

3rd State Conference of DMSC



Minister-in-charge, Departments of Transport and Sports, Govt. of W.B. Shree Subhas Chakraborti at Raksha-Bandhan by and for HIV+ people at Durbar office. Others present include Arup Biswas, councillor and, Jiban Prakash Saha, MLA

Minister-in-charge of Tribal Welfare, Govt. Of W. B. Shree Upen Kisku at a session of the International Symposium on Community Led Approaches to Health and Development, 16-17 September 2005, Peerless Inn, Kolkata



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Editorial

Is the Sex Sector a part of the Entertainment Sector ?

First there was the question : Can Sex Workers be called Workers? After more than 12 years of struggle around that question, now we have a second question: Can Sex Workers be called Entertainment Workers?

Let us begin at the beginning. Sex Workers provide sexual services to their clients. The work begins with a process of eye-contact, negotiation and persuasion. The settlement about the type, duration and price of the services is the end product of a very subtle and sophisticated process of communication, carried out in a given social context. This is the context of commoditized/marketized sexual services, which in its turn is a part of the commoditized/marketized service sector.

Once a deal is struck, in most cases, the sexual services agreed upon/negotiated culminate in sexual intercourse, carried out with non-reproductive intentions. It is common ground that sexual intercourse too is a kind of inter-personal communication. A very intimate communication, involving the sense organs eye, ear, nose, skin and tongue, coordinated by the brain. Sexual intercourse is a mutual performance of sexual partners, in a given cultural context. In the domain of commoditized sex work, these partners are sex workers and customers. In the heterosexual cultural context, sexual intercourse usually constitutes of a bit of warming/cozying up, a period of love play, that may involve various kinds of touching, kissing, caressing etc., leading to male penile erection, followed by its insertion into a by then hopefully mucus-lubricated vagina or mouth or some otherwise-lubricated orifice; in the case of female and male homoerotic or transgender and also in heterosexual contexts the foreplay may be followed by other options like mutual masturbation, anal sex or cunnilingus; all these moves are accompanied by mutual body movements of the partners with the aim of obtaining maximum pleasurable sensation of intimate contact. The partners usually feel relaxed after achieving a climax of the process.

As in all customer-service-provider interfaces, the satisfaction of the sexual service provider has two components: customer's satisfaction and, worker's job satisfaction. If the customer is happy then the service provider is happy about a job well done to the satisfaction of the buyer. If the job itself is so well executed that the resultant good feeling, joy and, beauty of it all provides a pleasing experience to the service provider, then one speaks of excellent intrinsic job satisfaction.

Like all service providers, like, say, the teachers, doctors, artists etc., the sex workers too have varying levels of both kinds of satisfaction with various kinds of customers. If it were true, that the sex workers had no job satisfaction at all, then the sex sector would not have grown over the last several thousand years. Worshipers of the familial slavery of housewives, masquerading as gender-sensitive social workers, social scientists or journalists, are fond of calling sex work the worst kind of patriarchal slavery. Being innocent of political economy, they fail to understand that contractual commoditized sexual services are more women-friendly, than the outright women-hostile familial sexual slavery of the housewives. In sum, the sex worker is not a slave but a worker who negotiates and enters into a contract with a customer and, provides sexual services for a negotiated price.

If the above description of what happens when a sex worker provides sexual services to a customer, holds good, in most heterosexual or homosexual cultural contexts, then we may agree that the services provided by the sex workers involve: some communication in a cultural context that includes the use of gesture, language and play, culminating in some pleasurable sensation, good feeling and relaxation. So much on sex work.

Now on entertainment. To entertain is variously: to hold someone's interest, to provide pleasure, to amuse, to consider and, to provide hospitality. An entertainer or entertainment worker is a person who entertains. She/he may be a singer, dancer, actor, comedian, magician or...a sex worker. A successful sex worker has to hold the interest of the customer from the very beginning of eye contact, provide hospitality, amuse and please the customer, all the time showing immense consideration for the requirements of the customer - all these according to the explicit and implicit codes of the given cultural context.

If the above analysis of the real social existence of the sex worker as an entertainment worker is true then why some people fail to see it? Their vision and

understanding is impaired by several cultural filters. In India, the modern Anglophone Indian happens to be the most vocal opponent of the recognition of the sex workers as entertainment workers. These people have been and continue to be conditioned by a social convention that stigmatizes the sex workers as the worst kind of outcaste. This convention has a vested interest in hiding the reality of human sexuality under layers and layers of false consciousness: familial, educational, religious, legal, literary etc. In the ultimate count, it is the vested interest of that culture, which ensures and champions the cause of the patriarchal labor production industry called the monogamous family. It works overtime to hide the pleasure-giving and pleasure-seeking aspects of human sexual behavior at all costs. However, once the veil of secrecy erected around human sexuality is removed, we notice that its connection with the reproduction of human labor, in the shape of the child, is contingent and historical and, not universal and eternal. It is our modern official culture that refuses to recognize the sex workers as entertainment workers. This is not to imply, however, that this culture recognizes the sex workers in their other simultaneous roles, as citizen, daughters, wives, mothers etc.

Like the other workers of the entertainment sector, the sex worker too is at once an educator. Right up to the 19th century the *Ganiika* or *Tanuaif* (the courtesan *de luxe*) was considered to be the best teacher of manners and etiquette for the sons of the aristocracy of our country. Today in the context of HIV/AIDS and heightened need for safe sex, our sex workers are our best sex educators. They are the best workers in the field of sexual health care. By providing scope for much needed relaxation, the sex workers, like the other entertainers, also look after the upkeep of the mental health of their customers.

A modern philosophical convention also comes in the way of recognizing the sex worker as an entertainment worker. This convention believes that the material and, the spiritual/intellectual are two absolutely separate domains. In reality, our physical body, its feelings, emotions and our intellection constitute an indivisible continuum. There can be no intellect without the body and, no feeling or emotion without culturally conditioned intellection. Thus, if intellectual pursuit and the resultant pleasure is sacred, so is its seat, the human body. Human sexuality in all its forms is as much worthy of respect and reverence as are our officially revered activities such as doing Mathematics, pursuing the arts and the sciences, singing *Dhrupad* or performing the *Bharatnatyam* dance.

The art of making love, even in its own terms requires – recognized sage Vatsyayana Mallanaga – cultivation of a wide range of communication skills and sensibilities, such as acting, mind-reading, dancing, singing, playing musical instruments, conversing, story-telling, reciting, writing, painting, beauty care, making and using perfumes, the art of making and using floral ornaments etc. etc. When we look back and take note of the heritage of the courtesans in our country and elsewhere, then the continuing connection between sex work and the various performing arts, that are but various modes of sublimating the more direct expressions of human sexuality, become crystal clear. If one has any doubt about this connection one may watch the famous films like the *Amrapali*, *Pakeeza* or *Umrao Jan*. Leave aside the courtesans and let's take a look at ourselves. Both in the non-market domestic sector and in the marketized sex sector, sexual services include very many kinds of human communications and expressions. Human encounters are never one dimensional. Sex work is a form of human encounter. Hence, it can not be an exception. It is the modern Anglophone Indian, blissfully and arrogantly ignorant of the heritage of our land and, carrying a woeful lot of baggage of distorted quasi-western or pseudo-western education, who remains quite unaware of the connotations of the words *Sakha*, *Vinodana* and *Ananda* in our languages, wherein a mind-body dualism was never posited. In fact our ancients have always equated supreme reality with supreme bliss, never caring to isolate the spiritual from the material. Bliss in all its forms was an object of reverence for them. They considered desire (*Kama*) of all forms and contexts to be the starting point of all other pursuits. No desire, no effort. No effort, no realization.

In the light of the above considerations, it is our humble submission that the recognition of Sex Workers as Entertainment Workers, that of the Sex Sector as a part of the Entertainment Sector, will not diminish the glory of the latter. In fact it will crown it with greater glory heralding the end of the rule of a convention based on some social and theoretical lies. On the banner celebrating that victory we shall write the following equivalence relations :

Sex Work ≡ Sexuality – Reproduction
 ≡ Play + Pleasure + Relaxation
 ≡ Intimate Entertaining Communication

Smagjit Jena

Sexual Experience of Three Female Sex Workers

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

I

I am Sadhana Mukherjee. I am the first elected secretary of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee. I became a sex worker at the age of 12/13. I was sold into a brothel at Sethbagan. At first I could not reconcile myself with this work. I had great difficulty. I had to endure beatings from the *malikin*, abuses and beatings from her servants. I shall not go into the details of that experience. Fellow workers-sisters and friends told me that if I do not accept the reality that there is no return from this profession once one is in, then they will keep me confined. The police and the goons are in league with the bosses of this business. I persuaded myself to accept the reality. I agreed to obey my *malikin*. I used to take 7/8/10/12 "shots" per day. Then there were 4/5 regulars per night. At times that was a great trouble. I used to fall ill. I was the only minor in the house. A man, let us call him Mr. S., used to visit our house. He used to visit my *malikin* and some other women. He did not approve of the fact that I had to take in so many customers. I did not notice the fact that he was in the love with me. One day he told my *malikin* that he would not go to any other woman and would like to be with me. My *malikin* demanded more money for that. He paid.

Sometime before this incident, when I used to take in 4/5 men per night, one person noticed that I leave the room after about an hour and go to some other room. He was suspicious. He confronted me and asked what was up. I told him the truth, that he was not my sole night-time customer and that I take in 4/5 other customers. The guy became very angry. He said, "If your *malikin* wanted more money then she should have said that; I would have coughed up and stayed with you for the whole night". He went to my *malikin's* room, rebuked her a lot, paid her some more money and said that, "This girl (me) will not go to any one else, throw out all the other men, or else I shall thrash them". The guy was not very gentle or polite. He just terrorized my *malikin* and stayed with me that night. He left the next morning.

Then came another lad. He also did not like the fact that I had to take in so many

customers. One day he came to my room and said, "I do not like the way you are being treated here. So much customer pressure! I think you are unable to cope with the work load." I said, "No, I can manage. I have prepared my mind. I do not detest this work anymore."

There were two rowdies in our locality. One day one of them entered into my room. My *malikin* was unaware of this. I tried to shut the door on his face. He just barged in. He came for a few more days and forced himself upon me. Another notorious ruffian was called Kegia. He ran away from a jail. He arrived at my place 3 days after the jail-break and, forced himself upon me. Around that time a gentleman came and, stayed with me for a few days. He told me that I need not stay at that place (house no.88 at Sethbagan).He took me to Rambagan.

This man stayed with me for 5 years at Rambagan. He was the eldest son of his parents. His parents were talking about his marriage. He said that he loved me and, wanted to know my opinion about whether he should marry or not. I could not say : no, he should not. He did not want to marry, but I insisted that he should. I told him, "Look here, so many people come to me. Some day you may think that you never went to anyone else. So you must get to know about married life, at least once. You should know about the advantages and disadvantages of married life. You should be father of children. That experience is also necessary." That man got married.

From then on I no longer worked under any *malikin*. I had my own place. One day another gentleman came. He was about 40. Let us call him Mr. SM. We bargained and settled for a price. He had sex with me and left. He came for a second day, but did not go for sex. Then for about 6-7 months he came almost the every other day. We just chatted lying down. He did not even touch me, what of sexual intercourse! I was peeved. What's this , I thought: this man comes, pays and goes away, doesn't do anything, doesn't even hold me in his arms! He went on telling me funny stories, made me laugh, caressed but no serious business! Why? What's the reason? This man always kept the money intended for me under the mattress, never handed it over to me directly. In 6-7 months there was a pile of dough. I never picked up the money. I was not very sure about what to do with that sort of money. One day I told him: "Every day you pay me for nothing, without doing anything; I won't accept any

money today." He retorted; "Why not?" I said, "You didn't do anything why should I take your money?" He said, "Alright, but not today, I'll do it some other day. Take the money today !" I said: "No, I won't." I picked up the money he kept that day from under the mattress and, shoved it into his pocket. He left; but came back from the Beadon Street nearby and said, "Look here, you are much much younger than me. I can not touch your feet and beg, but I am holding your palms and pleading : please, accept the money. If you do not take it, then I won't be able to sleep properly at home tonight. Take the money ! I'll come some other day and certainly have sex with you." I took the money at that time and kept it under my mattress. He came the very next day. I was lying on my bed. He didn't make any move. I pulled him up by force and asked him to have sex with me. He said "No, not now. Alright, latter on". I said "Why latter, let it happen now". I went on pulling him, by his shirt front, by his arm. I made him turn on his side and face me. I went on doing this, but he kept silent. After sometime he got up , sat on the bed, with his back resting on the wall. Then he took my hand, kept it on his chest, held me in his arms and, began to cry. He cried a lot. I kept silent when he cried. Then I wiped off his tears and asked: "What happend" ? He said "Look here! Never ever ask me to have sex with you". I said: "Why" ? He said: "I like you very much. That is why I come here. While I stay at home, I do think of having sex with you; but I forget all that as soon as I see you. The desire for having sexual intercourse vanishes. If ever I have that desire, then I myself shall go for it. You will not have to tell me to have sex with you." I said: "Alright, I won't ask for it." Then he said: "You know that I do not drink alcohol, do not smoke cigarettes, but if a day comes when you will no longer be mine, then I may smoke and drink. I may become mad." He worked as the head clerk in a big company. On that day I gave him my word of honour. I told him: "I am quite young, but I shall try to keep the promise that I am making today. I shall never show you the door. You will remain my mentor in whatever I do. I shall not go away from you." From then on he continued to come to my place. The payments that he made were enough for my upkeep. However, I had to send money back home, for my parents. They could not make two ends meet and, I never forgot our past, the torture they endured, the oppression of the landlord of our village. The money that I sent gave them some relief. I, however, never told this gentleman, that he should give me

some more money for my parents. He paid me enough for my expenses plus some more.

Driven by the need to send more money to my parents, I used to take in other customers. If one of them came back repeatedly, then I began to worry: "Why is he coming to my place repeatedly? Is he in love with me?" One such customer is married. He came to my place for about 10-15 times. He used to go to the other women too. He carried his condom with him. One day he gave me all his condoms. I enquired: "What's up? Why are you giving me these condoms?" He answered: "I do not need to carry them anymore." I said: "Why? Won't you have sex at other places from now on?" He said: "No, my search has come to an end. I won't go to anyone else." I already knew that he was married. I insisted then that he should tell me his story. He said: "You see, all of us who come here for sure have some difficulty. We go to many women, but when we find someone to our liking then the need to go to the others ceases to exist. That is why I am giving all my condoms to you." Then I told him about myself. I told him about the gentleman SM, who saw me on a regular basis. I told this enthusiastic customer that I shall never leave my place with him. However, if SM ever wanted to marry me, or take me to some other place, than I shall definitely go away with him. I said that I shall not leave this profession for the sake of anybody else. I told him that if after knowing all this, he still likes me, then he is most welcome; I shall not be rude with him. I said "If you are not a bad person, then why should I misbehave with you?" This gentleman, Mr. AG, too continues to visit me.

There is another man, who could have got married some day, used to visit our locality in his youth. At first he went to a few other girls, then he developed a liking for me. He is a regular with me for quite sometime now, must be some 25 years. Once his mother sent his father to meet me. His father told me that there is no prospect in the life of a sex worker, that there is no use staying put in a brothel and, hence I should marry his son. I said: "You see sir, I shall not marry your son; try and get him married off elsewhere; however, if your son comes here I can keep him. I shall be able to keep him here in accordance with my means, but I won't be able to marry him." Once in a while I visit him at his home. I went to his place when

his parents were alive. They are dead now. This man of mine has not married. He won't marry. He is 52 now.

I have already spoken of SM, we still do not go for sexual intercourse. We had sex only once, on the very first day of our meeting. Some years back a PWD officer, BB used to visit me regularly. Occasionally I went out with him, visited some places as tourists. During one such tour I became pregnant. I told SM about it. He said: "Good." He certainly realized that I had sex with someone else. SM continued: "You see, people come here, make women pregnant and go away. The do not do their duty. It's alright. If you want it, then I can be the father of the child and do all that is required to be done." I then told BB: "You see your child is now inside my womb. This is the truth, but this child will never call you 'papa'. I do not want to be tied to your name. I want to live with the surname of SM, with the recognition of my relation with him. Now you decide. If you insist that the child must carry your surname and be recognized as your child, then I shall abort it right now. If however, you agree that my wish shall prevail, then the child stays." After this talk B B said, "Okay! Do what you think is best." I kept the child. S M was a little worried, may be somewhat angry. He said, "Look here Sadhana, I am not the biological father of your child. After the birth of the child, will you love the biological father more than you love me?" I said, "You see, there is no point in worrying about that now. There is a saying: "What's your name, O Tree? How would you like to be known?", one asks. "Trees are known by their fruits", says the tree. Relations are like trees, they grow. Let me have my child, you will find out for yourself which way I would go and, how our relation will grow". Anyway, the biological father of the child continued to visit me for about six more years after the child was born. Then one day BB said that he can't continue any more and, that he will stop seeing me. He also said that he has started seeing another woman in Sonagachi and likes her. I said "Fine, if everybody comes to me, then who would go to the other women".

When my daughter got married I sent an invitation card to Dr. Samarjit Jana, our principal advisor. He was in Bangladesh at that time and, could not come. Quite a few ladies from our office came to attend my daughter's marriage. I introduced all of them to my men. Had I been married, I could have lived all my life with one man,

but then I would have had settled for less than what I have got. I would have pined for yet another man. Sleeping with men, having sex with them is no big deal. I still than I have loved SM. I love all my men but I love him a little more than I love others. I still do not want him to suffer because of me. I shall not want him to suffer for me in the days to come.

II

My name is Shankaree Pal. I am a sex worker. I live in Bowbazar. As doctors treat, lawyers plead, teachers teach, in the same way we the sex workers entertain our customers through sex work.

A customer used to visit my place. He is not coming for sometime. May be he has gone to some other place, may be he is dead. He always came with a bag and a newspaper. He carried a fine piece of cloth, a dhoti, in his bag. He would come and then ask me to bring another woman. I would call one of my friends. We would sit together and have tea. My friend would continue to sit on a chair and, I will change into that transparent piece of cloth. Then the customer would order me to sweep the room with a broom. I shall pretend, play act, to sweep in a couching position. The customer would point his finger at my breasts, visible from within that see-through dress, and say: "Sister-in-law, to whom do these belong?" I would say: "Don't touch!

These belong to your elder brother." The more I would repeat these words, the more excited he would become and, have erection. He would then come from behind, touch one of my buttocks and ask: "Sister-in-law, to whom does it belong?" Then again I'd say: "Don't touch it! It belongs to your elder brother". He would just mutter: "Oh! Sister-in-law!" He wouldn't touch any other part of my body. His erect penis will ejaculate. He would not have any further sexual encounter with me. All the time, however, a friend of mine will have to watch the whole show.



Shankaree speaks about her sexual experience

Another gentleman too goes for one active partner and one spectator. He comes with underwears for us to wear. The active and the passive sexworkers may have to rotate their places the next day. If the customer paid Rs. 200/-, we would share 50/50, Rs. 100/- each. He may just sit, have tea and go. One day I asked him, "Why do you just look us up, and then pay and go away?" He said: "I like it that way." He said he watches fashion shows in TV and, while watching women walking in bras and panties he has 2/3 erections and ejaculations per show. One day I said: "Come have sexual intercourse with me". He said: "Oh! No! Yours boobs and hips are just fabulous! Some show! I ejaculate by just watching you. That is why I want you to wear these underwears and look just like them." I said, "I am not as beautiful as those TV women." He said, "You have all that they have: boobs, hips. You are my fashion show." Then he asked me to walk the way girls walk on the catwalks. I walked and he ejaculated.

Yet another gentleman brings a small box of *Sindur* (vermilion) and, a phial of *Alta* (lac-dye). On the first day with him, I was standing at the entrance. We bargained. I asked for 100 rupees and he agreed. Then he brought out vermilion and lac-dye from his bag. I asked: "What are these for?" He said: "Listen mother, let me tell you something." I spat: "You'll screw me and you're calling me your mother! You mother-fucker!" He said: "No. I'll just dress you up as mother. I want to see you in the form of a mother." Again I hissed: "In the form of what sort of mother?" He said: "In the form of mother-goddess Kali." Then he asked for a bowl, poured the lac-dye in it - put a wide *Alta*-border on my feet and, a large round shaped vermilion mark on my forehead, spread a strip of vermilion on the head where my hair parted. I had long hairs. He combed them. I asked: "What do you want me to do?" He said, he is going to lie down on his back and, I'll have to stand erect on him, the way the image of goddess Kali stands on the image of Shiva. I said: "What sort of sexual activity in this?" He showed me how I should stand with a little slant, putting one foot on his penis and another on his chest. Then he asked me to rub his penis with my foot. I pressed hard and he started ejaculating.

Another one came and chose fat women. He chose me and Kamala. Then he asked for the string that we use to tie our petticoats. "What would you do with that string?" - we asked. He said: "Fasten it tightly around my penis, then make it dance."

The more we swang the string the more excited he became. We never knew of this form of sexual pleasure. He said it didn't hurt him. He enjoyed the sight of our moving breasts too, he said, and ejaculated. This too is a sort of sexual activity.

Then there is the other guy, for whom sex comes, finally, dripping from a piece of loaf. He is very handsome. His physical beauty defies description. He brings a candle, a panty and a bra with him. He would undress, slip into a panty, sometimes put on a bra too, sit on a chair and press his penis. The sex worker is required to abuse him profusely and, kick him. The more the merrier. Whenever he came, he hired the services of 4-5 women. sometimes he would like to be held tightly by a leash like a dog. Held in that position he would massage my body; in return I shall have to abuse him real rough and, whip him black and blue. Then alone he would have orgasm. When the above treatment did not suffice, then the candle had to be lit, the melting wax from it is to be poured on his bare back, while abusing and kicking will continue. Sometimes he would engage 5-7 women to perform these tasks at a time or in a row, serially. If he likes someone of us, then he would request her to urinate and, he would eat a piece of loaf soaked in that urine. Finally, he would wash and powder himself and go. From this customer I came to know that the experience of physical pain may culminate in pleasure for some people.

Yet others enjoy hurting someone else. Earlier I offered my services in the Jute Mill areas. One day a hooligan took me out. He preferred robust figures and, never went for the lean and thin ones. It was 4'O clock in the morning. We boarded a car and started drinking in empty stomach. He was kissing and toching me. It went on like that for about 8-9 hours. Then we checked into a hotel. I was quite drunk by that time. I wanted to lie down and sleep; but the moment I would lie down on the bed he would pick me up and beat. He slapped me real hard. I was perplexed. I shouted for help. I asked him what is it that he wanted from me. He said "Nothing" and, went on hitting me. I pressed the room service button and a boy came in. I asked him: "What's the matter here? This man is beating me so hard and, you people are not coming to help me out?" He said: "You are in great trouble sister. Why did you come here with him? No one knows how much beating you will have to take." This hooligan-customer enjoyed beating women. He tore away my synthetic sari. I was standing naked. He continued to drink and spill. I was very worried and very

angry. I started abusing him real hard. He was not listening. He got hold of me and forced himself upon me. I never knew some hard men went for such hard 'fore play'. Sexual intercourse over; the man started crying hoarse holding my feet. I extricated myself, went to the toilet and, came out covering myself with the petrycoat. He was still crying, he put his forehead on my feet and, once again I asked him: "Why did you do this?" He said: "I don't know what happened inside my head." He gave me a 500 rupee note and said: "Go home!" I said: "I can not go out just like this wearing just a petrycoat". He said: "Alright, I'll just go out and come back. You sit here!" He went out and brought a house coat for me. I came out wearing it. The man hailed a taxi and ordered the driver to take me to wherever I wished to go. While I was boarding the cab, one of the waiters of the hotel whispered: "O Sister! Why did you come with this man? He beats all his women black and blue. Did he break any of your bones? Some of the girls had their skull cracked." That was his way of ensuring orgasm. He would beat a woman to pulp and, then have sex with her.

III

My name is Deepa Das. I am a flying sex worker. I operate from the streets, in front of movie halls. We hardly go to the brothel areas like Sonagachi. I was married before I become a sex worker.

My husband did no work. He did not earn anything. Beating me was his only activity. Mine was a family drowned in dire poverty. I did not want to marry. I was forced into marriage. My husband forced me to have sex with him. I had to obey his command. I endured the torture for about 2 years. After that I couldn't take it anymore and, left my husband's place with a 6 month old baby. I came back to my father's place.

My father was very poor. He was a landless agricultural labourer. I left my baby at home and went out seeking work. I did various kinds of jobs. I sold sari, worked in various small factories. Everywhere I was forced to provide sexual services to somebody. However, no one called me a sex worker then and, no body paid. It went on like that for some time. It was hard to carry on with the little money that I earned. One day I came to Kolkata, with a neighbour. We landed up at Ultradanga and, I was engaged for paint work. There too I had to entertain people sexually. Morning 8 to

Sexual Life of a Male Sex Worker

afternoon 5 was the working time, with a recess from 1 to 1.30 p.m. Within that half hour I was forced to have sex. This was unpaid sexual service, for just keeping fellow workers or labour contractors in good humour. Other women working as helpers of masons etc. also had the same experience. Some of us become friends. One day we were chatting. Some one said; "Wherever we go, whatever work we do, we are forced to provide free sexual services. Then why should we continue here? Let us go to Sonagachi and, work as sex workers and earn some real money for doing that work!"

I thought she was right and, went to Sonagachi. There I struck a relation with one man on a regular basis. Here we call such men 'Babus'. He wanted to marry me. I did not like the idea. Nor did I take a room at Sonagachi. I have a son. I go back to him at the end of the working day. By and by I picked up many customers and some *Babus*. I keep my *Babus* as a kind of social insurance. I have a few of them outside Sonagachi.

I have a stable relation with a Babu for the last 5-6 years. He never engaged in sexual intercourse with me. We watch movies. Sometimes he would caress me. He never took me to any hotel. There are many such customers. They would like to go out with me, just stroll or go for a drive. They would take me to restaurants. We will eat together and chat. Some do not even touch me. They just pay the bills and, my fee.

I am working as a sex worker for about 7 years now. Earlier no one called me a sex worker, though I was providing sexual services to people ever since my marriage. Now people call me a sex worker, though many a times my actual work remains miles away from sexual intercourse, even from any sexually explicit touch.

Even now I do not tell my parents or neighbours on their face that I am a sex worker. Some of them guess that I am. I am feeding my child, parents and brothers and sisters with the money that I earn as a sex worker. I am not ashamed of my work.

I am Nitai Giri. I am a male sex worker. My customers are men. I do not stay in any sex work site. I live among ordinary householders. I have no specific worksite. I roam around in search of customers: sometimes around Sealdah, at others around Dharmatala or Bowbazar, where sex workers live, or in front of a movie hall, or else I stand by the side of just any road. I cross-dress when I go in search of customers. The saying goes that if you do not put on the proper garb, people wouldn't even bother to give you alms.

Our customers are drawn to us first of all by our looks. By looking us up they understand the type of sexual activity we would engage in. I start bargaining, when I like a customer. Usually, the customers of us male sex workers do not take us to any brothel. Some customers take us to their place of preference; I take others to one of the places where I feel easy. Some customers request me to dance. Sometimes I am required to dance without clothes, nude. I display feminine body movements, for those who seek a woman inside a male body. Such movements stoke their sexual fire. Once heated, the customer engages in the type of sexual activity he prefers.

Some of my customers prefer oral sex. Some go for anal sex. In either case, I take protection. When the customer demands oral sex, I sheath his penis in a chocolate flavoured condom and then suck it. For anal sex I make him wear just any ordinary condom.

Some customers prefer to talk sex. That satisfies them. They ask me about the types of sexual intercourse I have with my other customers. I tell them. These narratives trigger their penile erection then they embrace me, kiss me, shake their penis and ejaculate.

Some customers prefer bawdy talk. The would say pointing at my cock, "Whose cock is it?" I'll say, "It's my cock." Or they would go on a tangent and ask, "Whose article /thing is this?" I'd have to say, "It's my article." Some of them ask to be abused real hard. I abuse them to my heart's content. That excites them. Some customers go for love-talk, request me to marry them, call me their wife at the time of sexual intercourse. However, they forget all these words as soon as they ejaculate.

I have one customer, who demands that I call him *Rampantha* (large he-goat). I would have to tie him to the leg of a cot with a *Ganchha* (napkin). He brings some

leaves with him. I keep these leaves on the floor in front of him. I am required to beat him hard and say, "Eat the leaves *Rampambhal*. Eat, eat!" Then he would bleat like a he-goat : "Baal Baal!" The whole game gives him his kick.

Yet another customer drinks. He would also make me drink. When drunk he asks me to urinate in his glass. Then he drinks my urine. That drink excites him. Then he presses my boobs together to create an orifice of a kind, inserts his penis there, rubs it and ejaculates.

Another customer strips me stark naked. Then he licks my whole body, starting from my feet and going right upto my head. Then he goes on licking the skin around my anus. That excites me. The customer too gets 'heated up'. Then we go for sexual intercourse. When we give each other oral pleasure, I lick the entire body of my customer.

All sorts of people, from the rickshaw pullers to the barristers, come to us as customers. I had a few permanent customers. Many of them got married. Some of the rest come once in a while. One customer proposed, he wanted to marry me. I wished that he should have a happy family with kids. I do not have the capacity to give birth to kids. I would never be able to give him kids. That is why I declined. Besides, I could not rely upon him totally.

People at home know that I dance and sing, entertain people as an artist in variety entertainment shows. They do not know that I am a sex worker. Today I have no problem with their or anyone else's getting to know about my profession. My mother tells me, that I am no thief. I earn my bread by toiling. Who feeds me or gives me money when I fall ill? Nobody.

During the season of marriages I go to Uttarpradesh, to Varanasi, to Delhi. There I work as a *Hijra*, make babies leap in joy. This is a custom. People pay. Not everywhere I take customers as a sex worker; but I get a lot of customers in Uttarpradesh and in Bihar.

Now I am associated with the cultural platform of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee. Whenever I have some free time away from organizational work, I do take customers. I support sex workers' demand for workers' rights. I think that the female and the male, as well as the transgender, sex workers should have the same rights as the other workers in any other field of activity.

Stars of the Night in The Light of The Day

Shubhna Samyal

[This is a narrative about the sexual experiences of a housewife belonging to the Bengali 'poor' society.—Ed.]

Today my entire house has come alive. My daughter and son-in-law, son and daughter-in-law, my little granddaughter—all are here. Everyone is happy and loud—it's a veritable merry racker. My younger son Bittu too has come back from Singapore after about two years. I am busy in the kitchen. Rina is helping me. Shampa and Runa offered to help. They would have bothered me by asking for the location of this or that. It is better that I do all the cooking myself. As I went into the living room with a tray full of chicken pakoras and cups of coffee for the men, I found them talking very excitedly. The topic : a five year old girl has become the victim of lust of a forty five year old man. The story has been elaborately reported yesterday, in a newspaper. I did not like to participate in their discussion about it and, came back to the kitchen. What's so new about this event? Is it a contemporary phenomenon? This is something eternal. In earlier times all news did not become stories in the newspapers. The media did not highlight issues the way it does today.

How old was I at that time? On that day I had just taken admission in class Two. In those days the academic year began in January. There was nip in the air. I ran to Kamala's house; I wanted to give her this good news that I was in class Two already. Kamala was my best friend then. As I knocked, Kamala's father, whom I called uncle, opened the door. Without bothering to ask him whether Kamala was at home or not, I went straight inside the house, shouting "Kumi?" "Kumi?" [short form of Kamala]. Uncle just closed the door, picked me up and went straight to a bed. We were under a blanket. It need not be mentioned that he was alone in the house. He began to fondle me vigorously, rubbed his face on my chest, on my face. I was suffocating. I wanted to extricate myself, but there was no hope that his strong hold would loosen. Slowly I was feeling sort of benumbed. After sometime I felt that my pantie was not

in its place and, there was a strong pressure of something hard; I was about to groan in pain, but before that there was a knock on the door. Uncle was highly irritated, but was forced to get up. I do not know why, but I too became conscious and, could set my dress right. Auntie [Kamala's mother] came in. She wanted to talk to me, but I was afraid and ran away from the scene. There was no TV then, no fancy advertisements [about the rights of the child], nor was I educated enough to be able to read the newspapers. I was not as smart, talented or knowledgeable as the kids of today. However, dull though I was, that hard powerful male sex-organ—which was “that thing of the boys” in our language of those days—went on haunting me for a long while in my dreams, in my sleep. I do not know why I did not tell my mother or elder sister or anyone else anything about it. I could not tell Kumi, who was my best friend, though I wanted to, because I felt that what happened was wrong and, that I too was a party to that crime. Now I meet Kamala once or twice in a year, Uncle has recently got rid of his mortal body. The girl in the news story rekindled my memory today.

The father and the sons, the father-in-law and the son-in-law have uncorked bottles of liquor carrying foreign labels, brought by my younger son. Shampa and Runa went for shopping. My little granddaughter is on my lap and I am thinking : through how much social sin and guilt will this chaste girl walk in the days to come! I too have become somebody's wife, someone else's mother and, the grandmother of this child, after polluting my body with a lot of sin, consciously or unconsciously.

I was then in class Six, my elder sister was in class Eight. An elder cousin of ours, son of a sister of our father, used to stay with us as a dependent upon our family. He used to help us with our studies. While teaching, he never sat face to face with us. He made the two of us sit on two sides of him. His affectionate (of course that was pretense) hands roamed over our backs, sometimes quite carelessly touched my just blossoming twin buds. I paid more attention to his hand than to the studies. I used to be mad with just one curiosity. Is he doing the same thing with my elder sister? If yes, then how much? Later on Rangada (that cousin of ours) separated my study time from that of my elder sister, with the help of some beautifully credible pretext. I wonder now, that neither I nor my elder sister ever talked about it, even when we

quarreled or when we made up. At that age I got to see that hard, powerful male muscle one more time. It was the time of annual examinations in our school. It was noon. My elder sister had gone to school to write her answers for that date. It was a day off for me. News had come that my maternal grandmother had fallen from her cot, so my mother went to my maternal uncles' house to see her mother, having been forced to leave me alone at home. Rangada came into the house from somewhere and, said as soon as he saw me, “What's this! It's examination time and you are lolling in bed, not studying? Come on, get up!” I said, “I'll study after a while”. He went on saying, “Get up!”, “Get up!”, but slowly came closer, sat by my side, then leaned towards me and, finally lied down. He held me in his arms, showered me with kisses, his mouth was roaming over my face, neck and breasts. My entire body was thrilled. By then I was already a woman; virgin fiery water was flowing down my thighs. Then I saw that taut male muscle. When I was under a blanket with uncle (Kamala's father) I could not get to see anything. Now I saw it. In the course of our utmost yet inexperienced efforts at placing the right thing in the right place, Rangada's viscous heroism was shed. I had kept the story of this event as a carefully guarded secret within me, I could not tell anyone. I felt a little more proud about myself, than I thought my elder sister was. Rangada went to Asansol within a few months. My father arranged for a job for him. Today Rangada too is a fullscale married person like me. Shampa and Runa came back noisily with a lot of things that they had purchased. Who knows how many phials and containers [of cosmetics] they need for that just one face they have! I don't know what has happened to me today, I am unable to keep pace with them in anything. It's a day of great joy! The house is full of people. Everyday Nikhilesh and I spend our time watching tiring TV programmes and, listening to the clock ticking.

Once the dinner was over, each one went to bed. Nikhilesh had inbided a few pegs, so had gone to sleep as soon as he hit the bed. I am an insomniac. Oh! How many nights do I spend on a sleepless bed! Tonight I am lying by the side of my husband, apparently a happy housewife in a family full of children. Yet he comes, almost regularly, no not in flesh but in my mind, each and every cell of my body is thrilled as they savour the pleasure of my tryst with him.

Sarbajit is a friend of Nikhilesh since their days in the school. As it happens, once you go out of the school the thread of your contact with your friend gets thinner and thinner. At some point of time the thread snaps. There was no exception in this case. Nikhilesh was posted at Chennai then. Titu and Shampa were young, Bitru was not yet born. One afternoon we went for a walk on the Marina Beach. Time and again my eyes were drifting towards a smart and handsome gentleman. Suddenly I saw him heading towards us. "Aren't you Nikhilji?", "Ah! Sarbajit!", with these words they embraced each other. Sarbajit had come to Chennai on some official duty for about a fortnight. He had put up in a hotel near the railway station. I was drawn to him from the first sight and, took a further step forward and proposed that he should come and stay with us. At long last, pressed by earnest requests from me and Nikhilesh he agreed to come to our house and stay with us.

I do not quite understand whether I was in love or infatuated with Sarbajit. However, from that day onwards I have truly become adulterous; since then whenever I sexually met Nikhilesh, the body of Sarbajit floated on the canvas of my mind. I was captivated by Sarbajit's countenance, manners, talk and dress. At that time Nikhilesh's world had become unbearable for me. I contemplated running away with Sarbajit, leaving everything else behind. It wasn't possible. Sarbajit was married. Besides he was not in a state of frenzy, the way I was. He understood though or else why would he look so deep into my eyes the day before his departure, as to cause a flood of orgasm engulf my body! I had no idea before then that a mere look may cause orgasm. I do not get that feeling with any amount of fiction or rubbing with Nikhilesh. A mother alone knows about the identity of her child's father. Yet I fail to understand who should be called Bitru's father proper; though he is born of Nikhilesh's semen, Sarbajit has uncontested dominance over my mind. I lusted for Sarbajit through Nikhilesh's body. I heard that a child born of deep love grows to become intelligent. Perhaps that is why Bitru is much more dexterous, intelligent and gifted than his elder brother or sister.

I do not believe that one can love and be one with a stranger by just uttering some mantras without understanding their meaning. Two little acquainted persons may become naked and, be intimate in a new environment, on an unfamiliar bed, but

perhaps not always can they merge into one another. In just about fifteen days time Sarbajit has robbed me of everything without even touching me. Yet for the last thirty six years I am with Nikhilesh—inside one masquito net, in winter under one quilt. Desire of the body is satiated, but I do not get the pleasure of intercourse with my beloved. Birds are chirping in ones and twos. Dawn is arriving. The stars of the night will get lost in the depth of the light of the day, just as Sarbajit will lay hidden in the carefully nurtured secret corner of my mind. Nikhilesh is sleeping lightly. He is moving. He stretched his hand and pulled me close to his body. I, who thought of Sarbajit the whole night, embraced him effortlessly. The deep-dark girl of the night will slowly become fair by rubbing her skin with the turmeric paste of the day and, I shall become Nikhilesh's life, mother of Titu, Shampa and Bitru, Runa's mother-in-law, granny of little Jhumjhum and, shall pass my time merrily.

The Global Future of Sexology

Erwin J. Haeberle

[Excerpts from E. J. Haeberle's lecture delivered on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of China Sexology Association, at the Great Hall of the People, Beijing, on 16 October 2004.-Ed.]

Of all the countries of the world China has the oldest sexological tradition with a literature on sexual health dating back to several thousand years. [Three such works, *Shi-wan* (Ten Questions and Answers), *He-jin-yang-fang* (Methods of Intercourse between Yin and Yang) and, *Tian-xia-zhi-tao-tan* (Lectures on the super Tao of the Universe), date back to circa 168 B.C.E.-Ed.] This venerable tradition has long been forgotten, mostly as a result of negative Western influences. However, the present political, economic and cultural reassertion of China as a world power is now leading many Chinese to return to their own cultural roots. At the same time, they are helping the West to correct its formerly narrow view of cultural history.

The sexual side of human nature is the result of a very long and gradual process of evolution. Though the sexual behaviour of the early humans was not very different from that of ours today, the social organisation of all human behaviour, including sexual behaviour, has changed a great deal in the course of time. We have [introduced and] broken taboos, abandoned previous assumptions and, changed tradition, laws and, customs [related to human sexual behaviour]. Some such breaks with tradition and, introduction of new customs and laws may indeed have become necessary in our age. These breaks will help us face the challenges of the future.

One such challenge is to ensure greater equality between men and women. This will not happen in all countries at the same time or at the same speed, but the general trend seems to be irreversible. Decriminalization of sexual preferences or behaviour and, of sex work is also on the agenda of many countries. Criminalization of sexual behaviour or choice often creates more problems than it could possibly have solved. It forces people to cheat, hide and lie. Such lying becomes a serious obstacle to the prevention of STD, HIV/AIDS. Large European cities like Paris, Hamburg and Berlin now have popularly elected homosexual mayors. Sex work has been decriminalized in

many European countries, though a common European approach to this profession is yet to emerge. The fight against the present pandemic of AIDS and, other STDs can be won only if both the sex workers and their clients find the sexual health care systems and authorities to be people friendly. Such an atmosphere is not going to envelope so long as we push the sex workers and their clients, together with their sexual transaction, into the darkness of illegality.

Human sexual behaviour changes rather slowly. However, the way our authorities deal with them changes and, it is likely to change a great deal more in future. We will all be forced to become more rational about our sexuality in future. Being rational means being able to learn from past experience. We must avoid creating unnecessary problems and, understand that the management of sexual behaviour will develop new forms and will provoke new social reactions.

In 1975, the first modern definition of sexual health appeared, together with some recommendations for its protection, in a document of the World Health Organisation. There is now a general agreement that the promotion of sexual health should be considered a priority in every country. The current AIDS pandemic is threatening the economic and political stability in several regions of the world. So far there is neither a vaccine nor a cure for AIDS. Hence, global sexual health education is the only promising option left.

The basic curricula for comprehensive sexuality education for all and, for sexual health professionals are now freely available in the internet <<http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/GESUND/ARCHIV/PSH.HTM>>. For the last several years, the Harvard Medical School is providing free information on all aspects of health, including sexual health <<http://www.intelihealth.com/IH/int IH/WSIH000/23414/23414.html>>. Thanks to the internet, free sexual health information can now be sent to the farther regions of the globe. E-courses on sexuality can now be copied on CDs and distributed to people who have a computer, but no [reliable] internet access. Print-outs may be taken out for providing free texts for study. If we are serious about promoting worldwide sexual health, we must prepare for this future now. The Archive for Sexology in Berlin is doing this for the last 10 years <www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology>. They welcome any cooperation that anybody can offer. This implies, that I am arguing here for a

“communism of knowledge”: “To each according to her/his needs, from each according to her/his abilities”. All this has to be done without first thinking of profit. This may sound hopelessly utopian, but today we are closer to reaching it than ever before in human history.

The ongoing irreversible and accelerating process of globalization has produced both winners and losers in the economic sphere. In the sphere of education it need not be so. Here both the problems and their solutions are often merely two sides of the same coin. Capitalism always creates the grounds for socialism. The new epidemics of STDs and, the AIDS pandemic are fed by the same globalization that is giving us the means to fight them.

Modern western sexology originated in Berlin in the early 20th century, through the work of many, most importantly through the efforts of Magnus Hirschfeld. The guiding principle of his entire life was: “*Per scientiam ad iustitiam*” -Through science to justice. In the words of the ancient Chinese sage Confucius: “The love of justice without the love of learning will lead to harshness and abuse.” Let us honour the memory of these two sages and, help all those who [need to learn and] love to learn and, to whom access to knowledge is still unjustly being denied. Our aim is: Justice for all in the world.

Declaration of Sexual Rights of the World Association for Sexology

Sexuality is an integral part of the personality of every human being. Its full development depends upon the satisfaction of basic human needs such as the desire for contact, intimacy, emotional expression, pleasure, tenderness, and love.

Sexuality is constructed through the interaction between the individual and social structures. Full development of sexuality is essential for individual, interpersonal, and social well being.

Sexual rights are universal human rights based on the inherent freedom, dignity, and equality of all human beings. Since health is a fundamental human right, so must sexual health be a basic human right. In order to assure that human beings and societies develop healthy sexuality, the following sexual rights must be recognized, promoted, respected, and defended by all societies through all means. Sexual health is the result of an environment that recognizes, respects, and exercises these sexual rights.

The right to sexual freedom : Sexual freedom encompasses the possibility for individuals to express their full sexual potential. However, this excludes all forms of sexual coercion, exploitation and abuse at any time and situation in life.

The right to sexual autonomy, sexual, integrity, and safety of the sexual body: this right involves the ability to make autonomous decision about one's sexual life within a context of one's own personal and social ethics. It also encompasses control and enjoyment of own bodies free from torture, mutilation, and violence of any sort.

The right to sexual privacy : This involves the right for individual decision and behaviors about intimacy as long as they do not intrude on the sexual rights of others.

The right to sexual equity : This refers to freedom from all forms of discrimination regardless of sex, gender, sexual orientation, age,race, social class, religion, or physical and emotional disability.

The right to sexual pleasure : Sexual pleasure, including autoeroticism, is a source of physical, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual well being.

The right to emotional sexual expression : Sexual expression is more than erotic pleasure or sexual acts. Individuals have a right to express their sexuality through communications, touch, emotional expression and love.

The right to sexually associate freely : This means the possibility to marry or not, to divorce, and to establish other types of responsible sexual associations.

The right to make free and responsible reproductive choices : This encompasses the right to decide whether or not to have children, the number and spacing of children, and the right to full access to the means of fertility regulation.

The right to sexual information based upon scientific inquiry : This right implies that sexual information should be generated through the process of unencumbered and yet scientifically ethical inquiry, and disseminated in appropriate ways at all societal levels.

The right to comprehensive sexuality education : This is a lifelong process from birth throughout the lifecycle and should involve all social institutions.

The right to sexual health care : Sexual health care should be available for prevention and treatment of all sexual concerns, problems, and disorders.

Source : *Sexual Bill of Rights adopted by the World Association for Sexology (now World Association for Sexual Health), Hong Kong 1999*. Accessed from <http://sexuality.about.com> on 12.02.2006

Having Sex is not always just Work for Sex Workers

Moni Nag

Sex is a basic physiological drive or instinct in human beings and most other animals. It urges males, females and transsexuals to seek an outlet by having sexual relations with others belonging to a different or same sex. Sexuality is a social construction of sexual drive in terms of sexual behaviour and meanings attached to it. Sexuality of animals is determined mostly by their instincts. But human sexuality is controlled predominantly by social norms and values. The Institution of marriage in some form or other is a common strategy for controlling sexuality in human societies. It is the main factor responsible for the emergence of prostitution.

Prostitution in the form of a woman offering sexual services to a man in exchange for money or kind exists in the following conditions: (i) the presence of some customary form/s of marriage along with strong social strictures against marital infidelity of women, (ii) the strict observance of pre-marital chastity of women, (iii) the existence of significant economic and social inequality between classes/ethnic groups and (iv) dominance of men over women. All [these] four conditions exist in varying forms and degrees in all societies of the contemporary world. Hence it can reasonably be hypothesized that prostitution in some form or other is currently practiced in all societies, either openly or clandestinely.

Indian societies, being predominantly patriarchal in nature, exert considerably more control over female sexuality than over male sexuality. Violations of pre-marital chastity and marital fidelity by men are more tolerated than are such violations by women. Hence men are in a more advantageous situation to satisfy their sexual urge outside a marital bond. The most convenient and common way for a man to do so is to have sex in exchange for money with women who are mostly known as 'prostitutes' or 'sex workers'.

Over the last decade or so, the term 'sex worker' is being more commonly used than 'prostitute' mainly on the ground that women and men engaged in prostitution are providing a service in exchange for money like workers in many other professions.

It is consistent with the typical dictionary meaning of the term 'work' : "the labour, task or duty that affords one his accustomed means of livelihood".

When a sex worker has sex with her/ his client, the sex worker does so primarily for money, not to satisfy a sexual urge. It raises the question: does a sex worker consider all sexual acts as work or as means of a livelihood ? In other words, does a sex worker sometimes engage herself/himself in sexual relations with chosen clients for pleasure or for other self-interest ?

If a person is engaged in work as a source of income, it does not necessarily imply that the person does not derive any pleasure or satisfaction out of it. For example, artists, musicians, poets and many others often derive a sense of joy from their creations. Even those whose jobs may or may not require any skill sometimes get satisfaction from their work when they feel that it makes other people happy. Sex workers also sometimes have similar feeling when they entertain their client by providing sexual services.

However, Sex workers commonly have to submit themselves to the sexual wishes of a number of strangers almost every day, whether they like to do so or not, thereby making sex work a drudgery and often painful experience for them. It is particularly arduous for them when they are physically indisposed or mentally depressed or also when their clients become violent and abusive. Some clients become violent when sex workers are unwilling to submit themselves to sexual techniques, like oral or anal intercourse demanded by the clients. Violence and abuse occur when the sex workers insist on the use of condoms for protecting themselves from the risk of being infected with sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs) including AIDS, and the clients are reluctant to do so.

In terms of personal interaction and familiarity with her/his clients , a sex worker usually differentiates between the following three categories of clients: (i) casual clients who visit a sex worker casually and with whom the sex worker has no interaction except submitting to a sexual act in exchange for a mutually agreed upon amount of money, (ii) regular clients who visit a sex worker more or less regularly, for example, once a week or once a month and have sexual relations with her/him in exchange for more or less pre-determined rates and (iii) fixed (variously called permanent, semi-

permanent or non-paying) clients whose relationship with a sex worker involves elements of mutual trust, satisfaction and financial support similar to those between married partners.

A sex worker does not normally perceive sexual involvement with a fixed client as work. Although occasionally the sex worker may submit to the sexual desire of the client as a duty, mostly a sex worker engages in sexual relations with a fixed client for pleasure and does not expect any immediate reward for it. In this respect, the relationship between a sex worker and client is similar to the nature of relationship between a married woman and man. A female sex worker who is reluctant to submit herself to the desire of her casual client for oral or anal sex may be a willing partner for doing so in her relationship with a fixed client. She may insist on the use of condoms in sexual intercourse with a casual or regular client but may not choose to do so with a fixed client.

The social stigma against sex workers is so strong and the social environment in which they live is generally so impersonal or hostile that almost each of them seek a client who she can regard as her fixed client. The vernacular terms used to denote a fixed client in various regions are *babu*, *seth*, *aadmi* etc.

The intricate relationship between a female sex worker and her fixed client is a popular theme in some Indian novels and cinemas. For example, a few novels written almost about a century ago by reputed Bengali author, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, and cinemas based on this theme are very popular all over India. Sex workers portrayed by him - not only very attractive, but also gifted in music and dance - are, however, very rare in contemporary India. Only a minute proportion of sex workers categorised nowadays as call girls may have such qualities. During the last decade or so a few Hindi cinemas depicting the development of romantic relationship between call girls and their clients have been produced.

Reports on some recent studies of sex workers in various regions of India suggest that a considerable proportion of female sex workers, not particularly attractive or talented, have fixed clients at some point of time. For example, in a mid-1990s in-depth study of a small sample of sex workers in the Sonagachi red-light area of Kolkata, 14 out of 27 sex workers reported that their fixed clients at that point of

time were maintaining a steady relationship with them for periods varying from six to twenty years. Most of these sex workers entertained other clients also with or without the knowledge of their fixed clients. However, it was often a source of conflict and separation between a sex worker and her fixed client. Seven of the fixed clients stayed with their wives and visited their sex worker partners usually at pre-determined dates and hours. These clients often faced difficulties in maintaining balanced relationships with their wives and sex worker partners.

Sometimes a female sex worker may find satisfaction in a sexual relationship with a client other than the fixed client if that client, happens to be particularly handsome or sensitive enough to see that the sex worker also gets some pleasure out of the sexual act. Also, some sex workers want such clients to be the biological father of their children. The sex worker may get money for her participation in such a sex act but she also derives some physical and mental satisfaction out of it. Her sex work on such occasions is comparable to the work of a poet earning money for writing a poem, which itself is a source of joy for the poet.

The situations described above, however, do not contradict in any way the basic fact that for the vast majority of sex workers most of the time having sex is work and, it is often hazardous.

Displacement of the Bargirls of Maharashtra

Varsha Kale

More than 1250 'dance bars' and 'ladies service bars' came into existence since 1965 in Maharashtra, while the 'dance bar' phenomena emerged in 1977. Their number touched thousand after 1990. It had grown significantly in the last decade. There were approximately 800 of such bars or hotels in and around Mumbai city alone. The phenomenon was spreading rapidly in the adjacent suburban cities such as New Bombay, Panvel, Thane, Khopoli, Bhivandi, Dombivli and Shahapur. At the same time such places were mushrooming all along the highways throughout Maharashtra and even in and around other cities such as Pune, Nashik, Aurangabad, Solapur, Kolhapur, Nagpur and in other small cities and towns within the state.

On the 30th of March 2005 the state government of Maharashtra announced its decision to close down the dance bars. Subsequently, the local police forcibly closed bars outside Mumbai city without any government order or notice. In July 2005, the bill banning dance in the dance bars was passed unanimously by the legislature without any provision for rehabilitation of the bargirls.

This sudden and unilateral decision of the state government of Maharashtra to close 'dance bars' in the state has created a grave human crisis in the history of India. Though this decision was applauded and endorsed by the white-collar middle class, it has made around seventy five thousand 'bargirls' (women workers in the bar) and three hundred thousand male bar workers jobless. It is also affecting a large number of people indirectly.

For the last one and a half year, we were in the process of unionising the bargirls. It involved study of the living and working conditions of the bargirls. Apart from the legal issues pertaining to them it led to the identification of the issues related to their caste, class, age composition, their marital status, traditions and, their socio-economic and educational background.

During the process we visited more than 600 bars of different districts of the state,

organised protest on different issues, conducted more than 50 meetings and two training programmes, enrolled more than 12000 members in the Union, documented more than 100 life stories.

Since the announcement of the government decision, we are fighting a battle with the state on the issue of rehabilitation. It involved mobilisation of two mass rallies attended by more than 50000 bargirls and staging of an indefinite sit-in which lasted for almost a month. Intense lobbying and networking was done to raise the issue at the national level by involving UPA Chairperson, NCW, NHRC, NCSCST and the Indian Parliament. Alliance was built up with more than 50 women's social groups, and several influential personalities from different streams of the society. All this advocacy, lobbying and mobilisation work effectively delayed the promulgation of the ultimate order for more than four months.

However, since the bill has been passed complete closure of dance bars is now a reality. Tracking the impact of this eviction on these girls show that most of them have entered into sex work for their survival and they have become far too vulnerable to trafficking. Many of them are getting arrested in the different towns of different states for engaging in commercial sex work in the public places. Few of them have gone back to their native villages in UP and Rajasthan and even there they are being harassed by the local police. Lack of education and of any other skill have left the majority of these girls with no option other than sex work to feed their families.

Contrary to the claims of the government, this shows that the closure of bars will increase trafficking both within India and internationally. It is sad that instead of checking human trafficking their action is going to increase it enormously and on an international scale. The ban on dance in the bars cannot be an anti-trafficking measure as it is going to have exactly the opposite impact. Thousands of girls will have no alternative other than to accept proposals for performing in the Gulf countries, where they are usually duped and forced into sex work. Suddenly depriving such huge number of women of their source of livelihood without proper rehabilitation is going to force them into sex work *en mass*.

This situation needs urgent humanitarian response from the NGOs and concerned individuals on a scale of any natural disaster where large number of people get

displaced. Mapping and tracking of the displacement is required to design appropriate assistance and rehabilitation strategy. There is a need to address issues that have the potential to increase the vulnerability of the displaced girls vis-a-vis the criminal networks, police harassments. There is a need to evolve supportive structure at the local level for the girls scattered all over the country. Special efforts are needed for continuance of education of the children and especially of the girl children of the evicted bargirls. This displacement is going to increase health risks for the victims and it requires adequate attention.

After the bill banning the dance bars was passed, the dance bar girls challenged it in court. Unfortunately Maharashtra High Court has upheld the government's decision. Now the fate of our dance bar girls is uncertain, will they vanish like some tribes of Andaman ? Or will they resurface elsewhere ?



DMSC organized rally in support of Dance Bar Girls



Varasha Kale, President Bharatiya Bar Girls' Union addresses a gathering at Esplanade, Kolkata

HIV/AIDS Prevention, Sex Workers and Human Rights

Bharati Dey and Dr. Amitrajit Saha.

Successful HIV/AIDS Prevention is only possible through Empowerment of hardest-hit population groups and through appropriate Structural Changes: Lessons from the HIV/AIDS Prevention efforts of Sex Workers' Movements utilising the Rights-based Approach

A spectre is looming over the world: the spectre of sex workers unifying and organising and running quality HIV/AIDS intervention programmes worldwide – throwing all 'known' paradigms to the wind, challenging patriarchy, challenging the dominant discourses on gender, class, sex and sexuality – and leading marginalised communities to assert their rights! Everyone – governments and scientists, bureaucrats and Big Pharma, epidemiologists and religious heads, feminist theorists and the Old Left are running helter-skelter: trying to fetter this new upsurge of people's initiative in nation after nation. Trying to retain control, save profits and maintain bottom-lines and trying, through religious dogma, through 'scientific research' and through 'state power to keep women, gays, transgendered people, injecting drug users, the marginalised, the indigenous people and the people living with HIV/AIDS 'in line', as 'recipients of munificence' and away from the world of freedom, democracy, access to treatment and harm reduction and to what is rightfully theirs...

Peoples most at risk of HIV/AIDS Unite !

In the eighties, when HIV was first identified as a 'killer virus', epidemiologists and scientists called us "people with deviant behaviour". They said that it was a disease that affected people God cursed: gays, prostitutes and transgendered people. They called us the 'high-risk group'. When isolating us did not curb the epidemic curve; when vilifying us and 'playing ostrich' did not prevent the epidemic to spread across 'class', 'nation', 'family' and 'religious' barriers, they still called HIV/AIDS a 'gay curse' and the fruit of 'hedonistic life-styles' – and stigmatised all who become infected...

And then 'stairs' began to die...

Suddenly, HIV was the epidemic that needed to be stopped in its tracks: and who best to 'bear the burden' of new interventions but sex workers – women, gay and transgendered, and people who visited them? We were, alongside long-haul truckers and injecting drug users, identified as 'vulnerable' people who required 'intervention' and 'behaviour change': condoms, syndromic management, STI management and VCT services – all in a desperate bid to 'prevent' the 'large society' from 'becoming infected'!

And then 'Sonagachi Project', Shakti Project, and other successful sex worker led interventions happened all over the globe...

These projects proved conclusively that a 'vertical disease prevention' model centralised on 'individual behaviour change', would not work to prevent the spread of HIV. What was needed was a life-asserting community-led rights-based model: a model that challenged dogma and discourse, challenged old 'moralities' and challenged structures that kept people marginalised, stigmatised, underground and away from access and control over resources!

The World Health Organisation and Public Health specialists were forced to acknowledge that 'community mobilisation' and 'creating an enabling environment' needed to be replicated. That alongside scientific progress of testing methods, drug therapies and vaccine trials, awareness was the need of the day; that everyone from adults to adolescents needed information on sex and sexuality, on gender and power, and the importance of condom-protection; that HIV/AIDS was not merely a 'disease' but a social phenomenon that destroyed societies and its human resources; and that 'sex happens' so it is sensible to 'make it safe'.

We, the sex worker activists from India, organised ourselves, formed micro-credit co-operatives to break shackles of brothel-owners and power-brokers, began literacy classes, demanded workers' rights, demanded changing of laws discriminating sex work and sex workers, networked with civil society organisations, actively prevented trafficking of underage girls, began VCT and ART therapy on our own initiative, and through all our actions proved conclusively that what was urgently required to prevent

the HIV epidemic was structural intervention based on universal values; and that such intervention must be community-owned, community-led, community-monitored and community-managed. The success of Sonagachi Project and sister projects were too big to ignore and UNAIDS, the WHO and the Government of India all supported these programmes and recognised that this was a 'best practice' model.

Parallel to the events at Sonagachi and West Bengal (India), sex workers organisations were becoming active in other areas of the globe: Thailand, Brazil, Argentina, The Netherlands, Canada, Cambodia, Vietnam, etc. What arguably began at Sonagachi was fast becoming a global movement of sex workers; and this movement linked up with movements and networks of other groups marginalised but highlighted by the epidemic: PIWHA and injecting drug users! Most of these organisations were asserting their rights and were demanding access to harm reduction, preventive and curative services without stigma and discrimination. Networks of sex workers' groups like our National Network of Sex Workers (NNSW, India), Network of Sex Workers Projects (NSWP), and Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW) were active in uniting the voice of sex worker protest against discrimination, unethical research, and this unified effort was challenging the discourse on development, access, harm-reduction, *et al.* A groundswell of opinion in favour of a 'rights-based' approach to development, health and HIV prevention – backed by lessons learnt from a number of successful interventions – was making itself heard globally.

Did we sex workers' organisations, then, never have detractors?

Of course we did. Sonagachi Project and similar sex worker-run/-owned HIV intervention projects were never free of detractors, enemies and carping Cassandra predicting gloom-and-doom. They continued to snipe at our work and occasionally raised hysterical voices despite evidence-based research proving otherwise – that sex workers' rights would 'open the floodgates' that would challenge families and spread 'prostitution' far and wide; of how harm reduction strategies would increase substance abuse, etc. In countries like India, this Cassandra-brigade screamed loudly and darkly of 'India becoming a sex tourism spot', etc. etc. Conflating illegal migration of scores of human beings worldwide with 'trafficking in women for sex work' a number of people and organisations screamed that 'rights of sex workers would increase trafficking

of 'minor and innocents', despite evidence showing that rights-based intervention at Sonagachi Project has actually increased the median age of sex workers significantly and also reduced the proportion of minors trafficked significantly to near-zero levels. To scream thus was easier than acknowledging that rich countries kept their eyes closed to illegal migration to have access to 'cheap' human labour.

And then George W Bush became the president of USA in 2001 piggybacking on the support of the military-industrial complex, oil billionaires, the religious right and a compliant State machinery....

Buoyed up by the victory of George W Bush, his backers put to motion a clutch of plans they have been nurturing for long, based on religious bigotry, intolerance and lust for control over global economy....

With great fanfare, the US Administration declared that HIV prevention efforts supported by them would highlight the "ABC Approach" where emphasis should be on Abstinence, Being Faithful (to a single sexual partner) and then finally on Condom use. In one fell swoop, backed by the millions of dollars of US Federal funding, the administration ignored the epidemiological lessons learned globally from the preceding 25 years of living with the epidemic!

In 2003, the US House of Representatives passed the US HR2620, an Act that forbade US federal funding (i.e., USAID) to organisations that supported sex workers' rights or needle exchange programmes among injecting drug users!

The industrial complex did its bit too – Big Pharma showing the way by trying to block and slow down the global use of cheap generic anti-AIDS drugs and, in the name of 'research' targeting sex worker groups in poorer countries and the "10 billion dollars to fund ART" promised at Johannesburg remained just that: a fast-fading promise

The fall out

–Successful HIV/AIDS intervention programmes run / managed by sex worker groups are at risk of de-funding.

–Programmes supporting life-skills building of sex workers have stopped doing so,

fearing de-funding of their activities (e.g., an organisation in Cambodia supported spoken-English classes for sex workers to enhance their chances of alternative employment. Since US HR2620 was promulgated, they have stopped this support-decriminalising sex work and repeal of IT(P)A and Article 377 of IPC begin with the result: sex workers, who had an earlier opportunity to leave the profession, cannot do so anymore!).

-Instead of debate / discussion and / or replication of the Self-Regulatory Board model developed by the Sonagachi Project to prevent entry of underage girls into sex work, the current discourse is focussing on increasing state power to curb trafficking and in trying to do so, preventing sex workers from working, driving them underground and thereby increasing their risks of unprotected sex and HIV infection...

-Pushing through the "ABC" agenda at the expense of promoting condom use in Uganda, some 32 million quality-approved condoms remain impounded in government warehouses while the U.S. government ramps up financing for abstinence only approaches to HIV prevention. According to Ugandan AIDS activists, government's actions will undermine community efforts to reduce HIV prevalence and HIV transmission. These trends away from scientifically sound, evidence-based prevention strategies are occurring in Uganda and in other countries hard-hit by AIDS epidemic, such as Nigeria, South Africa, and Zambia.

-In resource-poor countries focus and funding are shifting from HIV prevention efforts to 'fighting prostitution'.

-De-funding of programmes that refuse to 'sign' on the dotted line agreeing either to 'eradicate prostitution' or promising 'not to support programmes that speak of sex workers' rights'.

-Risk of de-funding harm-reduction and needle-exchange programmes for IDUs.

The Demands of Sex Workers' Groups

1. The approaches to reduce HIV/AIDS among the most at risk groups (sex workers, MSM, transgendered people, IDUs, truckers and helpers) must continue based on evidence of what works with marginalised communities and not what is 'comfortable' for donors and administrators in India and across the globe.

2. Sex worker groups in India demand that in light of the new Recommendations to the 11th Plan (made by the Planning Commission), a national-level discussion on sex work and repeal of IT(P)A and Article 377 of IPC begin with the participation of sex worker and MSM/transgendered groups.

3. We demand representation in National and State-level policy-making bodies that deal with HIV/AIDS prevention (e.g. at NACO and at all SACS).

4. To prevent stigma and discrimination, we demand that sex workers be recognised as entertainment sector workers.

5. We appeal to Parliamentarians, Members of State Legislative Assemblies, and Representatives of Donor Organisations to engage in dialogue with sex worker, MSM/PLWHA groups across the country to add to and enhance the response to HIV/AIDS in the country in light of the NACP-III.

6. We wish to reiterate that we are fighting for our rights and for what is rightfully ours and we wish to do so by forging new alliances, strengthening old ties and by standing firm together: through successful implementation of community-led programmes, through challenging the dominant discourse wherever possible, through sharing our concerns with all the world's citizens, and through demanding the change in discriminatory laws and statutes that keep us marginalised. Brazil has shown one way: by refusing US\$ 40 million aid for HIV intervention as that clashed with the country's declared policies on sex work and sex workers !

7. We, the sex workers of India, are also lending our voice to the groundswell of global protest ! We are joined by our sisters and brothers in Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Canada, Argentina, the USA and rest of the world ! We call on you all to join our struggle *against* stigma, discrimination, increased vulnerability and marginalisation and for a rights-based, equitable, decriminalised access to care that is rightfully ours !

She is no outlaw

Rakesh Shukla

MPs may be caught taking bribes on camera, NGOs caught fudging accounts and judges nabbed taking favours – yet parliamentarians, social workers and the robe fraternity take the high moral ground when it comes to prostitution. They arrogate to themselves the right to pontificate on what is in the best interests of these “fallen women. Apart from expressing concern and anguish over the “plight” of these women they share a reluctance to actually listen to sex workers themselves on steps that could be taken to improve the situation.

Even in a society full of marginalised communities, women in prostitution are at the bottom of the social ladder. Stigmatised as immoral, sinful whores who lure decent men away from wives and families, they come much lower than that epitome of exploitation, ‘the worker’. In fact, attempts to acquire the higher status of ‘worker’ are reflected in the use of the term ‘sex worker’, instead of prostitute.

In the working of the law, sex workers are treated as non-persons with no right to life, liberty, shelter, dignity or self-respect. Last year, bulldozers demolished huts of sex workers on Baina Beach in Goa following directions of the high court. The huts were homes of women who had lived there for 40 years. They possess ration cards, voter identity cards, electricity bills, tax receipts and are bona fide residents of Baina. Many of their children born in Baina are vote-casting adults.

Such stigmatisation manifests itself in numerous other ways. The law with regard to assault, rape and kidnapping is uniformly applicable regardless of the identity of the victim. In reality, sex workers seem fair game to beat and rape as no consequence follow for the perpetrator. Last year, a prostitute from G B Road was kidnapped by a policeman, taken across the border and severely raped, beaten and brutalised. However, despite the matter surfacing in the media, no action was taken against the culprit Kokila, a hijra sex worker who was raped, beaten and brutalised by goondas in Bangalore.

The police instead of lodging an FIR chained her naked in the lock-up, tortured, humiliated and sexually abused her.

The criminal justice delivery system turns dysfunctional when it comes to crimes against sex workers.

The law pertaining to prostitution enacted in 1956 was called SITA or the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act; the name was changed to Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act or IT(P)A in 1986. The legislation is faithful to the conception of sex work being synonymous with trafficking, and predictably proceeds to stigmatise it.

Trafficking would be generally understood to mean transporting a person by the use of threats, force, coercion, abduction, fraud or deception. IT(P)A deals with acts like keeping a brothel, soliciting in a public place and living off the earnings of prostitution. It does not even have a definition of trafficking, leave aside provisions to check it. Yet, so deep is the association of prostitution with trafficking, that the law with regard to prostitution is called the Act for Prevention of “Immoral Traffic”.

Prosecutions under this legislation have been primarily of women for soliciting, and not of pimps or traffickers. The removal of the section which made soliciting an offence in the proposed amendments is a welcome step. However, IT(P)A has paradoxical offences like detaining a person “with or without his consent” in premises where prostitution is carried on, or taking a person, “with or without consent” for the purpose of prostitution. The provisions dealing with raid and rescue make no distinction between adults and minors.

Ordinarily, consent or lack of consent of an adult is the crucial factor in offences like abduction or illegal confinement which determines whether an act is to be dubbed criminal. The methodology of “raid and rescue” appears to have neither worked nor been effective, besides being violative from a rights perspective. The girls/women “rescued” feel they have been “arrested” and kept in confinement. These are issues requiring urgent attention of the lawmakers, but have been left untouched in the Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Amendment Bill, 2005.

The Bill proposes to introduce a provision making clients punishable. This has

been done without consulting sex workers on the impact of punishing clients on the profession. In fact, the National Network of Sex Workers has sent a letter of protest to the Department of Women and Child Development describing the provision as a direct attack on their livelihood. The move could drive the profession underground reducing chances of clients being caught by the police. This will result in more unsafe sex and unhealthy conditions, hindering work on HIV/AIDS prevention. The provision will provide a handle to the police to extort money from clients.

The move to punish clients amounts to outlawing sex work. It disregards the ongoing debate on efforts to decriminalise and self-regulate prostitution. Perhaps, more discussion is needed with active participation of sex workers on the separation of consensual sex work from the abominable practice of human trafficking.

The writer is a Supreme Court advocate.

Source : *The Times of India*, Sunday, December 19, 2005. Bangalore Ed.



A get-together of the HIV+ people

Durbar facilitates Empowerment of the Shabars

In June 2004 some members of the largely pre-agricultural Shabar tribe (one among about 150 such tribes of India) of Amlasole village, in the district of West Medinipur, West Bengal, died of starvation. Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee rushed to the spot to conduct relief operations. There they fed about 250 persons for 10 days. Durbar knew from the outset that providing goods and services to the Shabars could not be any long term solution. For real development to take place well-planned intervention was essential.

Starting from our own experience about the course of empowerment of the sex workers, we went on to act as a catalyst in the process of empowerment of the marginalized Shabars. The following steps were taken, one after the other. An assessment of the situation in the village was followed by the preparation of a micro-plan for income generation, housing, health and education. A rural development committee was formed in July 2004. Workshops were organized for rudimentary capacity building in networking skills, leading to the formation of 2 self-help groups involving women. Subsequently an informal health centre and, a non-formal school could be set up. In all our activities we endeavoured to be respectful towards the Shabars and other Adivasis (tribal people) of the area, rely upon them and recognize their wisdom, skills and worth.

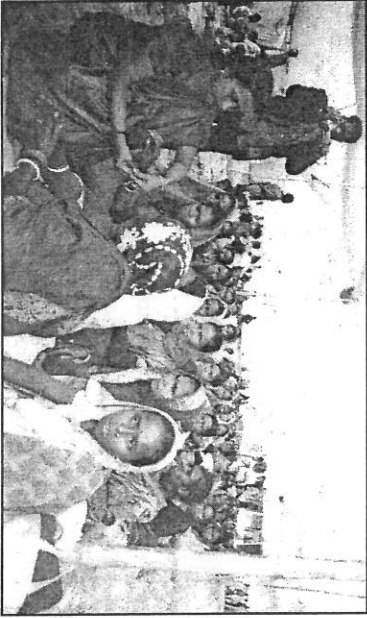
Since then the governmental agencies have also shaken some of their sloth. By June 2005: 3 hand-driven tube-wells have come up (earlier there was no provision for safe drinking water in the area); 17 kilometres of earth-packed, non-metalled road has been constructed (earlier there was none); 3 irrigation reservoirs have come up (earlier there was none); 20 houses have been built for the Shabars (they had no house). With financial assistance from Durbar, the Shabars of Amlasole have built a community house.

The most important gain in this period, however, is the ever rising confidence level of the Shabar people of Amlasole area. With suitable help received from us, the Shabars organized their First Conference at Amlasole, on 29-30 December 2005.

Here, Shabars from the other areas of West Bengal and, from the neighbouring states of Jharkhand and Orissa came together. Many spoke at a public meeting for the first time. There was another more important first: in this remote jungle location surrounded by hills, about 65% of some 10,000 people gathered were WOMEN. This is a very remarkable phenomenon for our cruelly patriarchal society. A lesson for the whole of South Asia, perhaps for the whole world.

The conference decided that henceforth they will observe the 30th of December every year as their Rights Day. The conference also prepared a charter of demands, resolved to form a task force, network with others working for the empowerment of our indigenous people.

On the 18th of January 2006, leaders of the Shabars and, their friends from various walks of life, met at the Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata, to chalk out their annual plan of action. It was decided that the central objective is to establish the rights of the Shabars as indigenous people. For this, steps are to be taken for social, political, cultural and economic development. In all stages of these activities ownership of the Shabars has to be ensured and, therein gender equity has to be maintained strictly. Durbar is committed to facilitate further mobilization of the Shabars along their chosen path.



Raksha-Bandhan at the First Conference of the Shabar People

Sex Workers of India seek your Support

We, the National Network of Sex Workers of India — a network of Female, Male and Transgender sex workers' organizations of the land, representing more than 2,00,000 sex workers and their children are organizing a rally at New Delhi on the 8th of March 2006, International Women's Day, to seek support and help of the members of our Parliament for our cause.

Our movement came into existence in the context of the raging HIV/AIDS pandemic. It has been realized that protecting the human and labour rights of sex workers is the best way of motivating our socially vulnerable community to fight HIV/AIDS by promoting safe sex. Our organizations were born some 12 years ago out of this realization. We first organized ourselves. Then we widened our horizons and, spread our activities among the other marginalized communities like the 'Shabar' tribe, ocean-going fisher-people, street-vendors and others. All of us realize that only Rights can stop the wrongs. From our Parliament we demand —

1. Repeal of all anti-sex worker laws of the land, including the IT(P) A;
2. Inclusion of sex work in the work list of the Ministry of Labour;
3. Protection of labour and human rights of the sex workers; and,
4. Recognition of the Self-Regulatory Boards of the sex workers, in the interest of stepping up the fight against trafficking and for improving the quality of life of us sex workers.

We are seeking the support of the entire civil and political society, in the name of humanity and civic responsibility. Today our country is in the threshold of a raging HIV/AIDS pandemic. It has already been proved by the STD/ HIV intervention work done by the sex workers of Sonagachi, Kolkata, for the last 15 years that the best way to prevent HIV/AIDS is to protect and uphold the basic human, civic and labour rights of the sex workers. The World Health Organization and the National AIDS Control Organization of India have praised the work done by us at Sonagachi and, upheld it as a model for others.

We seek your help, support and advice for making our March 8, 2006 rally and deputation at New Delhi a grand success.
Save us from the atrocities of the hoodlums and the police! Let us help the society to save itself from the AIDS pandemic!

স্বপ্না গায়ন
(Swarna Gayen)
Convener
3 March celebration committee

গৌরি রয়
(Gouri Roy)
Secretary
DMSC
NNSW

মীনা হালদার
(Mina Halder)
Convener
NNSW

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N N S W
NATIONAL NETWORK OF SEX WORKERS

DMSC's Calendar of Activities

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), an organization representing the interests of about 65,000 sex workers of West Bengal was born in 1995, in the context of the Sonagachi Project of STD/HIV Intervention going on since 1992. Our efforts surpass the usual framework of harm reduction in sexual health and embrace all round social, political, cultural, economic and legal empowerment of our long marginalized sex workers. We also facilitate the empowerment of other marginalized people, like the Shabars and street vendors. The following is our calendar of activities for the year 2005.-Ed.

January

- 14 • Sex workers meet noted author Samarash Majumdar, who subsequently wrote a special article about us in the Bengali daily *Anandabazar Patrika* (circulation 9,00,000).
- 22 • Residents of the Rahul Vidyaniketan (Children's home) run by Durbar participated in the annual sports organized by the Aikataan Club, Islamnagar, South Ramnagar, Baruipur and, won many prizes, including some first prizes.

February

- 18-19 • Representatives of DMSC and our Chief Advisor participate in the meeting of the National Network of Sex Workers (NNSW) together with the other constituents of the Network, at Sangli, Maharashtra.

19

- First phase of the campaign in support of the sex workers' March to the Parliament to demand workers' rights, begin in West Bengal. This phase of the campaign came to an end on 6 March 2005.

March

- 2 • Fifth International Consultative Workshop of the DMSC-TAAH Project

began at the Oberoi Grand Hotel, Kolkata. This workshop continued till 5 March 2005.

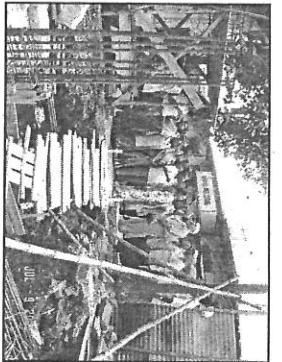
- 3 • International Sex Workers' Day. Celebration starts with a colourful procession. Sex Workers chant : Rehabilitation is sham indeed, Workers' Rights are what we need! At the end of the day Shree Ashokemohan Chakraborti, Secretary, Department of Labour, Government of West Bengal, inaugurated the website of Durbar < www.durbar.org >, in a ceremony at the Oberoi Grand Hotel, Kolkata.
- 21 • Durbar organized protest movement against barbarous attack upon a sex worker by her landlord at Shantipur.
- 22 • Durbar registers protest against fictional depiction of reality in the name of a documentary called 'Born into Brothel', shot by Jana Brisky.
- Roma Debnath, President DMSC, took part in the deliberations of Bishakha Committee—formed following directives of the Supreme court of India, for investigating instances of sexual harassment—at Kharaghpur, a major junction station of the South Eastern Railway. Durbar was invited to take part in these deliberations.
- 23 • Four hutments of sex workers were burnt down by some anti-social elements at Durgapur. Durbar rendered financial assistance to the victims and took up the matter with the police. One hooligan was arrested.

April

- 2 • Mithu Chakraborti, a leader of the sex workers of Siliguri was attacked by Alam, a hooligan, and his gang. The sex workers protested. The police arrested the entire gang.
- 23 • Members of Kanthi (Contai) branch of DMSC, were invited to take part in the AIDS Awareness Camp and inauguration of Ambulance Services, organized on the occasion of Centenary Celebration of the Contai Club, at Contai, East Medinipur.

May

- 1 • At midnight Durbar observed May Day by organizing a rally, distributed leaflets against the anti-sex-worker policies of the Bush administration and, staged a street play.



Dr. Sy Quarishi, the then Director General of NACO watches our Hospital under construction

- Construction of a hospital of, for and, by the sex workers began at Sonagachi.
- 3 • A delegation of DMSC took part in a protest meeting organized by the Dance-Bar girls of Maharashtra at the Azad Maidan, Mumbai.
- A delegation of DMSC took part in a panel discussion on the economic development of sex workers and their children, at Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- 18 • Roma Debnath and Kohinoor Begum led a delegation of DMSC, to the International Sex Workers' Conference, organized by Stella at Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The conference continued upto the 21st of May 2005.

- 23-24 • Representatives of DMSC trained police personnel on sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS and, conducted a quiz competition, at the Police Training College, Barrackpore, North 24 Parganas.
- 26 • Press Conference on the 3rd State Conference of DMSC.
- 27 • Third State Conference of the DMSC is held at the University Institute Hall, Kolkata. The conference was preceded by the formation of a human chain. The event and the conference involved the presence of noted educationist and humanist intellectual Shibharayan Ray, Minister for Tribal Welfare in the Govt. of W. B. Upen Kisku, Country Director of UNAIDS in India Denis Braun, ACD Care-India, Dr. Smarajit Jana and many other distinguished guests from Various organizations.

June

- 4 • Jyotsna Basu, the first sex worker Jt. Coordinator of the Ganga-Bhagirathi

HIV/AIDS Intervention Programme, took part in a discussion on the principles to be followed while conducting investigations involving sex workers and other vulnerable people, held at Bangkok, Thailand.

- 7 • Durbar launches militant protest movement against hincous attack perpetrated upon sex workers, including DMSC activists at Bowbazar, Kolkata.
- 14-15 • Workshop conducted on the rules to be followed during the forthcoming elections of DMSC.
- 20-21 • Sex workers' leader Jyotsna Basu and Pradip Baksi, advisor DMSC, participated in a consultation organized by the UNAIDS at ILO, Geneva, for creating effective partnerships for HIV prevention trials.
- 23 • DMSC participates in a meeting convened to discuss the proposed changes in the IT (P)A, at the Princeton Club, Prince Anwar Shah Road, Kolkata.
- July
- 12 • Durbar Mahila Samanway a Committee celebrated her 10th birth day, in a humble ceremony at the office.

August

- 10 • DMSC organized a seminar "In defence of rights and, in opposition to trafficking," at the Rabindra Sadan, Barasat. Participants included representatives of various organizations and, Asim Dasgupta, Minister of Finance, Govt. of W.B.
- 19 • Raksha-Bandhan Ursav on the courtyard of DMSC office; HIV + persons were offered Rakhi (a mark of acceptance as a sibling) and food ration.



Asim Dasgupta, Finance Minister of West Bengal, at a seminar "In defence of rights and, in opposition to trafficking," at Barasat

- 20
- Official release of the book *Jounakarmeeder Jibansatyra* (Truth about the lives of sex workers) and, panel discussion on 'Sexuality and Sex Workers', at the Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata.



Shibnarayan Roy, Shankarlal Bhattacharya and Samaresh Majumdar releasing *Jounakarmeeder Jibansatyra*

September

- 1
- Rally and meeting in support of the Dance-bar girls of Mumbai, who lost their jobs on government order. About 3000 persons from Durbar and various other organizations took part in this rally and meeting organized at Kolkata.
- 5
- Shantipur Branch of Durbar organized a meeting to raise HIV / AIDS awareness among the local people. Participants included local Government officials and DMSC central leaders.
- 11
- Sixth International Consultative Workshop of the DMSC-TAAH Project began at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Kolkata. The workshop continued upto the 16th of September 2005.

- 12-13
- Election of the central leadership of the DMSC, at the Ganabhaban, Dorjipara, Kolkata.

- 16-17
- DMSC participates in the International symposium on "Community Led Approaches to Health and Development," organized by the NNSW, at Hotel Peerless Inn, Kolkata.

October

- 1
- Workshop for capacity building of and, creating clearer understanding about the organization among the members of the DMSC branches in Kolkata, at the Ganabhaban, Dorjipara, Kolkata.
- 6-7
- DMSC participates in a workshop on "Oppression of Women at Home

and in the World outside", organized by the NNSW, at the Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata.

- 18
- Workshop for capacity building of and generating clearer understanding about the organization among the members of the DMSC branches in South Bengal, at Asansol, District-Bardhaman.

November

- 9
- Durbar agitates against forcible eviction of sex workers by hooligans in league with landlords, in Bowbazar. Political leaders and government officials were persuaded to intervene. The sex workers could get back to their rooms after two days.

- 27-28
- Workshop for capacity building of and, generating clearer understanding about the organization among the members of the DMSC branches in North Bengal, at Dinhat, District-Coochbehar.

- 30
- Durbar participates in a rally and meeting to raise the demands of the marginalized people in the context of the Hong Kong conference of the WTO, together with about 30 organizations, at Kolkata.

- Durbar participates in a rally organized in support of the demands of the street vendors of Kolkata.

December

- 1
- Awareness campaign organized at Sonagachi on the occasion of the World AIDS Day.

- Sm. Bharati Dey, a sex worker, takes over the management of all the Durbar run projects, as Director. The take over is announced formally in a press conference, at the Press Club, Kolkata.

- 6
- Discussion on the WTO conference with representatives of 22 organizations, at the DMSC Office.

- 9
- Policy issues of anti-trafficking activities discussed with state security personnel at Siliguri.

Taking the Prostitution Pledge

Since 2003, the Bush administration has required foreign groups fighting AIDS overseas to pledge their opposition to prostitution and sex trafficking before they get money from Washington. Last month, the administration expanded the requirement to American groups. On its face, this law seems innocuous. Who supports prostitution?

But in countries like India, controlling AIDS among prostitutes and their clients is the key to keeping the disease from exploding into the general population. So some very effective programs are built around trying to make sure that prostitutes and their customers use condoms. The groups who run these programs try to gain the trust of prostitutes by providing them with health care and reaching them about safe sex. They argue that being forced to state their opposition to prostitution would limit their ability to do that. Brazil turned down a \$40 million grant from the United States because it did not want to imperil successful programs.

The Bush administration and some of its supporters disagree. They argue that anything that makes life more tolerable for prostitutes encourages prostitution. That would include organizing sex workers in India to stand up to abusive clients, or helping Bangladeshi prostitutes get shoes so they can leave the brothel to visit a health clinic. Initially, the Justice Department ruled that the prostitution pledge could not be required of American groups because the American Constitution guarantees the right to free speech. The administration's turnabout would seem vulnerable to a constitutional challenge.

The new anti-prostitution requirement may have a hidden purpose: to take away the right of American groups working on family planning overseas to counsel abortions. On his first day in office, President Bush signed a reinstatement of President Ronald Reagan's policy blocking American funds for overseas family-planning groups that so

10 • DMSC organizes a walk on the occasion of the International Day of Protest against Oppression of Women.

17 • Durbar participates in the Annual Variety Show of the State Bank of India Staff Association, at the Mahajati Sadan, Kolkata.

26 • DMSC organized a workshop on Resistance to Trafficking at the Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata.

27 • All West Bengal Forum for Prevention of HIV / AIDS is formed through a workshop organized by DMSC, at the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Kolkata.

29-30 • The 1st *Shabar Jatiya Sammelan* (1st Conference of the Shabar Tribe) held at Amlasole, West Medinipur. The conference was convened by: Amlasole Birsa Munda Gram Unayan Committee. The event was supported and organized by: West Bengal Kharia-Shabar Welfare Association, Medinipur Loadha-Shabar Welfare Association and, DMSC. In the course of the conference DMSC handed over a house, built by contributions from sex workers, dedicated to the all round development of the Shabars and other tribes of Amlasole, to the local people.

much as mention abortion. Both restrictions are the work of Representative Christopher Smith, a New Jersey Republican. The abortion gag rule has never applied to American groups, for the same First Amendment reasons that the prostitution pledge did not. But the decision to strip Americans of their First Amendment right to speak as they please on prostitution opens the way to an attempt to keep them silent on abortion too.

Source : *The New York Times*, July 2, 2005, Editorial.

Namibia urged to decriminalize sex work

The Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) yesterday called for the decriminalization of prostitution in Namibia. The co-ordinator of LAC's Gender Research and Advocacy Project, Dianne Hubbard, said it is the only sensible and compassionate choice, while sex workers seek better alternatives. "Decriminalizing sex work does not have to mean the approval of sex work by Namibian society," she said. Her remarks were made to members of the National Council's Standing Committee on Gender and Youth, at a public hearing in Windhoek.

A member of the committee, Willem Apollus, welcomed the recommendation of LAC. "I agree to a certain extent that we try out decriminalizing sex work apart from legalising it," he said. "Sex workers are also human beings and not just numbers," he said.

Hubbard said decriminalization would reduce HIV transmission in areas where sex workers operate, since it would set the stage for more effective HIV-AIDS campaigns targeting sex workers and clients. She said decriminalization is more consistent with respect for human rights of sex workers. It would also reduce the general level of violence in sex work, because it would mean sex workers can report abuse and coercion without fear of being arrested, she said. Her organization's recommendations are based on a LAC study carried out in 2001.

The survey on sex workers covered five towns – Windhoek, Grootfontein, Keetmanshoop, Walvis Bay and Swakopmund. 148 sex workers were interviewed.

Apollus expressed dissatisfaction over the absence of sex workers from the public hearing. "We really need their contributions to give us a road map," he said.

DIFFICULTIES

Hubbard said it would be very difficult for sex workers to appear in public before a committee because of the stigma they carry. She suggested that members of the committee meet her after the open session and she would tell them how they might approach and meet those workers without scaring them off.

Tabling of a report on the public hearing in the National Assembly for discussion can be expected not later than March next year, Apollus said.

Hubbard said almost a quarter of the people her group interviewed said paid sex takes place in the veld [open grassland] – for privacy and also to give clients free rein to behave as they please without interference.

Interviewees were asked how long they had been operating as sex workers. The average period, according to Hubbard, is between two and 10 years. "Reasons for going into sex work vary," she said. "But the most important considerations are financial – such as having to support children or financial stability, combined with some catastrophic event, such as the death of a parent or losing some other job. The vast majority of sex workers (67 percent) would like to see the laws of Namibia changed to legalise sex work," she said. "Some sex workers also thought that legalisation would reduce the harassment which they experience," Hubbard reported.

LEST'S DEBATE IT

Rachel Cloete, representing Women's Action for Development, a women's help group, also proposed decriminalizing sex work. She said the concept should be opened for debate in order to gauge public opinion. Cloete expressed shock over teachers who impregnate young schoolgirls in exchange for material or financial favours. "The seeds of prostitution are planted right within our schools," she told the committee. "Whether in financial terms or in kind, this is nothing less than prostitution," Cloete said.