

## WOMEN'S GROUPS OPPOSE BAN ON DANCE-BARS

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Women's groups in Mumbai and from all over India strongly oppose the arbitrary ban on dance-bars in the state, which appears to have been made without considering the imminent and enormous implications on the lives and livelihoods of thousands of women employed in the bars.

The alleged motive of the present repressive State measures, headed by Home Minister of the state Mr. R.R. Patil is that of 'culture' and the bad influence these bars are on the 'culture' of Maharashtra. This is an attempt yet again, only this time from centrist rather than rightist forces, to subsume the diversity of cultures that form this country, into a monolithic idea of society. When the State began to issue licenses to the bar girls in the city around thirty years ago, many women who were traditionally dancers or women needing to earn a livelihood sought work in these bars legitimately as dancers. Many of these women belong to communities, which have traditionally been dancers such as Bhedia, Chari, Bhatu, Rajnat, Dhanawat, Gandharva, and see this profession as a more recent form of their own tradition.

Recent reports have indicated that the US may impose sanctions on India for not taking effective action to stop trafficking in women and children. This threat has prompted the State to ban dance-bars only to make a statement internationally that 'effective action' has been taken to curb trafficking while in reality no action has been taken against traffickers. It is apparent that the agenda of the State is to cleanse the city of its poor - be it slum dwellers, workers and or women working in dance - bars. On the issue of women working in bars, the State is even resorting to contradictory stands, on the one hand of 'sexual exploitation of women working in bars and on the other of accusing these very women of 'morally corrupting', the youth and society at large. Morality cannot be determined only by the dominant and privileged section of society.

Women's groups have continuously highlighted and fought against the sexual exploitation of women in patriarchal structures and institutions. The State today, with the banning of the dance bars is using the language of the women's movement without sharing either our concerns or understanding women's realities. We, the women's groups, strongly oppose the State's rhetoric of exploitation of women. Instead of creating spaces and conditions that ensure that women are not sexually harassed and that their rights are respected, the State has targeted the very livelihood of women which might have lent their lives independence and autonomy and thereby their freedom. By rendering women jobless and without financial resources, the State is making them much more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

The State in the past has never effectively rehabilitated dispossessed persons. In case of dance-bar girls it is lack of opportunities have forced them to take this traditional occupation. And so the State's half-hearted offer of rehabilitation without any serious research and study of women who are forced to lose on their livelihood options without issuing any warning or notice. This offer is neither believable nor viable because it is already disallowing non Maharashtrian dance girls. Banning dance-bars will compel women to resort to activities where there is even greater sexual exploitation and the government will not be in a position to either monitor or regulate these activities. A government that is genuinely interested in the welfare of its women will not resort to such mindless activities of revoking the licenses of 'dance-bars'.

WE THEREFORE DEMAND THAT:

- The proposed ban on dance bars be revoked.
- Right to work of women working in bars be recognised and protected.
- Right of women working in bars to a safe working environment be recognised and protected.

**Taken from Saheli's Website:**

<https://sites.google.com/site/saheliorgsite/solidarity/womens-groups-oppose-ban-on-dance-bars>