

# Prostitution, for a living

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Prostitution- civilized society avoids the mere occurrence of this word, leave alone acknowledging its presence. Putting aside the moral, ethical stuff surrounding it, let's look at the other rarely touched aspects. Prostitution as such is not illegal according to our laws, but yes commercialized vice (brothels), exploitation and trafficking are punishable. The current laws are ambiguous and are mostly put to use for wrong reasons.

Is the current scenario really a cause of concern? First things first, we cannot ignore it, for there are close to 3 million sex workers in our country and is sort of a thriving industry. Most of them work for brothels which are illegal and are missing in the mainstream. Most of them lead a miserable life both economically and socially and are exploited outright.

I spoke with one such sex worker; here are a few vital facts about her. Payal comes from a small village in UP, and she works for different agencies and is rotated among them periodically. She is paid a salary of 12k per month, while the agency gets paid at least 80k for her services. The burden of her family of two children (her husband died) forced her to take up this profession. She has faced a lot of abuse (both verbal and physical) from her employers, customers and police also. Most women in the profession have similar background. HIV/AIDS - a global threat has prostitution as one of its major causes. Thanks to various initiatives, many are now aware of STD and safe sex but this is no reason for contention. More than 50% of sex workers in Mumbai are HIV positive. Exploitation and extortion are part and parcel of prostitution, while we the citizens of India have promised ourselves the Right against exploitation through articles 23 and 24 of our constitution. Why this fundamental right should be denied to them, who are one of the worst victims?

Families of sex workers are in abject poverty, forcing their siblings and children again into same profession which is a grave concern. The other family members do not have a fair education and remain poor for all of their life. Also the number of sex workers has doubled in the past decade. As it is not a recognized profession for obvious reasons, all the money that flows in the industry is unaccounted.

The primary act dealing with these issues, PITA has to be given more teeth. Issuing identity or license cards to sex workers would bring them out of the darkness. By this we are not promoting, but acknowledging their presence. There would be hundred Muthaliks and other so called fundamentalists who would create ruckus, but the Government should not give in to them. If notoriously popular Amsterdam is slowly showing positive signs after reforms, why can't we replicate such reforms in Mumbai, Kolkata or Bangalore?

By recognizing the sex workers in the mainstream, their children will get a chance for education. Setting up rehabilitation camps, schools in the red-light areas will give definite results in the long run. NGOs and Government organizations working for such cause need encouragement. We can't have all this vanished over-night. It could be fought against only by understanding it and working with it.

- *Surya Adavi*