



## PROSTITUTION IN INDIA

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### Abstract

*Prostitution is one of the oldest professions of the world practiced since the birth of the organized society. Prostitution is practiced in almost all the countries and every type of society. In India, the Vedas, the earliest of the known Indian literature, abound in references to prostitution as an organized and established institution. In Indian mythology there are many references of high-class prostitution in the form of celestial demigods acting as prostitutes. They are referred to as Menaka, Rambha, Urvashi, and Thilothamma. They are described as perfect embodiments and unsurpassed beauty and feminine charms. They are highly accomplished in music and dance. They entertained divinities and their guests in the court of Lord Indira, the Lord of Hindu Gods. They were also sent to test the real depth of 'tapasya' (penance). Prostitution, the system that commodifies and dehumanizes the bodies and persons of women and children of both sexes for the use and profit of men, is today the object of an intense and international mainstreaming campaign that is working for the social and political acceptance of the hugely profitable industries of sex. Prostitution in India is a serious social problem and its solution has been rendered difficult by the problem of poverty. Prostitution is widely rampant in India and its main markets are in the big cities. The statistics available on the number of prostitutes operating in the country is not exact because there is so much of clandestine prostitution, in spite of such undetected prostitution the situation is horrifying. A very accurate, comprehensive picture of prostitution in India is not available since sexual exploitation and sale of women and children are mostly unreported crimes. This paper analytically reviews the history of prostitution, factors of prostitution, magnitude of the problem and the current issues and trends of prostitution in India.*



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## INTRODUCTION

Prostitutes were common during the reign of the Pandavas and Kauravas (Historical Indian rulers). They were an important part of the court and both dynasties possessed harems of aristocracy in Brahmanic India. Having concubines is common among the aristocracy. Kautilya's famous 'Arthasasthra' contains rules for prostitutes and their activities and gives an account of how prostitutes should behave and how their lives are ordered. A code of conduct was prescribed, for people seeking their favor and for them. They had certain definite prerogatives, rights and duties. Vatsyayan, the noted Indian sage of the Third century B.C. devoted a number of pages on prostitutes and their amorous ways of life in his

monumental treatise Kamasutra. Rules of conduct for popular and successful practice of their trade have been prescribed. His classification of the prostitutes indicates that the common, private, and the clandestine prostitutes of today had their prototypes in those olden days (Biswanath, 1984).

Prostitution is one of the oldest professions of the world practiced since the birth of the organized society. Prostitution is practiced in almost all the countries and every type of society. In India, the Vedas, the earliest of the known Indian literature, abound in references to prostitution as an organized and established institution. In Indian mythology there are many references of high-class prostitution in the form of celestial demigods acting as prostitutes. They are referred to as *Menaka, Rambha, Urvashi, and Thilothamma*. They are described as perfect embodiments and unsurpassed beauty and feminine charms. They are highly accomplished in music and dance. They entertained divinities and their guests in the court of Lord *Indira*, the Lord of Hindu Gods. They were also sent to test the real depth of 'tapasya' (penance) .

An apsara named Menaka caused the downfall of the great sage *Vishwamithra*, and became the mother of *Shakuntala*, the immortal heroine of the greatest drama of the world, *Abhigyan Shakuntalam* written by the great poet *Kalidas* of India. Aryan rulers of India followed the system of celestial court and developed the system of guest prostitution. They presented well-accomplished maidens in token of friendship of kings. They were also offered as ransom to the victor to part with his most beloved prostitute. Empires fell and came up for her sake. Another class of girls from infancy were carefully selected and fed on poisonous herbs and venomous foods. They were called Vishkanyas (Poisonous virgins). The kings to destroy their enemies utilized these prostitutes (Biswanath, 1984).

The sanctified prostitution in the third century A.D. in the Sanskrit works of Mahakavi Kalidas. Religious prostitutes were attached to the famous temples of Mahakala of Ujjain and the system of holy prostitutes became common. This class consisted of girls who had been offered by the parents to the service of the God and their religion. In the south India, they are known as Devadasi and in North India as Mukhies. These dancing girls were considered essential at the time of offering of prayers and were given a place of honor. Gradually due to the laxity of morals among the priests, they misused the systems for immoral purposes. Under the garb of religious dedication of girls to temples, clandestine prostitution developed.

The medieval period gave great importance to women and wine. The Muslim rulers with the exception of Aurangzeb recognized prostitution and the profession flourished under royal patronage. After the downfall of the Mughal Empire, hoards of concubines, dancing and singing girls women came out of the royal palaces. They were not trained for any profession and society had no jobs to offer them. When faced with economic problem they had no choice but to take recourse to the laziest of all the trades, the trade of sex. The place of women in India did not improve during the British regime. Conditions continued to deteriorate and in the absence of state control and regulation, prostitution thrived on a large commercial scale. Social disabilities and economic hardships of women made them an easy victim to the gangsters of this profession (Biswanath, 1984).

The shows that prostitution existed in India in some form or the other from time period to period but the evil has continued to persist. Today prostitution exists in almost every big city of the country. Women from third world countries are given allurements to work in India, as waitresses, models, artists and cabaret performers which subsequently lead to their exploitation by the flesh traders. Besides there are "high class call girls" who are engaged on lucrative jobs and yet return to these vice activities during nights in every discrete manner. If the traditional brothels or red light areas are on the wane, the evil of prostitution has manifested itself in posh localities of Metropolitan cities in the guise of singing and dancing schools. Prostitution in India can therefore be called as an "Ancient Vice in Modern Garb".

The current laws in India that legislate sex workers are fairly ambiguous. It is a system where prostitution is legally allowed to thrive, but which attempts to hide it from the public. The primary law dealing with the status of sex workers is the 1956 law referred to as the The Immoral Traffic (Suppression) Act (SITA). According to this law, sex work in India is neither legal nor illegal; it is tolerated since prostitutes can practice their trade privately but cannot legally solicit customers in public. In particular, the law forbids a sex worker to carry on her profession within 200 yards of a public place. Unlike as is the case with other professions, however, sex workers are not protected under normal workers laws, and are not entitled to minimum wage benefits, compensation for injury or other benefits that are common in other types of work. They do, however, possess the right to rescue and rehabilitation if they desire and possess all the rights of other citizens. In practice this is not common. Recently the old law has been amended as The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act or PITA (WikipediaContributors, 2006). The Indian Penal Code (IPC) which predates the SITA is often used to charge sex workers with vague crimes such as "public indecency" or being a "public nuisance" without explicitly defining what these consist of. Sections 366A and 366B

of Indian Penal Code, are intended to punish the export and import of girls for prostitution. Section 366A deals with procuring minor girls from one part of India to another. Section 366B makes it an offence to import into India from any country outside India girls below the age of twenty-one (21) years for the purpose of prostitution. Section 5, of the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1986 defines procuring, inducing or taking persons for the purpose of prostitution. Section 6 of the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1986 provides punishment not less than seven years for detaining a person in premises where prostitution is carried out.

### **Sex worker health**

Mumbai and Kolkata (Calcutta) have the country's largest brothel based sex industry, with over 100,000 sex workers in Mumbai.<sup>4</sup> It is estimated that HIV among prostitutes have been largely fallen, in last decade.

A positive outcome of a prevention programme among prostitutes can be found in Sonagachi, a red-light district in Kolkata. The education programme targeted about 5,000 female prostitutes. A team of two peer workers carried out outreach activities including education, condom promotion and follow-up of STI cases. When the project was launched in 1992, 27% of sex workers reported condom use. By 1995 this had risen to 82%, and in 2001 it was 86%. Reaching women who are working in brothels has proven to be quite difficult due to the sheltered and secluded nature of the work, where pimps, Mashis, and brothel-keepers often control access to the women and prevent their access to education, resulting in a low to modest literacy rate for many sex workers.

Not only HIV, but other infection diseases have been decreased, examined data from 868 prevention projects — serving about 500,000 female sex workers — implemented between 1995 and 2008. Research found that reaching sex workers through prevention programs decreased HIV and syphilis infection rates among young pregnant women tested routinely at government' prenatal health clinics.

### **Foreigners**

Girls from Arabia, Japan, Russia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and from other origins have been noted as working as prostitutes in India.

### **Popular culture**

Prostitution, has been a theme in Indian literature and arts for centuries, *Mrichakatika* a ten-act Sanskrit play, was written by Śhudraka in the 2nd century BC. It entails the story of a courtesan Vasantsena. It was made into *Utsav*, a 1984 Hindi film. Amrapali (Ambapali)

the nagarvadhu of the Kingdom of Vaishali famously became a Buddhist monk later in the life, a story retold in a Hindi film, *Amrapali* (1966).<sup>[44]</sup>

Tawaif, or the courtesan in the Mughal era, has been a theme of a number of films including *Pakeezah* (1972), *UmraoJaan* (1981), *Tawaif* (film) (1985), and *UmraoJaan* (2006 film). Other movies depicting lives of prostitutes and dancing girls are *Sharaabi*, *Amar Prem* (1972), *Mausam* (1975) *Mandi* (1983), *Devdas* (2002), *Chandni Bar* (2001), *Chameli*(2003), *LaagaChunari Mein Daag* (2007), *Dev D* (2009), *B.A. Pass* (2013) and *Thira* (2013).

*Born into Brothels*, a 2004 American documentary film about the children of prostitutes in Sonagachi, Kolkata, won the Academy Award for Documentary Feature in 2004.<sup>[45]</sup>

Child prostitution is also an issue in the 2008 film *Slumdog Millionaire*. *ChaarfutiyaChhokare* a Hindi upcoming film directed by Manish Harishankar has also dealt with the problem of child prostitution in India very strongly.

*Lakshmi* is a 2014 Hindi social problem film, directed by NageshKukunoor. The film deals with the harsh realities of human trafficking and child prostitution, which continue behind closed curtains in rural areas of India

### **History of prostitution**

History of prostitution extends to all ancient and modern cultures. It has been described as "the world's oldest profession".

### **Ancient Babylon and Sumer**

As early as the 18th century BCE, ancient Mesopotamia recognized the need to protect women's property rights. In the Code of Hammurabi, provisions were found that addressed inheritance rights of women, including female prostitutes. For example, if a dowry was established by the father for his unmarried daughter, upon his death, her brothers (if she had any) would act on her behalf as her trustee. However, if the woman received the property as a gift from her father, she owned the property outright and could leave the property to whomever she pleased.

One of the first forms of prostitution is sacred prostitution, supposedly practiced among the Sumerians. In ancient sources (Herodotus, Thucydides) there are many traces of sacred prostitution, starting perhaps with Babylon, where each woman had to reach, once in their lives, the sanctuary of *Militta* (Aphrodite or Nana/Anahita) and there have sex with a foreigner as a sign of hospitality for a symbolic price

In the Ancient Near East along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers there were many shrines and temples or "houses of heaven" dedicated to various deities documented by the Ancient

Greek historian Herodotus in *The Histories*<sup>[5]</sup> where sacred prostitution was a common practice. It came to an end when the emperor Constantine in the fourth century AD destroyed the goddess temples and replaced them with Christianity.

### **Biblical information**

Prostitution was common in ancient Israel, despite being tacitly forbidden by Jewish Law. Within the religion of Canaan, a significant portion of temple prostitutes were male. It was widely used in Sardinia and in some of the Phoenician cultures, usually in honour of the goddess 'Ashtart. Presumably under the influence of the Phoenicians, this practice was developed in other parts of the Mediterranean Sea, such as Erice (Sicily), Locri Epizephiri, Croton, Rossano Vaglio, and Sicca Veneria. Other hypotheses include Asia Minor, Lydia, Syria and the Etruscans.

The Biblical story of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) provides a depiction of prostitution as practiced in the society of the time. The prostitute plies her trade at the side of a highway, waiting for travelers. She covers her face; which marks her as a prostitute. She gets paid in kind, asking for a kid as her fee; a rather high price in a herding society, in which only the wealthy owner of numerous herds could afford to pay for a single sexual encounter. If the traveler does not have his cattle with him, he must give some valuables as a deposit, until the kid is delivered to the woman.

Though in this story the woman was not a real prostitute but Judah's widowed daughter-in-law, who had good reasons of seeking to trick Judah and become pregnant by him, she succeeds in impersonating a prostitute and her conduct can be assumed to be the real conduct expected of a prostitute in the society of the time.

A later Biblical story, in the Book of Joshua, a prostitute in Jericho named Rahab assisted Israelite spies with her knowledge of the current socio-cultural and military situation due to her popularity with the high-ranking nobles she serviced, among others. The spies, in return for the information, promised to save her and her family during the planned military invasion as long as she fulfilled her part of the deal by keeping the details of the contact with them secret and leaving a sign on her residence that would be a marker for the advancing soldiers to avoid. When the people of Israel conquered Canaan, she left prostitution, converted to Judaism and married a prominent member of the people.

In the Book of Revelation, the Whore of Babylon is "Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and Abominations of the Earth." The word "Whore" can also be translated as "Idolatress". Even as it so, the first Babylonian Prostitution was in a places called Hinchinopolises, which arisen from the appraised Hinchin family. At the time, Hinchinapolis

was the center of attraction for all travelers, who came to rest in the company of the families women, which perfected with each generation the art of satisfaction. Some ancient scrolls could tell us that the meaning of "Hinchin" came from the Hebrew "Hinam", meaning "free", because the males of the family would offer them selves for free.

### **Mesoamerica**

Among the Aztecs, the Cihuacalli was the name given to those controlled buildings where prostitution was permitted by political and religious authorities. "Cihuacalli" is a Nahuatl word which means "House of Women".

The Cihuacalli was a closed compound with rooms, all of which were looking to a central patio. At the center of the patio was a statue of Tlazolteotl, the goddess of "filth". Religious authorities believed women should work as prostitutes, if they wish, only at such premises guarded by Tlazolteotl. It was believed Tlazolteotl had the power to incite sexual activity, and at the same time do spiritual cleansing of such acts.

There are stories that also refer to certain places, either inside the Cihuacalli or outside, where women would perform erotic dance in front of men. The poet Tlaltecatzin of Tenochtitlan noted that special "Joyful Women" would perform erotic dances at certain homes outside of the compound.

### **Greece**

Both women and boys engaged in prostitution in ancient Greece. The Greek word for prostitute is *porne* (Gr: πόρνη), derived from the verb *pernemi* (to sell), with the evident modern evolution. The English word *pornography*, and its corollaries in other languages, are directly derivative of the Greek word *pornē* (Gr: πόρνη). Female prostitutes could be independent and sometimes influential women. They were required to wear distinctive dresses and had to pay taxes. Some similarities have been found between the Greek *hetaera* and the Japanese *oiran*, complex figures that are perhaps in an intermediate position between prostitution and courtesanerie. (See also the Indian *tawaif*.) Some prostitutes in ancient Greece, such as *Lais* were as famous for their company as their beauty, and some of these women charged extraordinary sums for their services.

Solon instituted the first of Athens' brothels (*oik'iskoi*) in the 6th century BC, and with the earnings of this business he built a temple dedicated to Aphrodite Pandemos (or Qedesh), patron goddess of this commerce. Procuring, however, was severely forbidden. In Cyprus (Paphos) and in Corinth, a type of religious prostitution was practiced where the temple counted more than a thousand prostitutes (*hierodules*, Gr: ιεροδουλες), according to Strabo.

Each specialised category had its proper name, so there were the *chamaitypa'i*, working outdoor (lie-down), the *perepatetikes* who met their customers while walking (and then worked in their houses), the *gephyrides*, who worked near the bridges. In the 5th century, Ateneo informs us that the price was of 1 *obole*, a sixth of a drachma and the equivalent of an ordinary worker's day salary. The rare pictures describe that sex was performed on beds with covers and pillows, while triclinia usually didn't have these accessories.

Male prostitution was also common in Greece. It was usually practiced by adolescent boys, a reflection of the pederastic custom of the time. Slave boys worked the male brothels in Athens, while free boys who sold their favours risked losing their political rights as adults.

### **Ancient Rome**

Prostitution in ancient Rome was legal, public, and widespread. Even Roman men of the highest social status were free to engage prostitutes of either sex without incurring moral disapproval, as long as they demonstrated self-control and moderation in the frequency and enjoyment of sex. Latin literature refers often to prostitutes. Real-world practices are documented by provisions of Roman law that regulate prostitution, and by inscriptions, especially graffiti from Pompeii. Some large brothels in the 4th century, when Rome was becoming officially Christianized, seem to have been counted as tourist attractions and were possibly even state-owned. Prostitutes played a role in several Roman religious observances, mainly in the month of April, over which the love and fertility goddess Venus presided. At the same time, prostitutes were considered shameful: most were either slaves or former slaves, or if free by birth relegated to the *infames*, people utterly lacking in social standing and deprived of most protections accorded to citizens under Roman law. Prostitution thus reflects the ambivalent attitudes of Romans toward pleasure and sexuality.

A registered prostitute was called a *meretrix* while the unregistered one fell under the broad category *prostibulae*. There were some commonalities with the Greek system, but as the Empire grew, prostitutes were often foreign slaves, captured, purchased, or raised for that purpose, sometimes by large-scale "prostitute farmers" who took abandoned children. Indeed, abandoned children were almost always raised as prostitutes. Enslavement into prostitution was sometimes used as a legal punishment against criminal free women. Buyers were allowed to inspect naked men and women for sale in private and there was no stigma attached to the purchase of males by a male aristocrat.

### **Asia**

According to Shia Muslims, the prophet Muhammad sanctioned fixed-term marriage – *muta'a* in Iraq and *sigheh* in Iran — which has instead been used as a legitimizing cover for sex



workers, in a culture where prostitution is otherwise forbidden. Sunni Muslims, who make up the majority of Muslims worldwide, believe the practice of fixed-term marriage was abrogated and ultimately forbidden by either Muhammad, or one of his successors, Umar. Like the Shia, Sunnis regard prostitution as sinful and forbidden.

In the early 17th century, there was widespread male and female prostitution throughout the cities of Kyoto, Edo, and Osaka, Japan. Oiran were courtesans in Japan during the Edo period. The oiran were considered a type of *yūjo* (遊女) "woman of pleasure" or prostitute. Among the oiran, the *tayū* (太夫) was considered the highest rank of courtesan available only to the wealthiest and highest ranking men. To entertain their clients, oiran practiced the arts of dance, music, poetry, and calligraphy as well as sexual services, and an educated wit was considered essential for sophisticated conversation. Many became celebrities of their times outside the pleasure districts. Their art and fashions often set trends among wealthy women. The last recorded oiran was in 1761. Although illegal in modern Japan, the definition of prostitution does not extend to a "private agreement" reached between a woman and a man in a brothel. Yoshiwara has a large number of soaplands that began when explicit prostitution in Japan became illegal, where women washed men's bodies. They were originally known as *toruko-buro*, meaning Turkish bath.

A *tawaif* was a courtesan who catered to the nobility of South Asia, particularly during the era of the Mughal Empire. These courtesans would dance, sing, recite poetry and entertain their suitors at *mehfils*. Like the geisha tradition in Japan, their main purpose was to professionally entertain their guests, and while sex was often incidental, it was not assured contractually. High-class or the most popular *tawaifs* could often pick and choose between the best of their suitors. They contributed to music, dance, theatre, film, and the Urdu literary tradition.

### **Middle Ages**

During the Middle Ages, prostitution was commonly found in urban contexts. Although all forms of sexual activity outside of marriage were regarded as sinful by the Roman Catholic Church, prostitution was tolerated because it was held to prevent the greater evils of rape, sodomy, and masturbation (McCall, 1979). Augustine of Hippo held that: "If you expel prostitution from society, you will unsettle everything on account of lusts". The general tolerance of prostitution was for the most part reluctant, and many canonists urged prostitutes to reform.

After the decline of organised prostitution of the Roman empire, many prostitutes were slaves. However, religious campaigns against slavery, and the growing marketisation of the economy, turned prostitution back into a business. By the High Middle Ages it is common to find town governments ruling that prostitutes were not to ply their trade within the town walls, but they were tolerated outside if only because these areas were beyond the jurisdiction of the authorities. In many areas of France and Germany town governments came to set aside certain streets as areas where prostitution could be tolerated. In London the brothels of Southwark were owned by the Bishop of Winchester. (MCCall) Still later it became common in the major towns and cities of Southern Europe to establish civic brothels, whilst outlawing any prostitution taking place outside these brothels. In much of Northern Europe a more *laissez faire* attitude tended to be found. Prostitutes also found a fruitful market in the Crusades.

In the 7th century, the Islamic prophet Muhammad declared that prostitution is forbidden on all grounds. In Islam, prostitution is considered a sin, as referenced here: "Allah's Apostle forbade taking the price of a dog, money earned by prostitution and the earnings of a soothsayer", attributed to Abu Mas'ud Al-Ansari (Sahih al-Bukhari, 3:34:439). Despite this, sexual slavery was very common during the Arab slave trade throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period, when women and girls from the Caucasus, Africa, Central Asia and Europe were captured and served as concubines in the harems of the Arab World. Ibn Battuta tells us several times that he was given or purchased female slaves.

The term devadasi originally described a Hindu religious practice in which girls were "married" and dedicated to a deity (deva or devi). In addition to taking care of the temple, and performing rituals they learned and practiced Bharatanatyam and other classical Indian arts traditions, and enjoyed a high social status. The popularity of devadasis seems to have reached its pinnacle around the 10th and 11th centuries. The rise and fall in the status of devadasis can be seen to be running parallel to the rise and fall of Hindu temples. Due to the destruction of temples by West Asian invaders, the status of the temples fell very quickly in North India and slowly in South India. As the temples became poorer and lost their patron kings, and in some cases were destroyed, the devadasis were forced into a life of poverty, misery and prostitution.

### **16th–17th centuries**

By the end of the 15th century attitudes seemed to have begun to harden against prostitution. An outbreak of syphilis in Naples 1494 which later swept across Europe, and which may have originated from the Columbian Exchange, and the prevalence of other sexually

transmitted diseases from the earlier 16th century may have been causes of this change in attitude. By the early 16th century the association between prostitutes, plague, and contagion emerged, causing brothels and prostitution to be outlawed by secular authority. Furthermore, outlawing brothel-keeping and prostitution was also used to “strengthen the criminal law” system of the sixteenth century secular rulers. Canon law defined a prostitute as “a promiscuous woman, regardless of financial elements. The prostitute was considered a “whore ... who [was] available for the lust of many men,” and was most closely associated with promiscuity.

The Church’s stance on prostitution was three-fold: “acceptance of prostitution as an inevitable social fact, condemnation of those profiting from this commerce, and encouragement for the prostitute to repent.” The Church was forced to recognize its inability to remove prostitution from the worldly society, and in the fourteenth century “began to tolerate prostitution as a lesser evil. However, prostitutes were to be excluded from the Church as long as they practiced. Around the twelfth century, the idea of prostitute saints took hold, with Mary Magdalene being one of the most popular saints of the era. The Church used Mary Magdalene’s biblical history of being a reformed harlot to encourage prostitutes to repent and mend their ways. Simultaneously, religious houses were established with the purpose of providing asylum and encouraging the reformation of prostitution. ‘Magdalene Homes’ were particularly popular and peaked especially in the early fourteenth century. Over the course of the Middle Ages, popes and religious communities made various attempts to remove prostitution or reform prostitutes, with varying success.

With the advent of the Protestant Reformation, numbers of Southern German towns closed their brothels in an attempt to eradicate prostitution. In some periods prostitutes had to distinguish themselves by particular signs, sometimes wearing very short hair or no hair at all, or wearing veils in societies where other women did not wear them. Ancient codes regulated in this case the crime of a prostitute that dissimulated her profession. In some cultures, prostitutes were the sole women allowed to sing in public or act in theatrical performances.

From the 15th century, Chinese, Korean and other Far Eastern visitors began frequenting brothels in Japan. This practice continued among visitors from the "Western Regions", mainly European traders (beginning with the Portuguese in the 16th century) who often came with their South Asian *lascar* crew (in addition to African crewmembers in some cases). In the 16th century, the local Japanese people initially assumed that the Portuguese were from *Tenjiku* ("Heavenly Abode"), the Japanese name for the Indian

subcontinent (due to its importance as the birthplace of Buddhism), and that Christianity was a new "Indian faith". These mistaken assumptions were due to the Indian city of Goabeing a central base for the Portuguese East India Company and also due to a significant portion of the crew on Portuguese ships being Indian Christians.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Portuguese visitors and their South Asian (and sometimes African) crewmembers often engaged in slavery in Japan, where they brought or captured young Japanese women and girls, who were either used as sexual slaves on their ships or taken to Macau and other Portuguese colonies in Southeast Asia, the Americas, and India. For example, in Goa, a Portuguese colony in India, there was a community of Japanese slaves and traders during the late 16th and 17th centuries. Later European East India companies, including those of the Dutch and British, also engaged in prostitution in Japan.

### **18th century**

According to Dervish Ismail Agha, in the *Dellâkname-iDilküşâ*, the Ottoman archives, in the Turkish baths, the masseurs were traditionally young men, who helped wash clients by soaping and scrubbing their bodies. They also worked as sex workers. The Ottoman texts describe who they were, their prices, how many times they could bring their customers to orgasm, and the details of their sexual practices.

In the 18th century, presumably in Venice, prostitutes started using condoms, made with catgut or cow bowel.

During the British East India Company's rule in India in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, it was initially fairly common for British soldiers to engage in inter-ethnic prostitution in India, where they would frequently visit local Indian *nautch* dancers. As British females began arriving in British India in large numbers from the early to mid-19th century, it became increasingly uncommon for British soldiers to visit Indian prostitutes, and miscegenation was despised altogether after the events of the Indian Rebellion of 1857.

### **19th century**

Many of the women who posed in 19th and early 20th century vintage erotica were prostitutes. The most famous were the New Orleans women who posed for E. J. Bellocq. In the 19th century, legalized prostitution became a public controversy as France and then the United Kingdom passed the Contagious Diseases Acts, legislation mandating pelvic examinations for suspected prostitutes. This legislation applied not only to the United Kingdom and France, but also to their overseas colonies. Many early feminists fought for repeal of these laws, either on the grounds that prostitution should be illegal and therefore not

government regulated or because it forced degrading medical examinations upon women. A similar situation did in fact exist in the Russian Empire; prostitutes operating out of government-sanctioned brothels were given yellow internal passports signifying their status and were subjected to weekly physical exams. Leo Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection* describes legal prostitution in 19th-century Russia.

While in the 19th century the British in India began to adopt the policy of social segregation, they still kept their brothels full of Indian women. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, there was a network of Chinese and Japanese prostitutes being trafficked across Asia, in countries such as China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and British India, in what was then known as the "Yellow Slave Traffic". There was also a network of European prostitutes being trafficked to India, Ceylon, Singapore, China and Japan at around the same time, in what was then known as the "White Slave Traffic". The most common destination for European prostitutes in Asia were the British colonies of India and Ceylon, where hundreds of women and girls from continental Europe as well as Japan serviced British soldiers.

### **20th century**

The leading theorists of Communism opposed prostitution. Karl Marx thought of it as "only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the laborer," and considered its abolition to be necessary to overcome capitalism. Friedrich Engels considered even marriage a form of prostitution, and Vladimir Lenin found sex work distasteful. Communist governments often took wide-ranging steps to repress prostitution immediately after obtaining power, although the practice always persisted. In the countries that remained nominally Communist after the end of the Cold War, notably China, prostitution remains illegal but is nonetheless common. In many current or former Communist countries, the economic depression brought about by the collapse of the Soviet union led to an increase in prostitution.

During World War II, Japanese soldiers engaged in forced prostitution during their invasions across East Asia and Southeast Asia. The term "comfort women" became an euphemism for the estimated 200,000, mostly Korean and Chinese, women who were forced into prostitution in Japanese military brothels during the war.

Sex tourism emerged in the late 20th century as a controversial aspect of Western tourism and globalization. Sex tourism is typically undertaken internationally by tourists from wealthier countries. Author Nils Ringdal alleged that three out of four men between the ages of 20 and 50 who have visited Asia or Africa have paid for sex.

A new legal approach to prostitution emerged at the end of the 20th century — the prohibition of the buying, but not the selling, of sexual services, with only the client

committing a crime, not the prostitute. Such laws were enacted in Sweden (1999), Norway (2009), Iceland (2009), and are also being considered in other jurisdictions.

### **21st century**

In the 21st century, Afghans revived a method of prostituting young boys which is referred to as *bacha bazi*.

Since the break up of the Soviet Union, thousands of eastern European women have ended up as prostitutes in China, Western Europe, Israel, and Turkey every year. There are tens of thousands of women from eastern Europe and Asia working as prostitutes in Dubai. Men from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates form a large proportion of the customers.

India's devadasi girls are forced by their poor families to dedicate themselves to the Hindu goddess Renuka. The BBC wrote in 2007 that devadasis are "sanctified prostitutes".

were so violent they preferred prostitution. Husbands or families introduced some women to prostitution. Many families knew what the women had to do, but ignored it as long as they got the benefits from it (Karkal

### **FACTORS LEADING TO PROSTITUTION**

A survey of prostituted women in India reveals their reasoning for staying in prostitution (in descending order of significance): poverty/ unemployment; lack of proper reintegration services, lack of options; stigma and adverse social attitudes; family expectations and pressure; resignation and acclimation to the lifestyle. (CATW - Asia Pacific, Trafficking in Women and Prostitution in the Asia Pacific). Most of the research done by Sanlaap (an NGO) indicates that the majority of sex workers in India work as prostitutes due to lacking resources to support themselves or their children. Most do not choose this profession out of preference, but out of necessity, often after the breakup of a marriage or after being disowned and thrown out of their homes by their families. The children of sex workers are much more likely to get involved in this kind of work as well (Wikipedia contributors, 2006).

### **Poverty's Role in Indian Prostitution**

One of India's most striking characteristics is its material poverty. An estimated 40% of India's population lives in poverty. This means that almost 400 million people cannot meet basic survival needs like food, clothing, and shelter. This is an overwhelming, almost unimaginable statistic. Poverty does not create imbalances in gender and sex. It only aggravates already existing imbalances in power and therefore increases the vulnerability of those who are at the receiving end of gender prejudice. In a patriarchal set up, the section in families in societies that is affected is women and girl children. Caste wars, political strife,

domestic conflicts through their manifestations and repercussions reflect strong gender prejudice against women. Violence against women, assault and rape on women are not individual sexual or physical crimes. It has become a tool of a political statement for aggression and gender persecution, which amply reflects on the degree of human degradation and commoditization of women in the eyes of the state, community, and society.

Indeed, such poverty belongs to an almost surreal world in which only the "wealthy" are certain to meet basic needs. Desperation seems to characterize the lives of India's poor. This desperate poverty is often cited as the root of India's growing prostitution problem. In some cases, a woman may prostitute herself in order to obtain material possessions she could not otherwise afford. While fundamental needs like food, clothing, and shelter may be provided, some girls pursue dreams of greater prosperity and economic opportunity through prostitution.

### **Devadasi System in India (Religious Prostitution)**

A review of Prostitution in India would be incomplete if it not refers to the special class of women known as devadasis. For centuries the devadasis or dancing girls serving in temples were taught music and dancing with all wealth of detailed technique. As they were hereditary employees of the temples, they enjoyed economic security. Further, they had an advantage of receiving training under technically competent traditional teachers. Unfortunately the system deteriorated and devadasis came to be increasingly identified with prostitution. The Devadasi system has a significant place in the history of prostitution in India. The term Devadasi literally means servants (slaves) of God and perhaps originally denoted a class of women who gave themselves to a life of religious service and austerities. These devadasis who were not supposed enter the bond of matrimony often functioned as temple singers, dancers, concubines and prostitutes. The term Devadasi became a euphemistic way of referring to women prostituting in the name of religion (Lall, 1968).

The Devadasi system was set up, according to a Times of India report (10-11-1987) as a result of a conspiracy between the feudal class and the priests. The latter, with their ideological and religious hold over the peasants and craftsmen, devised a means that gave prostitution their religious sanction. Poor, low-caste girls, initially sold at private auctions, were later dedicated to the temples. They were then initiated into prostitution. A Times of India report (10-11-1987) confirms that the practice of dedicating young dalit girls (Mahars, Mangs, Dowris and Chambhar) at childhood to a goddess, and their initiation into prostitution when they attain puberty continues to thrive in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and

other parts of South India. This is largely due to social backwardness, poverty and illiteracy, according to a study by two doctors of the India health Organization.

The report clearly indicates that the Devadasi system was the result of a conspiracy between the feudal class and the priests (Brahmins), who with their ideological and religious hold over the peasants and craftsmen devised a practice, which acquired religious sanction. They noted in their study on -"Devadasis - the link between religious culture and child prostitution". The study revealed that girls from poor families are married to God Krishna and are sold after puberty at private auctions to a high caste master who initially pays a sum of money to the families ranging from Indian Rupees 500/- to 5,000/-.The study, made during health camps organized by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the Devadasi populated areas, revealed that the dedicated girls formed 15 percent of the total women involved in prostitution in the country, and as much as 70 percent to 80 percent of the prostitutes in the border districts of Karnataka and Maharashtra

The devadasi tradition, still prevalent in many parts of India, continues to legitimize child prostitution. A devadasi is a woman married to a god and thus *sadasuhagan* or married, and hence at all times blessed. As such, she becomes the wife of the powerful in the community. Devadasi is known by different names in different states. In the Bijapur district of Karnataka, girls are given to the Monkey God (Hanuman, Maruti), and known as *Basvi*. In Goa, a devadasi is called *Bhavin* (the one with devotion), In the Shimoga District of Karnataka, the girls are handed over to the goddess *Renuka Devi*, and in Hospet, to the goddess *Hulganga Devi*. The tradition lives on in other states in South India. Girls end up as prostitutes in Bombay and Pune. The *Banchara* and *Bedia* peoples of Madhya Pradesh also practice "traditional" prostitution. (Lambey, 1997)

### **Social Factors in Prostitution**

The view of women as a commodity is pervasive in popular manifestations of Hindustan culture in India. Women who have had sexual experiences are considered to be 'used goods' and are unlikely to ever marry. Without a husband, a woman has no source of income; she also cannot wear the marriage *bindi*. She is an impoverished cultural outcast. The prevailing line of reasoning is that she at least has a useful place as a prostitute. Women who have been widowed or divorced are also confronted with this social stigma. If a woman's husband dies, she has essentially outlived her purpose. Since she is not a virgin, she obviously cannot marry again. In rural areas, "bride burnings," in which a woman burns herself to death on her husband's funeral pyre, still occur. The social stigma, which leads a



woman to believe that her life is worthless after her husband's death, is also attached to a woman whose husband chooses a different woman as his wife.

When strong cultural notions are combined with the potency of religion or poverty, even more people are pressured into prostitution. For example, a girl may become a street child because her mother died and her father's new spouse will not accept her. As a street child, she may be periodically arrested along with her fellow vagabonds for crimes, which they may or may not have committed. While in police custody, instead of simply being beaten as her male cohorts are, she may be sexually abused by the police officers. She may decide to become a prostitute to support herself and to find her place in the broken world in which she is fated to reside. Her children will likely be prostitutes as well.

### **MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM IN INDIA**

India is a receiving, sending, and transit country for prostitution. Due to its geographical proximity to Nepal and Bangladesh as well as Pakistan, all of which are economically less developed than India, the constant illegal movement of people is a perpetual phenomenon. Every day, about 200 girls and women in India enter prostitution, 80% of them against their will (CEDPA and PRIDE, 1997). Prostitution is widely rampant in India and its main markets are in the big cities. The statistics available on the number of prostitutes operating in the country is not exact because there is so much of clandestine prostitution, in spite of such undetected prostitution the situation is horrifying. A very accurate, comprehensive picture of prostitution in India is not available since sexual exploitation and sale of women and children are mostly unreported crimes; since many cruel episodes are caused by middlemen and procurers who act secretly and in a very organized, criminal manner. However, some intensive project studies and research work reveal following facts: According to a recent publication on trafficking, (The Coalition against Trafficking in Women – Asia Pacific. [www.catwinternational.org](http://www.catwinternational.org)) there are about 2.3 million prostitutes in India. This data may seem to be on the higher side but authentic data of a survey of Bombay (Mumbai) city alone indicates an alarming figure of more than 0.1 million prostitutes in its 12000 brothels. Approximately 20% women in prostitution are under 18. A sample survey of 12 states and 2 union territories reveals that women who are sexually exploited and sold are usually children (under 18 years) at the time of their initial exploitation or abduction.

A survey by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development reveal that only 4.9 % of the prostitutes in Calcutta are born within the city. More than 70 districts supply prostitutes to Delhi. The survey also revealed that two third of the original families of prostitutes lived below the poverty line and 60 % of the prostitutes covered in the survey belonged to

Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes or Backward Classes. A study of 12 states and 2 union territories reveals that the majority of rural girls are forced to take up prostitution (Rozario, 1999). One can conceptually see that these prostitutes are mainly from two groups. They have no education and belong to the lower income group or they belong to castes, which are lowly placed - they come from a backward community with little education (The Fact book on Global Sexual Exploitation, 1999).

Prostitution is increasing in India where there have been fears over the spread of AIDS and reports of young girls being abducted and forced into prostitution (Reuters, 1998). It takes up to fifteen years for girls held in prostitution via debt-bondage to purchase their freedom (Freidman, 1996). Children of prostituted women are victims of sexual abuse as well. Children are forced to perform dances and songs for male buyers, and some are forced to sexually service the males (Menon, 1997). There are three routes into prostitution for most women in India. 1) Deception; 2) Devadasi dedication and 3) Bad marriages or families. For some women their marriages (1997).

The children of sex workers are much more likely to get involved in this kind of work as well. A survey completed in 1988 by the All Bengal Women's Union interviewed a random sample of 160 workers in Calcutta: Of those, 23 claimed that they had come of their own accord, whereas the remaining 137 women claimed to have been introduced into the sex trade by agents. The breakdown was as follows:

- Neighbour in connivance with parents: 7
- Neighbours as pimps (guardians not knowing): 19
- Aged sex workers from same village or locality: 31
- Unknown person/accidental meeting with pimp: 32
- Mother/sister/near relative in the profession: 18
- Lover giving false hope of marriage or job and selling to brothel: 14
- Close acquaintance giving false hope of marriage or job: 11
- "Husband" (not legally married): 3
- Husband (legally married): 1
- Young college student selling to brothel and visiting free of cost: 1

The breakdown of the agents by sex were as follows: 76% of the agents were female and 24% were males. Over 80% of the agents bring young women into the profession were known people and not traffickers: neighbors, relatives, etc.

Also prevalent in parts of Bengal is the Chukri System, whereby a female is coerced into prostitution to pay off debts, as a form of bonded labour. In this system, the prostitute

generally works without pay for one year or longer to repay a supposed debt to the brothel owner for food, clothes, make-up and living expenses. In India, the Government's "central sponsored scheme" provides financial or in-kind grants to released bonded labourers and their family members, the report noted, adding over 2,850,000 people have benefited to date. Almost 5,000 prosecutions have been recorded so far under the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1976.

Some women and girls are by tradition born into prostitution to support the family. The Bachara, for example, follow this tradition with eldest daughters often expected to be prostitutes.

Over 40% of 484 prostituted girls rescued during major raids of brothels in Mumbai in 1996 were from Nepal. In India as many as 200,000 Nepalese girls, many under the age of 14, have been sold into sexual slavery. Nepalese women and girls, especially virgins, are favoured in India.

It's called the world's oldest profession, and for good reason. Prostitution has been around since the beginning of recorded history and it's had a lot of time to grow. A prostitute isn't just a prostitute—there are a wide variety of different types of women throughout history who have served a varied role in civilization, from shunned outcast to pillars of society. Ying-chi, Temple Prostitutes, Devadasis, Auletrides, Comfort Women, Ganika, Zonah, Hetaira, Tawaif, Mut'ah

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