncovered a new angle to the racket. Ulunderpet town,
about 220 kilometres from Madras, has it appears been a famous "roadside prostitution"
site for decades, known to truck drivers as the "Relaxing" spot. The prostitution is
organised by 11 brokers known as the "business companies". The police station is
young, just one kilometre away. Each broker owns four to five women, purchased in nearby towns,
but some in distant places. Each broker has two juniors responsible for taking the
"commodities" to the roadside and each junior is paid Rs. 5 per night plus refreshments.

The broker told volunteer workers that each "business company" pays Rs. 150 weekly to
the police station as "mamool", plus two rupees plus refreshments for each night a
constable is on night duty. Most of the women were there because of poverty. Again
poverty, illiteracy, lack of employment opportunity, are the responsible combined factors.

There are moreover illiterate women who are duped by greedy husbands, fathers or brothers into signing on stamped paper, which they cannot read, stating that they are seeking divorce on grounds like infidelity or cruelty. The stamped paper is executed by a notary, also in the racket, and the woman is "married" off to some other man, again a contract on stamped paper. In this way the ignorant woman is sold from man to man, with legal sanction.

Victims of trafficking are also sold to foreign markets, to Singapore, the Gulf countries etc. Many Nepalese women are caught in the net and Indian brothels have a fair number of Nepalese and Tibetan women. Manushi, the magazine, run by women, which highlights women's problems and oppression, reported some time ago that the procurement mafia had been increasingly active in procuring Nepalese girls and a JVP worker had witnessed the arrival of a minibus filled with girls from Nepal in the red light district of Allahabad. Manushi also reported a case of three young Nepalese women who were travelling from New Delhi, and who were deliberately separated from their four male family members by a railway official with the connivance of the police. The women and children have not been heard of since. In other cases too railway staff and railway police have been found to be involved in the procurement network. The story of the Nepalese girl, Tulsa, abducted and made to join the Bombay brothels at 13, whose case was reported widely in the press when she was taken to the hospital, suffering from syphilis and TB and other diseases, focussed public attention on the fate of such Nepalese girls, but only momentarily and today few people remember Tulsa.

In the case of devadasis, procurement is much easier and agents run few risks. They just attend the dedication ceremonies and make their human bargains with the priest, or the family. Often priests themselves are the agents. Sometimes the girls are whisked off to cities right away, some have their "deflowering" rites done by local patrons and then end up in the brothels, others are enticed away, as mentioned earlier, to join older devadasis already in the trade whose prosperity they envy.
How the Prostitutes Live

Conditions under which prostitutes live and function, whether it is the human cages of Bombay, Calcutta's Kalighat area, the famous Gaiason Bastion Road or B.Roafi as its commonly known or the red light districts of smaller towns, have everything common. They are miserable, overcrowded, dirty, unhygienic, run-down—very different from the life of luxury and ease painted by elderly prostitutes turned procurresses to their innocent young victims. Brothel management is very similar all over the country. In Calcutta there are "mashies", some self-appointed, others paid by more affluent employers; Delhi and the north there are the "gharwalis". These are the brothel keepers, the mashis. Sometimes an aged prostitute is the supervisor of a brothel, in charge of cooking, looking after children and other "household" chores. A brothel is run on purely commercial lines but here the employees enjoy no rights, and are usually at the complete mercy of the madam. Intimidation and physical violence are used relentlessly to enforce discipline and check rebellion or attempted escape.

Madams "train" their girls by various means. Girls who come from communities where prostitution is hereditary or traditional, have less difficulty in adjusting to the profession but for others it is a tough, heartbreaking experience and the brothel is like a prison. There appears to be a routine technique of socialization. The girl, suffering from the trauma of being sold, kidnapped or deceived, already feels helpless and completely isolated, cut off from her family and familiar surroundings, fearful and insecure, perhaps terrorized. In most cases she is taken away far from home, perhaps in a totally different linguistic environment so she cannot communicate with anyone. Her sense of isolation and vulnerability, absence of any protection and security, is calculated to wear down her resistance. She cannot escape because she has nowhere to go, for in most cases she feels that after her experience her family will not want her back. If she has been forcibly seduced or raped this is common, she is ashamed of being dishonoured and sees no alternative to prostitution. If her captors are somewhat gentler, she may have been coaxed or cajoled into the profession. Ultimately, judging by the large number of case histories cited by sociologists and animalists, except in rare cases, it appears that the girl accepts the situation. If she resists, she is beaten into submission.

The few studies that have been carried out show that gradually the value
system of the girl changes. Eventually many develop an attitude of hatred for their clients, for all males, because the man is identified with deceit and exploitation. It is not surprising that prostitutes who have been in the profession for several years become hardened and cynical, with few expectations from life or from other human beings. They realize that their professional career is limited, from ten to thirty years, depending on their health. Towards the latter years, in many cases after 40, their health deteriorates because of the way of life, their environment and lack of proper medical attention. Their future has no security. A few may become carphawia, some may find work in brothels in other capacities, others perhaps turn procurers. A few find jobs as maidservants but this is not easy. There is too much discrimination against them from society. So the majority are left without financial provision for their old age. Many and their lives in Varanasi or Puri, begging from pilgrims.

Only a handful are fortunate enough and shrewd enough to insure against old age. But Kanaka of Naihat, a Calcutta prostitute mentioned by Joardar is an example of what often happens in this environment of pimps, agents and deceit. Kanaka had a house and gold given to her by a permanent client to ensure her future comfort. But two years after his death she had lost everything to the maschi and the pimps, and was a pauper. Ignorant and illiterate, she had signed it all away without knowing what she was doing.

But Joardar found that the self-image of the prostitute was very different from what one might imagine. Some, he observed, see themselves as criminals, but others do not think of their profession as vicious or corrupt. They see it as just another profession and feel they should be part of conventional society. They see ordinary women as hypocritical and are knowledgeable enough to comment that many women who are married are doing exactly the same thing as prostitution but with husbands under the marital facade.

While all this may be true the reality of conditions in a brothel are sordid and miserable. Writing in The Sunday Observer (Bombay) Jyoti Sabherwal captured the atmosphere of the G.B.Road "kothas": "Dark, dingy, stinking staircases lead to these brothels which are approximately 64, according to police records, though other sources put the number at 90. Painted, unsmiling faces, 15 to 20 girls huddled up in each flat. There's a spread of make-up kits owned by each individual. They dare not open their mouths in the
presence of their own madam". Another report describes the dirt and sordidness behind the tawdry superficial glitter of G. B. Road, the young children brought up in this environment. Sabherwal also mentions how a nine months pregnant prostitute, harassed literally to death by her madam, had jumped off the roof and killed herself shortly before the reporter visited the area.

The children are innocent victims for while prostitutes are devoted to childre of the little ones know only the brothel world and are inducted into the business as soon the mothers care for the children properly.

Natural consequence. Those prostitutes who can afford to do so send off their children to good schools in other cities so they will not know their mothers' profession and will hopefully, escape the stigma. But the majority of mothers cannot afford this luxury.

Most prostitutes are condemned for life, for few escape, through marriage by running away. Those who come from areas like Uttarkashi where prostitution has no name in the majority of families, have, as has been described earlier, a chance to return to living and make a life of their own, if they have not become addicted to the profession. But for the vast majority there is no future, for they live from day to day, unable to save.

These women keep very little of the money they earn by selling themselves. According to Nimmi Rai, President of the recently formed prostitutes' union in Delhi, the Patita Udhar Sabha, each prostitute has to pay a sizeable "registration fee", unofficially to the police who keep in informal, but regular register in which every prostitute's name entered so she cannot escape the police net! For every 20 rupees a woman earns she must give 5 rupees to the police as "protection money". This is divided up amongst the police personnel. 2 rupees goes to the brothel keeper, and one rupee to the pimp. The girl herself thus gets only one rupee out of 20 for every client and in many cases clients pay no more than 1.

Pushpa from Nepal, 24 years old, told Femina, (October 23rd 1984) that although she made Rs. 1200 a month she had no money with her. The brothel keeper charged three rupees for a bucket of water and interest on whatever she spent on buying things for the prostitute. She was sold to a eunuch for Rs. 3000, and because she resisted being a prostitute he kept her "day and Night" until she gave a breakdown of what a Calcutta prostitute spent daily.

It is interesting as an expose of how easy it is for these women to become insulted
to loan sharks, in many cases the brothel keepers or the retired prostitutes who rent out rooms to women working on their own. This woman earned Rs.40 daily and her expenses were:

- Rent: Rs.10.
- Lighting and Fan: Rs.2.
- Pimp: Rs.10.
- Servant: Rs.2.
- Food for self and servant: Rs.10.
- Miscellaneous: Rs.2.

Total: Rs.36.

This left her just four rupees for everything else; clothes and make-up (all essentials for the trade); medical care, a major expense for most women; payment for Puja (prayers) on festival days. Under these conditions the women have to live on loans and this often means that they are literally "bodily" mortgaged to the loan-givers, whether they are madams, the so-called "doctors" who cater to the brothels or the eating places which provide food.

Religion is an important part of the prostitute's budget. For these women, rejected by society, are very religious and the priests who come to the red light areas to perform Puja find it a lucrative business. Many rooms in brothels have pictures of the deities and prostitutes tell visitors that since man has deceived them all the way, Bhagwan (God), is the most important thing for them. They keep fasts religiously, celebrate every festival and in these respects behave like perfect housewives. Their special deity is Kartik, represented as a fine, good looking specimen of manhood, but they also worship Saraswati, the goddess of learning and culture, and the monkey-represented god, Hanuman. Besides religion their only other pleasure seems to be the cinema and they are avid movie goers. Otherwise there is little joy in their lives. (All these comments apply only to the red light district professionals.)

Volunteer workers, reporters, and doctors all agree that prostitutes are usually devoted mothers, and as mentioned those who can send their children out of the environment and try to give them a good education. Many make the supreme sacrifice for a mother of breaking all contact with the children so they will not suffer from any disadvantage. One Bombay prostitute known to Dr. Bablara had two daughters in college in Delhi who have no idea who their mother is, although she pays for their maintenance and education to her sister who is bringing up the girls. In the reports on the devadasis there are many similar instances. But there are mothers who, for their own future security, see that their daughters enter the profession as a sort of old age insurance. In most cases histories reveal these as exceptions, unless there is a tradition of hereditary prostitution.
Police harassment is a routine in a prostitute's life. Weekly or monthly payments are demanded and cannot be refused. Nirmal Bai told the press that from the sub-inspector to the constable the police have their different rates and the "take-in" is considerable. She estimates that since there are 90 brothels in the G.P. Road, the police collection amounts to Rs. 20,000 per month for a constable and Rs. 2,10,000 for a sub-inspector (These are her estimates, for obvious reasons unchecked by any other source). Police also take money from pimps and, say the prostitutes, blackmail into lying them or giving them their possessions. The police of course deny these accusations. But in an unusual programme on Delhi Televison, prostitutes from the G.P. Road were interviewed and although they determinedly kept their backs to the camera, they told the interviewer frankly how the police came regularly for payment and confirmed that each officer and constable had his set "fee". They also stated that the police demanded and were given free service from whichever girl they wanted and whenever. "We have to" said the prostitute being interviewed. Reports on prostitutes from Bombay and Calcutta confirm the police payment racket.

Being completely under the thumb of the brothel keepers the majority of girls and women have to take on as many clients a day as their madam demands. Depending on the popularity of the kotha, the girls are exploited mercilessly with no consideration for their age or health. Some are forced to submit to sadistic or perverted clients. They have no choice in the clients unless the madam herself is selective. But the brothel keepers and pimps want to get as much as they can for their money's worth and wear and tear on the prostitute is of little concern to them, for new "material" is always available. Young girls, even teenagers, are forced to entertain several men a day, and as the agent told Ashwini Sarin in "Kamla country" 10 men a day for 250 days a year made Rs. 6,000 a viable price for a girl.

Clients come from every section of society. The "aristocratic" call girls enter the top echelons of society, and a recent cover story in the English Language weekly, "Looker", listed by name various political figures who have been involved in escapades with call girls. But studies on clients are rare, although sociologists concur that the sole problem of prostitution cannot be studied properly unless enough is known about...
their clients. This lacuna is another manifestation of the double standards accepted
for men and women, a duality also evident in the implementation of the Suppression of
Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act, the SITA, where clients are not even mentioned
and women are treated as criminals."

One detailed study on clients was commissioned by the Planning Commission in
1966 and three doctors studied 400 men treated in the State Hospital for venereal
diseases. Although this kind of study has its obvious limitations they came up with some interesting
findings. Of the 400 clients about 40 per cent came from the 21-25 years age group,
followed by the 16 to 20 years and the 26-30 years groups. About 60.5 per cent of the
men were unmarried and only about 3.5 per cent were widowers, the rest were married.
The great majority of this crosssection were illiterate or "just-literate". Many
were immigrants into the city, coming for employment, and living away from their
families because of lack of accommodation. Their temporary rootlessness encouraged
their brothel visits.

The largest number were skilled workers, followed by unskilled workers.
Washermen, barbers and tailors came next, then peons (messengers), attendants, truck
drivers, cleaners etc. Clerks, supervisors and other "white-collar workers made up only
6.5 per cent while high school and college students were only 5.2 per cent. Many of
the clients suffered from some sort of family insecurity — either one or both parents
had died — and most belonged to the low income families where sexual permissiveness
was not unusual. 51 per cent visited professional prostitutes and about 28 per cent
visited private ones, while 17 per cent visited both. Visiting professional prostitutes
was often a group activity. 65 per cent of the sample clients were adolescent boys,
and the high percentage of bachelors. But most of them had no hobbies or other
activities except work, so visiting prostitutes was their only "entertainment", apart from
the ever-present cinema. They confessed that they visited brothels after going to
the cinema.

Reasons given for these visits were curiosity about sex, motivation by seeing
films, company of friends, emotional backlash from unhappy love affairs, search for
sexual outlets because of the custom of men marrying girls who had still to reach
puberty and some other reasons. Out of station students confessed that their new found freedom in hostel life, plus having more money than they were used to at home, tempted them to drink and visit prostitutes. Students also figured in the small sample study carried out by sociologist Sadanand Jambagir in Belgaum. Out of 15 clients eight were students, two were teachers, three clerks and two police officers. The other 15 were true drivers, tongawalas and mechanics. There is a certain similarity in the two samples. These are of course clients of what one might call the classical type of prostitute. No studies appear to have been done in this country of the clients of call girls, which is not surprising since this 'clandestine' prostitution is the most secret.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

It is interesting that the study for the Planning Commission used as samples patients being treated for venereal diseases, for it is widely accepted by medical sources that prostitution is the major source of infection for sexually transmitted diseases. The spread of STD in India over recent years has caused serious alarm. Venereal diseases are now the third ranking dangerous disease after malaria and tuberculosis. But surprisingly this has not provoked organised efforts, official or unofficial, to introduce effective health measures to attack the problem and stop the spread of these diseases.

One major difficulty in attacking STD in India is that unlike most developed countries India has no facilities for 'contact tracing'. In developed countries laws are strictly enforced making it compulsory for people suffering from STD, not only to go for medical treatment, but also to reveal the source of their infection. In India no such laws, have been passed, none are being drawn up, nor is the general public sufficiently educated about STD to be aware of the grave consequences of neglecting such diseases out of fear of social condemnation.

Prostitution may have been accepted as the major source of infection, but no investigations have been carried out to find out how the girls get infected in the first place. Young girls arriving at a brothel are not suffering from these diseases, after the procurers who violate them in order to subjugate them, or their first clients...
who are already diseased, who assault their virginity, transmit the disease to the girls. But with the easy "automatic" condemnation of the prostitute by society, which includes the medical as well as the law enforcing authorities and male sociologists, the prostitute is automatically defined as the culprit. The possible guilt of the man is ignored.

Bombay's Indian Health Organisation has done pioneer work under Dr. Gillada in trying to curb the spread of STD among prostitutes. They found that in the Kamatipura area of Bombay, the best known red light district, 90 per cent of the prostitutes who attended their health camp were suffering from VD and in most cases lack of medical treatment was evident. Other camps in Pune and Bombay suburbs confirmed these trends. Dr. Gillada of the IHO told India Today which ran an in-depth story on STD that most of the women were treated by "quacks" operating so called "clinics" in the red light districts. Often, according to other reports these 'quacks' are assisted by elder prostitutes for whom this is a good way to make money when they become too old for the profession. Dr. Gillada said that since these unscrupulous men have a vested interest in the ill-health of their patients, they make no effort to cure them.

Dr. Bhalero's personal experience highlights the inborn prejudice, even in medical circles, against the unfortunate prostitute. When she wanted to take up an area in Bombay's "Cages" as a "service area" and asked for a skin specialist to work with her, not only did the specialist refuse but disallowed the assistant to accompany Dr. Bhalero. In her opinion home health care was necessary for prostitutes wherever possible since they were reluctant to go to hospitals where the staff treated them badly, or refused to treat them at all, partly from fear of infection, assuming that all prostitutes had STD, and that STD was highly contagious and could be easily passed on to nurses and attendants.

A man came to Dr Bhalero and asked her to come to the brothel and treat a woman who was ill. The doctor found that the woman was suffering, not from STD but from spinal tuberculosis. She brought the woman to the hospital only to find that certain women doctors would not go near her in spite of the Hippocratic oath. When she went to treat women in the red light area, hospital van drivers deliberately "lost" their way, telling her "Why don't you leave these women to their fate?". Dr Bhalero deplores
the callousness of people who are not interested in prostitution as a social problem, but only in "sex and sensation". Prostitutes themselves have told reporters that they do not get proper treatment in hospitals. They say that only mobile clinics visiting their areas of residence can give proper treatment. But nowhere is any such medical facility given to them.

STD are also spread by infected men who want virgin girls for their pleasure or because of the despicable belief that sexual intercourse with a virgin is a cure for venereal disease or for sterility. These factors combine to condemn very young girl children to a diseased life. The Patna Association for Social Hygiene reported a tragic case where two girls, aged three and five, were raped and infected by a male servant suffering from syphilis, who believed in this criminal myth. A Hyderabad skin specialist, J.M. Aurangabadkar told India Today that every year he treated at least four girls of four or five years who had been infected by the disease in similar cases. This kind of ignorant hearsay, with its fearful consequences, needs to be taken cognisance of by the general public and exposed as nonsense through education on STD, using every channel of the media including radio and television.

If the spread of STD is to be checked, the authorities agree that there must be mobile, free clinics in the red light districts and that legislation ensuring that clients as well as the women are checked up regularly. Otherwise as concerned doctors have pointed out "What is the point of curing the prostitute if, on his next visit, the diseased client infects her again?" A municipal dispensary in Bombay's red light area has found that prostitutes hesitate to visit the VD dispensary because it is run by male doctors so what is required is sympathetic, understanding women doctors assisted by social workers, to create the necessary confidence and overcome the psychological barriers of years of social condemnation.

The fear is that even if all these measures are taken, women will continue to be harassed while the men will evade medical examination. But at least such measures would help the prostitutes whose diseases remain untreated with all the tragic developments caused by these diseases, often because they have insufficient funds for treatment, or because their madams are not interested in "wasting" money on treatment. STD is only one of
the health problems from which prostitutes suffer. Their lives in congested rooms, exposure to men who also have other diseases, and their lack of proper diet through poverty, also lead to tuberculosis, anaemia, gynecological and other health problems. The lack of medical attention almost ensures that the majority of the women will suffer in their later years. Doctors treating minor girls engaged in the trade in a Bombay hospital concluded that even a few years in the profession seriously affects their health. Many of the women receive major physical injuries, all part of their world of violence, often suffer from results of sadism and perversion, many suffer psychologically with severe depressions, fearful nightmares, insomnia and suicidal tendencies. Sheila Barse, a tireless journalist crusader for oppressed and downtrodden women wrote in the Hindustan Times how "a prostitute leads a life totally devoid of any kind of relationships we [readers] thrive on... Her world consists of the predatory culture of the flesh trade ... the commercialized violation of a woman's body ... the pimp's moral system. She knows that instead of leading a peaceful life in her old age, she would oppress young girls and live on the sales proceeds of these victimized girls". In these words Barse has condensed the whole tragedy of the prostitutes being. But there is no help forthcoming for society has imprisoned the prostitutes in an isolated existence by making them social outcasts.

The call girls are of course in a different category and their dual existence makes them a greater danger for the transmittal of STD. Yet their style of life protects them from the greater hardships of the customary prostitute. Medical sources agree that the increase in STD in recent years is explained solely by the increase in this unorganized prostitution of the semi-elite and elite, and the growth of general permissiveness in social behaviors. To enforce legislation on these call girls and their clients is virtually impossible. Unless the advent of the new, very real threat from AIDS forces a new public approach to the problem through sheer fear.

While working with the Bombay prostitutes, Dr. Bhalero investigated the incidence of STD in children and her findings confirm one of the most appalling aspects of prostitution in India, child prostitution. Dr. Bhalero points out that because no provision is made for young girls of orphanage and street-child welfare.
In the procurers who can make a high profit on "virgin prostitutes". This shocking situation has not been exposed as fully as it should have been, either by child welfare authorities, by women's organisations or the Press, not even the sensational papers. Dr Dhalero's team investigated and gave medical attention to 500 prostitutes in Bombay's red light district, out of whom 80 were child prostitutes of 15 years and less. The investigation found out that child prostitutes inevitably end up permanently in the profession. Perhaps the most horrifying aspect of the situation is that these children are sold repeatedly as "virgins", socially to men suffering from STD because of the criminal belief mentioned earlier, about VD being cured by intercourse with a virgin. The case history of a girl who was forced into selling liquor at the age of nine by relatives, then tortured and finally forced into the profession makes harrowing reading. When Dr Dhalero met her, the girl suffering from STD, had become a chronic case with no hope for a cure.

Reform and Legislation Measures

Attempts to reform prostitution go back to the days of the Hon'ble John Company, when in 1668 the Company authorities brought out regulations against prostitution and brought brothels under their control. In 1860 provisions were included in the Indian Penal Code to prevent prostitution of girls under age and against a woman's wish, along with some measures against kidnapping and procuring. In 1875 social reformer Keshav Chandra Sen tried to prevent the supply of Indian and Japanese girls and women to British troops stationed in India. Various laws were enacted over the years, committees set up which made their recommendations and, in 1923 the Calcutta Suppression of Immoral Traffic Bill recognised for the first time the need to rescue minor girls (below 16) from brothels. Legislation to prevent the dedication of Devadasis was passed in several states in the 1920s. Anti-Imperial Traffic Acts continued to be passed in various states over the years and between 1923 and 1953 fifteen such acts had been added, plus Police Acts and Municipality Acts which dealt with some aspects of prostitution. Living on the earnings of prostitution, soliciting in public streets, managing a brothel, procuring girls for prostitution...
were some of the activities which invited punishment.

After India became independent in 1947, other aspects of the problem were recognized and in 1954 the Advisory Committee on Social and Moral Hygiene was appointed by the Central Social Welfare Board to go into the whole question. This Committee, under the Chairwomanship of Lady Danyanthy Rama Rau paid attention for the first time to the human side of the problem and laid down guidelines for attacking it, stating that "... policies and programmes much wider in scope and more far-reaching in character have to be considered to combat this evil... The question of prostitution cannot, therefore, be considered except in the context of national programmes of full employment, economic advancement, social justice and general raising of standards of life of all sections of people." The Committee report classified prostitutes into four groups: a) hereditary groups bound by community and social pattern; b) religious and traditional groups; c) victims of social and sociological conditions; d) highly sexed pathological cases and temporarily immoral individuals. The Committee proposed that 80 state homes and 324 district shelters or reception centres should be opened all over the country. It recommended certain measures for enforcing the existing laws properly and recommended research on these social problems based on intensive field work. Many of these recommendations, repeated by other Committees in later years, remain to be implemented.

In 1950 India signed the International Convention for the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls, and as a follow-up legislated the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act December 1956, the SITA. The Act is intended to supplement the provisions of the Indian Penal Code 1860 which dealt with procurement of women under certain circumstances. The SITA defines the terms "brothel", "prostitutes", "prostitution", "girl" etc. and lays down measures to suppress traffic and abolish brothels and commercialized prostitution. It also provides for establishing protective homes, rehabilitation measures and education and training of women rescued from prostitution. It does not forbid prostitution per se. (The Act is included as an Annexure to this report). The reformative and rehabilitative aspects after rescue are given great emphasis.
In practice however the Act has proved ineffective and difficult to implement for many important reasons, some purely logistical, others connected with the basic human attitudes to the whole question of prostitution in this country adopted by the public, the bureaucrats, the judiciary, the law enforcement authorities and also by the majority of social workers. In spite of the Rama Rau Committee guidelines, little change in approach is evident. In spite of the Amendment Act to the SITA in 1978 passed after the experience of the intervening years had brought out certain inadequacies in the legislation, the SITA has bitterly failed in attacking the problem.

Some of the important provisions of the Act are:

1. Punishment for keeping or allowing premises to be used as a brothel.
2. Punishment for living on the earnings of prostitution.
3. Procuring, including or taking a woman or girl for the sake of prostitution.
4. Detaining a woman or girl in premises where prostitution is carried on.
5. Prostitution in or in the vicinity of public places.
6. Seducing or soliciting for the purpose of prostitution.
7. Seduction of a woman or girl in custody.
8. Special police officer and advisory body.
9. Search without warrant.
10. Rescue of girl.

Looking superficially at these provisions it is difficult to see why the legislation has not proved satisfactory. One explanation is hinted at in a comment by K.C.K. Raja, Principal of the Police Training College in Mysore. He points out that SITA is an act of social legislation, and therefore for it to be successful, the section of society to which it is aimed must realize the need for enforcement and recognize that it derives benefit from such legislation. This, he says, is not true in the case of the prostitutes. Raja further points out that in the case of the SITA which deals with women and girls, the accused parties are those same "females" and the search of a woman can only be conducted by a woman, and women are also required to be present when premises suspected of being used for immoral traffic are searched. On neither side of the law are women prepared to cooperate with the Act. The accused woman tries every means to avoid appearing in court because she is afraid and feels that SITA is aimed against her and is not for her benefit. The "respectable" woman expected to accompany the police is not willing to cooperate with the authorities because she does not want to get mixed up with prostitutes.
The basic flaw in the Act appears to be the spirit behind it. For although it aims to stop a practice in which women are the exploited victims, of what society accepts in clandestine practice but condemns as deviant and immoral in public with sanctimonious hypocrisy, it treats the prostitutes as criminals, not as victims. The clients of the prostitutes are not mentioned in the Act at all, and although in the view of some sociologists and feminists they are more to blame, since they create the demand for prostitution, get off scotfree. Again the basis for these double standards comes back to the accepted inequality between man and woman. Those concerned with the whole question have pointed out that the Indian Penal Code, which remains the law in spite of its antiquity, lays down in Section 497 that if a married woman has sexual intercourse with a man other than her husband, the husband can move a criminal action against the other man and prosecute him on the grounds of adultery. The court does not recognise that the married woman, can of her own desire indulge in extra-marital sex. The woman is the property of the husband in the eyes of the Court and society, so that instead of demanding a divorce from his wife, the husband takes action against someone who is violating his property. A woman cannot take the same action against a wife who commits adultery with her husband, because her husband is not her property.

Discussing this duality of approach Amit Dhanda of the Faculty of the Law in Delhi University points out that certain provisions of the SITA are aimed at protecting society from the "nuisance" aspects of prostitution, without thinking of how these will affect the prostitute. Because it does not prohibit prostitution per se but makes it difficult for women to practise the profession, the Act made the profession clandestine, and this, in turn, leads to harassment of the women by enforcement officials. It is interesting to contrast the success of the anti-devadasi legislation with the failure of the SITA. If Raja's analysis is acceptable then the explanation is clear. For while prostitutes see the SITA as anti-prostitutes, the devadasis who have rebelled have been convinced that the legislation is for their benefit and it is their participation in the fight against devadasi which has started them on the road to success.

The SITA totally fails to recognise the guidelines laid down by the Rama Rau Committee for attacking the socio-economic factors leading to prostitution, or other
Amitdhanda's strong criticism is that the Act seems to operate on the premise that prostitution is a phenomenon independent of social conditions, which is practised due to the "individual, immoral predilection of the prostitute".

Raja has pointed out that the practical difficulties of enforcement according to the SITA's provisions, as already mentioned, it is virtually impossible for the police to find "respectable" women of the area who will accompany them for a search which normally takes place "after sunset and before sunrise". Another major problem is that since women apprehended under the Act can be bailed out, persons posing as relatives apply for custody of the women and take them away. Even a woman wants to be rescued, pimps and procurers, in reality her jailors, often make it virtually impossible for the police to detain her, because they come with legal support to "bail" her out.

Since a woman can only be searched by a woman, at least according to the law, the Act makes special provision for assistance by women police to the special police officer appointed for this work but in reality statistics show that there are not nearly enough women police to fulfill this requirement. The statistical surveys of the SITA put out by the government seldom show the number of women police officers appointed (or even the number of such officers appointed). In 1975 the total was given as 85 for whole of India. The Act also provides for a non-official body of not more than five social workers of that area but so far this provision has largely remained on paper. Mrs. Shakuntala Lal, when questioned about this, remarked that it has not been done to her knowledge.

Raja points out that even if this provision was implemented it would necessarily be restricted to areas where some social worker's organisation was functioning with a large number of workers, a very rare situation. Special Police Officers to enforce the Act should be allocated solely for this work but according to Raja, presently officers with other duties are only acting in this capacity. Since no special officers have been sanctioned for SITA, officers have only limited time to attend to the SITA proceedings. And to add to their own difficulties such officers can only take action in a restricted area. Raja cites the theoretical case of a girl taken from Bombay to Delhi for immoral purposes. The special officer in Bombay would have to ask his
counterpart in Delhi to take over the case. This requires "high level coordination and cooperation" which in normal circumstances is not available.

Nor are there enough protective homes. Under the Act the special officer must produce rescued girls before the Magistrates who are supposed to arrange intermediate custody pending trial in such homes. But because these are few in number, custody often means "Ordinary Judicial Custody" which carries an implication of criminality, another obvious and serious disadvantage for the women. Kiran Bedi, the reputed police officer, who has dealt extensively with the problem says that the police need to have panels of names of social workers located in various areas who will keep in touch with the police regularly, and when the police can contact immediately they find a girl, particularly one relatively new to the trade who wants assistance to escape from the profession. She feels that there should be a close link between the Government, Social Welfare authorities and voluntary workers so the efforts to help those who can be rehabilitated are persistent and patent. The ease with which prostitutes are bailed out hampers police efforts for rescue and rehabilitation because the women are whisked away before a social worker can approach them.

If there was some way of keeping regular records on the inmates of brothels up-to-date, Ms. Bedi felt that it would be possible to check on new entrants to find out how they came and from where. It would then be possible to help those who are being restrained forcibly. More interest by voluntary organizations could make implementation of SITA more effective. But under the circumstances described above and partly because the hardened prostitutes see no other alternative open to them and because society will not accept them back, Ms. Bedi is of the opinion that little can be done. She added that volunteer workers could be a great help by keeping a watch on the comings and goings of fresh recruits to the brothels and informing the police immediately.

Critics of the SITA allege that the provisions against traffickers are not efficiently implemented and this largely responsible for the legislation not being effective. Again they allege that powerful interests protect the traffickers. It is interesting to note that in the Statistical Surveys on the SITA implementation
carried out annually by the National Institute of Social Defence, the figures for 1980-81 show there were 2219 cases involving males and 13985 concerning females. But only 72 males had cases registered against them for procuring. 62 males were sentenced to prison as against 1379 females. Given the vast procurement network the figures graphically illustrate the failure of SITA.

In an interesting new development the Bharatiya Patita Udhar Sabha, an organisation established for the welfare of prostitutes in Delhi, has filed a writ petition challenging the provisions of the SITA. The petition filed by Mr. Khersiti Lal Bhola argues that SITA is ultravires of the Constitution of India because it imposes unreasonable restrictions on the fundamental rights guaranteed to every citizen under the Constitution. The petitioner asks: Why should prostitutes not be allowed to form cooperatives so they can get the maximum payment for their services? Why should they not be allowed to form an organisation and allowed to earn their living? Should prostitution be considered a profession or not? The petitioner questions why children of prostitutes should not be entitled to the same benefits and social position as enjoyed by other children. He points out that children of prostitutes are denied admission to schools on the ground that the name of the father is unknown, that through no fault of their own such children are forced to carry on the mothers' profession. The petition also says that the SITA gives no guidelines for regulating the profession, nor does it ensure that new entrants are not forced into the trade.

The failure of SITA is obvious in every aspect of the continuing immoral traffic in women which it was supposed to suppress. Girls continue to bought and be sold in places known to the authorities; the G.T. Road brothels thrive under the very eyes of the enforcement authorities; there are around 50,000 "cages" in Bombay where prostitutes openly solicit; pimps and brothel keepers carry on their activities unchecked except for routine "raids" by the police which have become a farce, both for the police and for those engaged in what is a criminal activity for under the SITA all these are punishable. The government controlled television services broadcast interviews with prostitutes on the same programme on which the interviewer discusses
the problems of prostitution with the Commissioner of police of the national capital. Under the Sita prostitutes, pimps and all others involved should all be charged with violation of the Act. Yet they operate openly making a mockery of the law.

The lack of will to enforce the Act, which lies at the heart of the failure, is difficult to understand. No attempts have been made to correct the enormous lacuna in enforcement staff without which the police cannot be effective. The advisory committees of social workers and others which have a vital role, both in enforcement and in rehabilitation have not even been appointed in most cases, and even where they exist on paper, do not function. Nor have the facilities for rehabilitation provided for in the Act been set up.

Even more extraordinary is the fact that women's organisations which have taken up many women's issues over the past few years, sometimes with great stridency, and some success, have not been interested in the cause of hundreds and thousands of prostitutes all over the country, the vast majority of whom have been forced into the profession against their will because of the sexual bias feminists fighting against. No women's organisation has demanded that the SITA be replaced, or at least amended, so that the prostitute is treated not as a criminal, but as a victim of the failure of society to solve the problem of the many socio-economic pressures which oppress a woman from her childhood and force her into the profession.

The only explanation seems to lie in the attitude of society at every level to prostitutes. Dr Ehalero of Bombay painted a graphic picture of the contempt and distaste displayed by hospital staff even in professional attitudes. Joardar relates how the study of prostitution has been inhibited by fear if the social stigma attached to anyone who ventures into the red light districts, even social scientists. He cites his own experience. While he was carrying on his investigations, relations who had heard from friends of his visits to the area refused to talk to him, and he had great difficulty explaining the purpose of his visits. He opines that this is the reason so little research has been carried out. He was able to continue his work only when, as a local politician, he was able to make contacts with the underworld which gave him an entry into the red light area.

Writing in Social Health last year Dr J.Visurathao Jeya Singh reveals his anti-prostitute bias in the title of his article "Social Welfare for Harlots" and goes on
to talk of women who "enter this sex-satisfying profession". "Harlots" he says "otherwise known as prostitutes, are vulnerable sections of society who need special care, assistance, services and guidance" as if these women are in a special category of the rest of society. He makes no attempt to disguise his distaste and bias.

In the case of devadasis, because voluntary organisations have worked with them, with sympathy and understanding, the desire for reform, the hope of rehabilitation, the confidence that an alternative is possible, had been born in the devadasis themselves. Given the same approach, the larger problem of prostitution could be tackled the same way.

The failure of the SITA, however, strengthened the voice of those who favoured what is called the 'regulationist system to control prostitution. This calls for "legalisation" of the profession and the licensing of prostitutes. These circles believe that prostitution cannot be wiped out, that it should not be stopped, because it is necessary for satisfying male sexuality which is a natural biological condition. They claim that licensing will free the prostitute from the clutches of brothel-keepers, pimps and the police.

One of the strongest supporters for licensing is Mr Kherati Lal Bhola mentioned earlier in connection with the Delhi prostitutes union and the petition against the SITA. Bhola claims that before the Act there was no police harassment of Delhi prostitutes. He also claims that before 1947 prostitutes used to go, on their own, for regular medical check-ups to the Victoria Zenana Hospital. But, now, because they are not given proper treatment in hospitals and clinics, they will not go. He is fighting for licenses only for prostitutes, not for brothel-keepers and pimps who would be liable for punishment in his view. By the licensed prostitutes would be freed from their clutches and their own masters. Asked how new girls would come into the profession if procurers and pimps were eliminated he replied that they would come, that even the SITA had not been able to stop this activity, that this was the "human element" and would continue.

Journalist Tavleen Singh is of the view that the deterioration of conditions in the brothels of the G.B. Road is because of police harassment. Since the brothels are illegal under the SITA they exist only by leave of the police, a permission which is secured by regular "protection" payments and free "service" to the police. Other licennin
supporters claim that by restricting prostitution to a separate locality, licensing would reduce the crime that springs up around brothels under present circumstances and would help enforcement of law and order.

Those who oppose the licensing and legalisation system are equally convinced that legalising prostitution is totally against women's interests. Such action they say would legitimise the exploitation of women, would mean that the state indirectly sanctions the exploitation. They admit that legalisation accompanied by demands for minimum wages, better living and health facilities, creches for prostitutes' children and other rights for their children, would give a measure of protection. Also legalisation would help to wipe out "the stigma of immorality and criminality". But they argue that while protection can be given without legalisation if legislation so provides, the so called stigma can only be removed by a change in social attitudes and "formal" legalisation will have little impact on such deeply rooted prejudices. Their view is that licensing will in fact make the prostitute more vulnerable because it will single out and identify her permanently, so that in fact the "stigma" will always be with her, even if she decides to leave the profession after a very short period of time. They also point out that in several countries which have tried out licensing, it has been found that a prostitute fights shy of such registration, for the reasons given above, and, in fact, is driven into concealing her activities even further.

This school of thought, which is supported by many feminists, refuses to accept that prostitution is a necessary social evil because men's sexuality has to be satisfied in order to save the rest of society and his family life from his sexual frustration. To them this is the worst form of sex discrimination, based on theories evolved they allege by male sociologists and others. They deny that by legalising prostitution you are asserting women's right to act as she pleases, including the right to sell her body. As Jean d'Junha puts it, all that you are doing is accepting that "sex and a woman's body are commodities to be sold in prostitution". Replying to the argument that a woman should be able to sell her body just as she can sell her other talents, intellectual or other skills, D'Junha says that "to justify prostitution as a valid form of work for women augmenting their incomes is to legitimise sex and women's bodies
as market commodities."

Those who share these views are convinced that licensing will stop neither police harassment nor exploitation by pimps and brothel keepers. These views are borne out by several international authorities on prostitution research. Benjamin and Master admit that "when prostitution is driven underground, prostitutes are forced to associate with criminal elements", and this is true of the Indian scene to-day where underworld elements are normally active in the red light districts. They also point out defects in the "abolitionist" system to which India is pledged, which in some countries has also "substantially increased the number of pimps and facilitated gangster control of prostitution". This is in fact true of India under the SITA.

But they assert, in discussing the licensing system, that it has not succeeded in abolishing prostitution; it has on the contrary driven "the unhappy women into the hands of pimps, crooked lawyers and others who love to take advantage of prostitutes."

Another authority on the subject, Pignier, points out that instead of ending the exploitation the licensing system encourages and increases the traffic in women and "makes the prostitute a sexual slave" dependant even more on the licensing authorities and the police.

D'Cunha suggests that what is required is legislation which will decriminalize the act of prostitution per se. This would make the act neither legal nor illegal and remove both the focus on the individual prostitute, and the punishment which threatens her. The law should make the client an offender and at the same time make measures against pimps, landlords, and brothel keepers who exploit prostitutes, more stringent and foolproof.

At present there is little organisation among the prostitutes themselves. This is a great handicap because it means they have no voice to express their grievance, their problems and their demands. Again the contrast with the devadasis is noticeable. One reason for the lack of organisation is that the vast majority of prostitutes in the red light districts are uneducated. Largely illiterate, there are few educated women amongst them to take the lead. The Calcutta prostitutes have a long history of protest. As far back as the last part of the century when letters appeared in the...
press protesting against the residence of prostitutes in certain areas, the Calcutta
prostitutes replied by asserting that they were in the profession as a result of
society's actions. After the SITA came into effect the Calcutta prostitutes held
a massive rally at the Maidan and demanded that just as other countries had
organisations -- The Italian League for Defence of Prostitution, COYOTE in the
United States, standing for "Call of Your Old Tired Ethics" with 3,500 members, or
PCNY, Prostitutes of New York they should have their own organisation. (In 1974
when COYOTE held its first National Conference in San Francisco it demanded legalisation
of prostitution for protection of the civil rights of prostitutes.)

But the action of the Calcutta prostitutes stopped at the rally and they
made no further attempt to organize themselves along the lines of the Western
prostitutes. However in 1981 a middle-aged prostitute of Ujjain, one of the ancient,
traditional cities where prostitution has flourished for centuries, started the
Vaishya Kalyan Sangh, the first registered association of prostitutes in the country.
Shakuntala Devi told Tavleen Singh "This society has made us what we are and now they
tell us we have no right to live!" She was referring to the efforts of citizens to
remove Pinjarwadi prostitutes from the red light district of Ujjain. The story began
with Kunni Bai, who managed to give up the profession and lived in the temple premises
in Pinjarwadi, acting as its priestess for eight years. Then, with no cause, some
citizens decided that the temple's sanctity was being destroyed by a prostitute's
presence. They started a campaign to remove the red light area from Pinjarwadi, took
processions through the streets, and started a poster war. The various Devadasi
organisations mentioned in detail in the section on the corruption of the devadasi
cult, are working examples of how such organisations can function, exert pressure on
the authorities and receive recognition. Of course these bodies have benefitted
enormously from the strong of volunteer agencies such as the Joint Women's Programme
and the Mahatma Phule Satya Pratishthan. There is no reason such support cannot be
extended to other organisations such as the Ujjain Sangh and the Bharatiya Patita
Udhar Sabha. The one drawback of this last named organisation seems to be that men
are its spokesmen. The soft-spoken Bhola who has filed the writ petition is also the
President of the All India Hijra Sabha, his Secretary is also a man, who speaks on behalf of the Delhi Sabha and is convinced that prostitution is necessary as a safety valve for men’s sexual needs which should not be frustrated. He talks prostitution as a security operation for society, the concept which is anathema to the women’s rights movement.

The advantage of European and American prostitutes in respect of organization is that they are educated and vocal. The Indian prostitute, conscious of the judgment of other women that she is a "fallen woman", an outcaste from society, as well as being poor, illiterate and ignorant of the concept of civil or human rights, has little chance to organise on her own. She needs other women’s support. The irony is that those prostitutes who are able to educate their children, who might then be able to help them to fight for their rights, distance themselves from those children to spare their offspring the ignominy of their own lives as far as possible. It is significant that Revabai, the devadasi who is President of the active Pune Devadasi Sanghathan, was influenced by the educated daughter of another devadasi who opened her eyes to the corruption of the cult.

The Problems and Priorities for Rehabilitation

The key to the long range solution of the problem of prostitution, for which the cooperation and participation of the women and girls themselves is essential, is successful rehabilitation. As far back as 1954 the Rama Rau Committee pointed out that aftercare homes for prostitutes were inadequate and that prostitutes should themselves be associated with programmes to help prostitutes to earn a decent living. This has not happened, except again in the case of devadasis. The Committee stressed the importance of a special counseling service for better understanding of the problems faced by prostitutes, along with its recommendations for about tackling the socio-economic problems responsible for prostitution. The Committee’s report is as valid today as it was more than 30 years ago.

In the same year the Advisory Committee on Aftercare Programmes made its recommendations which were incorporated in a scheme under which 50 state homes and
32 District shelters or Reception Centres were to be set up. Short Stay Homes to
give immediate shelter and protection from traffickers for rescued girls were also
provided. The scheme specified that there should be a "sympathetic" atmosphere
where apart from food, clothing, medical treatment, and physical protection, those
rescued should also have "mental peace." The environment should be "homely" according
to the scheme, inmates should not feel bored by a sense of monotony, and the training
programmes should "aim at a balanced development of their minds and characters" so
that these women could build up a sense of self-respect, self-help and self-confidence.

These then are the ideals, the objectives. 30 years later what is the reality?
The "Times of India" of October 6, 1985 carried a report by Fresti Mehra on the
government Protection Home in Agra. She described the difficult approach through
slush and water, the huge iron-barred gate like the approach to a prison, no electricity,
no transport out of the area, no doctor on the premises, no hospital in the vicinity.
The 75 inmates were crowded into space adequate for five, in rooms which were totally
unsafe because of their accessibility in a building surrounded on three sides by low
walls which could be scaled by any intruder as the reporter herself demonstrated. In
1981 the General Secretary of the (Agra) branch of the Association for Social Health
wrote to the press describing the conditions in the home, at that time in the city
itself. He alleged that the inmates had been "locked up for years without any authority
of law", that they included women who were insane, dumb children and victims of rape.

Mr. Upendra Baxi and lawyer Lotika Sarkar have been fighting the U.P. Government in
the Supreme Court against these conditions. When the two petitioners went to inspect
the home they found an intolerable situation. There was one small lavatory without any
water, for the 75 inmates, in the most frightful condition, and just one tap of water
in the outside courtyard for their use. The kitchen was next to the stinking lavatory
so filthy that they found it difficult to enter. They discovered that when the
Supreme Court ordered a medical inspection of the inmates, those in charge of the home
had forced some of the mental cases out into the streets so that the inspection team
would not see them. The report of the medical team said that 40 of the inmates were
offering from STD, 21 from extra pulmonary tuberculosis and 33 from various degrees of 
mental degeneration". The report added that the same women and children had completely 
clean medical records when they entered the home.

The Nari Niketan, the government Protective Home in Delhi, came under enquiry 
when Ms. Chinnammal Sivadas, a long-term member of the Association for Social Health 
alleged that women in the home were being denied basic amenities, and were not given 
any psychological help, opportunities for rehabilitation or vocational training. On 
the contrary they were "deprived of their liberty" and used as cheap labour. She 
claimed that they were abused and beaten and "channelled into prostitution". One 
of the Nari Niketan girls alleged that innocent and ignorant girls were sold off 
by a former superintendent and others were forced to marry old men selected by her. 
The girls were sold under the pretence of being sent off to work in jobs. Some of 
the girls told similar stories and the Supreme Court passed orders that to prevent 
such prostitution under the guise of marriage no girl should be married without 
prior permission of the Court.

Unfortunately these are not isolated cases. Similar situations have been 
exposed from time to time in other so called "protective homes", and it is obvious 
that rehabilitation as it exists has little resemblance to the stated requirements.
The very term "rehabilitation" is misleading. Rehabilitation infers "restoration" 
of conditions which existed previous to the present situation before some change in 
circumstances. But in the case of the vast majority of prostitutes, there is no 
question of restoration; they must start a new life altogether. They cannot go back 
to their old environment. So the so called rehabilitation and aftercare of women and 
girls rescued under the SITA is a very complicated matter, which requires intense 
efforts by government and voluntary organisations. Under the SITA there are two types 
of such rescued individuals, girls under 21 years rescued from brothels, and another 
category who are rescued by Security Force of Railways, voluntary social workers and 
police. The five girls or women who have run away from home or have been thrown out 
of the families, or been deserted by husbands or other men who have induced them away from 
homw. They are picked up at railway stations, bus depots, near hotels, temples and 

......../57
touist centres. The first category may be harder to "rehabilitate" but both pose similar problems.

Social workers and members of organisations like the Association for Social Health and the Nari Raksha Samiti, along with sociologists, have elaborated on the kind of programmes required in After Care and Rehabilitation of prostitutes. They have pointed out that such programmes have to be administered by properly trained and oriented staff, and have to be modernized by injecting a new approach. Presently many of the inadequacies of the institutions can be blamed on the lack of training and motivation of the staff as the Delhi and Agra cases show only too clearly.

Not only are educational and vocational training facilities very poor at most of these institutions, but medical supervision is equally lacking. The result is that although a woman may be in a home for a longish period, at the end of her stay she is still not prepared to go out into the world in the way the "rehabilitation" programmes intend. This explains why a large number of women and girls, ready or unable to adapt to normal life, return to the brothel existence which has the reassurance of familiarity, and where they at least have their place in the environment.

The first requirement of such institutions then is sympathy from the staff, and that, because of the general attitude towards prostitutes, is rare. Instead there are people like the Nari Niketan superintendent who sees these women, already condemned by society, as creatures to be further exploited for her own benefit rather than treated as unfortunate fellow human beings needing her help. But the women themselves also create great difficulties, for as social workers point out from experience, prostitutes become so alienated, so hardened in many cases, so skeptical of the outside world, so despairing, that they resist all efforts to win them over.

One major problem is that even when a girl who wants desperately to change her way of life goes out into society from the prostitutes' world, that society is not ready to accept her on "an equal and honourable footing". To cite the simplest example: how many households would accept a maid-servant if they knew her brothel background? To cross this barrier a massive effort is required to "educate" society about the need to allow these girls to lead normal lives, forgetting about their past, forgetting about
any attitudes of condescension or condemnation. So far there has been no evidence of this on the part of the government or women's organizations. There have instead been instances when residents of a locality have bitterly resisted the establishment of a protective home nearby. What would help is a persistent mass media campaign to create a sympathetic climate for acceptance of the reformed prostitute. In today's context popular TV serials offer a perfect vehicle for conveying this message as do short stories and features in women's magazines.

Apart from rebuilding the psychological damage and this too requires individual attention depending on each woman's personal past, the most important element in rehabilitation is to make sure that when the woman leaves the home she is economically independent, at least able to make a living, even if she has to live as part of a family unit. To ensure this as S.K. Bhattacharyya of the National Institute of Social Defence has clarified that there must be diversified vocational training relevant to the local market, as well as to the aptitude and interest of the trainee. It is no use having the routine training of sewing, pickle making etc. which is too often the be-all and end-all of such programmes.

Skilled and productive citizens will also find it easier to be accepted back into society. But the rehabilitation efforts cannot stop at training. The trainees must also be helped to find work when they are ready to leave, they must also be ensured job security, because otherwise all the training and rehabilitation efforts will be lost. If a girl starts working, only to lose her job, or to face threatened sexual or other exploitation from an employer, her entire self confidence and self-respect hopefully built up in the rehabilitation process, will be shattered. Such security requires that the social workers will have to maintain contact for a suitable length of time with the girls, as well as the employer, and also perhaps be available for counselling for a longer period.

Yet another major problem is accommodation. Even if a girl is suitably trained and placed in a satisfactory employment, where is she to stay? A working women's hostel is one answer but whatever it is, suitable residence facilities have to be provided. It becomes obvious that the whole process of restoring rescued girls and
women which requires immense effort and resources demands a scientific overall planned integrated approach of which so far there has been little sign. Most social workers or law enforcement officials, when they talk about their efforts at rehabilitation or their efforts to discuss the possibility of an alternative lifestyle to prostitutes, give the same story: the girls, or women say "We know nothing. We are trained for nothing else. What else can we do?"

Reports by concerned institutions and individuals indicate that marriage remains the rehabilitation worker's favourite solution for rescued women and girls. But here too the marriage partner has to be carefully screened. In protection homes, as they are operated at present, there are too many cases of girls being married off without proper investigation or proper follow-up and being exploited. In many cases girls who have been in the profession for a long time, unless they are very keen to get married, feel it difficult, even impossible to adopt to the life style of marriage. But there are also many cases where rescued girls have been happily married.

Some private organisations have taken up rehabilitation work, one of them being Savdhan which runs a Rehabilitation Centre in Talseri, an Adivasi village 150 kilometres away from Bombay. In November last year there were 14 girls at the centre and Lakshmi Iyer reporting on the Centre found that here they had found peace and a home. These girls had either been rescued from brothels or had run away. Vinod Gupta, who founded Savdhan, has found that in most cases the families of the girls will not bother about them. To the families they are "fallen" girls, so he tries to find good husbands for them. He believes that marriage is the best way to restore the self-respect and sense of honour of girls who have suffered in this way. The marriages he arranges are VIP affairs, and so far all seem to have worked out.

The most interesting feature of the Centre is that after marriage some of the couples choose to stay on. This gives the Centre a sort of family atmosphere, a microcosm of society outside, which itself has a therapeutic effect. Rehabilitation is achieved largely through working on the 400 acre farm belonging to the Maharashtra Gopalan Saniti. The girls themselves have built their rooms in this temporary centre and the atmosphere is relaxed and peaceful. Unfortunately there are few centres
like this.

The most fortunate prostitutes perhaps are those from communities like the Uttarkashi Pirela women who are accepted back in their homes and families after four or five years of the profession and can lead a normal family life. Their children also are fortunate because there is no stigma attached to their names and they can lead a normal life in the future. The children of most devadasis also enjoy this freedom. But not so the children who are brought up in the brothels. Here again the child welfare organizations do not seem to have realized the extent of the problem or their responsibilities. Many brothels are full of small children, for many prostitutes bear children regardless of their circumstances. Many have them for their future security so there will be someone to look after them, even if it is a daughter turned prostitute. Others bear children just to have someone to love as their own. Anyone who has had anything to do with prostitutes in social work agrees that they love their children, that those who don't have their own, shower their affection on the children of other prostitutes.

But these children grow up in the brothel environment, observing sordid scenes of drunken brawls, beating, violence, overt sex and crime. Some even pimp for their mothers or sisters. Sheela Barse has brought up this matter repeatedly to the public notice in what can be described as "passionate" articles, highlighting the plight of these children.

Many of these children go into the profession. Barse talks of a girl in Grant Road brothel, 9 years old, working at the rate of Rs. 20 per customer, of a 7 year old boy, dressed up as a girl, being raised in Bombay as a future castrated eunuch, of a ten year old who "cried her heart out," describing what she had to do. These are true horror stories. Wherever prostitutes have got together they have asked for schooling for their children. It should be possible to meet this simple request, even while the mothers remain in the profession, because the measures to help them find an alternative life are not adequate or enthusiastic enough.

When it comes to the call girls of different types, "rehabilitation" assumes a different form. The emphasis is on psychological rehabilitation on an individual
basis, not institutionalised measures. Mrs. Chakuntala Lol laid stress on the need for preventive measures with the group that the Association of Social Health is concentrating on, the lower middle-class, educated girls with small incomes who are being induced into the call girl racket. At meetings and lectures, Association workers and other recruited by them for the purpose, talk of the values of family life, trying to explain why certain family problems exist how they can be solved. With changing conditions, rifts in the joint family system; parent-child conflict and such problems leading to call girl prostitution, the girls are encouraged to discuss their problems.

The Association have special programmes for different groups, and a panel of experts to form a syllabus for the programmes. They reach the girls at colleges, community centres, and talk to girls and mothers at Ladies Clubs. Their attention, even when it comes to the customary prostitutes is more on education of the women, on prevention rather than on rescue. They are very proud of the fact that no one has run away from their rescue institutions. Since no studies have been done on any aspect of this work it is difficult to assess what impact this preventive programme has had.

Dr. Bali's perceptions are different. In her experience, because society's values have changed, there are fewer cases of "exploitation" as such among the call girl (Dr Kapur defines the "call girl" as a prostitute who operates independently and voluntarily and is somewhat educated and sophisticated.) Dr. Bali has found that the majority of girls involved know what they are doing, are doing it of their own volition and whereas, counseling is useful, the girl involved has to want it herself. Only if and when the need arises does the counsellor have a role. Otherwise the counsellor can only point out the potential psychological damage. However, speaking at the March 1978 National Training Seminar on Suppression of Immoral Traffic Dr. Bali stressed that counseling is a necessity in the stress and strain prone society of today, particularly for parents and teachers. Because as other speakers in such training programmes have also pointed out, the import of a happy family life in preventing the call girl phenomenon is undeniable.

The "Association for Social Health and the National Institute of Social Defence
of the Government of India collaborate in organizing National Health Training Courses on this problem in different states. This is a valuable exercise in exchange of views and discussions on the various aspects and developments in this problem. A large panel of participants includes officials and non-officials, social workers both voluntary and paid, academics and researchers, police officers, family counsellors and social workers. The reports and resumes at the end of the courses are useful in content, by and large the conclusions are almost identical. The recommendations are similar to recommendations included in earlier reports going back to the Rama Rau Committee. But implementation is lacking, although Mrs Shakuntala said in New Delhi at the 1978 course that the "Training Programmes was geared to create an effective implementing Agency that we hate the sin but not the sinner."

The Media Response - An Assessment

How has the print media responded to the issue of prostitution in this country? Certainly, over the past few years, as a direct consequence of the greater focus on women's issues during the just concluded UN Women's Decade, the media has shown increasing awareness of the complexity and seriousness of the problem of prostitution. But in comparison with the extent of the human tragedy which invests certain aspects of the profession, the shameful acceptance of forced prostitution and child prostitution by our society, with the exploitation of girls and women by the massive network of the flesh trade, the media exposure has been woefully inadequate. Nor has the media played the role of which it is capable, both in educating the public and in stirring the public conscience into action against the exploiters, either by trying to change traditionally biased attitudes towards the victims of the profession, or by putting pressure on the authorities concerned into attacking the factors of inequality and poverty which generate prostitution.

A number of studies on various aspects of the profession have been published some of which are referred to in this report. These provide a great deal of valuable informative and interesting material for journalists interested in following up the leads. But it has happened in very rare cases. The situation in Purula...
is a glaring example of how good human interest stories have been ignored while the devadasi coverage provides an example of where they have been followed up. Relatively speaking, perhaps because of the failure of women's organisations to focus on the problem and to play a more and constructive active role in helping the victims, the studies also fail to cover important aspects of prostitution. As mentioned earlier, no studies in depth have been carried out on clients of prostitutes or on the call girls, and the special issue of child prostitution remains without proper investigation. As does research follow-up on those who have been "rehabilitated". So we have serious lacunae even in the studies and reports. But on the whole the press has failed to take advantage of some good information matter available.

However, some extremely-useful stories have appeared in magazines and Sunday papers, and journalists from different parts of the country have from time to time exposed interesting developments and situations. The Review report on "Highway Prostitution" (Footnote No. 15) where teashall owners on the main Rajasthan highways were found to be operating makeshift brothels with girls housed in sheds just off the road for the "use" of vehicles drivers, highlighted this unfamiliar side of the profession, which apparently also exists in other places. The reporter discovered that in some of the adjacent villages involved in this practice, where extreme poverty exists, prostitution before marriage is an acceptable fact. The "deflowering" of a girl at the age of 16 is a ceremonial celebration in the community, performed by a carefully selected man of some means, who is obliged to entertain the family at a feast. The girl's father and brothers eagerly anticipate these occasions. The reporter also learned that clients come from all walks of life, and come quite openly. They include students, merchants, government employees, politicians and the police, who, according to the reports benefit both from bribes and from free service from the girls.

An interesting story on the exploitation of tribal girls, in India Today (Footnote No. 16) was Farzand Ahmed's report on the girls of Shumser Mahalgarh in Orissa. The girls of this village have always been famous for their beauty, and in
the past, as happened in other tribal areas where the beauty of the women attracted
attack and capture by other tribes, the Ghumsar Udaigiri parents deliberately
disfigured the faces of their daughters with tattoo marks. When development came
to the area in the form of officials, roads and contractors, the village women
once again became victims. Because these Adivasis, living in an isolated existence
until very recently, are easily taken in by petty officials and contractors who
"buy" a wife, live with her for a few months and then abandon her, even when she
has borne them children. As many as 200 "wives" had been abandoned.

Prokash Hindustani writing in Ravivar (July 17, 1973) reported on how
tribal girls were similarly exploited in an area in Madhya Pradesh where two-thirds
of the population are Adivasis and where out of 320 state legislators, 165 were
from the backward and tribal groups. These legislators were unable or uninterested
in putting a stop to the blatant exploitation of the tribal women by landlords
and babus, and also by officials and contractors who "employed" these women for
"housework", paid them Re. 40 per month and forced them to have sexual relations.

These are among the successful exposes of the facts which exist. But
there is no follow-up, either by the newspaper, or by other journalists. No
reporters have visited the roadside brothels, or the village of Ghumsar Udaigiri,
and the intrigued reader is left wondering about the fate of the abandoned 200
girls and their children. What eventually happens to them? Did the authorities
take action against the concerned officials? Are the girls taken care of by social
organisations? Or did they end up in the hands of procurers? Why were the Madhya
Pradesh legislators inactive in this matter? What was the fate of the exploited
girls? The human tragedy of the women remains untold and the story incomplete.

In contrast another story in India Today, on the spread of STD (Footnote
No. 42), is a full investigation in depth, a major cover story, because obviously
the editors felt that this subject was of great interest to all readers. This
reflects part of the problem regarding the print media coverage of prostitution.
The profession may be the oldest in the world, but it does not arouse the interest
of the general public. The fault for this, unfortunately, again lies partly with
the media, which has been unable, or unwilling to project the human interest.
content of prostitution with the sensitivity the subject demands. This failure of society again reflects the common attitude to the problem, which is seen as a condition about which little needs to be done, because the prostitute is an outcaste. The attitude appears to be that these women have made their "choice" and therefore there is no need to highlight their condition compared to say, bonded labour.

The seven page India Today story covers many aspects of the STD conditions in the country. According to the report "Harisingh accounts for over 50 per cent of the STD cases reported by Government clinics (1,40 lakhs) with Bombay's notorious red light areas being the logical reason for that city's distinction as the STD centre of the country..." In Bihar, 25 per cent of the cases reported were children below the age of 15, and 80 per cent of the cases reported were unmarried. The report quotes Madras psychologist Savithri Subramaniam's findings that among 2000 STD patients in that city as many as three quarters of the males and almost half the females surveyed between 31 and 30 years and STD was higher among teenage girls than boys. And more than half of the people surveyed were unmarried. Even though the India Today story was a study in depth, it did not take up the nexus between STD and prostitutes nor it triggered off a spate of follow-up stories that it could have.

The less serious magazines do carry occasional stories on the subject and the recent report in Onlooker (Footnote No. 39) on the sexual adventures of politican is a typical example of the kind of sensationalism which creeps into media coverage on prostitution. "How our Sex-Hungry Leaders Lead a Lustful Life and Get Away with it" is the cover story, which goes on to name various political figures and relate their escapades in sensational terms with no attention paid to way women are used for this purpose. The article refers to "... an orchestrated police raid" in Lucknow which found that one of the "most frequent haunts of girls" were the "carusharas" (MLA residences), and to the "bus depot scandal" at the Nagaur bus depot in Jodhpur in which it was alleged that "certain top officials of the depot had struck on this novel idea of hiring women on daily wages" and using these women for sexual exploitation by employees and political VIPs. Onlooker reported that the scandal broke with the death in mysterious circumstances of one of the girls, a
traffic assistant. But in spite of its sensational presentation, the story, which required a good deal of investigation, serves a useful purpose in exposing the situation. However, again lack of follow-up vitiates its value.

Similarly the Probe magazine story (August 1934) on an income-tax raid in Delhi which uncovered a call girl racket, performs the same function. The income-tax officials found not only a young attractive "manager of a popular club in a new five-star hotel" in a compromising position with the owner of the hotel, but also a list of names with descriptions of young women coming from different social backgrounds along with assessments of their "performances"! Other lists found on the premises contained the names of a lady journalist photographer and a well-known magazine editor. Stories such as these, and the front page news story in Bombay's The Sunday Observer (December 29, 1985) are essential because they shock the reader into awareness, but the readers' reaction is only shock, and perhaps censure of such goings on. There is no sympathy generated for the girls who are the victims, particularly in the Observer and Observer accounts. In the Observer coverage, headlined "The Party in Kamathipura," the reporter described drunk Congressmen arriving in Bombay for the Congress Centennial celebrations, who visited brothels in the city's red light district, how "special police arrangements in Kamathipura had evidently been made to protect rather than to prohibit," how he watched a "group of boisterous congressmen..... form a queue and troop up the rickety stairs that lead to a brothel" after being reassured by a pimp that the girls went for regular medical check-ups, how "the more expensive brothels" told him that "there had been a flood of bookings from delegates who did not want to be seen in the red light area". These are the legislators whose responsibility it is to legislate for the protection of the very girls made available to them, and the courage and usefulness of the story are an instance where the sensational story has a definite part to play.

But many more stories of this nature are required, simply as exposures of exploiting situations. The India Today report on Madras massage parlours, "Parlour Games" (Footnote No. 29) described the proliferation of such establishments where the reporter found clients were largely petty businessmen with money to spend.
Massages of various kinds cost between Rs. 40 and Rs. 70, the girls most of them ill-educated, came from very poor families, many of them Anglo-Indians and Keralites. All of them were from out of town, lured to Madras by touts. One girl, Shanti, told the reporter that she was married, but her husband was working in another town. She had "drifted into this work" because she found her previous job too taxing, had "picked up the rojes on the job" and was comfortable and contented with the pay.

On an average this was about Rs. 300 to 500 per month at that time. The reporter also highlighted the statement of a leading venereologist that although a year earlier every STD patient he knew had picked up the disease from a brothel, an increasing number were picking up infection from the parlours. This story makes it clear that plenty of similar stories exist to be ferreted out, that this is one aspect of the "new prostitution" on which information can be collected.

For while many reports on the call girl world refer to massage parlours, dancing schools, beauty saloon, health clubs, etc. as places where such activities are often carried on under another facade, there have been few stories on this aspect and no investigative report, or any research study has focussed on this element in the call girl racket, which obviously is helping the spread of STD.

Sensational journalism can lead to a major media contribution towards attacking the problem of exploitation of women and Ashwini Sarin's coverage of the "Kamla Story" in the Indian Express (Footnote No. 31) is a landmark in media coverage of the subject, a combination of sensationalism and serious reportage.

....../68
Sarin happened on the story accidentally when, on an earlier election assignment in the Morena area of Madhya Pradesh, he overheard three villagers talking about the "accha maal," (the good goods) available in Pachgaon. They had with them a frightened young South Indian girl, about 18, and he instinctively felt that they were referring to her. His enquiries found that Pachgaon was the site of a regular mandi, market for women where brothelkeepers from all over the country came to buy "fresh stocks" and perhaps exchange some of their older material.

Sarin reported that secrecy surrounded the transactions and Dholpur set in the heart of ravines where law and order are ineffective because of relative inaccessibility, was considered relatively safe. This location where three states meet also makes it much easier for the procurers to elude the police of any one state. When Sarin returned to do the story he visited the area ten times to gain the locals' confidence, dressed like a local, collecting information and establishing himself. He discovered that most of the villagers in the area were making large amounts of money from the racket, hence the secrecy. A young man from the Beria community, one of those where prostitution is hereditary and traditional, assured him that there was no brothel in the country without some connection with Dholpur. Sarin reported that because such a racket could not flourish without police abettment, a posting in the area was a prize, literally fought over by the lower ranked policemen because of the monetary profits to be gained from the traders and the "free" service forced from the girls.

He found Kamla after some difficulty and bargained for her, finally purchasing her for Rs. 2300. This provided the sensation required for a front page headline story, the "Scop" which caught wide public interest. Kamla's story was typical. Thrown out by her husband and his family, separated from her two children, she was sold from one person to another for at least five years before Sarin bought her. She could not recall details and was in a highly nervous state because of her traumatic life. Ultimately Kamla "disappeared" from the Arya Samaj institution where she had been placed awaiting rehabilitation and has not been found to this day.
The girls are "trained and adapted" in Dholpur before they are sold off. "Training and adoption" is a cruel business for many of them. Socialization into prostitution can either be achieved by gradual persuasion, by gentle breaking down the resistance of traditional mores, or through torture and beatings to force submission. If a girl is obdurate, her spirit is broken by deliberately raping her so that she has no alternative but to submit. Sarin was told that brothel keepers come to exchange girls periodically so that the girls can never get familiar with one area or with any special customer. Such familiarity can lead to escape attempts and possible loss of the brothel's valuable "property".

Efficiently organised, the network has houses in Dholpur and nearby villages with special basements to hide the girls waiting to be sold. Truck drivers regularly carry girls from one location to another and some become traders, buying new arrivals and selling them in Bombay for big profits. Sarin was given figures — "A girl of 16, working 250 days a year, handling up to 10 customers a day for Rs. 50 a throw — for three years... O.K., I'll pay Rs. 6000 for her". He was told about a 16 year old Raria girl sold for Rs. 20,000 in a "mandi" nearby.

He found there was another aspect of procuring and his report differentiates between the "flesh trade" of Agra and Dholpur and the "girl-runners" of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, who he says are totally ruthless and use arms to capture women and transport them. Uttar Pradesh has been described as a "paradise for kidnappers" and these girls are kidnapped, usually in the first three months of the year because the farmers' post-harvest profits create a heavy demand on the brothels of Korwa, Gwalior, Shivpuri and other towns known for their rich crops.

Local agents work with these gangs and the girls are sold off very fast. Those who do not make the grade are passed on to the flesh trade. Lawyers and their clerks are an integral part of this operation, for prospective buyers and procurers need their services to file affidavits in which the victimised girl, forced to sign, gives her "voluntary" consent to live with the new buyer, thus allowing him to elude any police or legal action. Traffickers and procurers often keep lawyers on a retainer just to take care of any eventualities and to "bail"
out the girls, whenever necessary.

The police are either involved or turn a blind eye. An officer told Sarin frankly that selling of women was a "routine" matter here and had been going on for years and the police have no "time" to deal with it! They have enough on their hands with the endemic deceit menace in the area. When Sarin's story broke, the Madhya Pradesh Government ordered a probe and the Indian Express filed a petition in the Supreme Court praying the Court to initiate remedial measures of several kinds. There has been nothing heard of the enquiry and the petition is pending in the Court.

Meanwhile the trafficking continues without any change in the intensity or location of the trading. "Kamlas" are still bought and sold. Since the Indian Express expose, other journalists, most of them local press representatives, have found on investigation that this area remains the centre of the traffic and that, in fact, more villages are now involved.

Kamla had tremendous impact at the time and Sarin's expose which he himself followed up to some extent, inspired a film and a play of the same name, both of which attracted large audiences all over the country and created on one side awareness, and on the other provoked a certain amount of debate on the whole subject of the flesh trade. The writ petitions in the Supreme Court and the Rajasthan High Court were also a direct spin-off from the story. But as Sarin himself found the expose did not trigger off any official action against procurers even in the Morena area. Perhaps for other journalists the follow-up was too difficult because once the story broke, the veil of secrecy which conceals the operations became even more difficult to penetrate for outsiders. Also few newspapers are willing to give the kind of financial and other support the Indian Express offered Sarin. The need now is for the paper to carry follow-up stories from time to time and for women's research organizations to commission studies on trafficking so that the subject is constantly before the public eye.

In the past news stories in particular were only on sensational events connected with prostitution. But over the past years, particularly since the start
of the Women's Decade, there has been greater interest in women's issues with a more serious approach to the problem of prostitution. In general women's magazines have taken on a new look, focusing on serious problems instead of just on fashion, the home and cooking etc., and several newspapers have assigned reporters to concentrate on issues connected with women. Jean D'Cunha's excellent reportage in Regina magazine "No, this can never be a profession like any other" (Footnote No. 49) is an example of how a perceptive writer can grip the reader's attention by projecting the tragic human side of the exploitation of fellow women. Similarly Pratibha Nehra's "Only a Hell to call Home" on the fearful conditions of the Agra institution for rehabilitating women (Footnote no. 51) is a scathing indictment of how authority handles the rehabilitation of unfortunate victims who want to escape the profession.

But in spite of this improvement in coverage the immoral traffic in women rates relatively few stories and remains largely ignored. Why this should be so is not very clear. But even those outstanding women journalists who are concentrating on the broad spectrum of women's issues, and have done commendable investigative reports, many of them on a regular basis, have not paid much attention to studying the socio-economic factors which push village women into prostitution. In spite of the two detailed excellent studies on the nexus between bonded labour and prostitution in Uttar Pradesh, which appeared several years ago and hit the newspapers in condensed version, no serious journal has covered this phenomenon in a human interest report. What is even more extraordinary is that with the spate of stories on bonded labour which have been carried in the newspapers or three over the past two years, no journalists specialising on women, have covered this aspect of female bonded labour.

An even more extraordinary case of ignoring a glaringly obvious heinous crime was the omission of child prostitution from a recent workshop on the "Girl Child", organised in Delhi by UNICEF and the Media Centre of Delhi. The objective of the largely attended exercise was to highlight the importance of the girl from five to fifteen years of age for the future development of the country. Many papers were read, many articles written, many issues were discussed. But, apart from a passing reference to child prostitution, no study was done on the thousands of prostitutes in that age group, all over the country. Nor was any article written by any of the many prominent journalists present,
including some of India's top women members of the press corps. Following the workshop, many articles appeared elaborating on problems brought up in the workshop but not a single piece on the girl child as a prostitute was written. The reason for this lacunae is surely tied up with society's attitude to the "fallen woman", particularly the common prostitute in her surroundings. Journalists, even women, like the rest of the population, have been oblivious of the extent and depth of the tragedy.

Nonetheless media coverage has played its important role since the 1970s in bringing the conditions under which prostitutes exist to public notice. Jyoti Saharan's description of the unsavoury conditions under which prostitutes pass their lives in Delhi's G.B. Road (Footnote no. 36) and Balu Bandhopadhaya's "A Woman's Last Resort" (Footnote no. 38) are invaluable testimony now available to a large audience of readers, and stories like these are essential for correcting the impression of the tough harlot "enjoying her sexual satisfaction".

Media coverage appears to be connected with the extent of voluntary work which is carried out in a particular area. The large amount of material available on the devadasis is a good example. The bibliography attached to this report contains more articles and news items on the devadasis than on any other subject. Not that there was any intention to highlight this issue and look for material. It was just there because the organisations involved in working with devadasis—and those who have taken interest in this issue—remark that men have been the most active workers—highlighted the problem in their many news releases, kept the press informed, and encouraged reporters to attend their conferences. Devadasis have always been good value but for sensational reasons.

This time the sensation was not only the ancient rites, but in the reform movement. This was brought out admirably in excellent in-depth articles by Jyoti Punwani (Footnote no. 19), Chakresh Jain (Footnote no. 17) and Iraan Okureshi (Footnote no. 21). Punwani, reporting in 1980 on the Niyari conference of the devadasis organised by the Mahatra Phulo Santa Pratishthan, gave what was perhaps the first detailed description in recent years on the present situation of what she called the "Godforsaken" women and girls dedicated to the Goddess Kali. She described the Pratishthan's work in trying to change the system, and through case histories of girls like "Baby" (referred to in the section on devadasis), exposed the miseries of the women.
"Baby", made a prostitute by her mother, has two children, their father unknown, who she has put to school but never visits because other children would taunt them about their parentage if they knew. All kinds of men come to her, she told Punwani, and pay whatever they want to. Another girl in Bijapur told social workers that she was sent to a brothel. A 32 year old devadasi was dedicated at Saundatti as an infant because mother had lost a child in childbirth before she was born and had promised to dedicate the next living child to Yellama. (Boys are also dedicated to the goddess and must be brought up as boys.) She now lived in the sordid red light district of Bijapur, having left her son in the village with her parents so he would not learn of her profession.

Jain in his full page story on "Devadasis: Middles of God—and Men" focuses on the way social workers have encouraged the devadasis to organise after creating an awareness in some of the women of the exploitation to which they are exposed, and how little they has to do with religion. He talks of a Pune-based lawyer, Suniti Pungaliya, invited to Bangalore to organise devadasis and how the pressures generated by such efforts helped in having the anti-devadasi legislation passed in Karnataka. He also describes how to a factory devadasi tobacco workers, Sushila and Kamal Naik, have, with the help of Professor Subhas Joshi, a dedicated social worker and union man, established an institution called Savali in Nipani, one of the focal points of devadasi dedication. This institution works for rehabilitation of women and the care of their children.

In another in-depth story Irman Quershi gives yet another facet of the devadasi example of how women themselves can fight for their rights in this degrading profession. He highlights the role of Revabai Yamanawa Kumble, President of the Pune Devadasi Sangathan. Revabai was a garhwali, brothel keeper, herself, who believed implicitly in the religious sanction of prostitution until an educated daughter of another devadasi told her what newspapers were writing about the corruption of the cult. Her 4000 member organisation had succeeded in creating awareness of health problems in Pune prostitutes who, she claims, now visit the dispensary regularly. All these reports not only place the devadasi problem squarely before the public, but certainly the publicity through media coverage put pressure on the state government to pass the anti-devadasi law which will be a major weapon against this cruel system. The example of the devadasi success, limited though it may be at present, provides valuable guidelines for tackling other
forms of prostitution.

Another very different aspect of the problem, the "Flota Marriages" in Bombay and Hyderabad, has benefited a great deal from the relatively wide media coverage it has received. Kalyan Chander Jaiswal (Footnote no. 27) and the Punjab Kesri (Footnote no. 28) along with other journalists and papers, have performed a great service by focusing on this aspect of "Prostitution Tourism". Explaining how these "marriages" are contracted, and how young girls are exploited, Jaiswal found that the men from the Gulf countries were not the wealthy sheikhs that they were made out to be.

That many of them had a shrewd mode of operation. They pretended that they were important officials or wealthy men, where, in fact, they were just security guards, drivers, petty shopkeepers and the like who came to India because they could not afford the high "bride price" demanded for even one wife, in their own countries. In some countries the "bride price" amounted to a lakh of rupees. They had no hesitation in walking out on their "brides" and on their promises.

Even for the wealthy men the "Flota Marriage" for a few weeks was a better bargain financially than having to pay for a call girl every night. In the bargain they often got virgins, who have a special value in prostitution. Jaiswal cites case histories where young girls were "married" to men, more than twice her age, sometimes three times their age, for sums like 3000 rupees, and then deserted. Thirteen year old Zubeida, daughter of a car mechanic's widow was married to a 73 year old man from the Arab Emirates. He spent 8 days with her, had her passport made, and then disappeared! How she and her sisters, who had none of them ever worn the burqa (the chador) before, do so to hide from their neighbours.

But even then others' experience tells them their daughter's financial benefits, her happiness, are only measured in a few days, the temptation of money in hand for the family is too strong to resist where poverty is the permanent condition. So Marriages are continuing. The press should follow-up the stories where again no one has cared to investigate the fate of these young women, some of them "just children".

Perhaps the greatest service done towards waking up the public conscience to the cruel exploitation of women in the profession of prostitution is by a journal women's called Manushi, which focusses on condition and oppression in all ways. The Manushi editor and staff have picked up each and every story and news item which, taken as any
aspect of the profession, from trafficking to the arguments for licensing brothels and prostitutes, from the financial position of women to the individual corruption. Hanushi starts off debates on the issue, something which is still missing in major newspapers and magazines. Articles from this journal have been referred to throughout this report. But Hanushi has the drawback of having a limited readership, an important and selective readership it is true, but a readership which does not extend to the general public.

But even media coverage can do little if the public conscience has become so dulled or is so unresponsive that people are not provoked into helping those in distress. The case of the Nepalese girl, Tulsa, which received maximum attention from the press not so long ago is a sad example. Tulsa, thirteen years old, was brought to Bombay when she was abducted from her home in Nepal. Comi Kapoor related how, in 1982, she was taken to the J.J. Hospital at her death's door, suffering from a bad case of syphilis, TB and other ailments. Somehow she had been able to escape from the brothel, and reach the hospital. Tulsa made the headlines in many publications. Public attention and indignation was aroused, many offers to help came, there were even offers of marriage. People wanted to "restore her lost childhood".

But after three years—Kapoor's article was written in November 1985—Tulsa has no home. She is cured of all her ills, except that she will always be lame in the left leg. But the "mark on her character has not been washed away" in the eyes of society. Homesick for her family she had been sent back according to her wish, but her family could not accept her with her past. She explained that people pointed their fingers at her. Her father who had wanted her back told Dr Gillada of the Indian Health Organisation that "instead of my laughing, happy thirteen year old daughter, you have given me back an old woman." Tulsa, equipped with her special crutches, is being given vocational training so she can be independent, and wants to return to Bombay.

But although the media coverage has not brought happiness to Tulsa, it has resulted in the police rescuing 1600 girls from brothels in similar circumstances, forced to do so because of the publicity generated by the Tulsa story. The Nepalese Government has also opened its first home for women and the three criminals who raped Tulsa then they abducted her were jailed for three years. But Tulsa remains on the social conscience and the three criminals who have ruined her life, having served their sentences, are free. While Tulsa remains a prisoner of her past and her disability.
The reaction of the daily papers has a dual character. Many more news items appear now than before, but again there is no follow-up of a story to attract the readers' interest. An item may appear about a raid on a brothel where a girl is rescued. But that is all. What happened to the girl? If she went to a home that was the condition there? And what happened to her after the home? How did she get to the brothel? Who was with her when the police came? Such coverage would inform the reader about the factors leading to prostitution, would make the prostitute a human being instead of an object, might create a social awareness that this is a problem which should be a social responsibility. For this is an approach which the media is only beginning to focus on now, that society is responsible for the prostitute being in the trade, and therefore must assume a certain responsibility for improving her condition and stopping the exploitation of/assault/did not make a free choice.

There are many aspects of the entire prostitution picture which, if they were systematically covered by the media, could be tackled in such a way that public attitude could be changed. One change of attitude which is basic to the whole question of rehabilitation is a change in the general view that the prostitute is a social outcaste with no hope of returning to the society which exploited her and considers her a criminal. If newspapers and magazines tell the many different human interest stories behind the profession, they could contribute to a gradual change of approach of all the authorities concerned with controlling the profession and to the change in attitudes of women readers who know very little about it.

A simple story on how SITA affects one girl or woman, in all its aspects, would carry more knowledge to the public than any amount of matter appearing in social welfare journals.

One reason why less stories appear is that covering the subject is not easy. The "Kamal" story is one example. Another is that it is virtually impossible to enter the protection homes where rescued girls are kept and talk to them freely because of the tight guard kept over them by the authorities. Nor is it easy to visit brothels and talk to the inmates without the all-powerful Madam around. It has been done several times but very often, with little satisfaction because the girls themselves are reluctant to talk of lives which may be basically ashamed of. Many have a great chip on their shoulder and resent questioning by outsiders. Nor do they trust outsiders who they know from bitter experience have little real sympathy for them. Organisations like the Association of Social Health could mobilize press support, particularly that of women journalists, by helping them get into homes and witnessing the
peers, by seeing that they are briefed after seminars and conferences.

Given all the drawbacks which exist, media coverage of the issue of prostitution is to be said to have responded in part to the challenge with sympathy and interest, although it must be admitted that a good deal of curiosity is mixed up with these. The Ball girls, on the other hand, have received only sensational coverage so far. There has been no attempt in any story to understand the reason for the activity.

Some journalists have performed a unique role in focusing on the human interest angle of different aspects of prostitution. Perhaps the most outstanding in Ms. Sheila Barse. Her three articles mentioned in this report, "To the Brothel burn", "Selling Body Soul" and "Minor Girls handed over to strangers", (Footnotes Nos. 54 and 55) are full of compassion and anger, both emotions which should be aroused by the exploitation of women implicit in this profession. The contrast between her coverage and the coverage of others like Lakshmi Iyer("Promise of Rebirth", Footnote No. 53) and Preeti Mehra's "Only a Call to Call Home", both fine, evocative and informative pieces, is that Sheila writes constantly on the subject, dedicates all her efforts to redressing the wrongs done to women in every aspect of oppression and injustice, has the requisite connections and the confidence to obtain inside information which others find it impossible to do, perhaps because few have her dedication. Her kind of stories demand a unique courage and singleness of mind.

Every area of the prostitution network is full of human interest stories. It is also a part of Indian life, perhaps even culture in many respects, which we should all know about because it hangs heavy on the national conscience after so many years of independence, of promises of social justice for all. The media coverage does exist but much more is necessary to do the subject justice, to point out that prostitutes are citizens deprived of their rights. Much of the coverage will have to be with depth, follow-up and understanding, along with the new item each time an instance is uncovered, for that is the only way to keep the problem in the news and in the public attention.
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