

Some Aspects of Prostitution In Bangladesh

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Introduction And Background

This paper attempts to highlight some aspects of prostitution in Bangladesh. Data of this paper was mainly collected from two brothel areas of Dhaka and Narayanganj. This paper is part of a study which aimed at investigating into the possibilities of rehabilitating prostitutes by looking into their backgrounds and the operation of prostitution in the brothels. Specifically, this paper provides some ethnographic data on brothel prostitution. In this study we have defined prostitution as the granting of sexual access on a relatively indiscriminate basis for payment either in money or in goods.

Review of Literature

Very little literature is available with respect to prostitution in our country, although a considerable num-

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ber of work has been done on the prostitutes of West Bengal in India. We have been able to come across Joardar's work in prostitution in nineteenth and early twentieth century Calcutta, in which he describes the nature and form of prostitution in Bengal basing mostly on ethno-historical data.¹

The existence of prostitution in East Bengal and particularly in our research locale, namely Dhaka and Narayanganj, since the middle and early nineteenth century is evident from the Decennial Census of India and official municipal documents. Accounts of traveller's also reflect on the presence of prostitution. The Report of the Census of Bengal 1901 and the earlier censuses estimated prostitutes "including *sagins* and *nauchis*" under the broad occupational category of "unskilled labour not agricultural" and under the subheading of "indefinite and disreputable."² Also under this sub-title "of indefinite and disreputable", the 1901 Census of India estimates procurers, pimps, receivers of stolen goods, witches, wizards and low prisoners etc. From the 1911 Census onwards prostitutes were categorized in the group of beggars, vagrants and prostitutes in the miscellaneous column.³

In contrast to the interest that the British took in including prostitutes and even beggars as occupational groups in the population census, the census taken in Pakistan and later in Bangladesh unfortunately totally ignores them. This deliberate avoidance seems to reflect the religious biased policies followed by the state during this period. Looking at the trend in the increase of prostitution in our country and the reasons for it, one can

only conclude that prostitution and prostitutes not only existed during the 'Takistan' period but existed in larger numbers than during the British period. Our own study shows large numbers of women earning an income in Narayanganj and Dhaka alone, while there is no mention of them in the Census 1974, 1981. We feel that by leaving these women out of the estimate of working women in the country, the census is leaving a big chunk out of the total picture of women's position.

We get glimpses of the nature and form of prostitution in Dhaka in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in a journal of personal experiences by Dewan Gaziur Raja, a *Zamindar* hailing from the former Sylhet District of Bangladesh.⁴ Through this well-documented account of Dewan Gazi's intimate encounters with prostitutes of Dhaka we get to know their lives and situations; we also see the pattern of lifestyle of zamindars and wealthy persons of that time. According to Dewan Gazi's dairy, wealthy persons from the countryside used to visit Dhaka for entertainment in the houses of '*Baiji*' (dancing girls) and prostitutes, whom he refers to as *khemtawali* and *gonika*. His account gives us the idea that even at that time the prostitutes had to 'register' their names with the police. Most prostitutes were Hindus by religion and took Hindu clients only. It was common for young prostitutes to have small children living with them. He also indicates that there were several brothels with large numbers of prostitutes close to the Sadarghat river craft terminal, and along the river bank which is located in the present old city area. Drinking,

singing and dancing in the prostitutes' houses was common. Exploitation of the prostitutes by the police in the form of money extortion and physical assaults were also reported. From this account we can assume that prostitution in Dhaka city was quite widespread. Even Taylor, an English civil surgeon reported such a state with respect to prostitution during the early eighteenth century⁵.

Two important recent reports on the prostitutes of Dhaka city are available. One study was part of a survey of the urban population conducted by the National Institute of Local Government. It gives a brief socio-economic profile of a selected number of prostitutes of Dhaka city. Data on the socio-economic background of three groups of low, middle and high income prostitutes were gathered through interviews conducted in the project office of the institute. The method of data collection seems to be limited in its scope since the interviews were conducted in a controlled situation. As a result, we apprehend that the flow of information from the samples themselves could have been interfered with and hence the data cannot give a representative picture. In spite of its methodological shortcomings, this was a pioneering study done by a government sponsored research organisation.⁶

The second study was conducted by a team of sociologists sponsored by the Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights, Dhaka. This study was the result of the widespread media coverage of the tragic situation of under-age prostitutes in the country in 1985. Like the other study, this study also collec-

ted data in a controlled situation, gathering information from floating prostitutes who were contacted through pimps and interviewed in the project office. Another limitation of this study is that it is mostly based on opinion collection from the prostitute, rather than on actual background data about them.⁷ Given the time frame, this study could have provided more insights into the lives of the prostitutes had it been conducted in their actual residential locale. Nevertheless, both these studies provide us with some valuable information about the mechanism of the operation of prostitution in our society.

The third group of available literature on prostitution and prostitutes are the reports and articles published in the dailies and weekly journals. Prominent among these are the weekly *Bichitra* & *Robbar*. Since the incident of Shab Meher in 1985, there was a media uproar on the situation of child as well as adult prostitutes. Both *Bichitra* and *Robbar* brought out cover stories. Widely circulated dailies, like *Sangbad* and *Ittefaq* also reported hairraising stories alongwith articles by prominent social activities recommending possible measures for tackling the situation. The cover stories of *Bichitra* and *Robbar* give valuable insights into the circumstances that lead women in to prostitution and the role of men and women involved in the process of their induction. These articles also throw light on the political and legal aspects of prostitution in the country, making prostitution and the prostitutes an issue of national interest as well as arousing the awareness of the general public. However, these journalistic reportings have

their own limitations. Firstly, the features could not rise above the normal journalistic sensationalism which fails to provide objective reporting of actual incidents or situations. Since the media uproar originated from the Shab Meher incident, the writings became biased towards the suffering and the tragedies of the women and their lives. Consequently, these overlooked other important aspects which are related and relevant for understanding their lives. For example, the fact that a noticeable number of brothel prostitutes are born to prostitutes pursuing this profession for generations, is left out of the picture. A large number of girls voluntarily choose this as the only means of earning a living not only for themselves but also for their families. Many of the male children who are born to prostitutes and forced to become part of the complex organisation of the business of prostitution, and become outcasts of society are in no less miserable condition than the women.

Recent trends, present forms and the magnitude of prostitution in Bangladesh

Although it is very difficult to get the actual number of prostitutes operating, there are according to police estimates, at least 25,000 to 30,000 women in Dhaka, and 5,000 to 15,000 in Narayanganj.

As has been mentioned earlier, organised prostitution has been in existence in Dhaka and Narayanganj for a long time. From the reports of the Decennial Census of India and from the writings of personal experiences of travellers we get an idea that the form

and the extent of the existence of prostitution were different from what it is today. Some similarities, however, can be noticed even today. One important trend which has been noticed is that organised prostitution grew up in the city and trading centres along the rivers. The prostitutes mostly came from rural or semi urban areas to these centres. A similar trend is noticeable when we compare the district or region of origin of prostitutes during the British times and today. The Decennial Census, and the descriptions of prostitutes of Calcutta city by Joardar indicate that prostitutes operating in Dhaka and Calcutta came in large numbers from the former districts of Faridpur, Barisal, Mymensingh and Comilla. A survey on the prostitutes of Anandabazar brothel conducted by the social welfare department in 1985 shows a similar districtwise distribution trend. Again a similar trend has been noticed when we looked into the listings of prostitutes under Kotwali police Station, Dhaka, with regard to their districtwise distribution. Out of a total of 380 prostitutes enlisted (during part of 1935, whole of 1986 and till August of 1987) 205 or 54 percent come from the above mentioned districts. The National Institute for Local Government's report and Report of the study by the Human Rights Enforcement Society of Bangladesh also show a similar trend. The following table from our data gives a similar pattern.

From this continuing trend we can also discern that prostitution in the cities is linked with rural-urban migration vis-a-vis the ever growing urbanization process. It should be mentioned that Dhaka city had

Table 1 : Home districts of Natinagar and Anandabazar prostitutes (1987)

Home Districts	Natinagar		Anandabazar		All	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Dhaka	11	18.33	13	21.66	24	20.00
Barisal	10	16.67	10	16.66	20	16.67
Mymensingh	6	10.00	9	15.00	15	12.50
Faridpur	8	13.33	7	11.66	15	12.50
Jessore	6	10.00	4	6.67	10	8.33
Comilla	4	6.67	3	5.00	7	5.83
Khulna	3	5.00	3	5.00	6	5.00
Noakhali	2	3.33	2	3.33	4	3.34
Rangpur	2	3.33	3	5.00	5	4.17
Pabna	1	1.67	1	1.67	2	1.67
Dinajpur	—	—	1	1.67	1	0.83
Tangail	3	5.00	3	5.00	6	5.00
Chittagong	—	—	1	1.67	1	0.83
Rajshahi	2	3.33	—	—	2	1.67
Jamalpur	1	1.67	—	—	1	0.83
Not reported	1	1.67	—	—	1	0.83
Total	60	100.00	60	100.00	120	100.00

an 105.9 per cent increase in its population between 1974-1981 due largely to rural-urban migration. Recently, an ILO estimate quoted in a local english daily forecasted that Dhaka will be one of the largest urban conglomerates in the world by the turn of the century. Further, related to this is that landlessness in the districts from which the prostitutes are out-migrating is alarmingly high.

One of the big differences in the nature of prostitution in the British period, the Pakistan period and even during the early seventies in Bangladesh and today, is the spread of prostitution from one locale i. e., the brothels or red light areas, to other areas of the cities.

Until the early eighties, prostitution in Dhaka and Narayanganj was confined to the few red light areas, a limited number of floating prostitutes and a few hotels. It should be mentioned here that in Dhaka there were four red light areas (namely Shachi Bandar, Kumartully, Kandupatty Gangazali) and three in Narayanganj. In the mid-eighties following the Shab Meher incident all but one of the brothels in Dhaka and one in Narayanganj were closed down and the many women inmates evicted. Our observation during the study and from our discussions with law enforcement and local government officials, show that the magnitude of floating prostitutes have increased manifold following the closure of the brothels in general. In addition, it was also obvious that with the increase of the volume of trade, business and foreign deals, the demand for prostitutes has increased considerably.

Another recent trend is the increase in the numbers

Table 2 : Fathers' occupation of prostitutes of Natinagar and Anandabazar.

Occupation	Dhaka No.	%	Narayanganj No.	%	All No.	%
Agriculture	14	23.33	17	28.33	31	25.73
Small trader shop keeper	8	13.33	9	15.00	17	14.11
Agricultural labour/day labour	18	30.00	14	23.33	35	26.56
*Service	2	3.33	2	3.33	4	3.33
Bus/Truck driver/helper	—	—	5	8.33	5	4.15
Rickshaw/Autorick- shaw driver	6	10.00	2	3.33	8	6.64
Boat-man	—	—	2	3.33	2	1.67
Smuggler	—	—	1	1.67	1	0.83
Alcohol seller	—	—	1	1.67	1	0.83
Kabiraj	—	—	1	1.67	1	0.83
Zamidar's clubmen	—	—	1	1.67	1	0.83
Fisherman	2	3.33	5	8.33	7	5.81
Umbrella maker	1	1.67	—	—	1	0.83
Hotel bell-boy	1	1.67	—	—	1	0.83
Carpenter	2	3.33	—	—	2	1.67
Cart-puller	1	1.67	—	—	1	0.83
Not reported	5	8.33	—	—	5	4.15
No. of respondent	60	100.00	60	100.00	120	100.00

* Service refers to white collar jobs.

of floating/street-walking prostitutes who are said to be the victims of increasing and landlessness poverty in the countryside joining the ranks of the poor who dwell in the slums of Dhaka and Narayanganj. And since 1970, landlessness has increased by over 100 percent.

Further, due to the ever growing labour market in the country, particularly in the urban areas, these women are pushed into a marginal situation in the entire labour market which is been over whelmingly occupied by men. As a result these women cannot compete with the ever-increasing unemployed male labour force. Consequently their vulnerability to opt for prostitution for survival increases. We also have data which indicate that most of the prostitutes come from traditionally poor agricultural backgrounds. See Table 2.

Different forms/types of prostitution in Dhaka and Narayanganj

We have been able to identify several ways in which the business of prostitution is carried on in these two cities. These types can be broadly categorised under four main groups—brothel prostitution, hotel prostitution, prostitution carried on in rented houses in posh residential areas by small groups of girls, and street walking/slum (floating) prostitution.

Brothel Prostitution

In Narayanganj municipal area there are 2 main brothels operating at present both of which are about 200 years old. in Dhaka there were several old brothels in the old city area. All were closed down in 1985. Today only one remains in Natinagar, (Nawabpur) area.

We have found that several kinds of prostitution in operate the brothels. There are firstly resident prostitutes who reside permanently in the houses in the brothel areas. Some of these girls are born in the brothel and some have come from outside, on their own free will or were sold to *Sardarni* (madams) in the brothels. Among these women there are *sardarnis* who are either ex-prostitutes 'owning' a few girls and/or renting out rooms to girls and some are also *sardarni-cum-prostitutes*. There are '*baijis*' (dancing/singing) girls whose main income comes from entertaining clients with songs and dances. Some '*baijis*' also prostitute. There are girls under control of *sardarni* who take away their (girls) total income and provide for all their necessities. There are girls who operate independently by renting rooms themselves. Usually these are young girls who have been in the brothel for several years. Apart from selling sex and entertaining clients in the brothels, many girls at times go out for the night to entertain clients in residential houses.

There are various 'categories' of prostitutes with differing status depending on their income and the 'classes' of the clients they associate with. The highest 'class' earns approximately between Taka 15,000 and 40,000 per month and the lowest group approximately between Taka 3,000 and 8,000 per month. Between the two groups there are several categories. The highly paid girls from Anandabazar, Narayanganj, it is said, go out with clients for days to other parts of the country or abroad.

Apart from women who are residents in the brothels, there are hundreds more who use the premises

for entertaining and selling sex to clients by renting rooms for a day or for certain specific hours of the day. There are again different types of women among non-residential brothel prostitutes. One group is said to be 'housewives'-married women from the very low income groups from the neighbourhood who come to the brothels in '*burkha*' at a fixed time each evening usually from 6 p. m. to 9 p. m. They use the rooms in the brothel by paying rents to *sardarni* or agents of '*bariwala*' directly. After the fixed time they go back to their homes. Sometimes street-walking prostitutes bring in their clients to the brothels and use rented rooms but they do not reside in the brothels.

Street walking

This type of prostitution is very prominent in Dhaka. There are certain 'marked' areas in Dhaka City, specially in the new city where the street prostitutes contact their clients directly or through '*dalal*' (middleman). The prostitutes frequent these places usually in rickshaw whose drivers get a payment from the girls. From these places clients can take the girls wherever they want. Sometimes they conduct business in nearby parks or lonely alleys behind office buildings. Many office premises in Motijheel Commercial Area are used for these purposes in the evening. The '*darwan*' (night guards) earn a little by renting out rooms after office hours. Sometimes the street walking or roaming/floating prostitutes take the clients to their own residing places. These prostitutes are reported not to be unlicensed and are very low paid.

In certain areas near the Motijheel Commercial centre there are large numbers of boarding houses for men—where low income group bachelor men or men whose family live in villages live together and eat from a common kitchen. These places are regularly visited by prostitutes from the streets or slums. The street walking prostitutes are most common preys of police round ups and harassments. They are the most 'insecure' prostitutes.

Hotel Prostitution

This type is more prominent in Dhaka than in Narayanganj. The majority of the women who sell sex for money in the city hotels are said to be middle and upper middle class married women. In most cases these women frequent some specific hotels from early in the morning till early afternoon. Certain rooms are reserved for their use by the management and the hotel gate-keeper and bell-boys act as '*dalal*' or procurers for the clients. The management, and the *dalals* all get a share of the prostitutes earnings. According to the police many such women were found to be doing this business with the full knowledge of their husbands. Young college girls are also said to be involved in this type of prostitution. Besides these hotels, the two five star hotels of Dhaka have been reported to be frequented by prostitutes mostly for entertaining foreigners. It has been reported that these prostitutes are often the victims of sexual harassment and exploitation by the different people in hotel management.

Prostitution in Rented Houses

Located in the residential areas of Dhaka, this type of prostitution has been on the increase recently. It has grown noticeably since the closure of several brothels in 1985, and has been spreading very rapidly in many parts of the city. The mode of operation of this type of prostitution is that two or three girls usually helped by a male accomplice rent a small house - a small independent flat or tin shed where they live and entertain clients. The '*dalai*' (procurers of clients) know these addresses which they supply to their clients. In such prostitution the women cannot live in one address for long. Sometimes neighbourhood musclemen extort money and demand sexual gratification from the girls involved in return for protection in the locality. As soon as neighbours come to know about their covert activities they pressurize the landlord to evict them. They then move out to another house in a different locality. We have come across a few cases where some girls live in flats where they are visited by clients who are businessmen, bureaucrats, bankers and other personalities. These women charge a very high rate and are said to have contact phone numbers. These prostitutes are also not usually 'licensed'. The locality in which this form of prostitution predominates are the upper and upper middle and middle class neighbourhoods of Dhaka city.

Methodology

This is basically an anthropological study. Two brothel areas, Anandabazar in Narayanganj and Natinagar in Dhaka were selected for the fieldwork. The metho-

dology followed for this short term study was a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques of data collection. In depth case-studies based on open-ended interviews, discussions and observations were combined with information collected through questionnaires and quantitative data. Traditionally, the anthropological technique of data collection involves long-term in-depth participant observation. Because of time constraint we had to design the method of data collection for this study, in such a way, so that we could combine anthropological and other survey techniques to get the maximum information in a minimum time frame. We emphasised on the anthropological approach because the nature of this particular area of research is a difficult and sensitive one and needs a lot of insights which the usual procedure of data collection through quick survey based on structure questionnaires would likely to fail to generate.

The 12-week study was conducted by a team of eleven researchers-eight men and three women-under the guidance of a female anthropologist and a male sociologist. This combination of men and women both at the expert level and the field investigation levels worked out to be an excellent strategy for such a difficult study.

A few words should be said on the sampling. We had drawn 120 samples taking 60 from each brothel area. We made purposive sampling since the samples were drawn on the basis of our personal relationships with the prostitutes. We followed this procedure considering the fact that random sampling will not be applicable here since we did not conduct any census.

Secondly, this particular study specifically called for the creation of a good relationship with the inmates from whom we had to get most of the information and hence had to depend on samples from our limited acquaintances. Also careful attention was given in drawing the samples so that different categories of brothel inmates are represented as far as possible. We however feel that a limitation of our methodology is the absence of a total census which was impossible to do on the large number of brothel population in the given time frame.

In addition, interviews of a cross-section of people drawing from lawyers, magistrates, journalists, university teachers, high ranking government officials associated with the rehabilitation of the socially handicapped women, law enforcing officials at various levels and local government officials were conducted. This was, in order to get their opinions on the institution of prostitution in the country and their suggestions regarding the possible rehabilitation of these women.

Apart from investigating inmates in the brothels, all persons connected with brothel business as well as ex-prostitutes in governmental vagrant homes in Godnail, Narayanganj and Kashempur and those resettled in society through marriage were also interviewed. This was done with the hope of getting as total a picture of the lives and aspirations of these women as is possible.

Finally in order to get a clear insight into the growing nature of prostitution in Dhaka in different forms, we designed to gather some information quickly on prevailing forms of prostitution other than the brothel

based one. Unlike the in depth studies for the brothels, case studies on limited focus were conducted on hotel prostitution, floating prostitutes and prostitution in private residences. This technique worked out well in fulfilling our objective of understanding the present magnitude and the future trends.

Significance of the Study

There has been little or no comprehensive study done on this problem in Bangladesh so far. Hopefully the present study will fill in the existing vacuum with regard to literature in this particular area of knowledge. It is crucial to understand prostitution not only as a social problem but also a sub-culture.

This study will be a contribution towards the development of urban sociology in Bangladesh since there has been little or no study - theoretical or empirical—on this issue. This will also help us to understand the relationship between industrialization, urbanization and the process of marginalization of women in the socio-economic structure. Further, this also will help us to understand the overall process of social change following the penetration of the market economy in Bangladesh. In fact this study will show the increased trend of commoditization process of women. In this connection, the study might in some ways indicate the overall situation of women in the country. This might provide important insights to people who are concerned with women's studies, as well as those involved in women's movement in the country. Hopefully this will arouse awareness among the masses of women

about themselves in relation to creating public opinion regarding women in society. This might also serve the important purpose of understanding the issue both by academics and non-academics. The main intent of this study was to throw some light on the situation of prostitutes and to indicate ways and means to rehabilitate these socially handicapped women. Hopefully, the data of this study, will help our policy makers to take a more realistic view in their understanding of this issue, and thereby, take a more objective and thoughtful approach in planning policies for the women involved.

Research Locale

We have selected two brothel areas—Natinagar in Dhaka, and Anandabazar in Narayanganj—as our research locale. In Dhaka, Natinagar is the only existing brothel, while in Narayanganj, Anandabazar is the more prominent among the two existing ones. The following are the brief descriptions about the two brothels.

Natinagar

We have not been able to find much about the history of Natinagar patty locality from available literature during this short period of study. However, our conversation with the elderly inmates of the brothels provided some clues about the origin of the locality. The name Natinagar originated from the word Kandu title of upcountry businessmen who settled in this area in large numbers. Gradually this developed into an important business centre in the city. The brothels grew up as

entertainment centres which drew clients from the traders, business people and zamindars from all over the country.

Natinagar is located in the old part of Dhaka city, under the Kotwali Police Station. The area covers approximately 2.5 acres of land. This small area of land houses fifteen *pucca* and *semipucca* buildings which are all very old and in dilapidated conditions. Of these fifteen buildings, four are two-storied.

A maze of very narrow, dirty lanes and bylanes crisscrosses the entire area connecting the buildings with one another and with the main thoroughfares. In total there are six entrances to the area from various sides.

It is important to mention here that we noticed that this brothel is under threat of being engulfed by the burgeoning commercialisation, which is quite apparent from the growing wholesale market buildings which are being constructed all around.

There are 230 rooms in the buildings in which 1700 to 2000 women huddle themselves in. These are tiny rooms with no windows for ventilation or for sunlight to enter. Even during daytime, lights have to be used in the rooms. Excepting for a few selected rooms in recently constructed outer buildings, no electric fans were noticed. There is electricity to light in the area, but no gas connections in the brothels although there is regular gas supply in the locality. The cooking is done in kerosene stoves. It has been estimated that on an average six girls live and carry out business in one room. Daily rent for a room is on an average Tk. 60 which is shared by all the girls. There are no

separate kitchens and all the cooking is done either in a corner of the rooms or in the open lanes. There are only 20 ill-maintained service latrines in the entire area and no bathrooms. Needless to mention here that the number of latrines are inadequate in comparison to the population of Natinagar. The inmates—both men and women bathe and wash in the open lanes. The faeces from the latrines are exposed spreading an intolerable and continuing smell over the whole area. The lanes are lined with narrow drains which are flooded with long standing garbage and stagnant water which poses serious menace to the health of the inmates.

The huge heaps of garbage that have accumulated all over the place and the foul smell emanating from these confirm the total absence of municipal sanitation services in this area. Likewise water supply in the area is extremely poor. There are only 5 water supply lines and water is carried to the rooms where it is stored in highly exposed and unhygienic containers. There are many liquor shops and *pan* shops inside the red light area. The owner of the buildings own these shops as well. In the liquor shops both local and imported liquor as well as *ganja* (marijuana) are sold. There are also grocery shops. A few women sell cooked food inside the brothels.

The population of prostitutes in Natinagar is estimated to be between 1700 to 2000. Over and above this number, 500 to 1000 persons comprising of elderly women who provide various services to the prostitutes, shopkeepers, children, and *mastans* (muslimen) also

reside in this area. Among the prostitutes, 75 percent are between the ages of 15 and 30 and the rest between 30 and 45. About 500 women who are 45 or above not capable of working as prostitutes. In Natinagar there about 200 children below the age of 10 who are mostly the sons and daughters of the prostitutes. Among the prostitutes around 60 have been reported to be married women who earn through prostitution. In this brothel, there are about 350 girls who operate under the control of *sardarnis* (madams) and the rest operate independently.

Among the women in Natinagar there are some who are basically entertainment girls called *baiji*. Primarily they earn by singing and dancing for the clients. Usually their rates are higher than non-*baiji* prostitutes and they restrict their activities to certain selected clients who can afford the higher payments. They also earn by selling sex. It has been found that the lifestyles of these women are of higher standard than that of the other women. The girls under *sardarnis* are called *bakris* (goat) and the independents as *azadi* (free). Our estimate shows that there are 50-60 *sardarni* in Natinagar and each controls around three to four prostitutes. No male *dalals* are said to be operating in this area. However, our observation shows that some *sardarnis* often act as *dalal* in procuring clients for their girls. According to the prostitutes about 600/700 women who are non-residents provide services to the inmates in the form of cooking, washing clothes, buying daily foodstuff and running errands for the clients (buying cigarettes, drinks, food etc.).

Most of the owners of the buildings in the area are wealthy, influential persons who operate the business through agents who are local *mastans*. Two of the owners are powerful public officials. We have come across an old ex-prostitute in her late 80's who 'owns' an old abandoned two-storied building for which she pays regular tax to the government exchequer.

Rents are collected on a daily basis from each room through the owners' agents commonly known as 'managers'. We found that one of the most powerful manager in Natinagar is Charag Ali who is generally known as the 'controller' of the area and himself is a highly feared *mastan*. Even other house owners-such as Parbati amply indicated the ferocious nature of Charag Ali and the atrocities often meted out by him towards the inmates of the locality. Charag Ali, however, operates through an assistant *mastan*, named Keramat Ali, whom we met several times. Keramat Ali handles the day to day affairs in the brothel houses of his owner, such as collecting daily rent of the room while Charag Ali maintains the linkages with the police and authorities and other interest groups. Charag Ali also keeps *mastans* managers of other house owner under control.

There is a linkage between the owners and their agents/*mastans* with the local law enforcement agencies. Officially the brothels are under the jurisdiction of the police authorities. But at the local level the *mastans*' role in controlling the area is noticeable. According to the police it is their responsibility to ensure that no under-aged girl is forced to prostitute in the brothels.

nor that any business continue there beyond ten O'clock at night. In actuality, there are many under aged girls in the brothels and often business is continued for the whole night. According to prostitutes and the agents this is 'arranged' by appeasement of the police through regular pay-offs. It was reported that the prostitutes of Kandupatty pay Tk. 130 per week to the police outpost and Tk. 100 per week to the policemen on duty in the brothel area. In addition any client who wants to stay the night in the brothel pays Tk. 100 to the policemen on duty in the area that night. It has also been reported that the police station personnel receive a monthly payment of a big amount from the brothel owners and from other connected interest groups.

As far as the lifestyles of the Natinagar girls are concerned, much variety was noticed. For example, the dresses and the make-up they wear ranges from very cheap and ordinary ones to reasonably expensive and fancy ones. But most dresses are gaudy and the facial make-ups are cheap and overly-done. The girls consider heavy facial make up as one of the effective tools to attract clients. Majority of the young girls wear long skirts with short blouses, shalwar kamiz sets without dupattas and trousers and shirts. A little older ones wear saris mostly. The clothes are worn in such a way that it reveals the body for the eyes of potential customers. The young girls of Natinagar made-up and fully dressed line up the outer sides of the brothels and call passing men through vulgar gestures and language. Sometimes passing men are pulled and dragged

inside the houses.

All prostitutes are habitual smokers (cigarette, marijuana etc.) and drink alcohol. A major part of their earnings goes towards food intake. They are particularly keen on taking relatively rich food as they are conscious of the relationship between food and their well being which is important for their trade. Personal cleanliness like daily bathing and frequent washing are considered essential for their physical fitness.

We found that a distinct type of 'language' connected with sexual entertainment is used in the brothels. Certain words having sex connotation are commonly used in their day-to-day conversations. For example, prostitutes address themselves as *Khanki magi*. Outside the brothels these words are used as abuses or as swearing by both men and women. Even prostitutes address each other by these words. Also, they use the English word '*pros*' (short for prostitute) and *pros quarter* while referring to prostitutes and brothels. The word *beshya* is also used to call a prostitute. Abuses and swearings referring to the private parts of the bodies of both male and females relating to incest relationships is very commonly used. An estimated 3,000 clients visit the Natinagar brothel daily. The clients come from various backgrounds starting from petty traders, businessmen, smugglers, service holders, both civil and military, service holders in the private sector, public transport drivers including truck, bus, car drivers, day labourers, rickshawwala, students as well as the police. Besides, it has been reported that powerful persons with political linkages also frequent Natinagar. This place is also

sometimes said to be used as hideouts by political activists and underworld criminals. We have noticed that clients in Natinagar include expatriates. Business transaction there normally starts in the late morning reaching peak time in the late afternoon and night. Although according to police 'curfew' is clamped down on the area from 10 p. m. and no business is allowed after that, many clients who have prostitutes known as *bandha* (regular) often spend nights in the brothels : other clients are also known to manage night-long stays with the prostitutes through relatively high payments to girls, a share of which is given to the policeman on duty.

The monetary transaction is high in Natinagar brothel area. Prostitution is a business and should be considered as such. It has been conservatively estimated that the monthly income of all the prostitutes is around 18,000,000 (lakhs) Taka. To get a picture of the total

Table 3 : Monthly Average Incomes of Natinagar and Anandabazar Prostitutes, 1987

Nature of income	Dhaka		Narayanganj		All	
	Income	%	Income	%	Income	%
In cash	3,935	95.23	8,287	94.36	6,092	94.64
In kind	39	0.94	130	1.48	84	1.31
As gift	158	3.82	265	4.16	261	4.05
Total av. income	4,132	100.00	8,782	100.00	6,437	100.00

Note : Calculation has been made to the nearest Takas.

transaction in the brothels, to this number should be added the income of the *dadal* (pimps), police and income from drug and liquor shops. In total the money transaction can be estimated to be more than 5,000,000 Taka per month. In this connection, we can say that this is an important part of the economy of Dhaka city and of the country.

The table above show the average monthly income of the prostitutes in the two areas, Table 3,

Beliefs, Rituals and Ethics

In Natinagar there are both Muslim and Hindu prostitutes. Today the Hindus are a minority. But it is said that before 1947, this area was inhabited mostly by Hindu prostitutes. We have found that prostitutes have a flexible and liberal attitude towards beliefs and rituals. Even though they are not particular about the practice of rituals themselves, generally they look upon religious beliefs and practices with respect.

Sometimes, they observe rituals, such as fasting during *Ramajan*, visiting *mazar* (shrines) saying daily prayers, and abstaining from business during the day in *Ramajan* and during weekly *Jumma* prayers for the Muslims; and daily *pujas* and seasonal *pujas* as well as visiting *mazar* (shrines) by the Hindus. Although the prostitutes are not strict in the performances of religious rituals, they seemed to be strong in their religious beliefs. Many girls expressed that they believe that although they indulge in immoral acts, still they are Muslims by birth, and hence have fears about life after death. The community is by and large

syncretic in its beliefs and rituals. We came across Parbati, 80, a hindu *bariwalli* ex-prostitute of Natinagar who reverts Islamic beliefs by regularly donating money, *Jainamaz* (prayer rugs) and copies of the holy Quran to Muslim devotees, mosques and holy places. According to parbati, she does this in repentance of her past life as a prostitute and to get forgiveness for her sins. She even wanted to give copies of the *Quran* to us when we visited her. Apart from these, we came to know of the existence of certain rituals related to the sub-culture of brothel prostitution. One such ritual was described to us by many prostitutes. This is the ritual of induction of girls born in the brothel into the profession when they reach puberty. They are ritually married through a ceremony to either men or objects such as trees (banana tree) and even the sun and the moon. These mock marriages have also been reported between two girls. Behind this ritual is the belief that a girl in our society ideally should have sexual experience only after marriage. Therefore, before she is put into the profession the basis of which is sexual, she is given a ritual marriage. This points towards a certain underlying ethos that operate in relation to sex among the prostitutes.

Like the condition of sanitation which was discussed earlier, in the brothels health services are virtually non-existent. There is no resident doctor or any health centre in the area. Neither is there any provision of regular visits of health personnel to the brothels. The inmates have to take care of their medicare needs

through visits to private doctors and hospitals. We have been told that most children are born in the brothels with the help of 'dai' and para-medics. The inmates also avail the services of traditional healers like *kobiraz* and *phokir*. It seems that the public health services do not reach the brothels where a considerable number of the capitals population live.

Anandabazar

The history of Anandabazar brothel in Narayanganj is nearly 200 years old. We could trace back its origin to a few residential houses which were located in Kuthipara *Mouza* back in the midnineteenth century. It is said that in those days English businessmen from Calcutta and Greece and English sailors used to visit Narayanganj port. The local businessmen kept *baijis* in houses in *Kuthipara* to entertain these foreigners. Later they built permanent buildings for these women and thus laid the nucleus of the present brothels. Later *Kuthipara* area came to known as Tanbazar.

It should be mentioned here that these local businessmen were mostly Hindus, and the concubines and the mistresses they kept in these houses were said to be mostly Hindus as well. During this period, Narayanganj river port began to gain prominence following the expansion of jute export to Dundee in England. It is said that entertainment for English and other foreign businessmen increasingly became a part of the life of the business community. This indicates strongly that the prostitution business which developed in Natinagar had a close link with the market economy which started

penetrating in this region during the nineteenth century. As a result, foundation of organised brothel prostitution was laid and it started to flourish in Anandabazar. It continued to flourish in the same way during the Pakistan period. Starting mostly with Hindu prostitutes, it gradually attracted many Muslim women as well. Today, the majority of the women are Muslims. Following the liberation of Bangladesh, in 1971, which resulted in large-scale dislocation of families and the famine and other economic crisis during the first half of the seventies Anandabazar brothels expanded and grew into its present dimensions. It is reported that following the famine of 1974, over 1000 girls 'registered' as prostitutes in Anandabazar alone. It has been observed that presently, increasing landlessness and other economic disasters have pushed large numbers of women into the Anandabazar brothels.

The flourishing business in Anandabazar was seriously disrupted following the incident of Shab Meher's death in April 1985, coverage of which in the media created widespread public opinion against prostitution.

All this and the police raid and rounding up of underaged brothel girls, led to a drastic fall in the volume of business in Anandabazar throughout 1985 and 1986. But by the beginning of 1987 business began to increase again. Today, it seems to have regained its past throbbing business and activities, and in the future it is likely to grow into one of the biggest entertainment centres in the country.

The 14 buildings in Anandabazar brothels are located along the two sides of a narrow unpaved lane

known as *Kuthibari Road*. The road runs from *Balaka Cinema Hall* on the east and hits the *Anandabazar Road* on the west. On the other side of the *Anandabazar Road* is located one of the building owner's, two-storied office building. Adjacent to this owner's office are a garments factory and the *Anandabazar mosque*. There is a big iron gate on the western end of the area accross the manager's office to shut off the brothel area from the *Anandabazar Road*. According to the brothel inmates, this gate is closed during the prayer times of the mosque. The second manager's office is located on the eastern end of the *Kuthibari road*.

We have already mentioned that the brothel buildings are located on both sides of the *Kuthibari road*. On the eastern end of the brothels are located same multi-storied buildings some of which are five-storey high. The five tin sheds are located on the western end, where less paid prostitutes live. There are 70 liquor shops which line the two sides of the *Kuthibari road* covering the fronts of the ground floors of the brothel buildings. Adjacent to the manager's office on the eastern side, is a *Tarikhana* where marijuana and other kinds of drugs are sold and smoked, and a gambling den. It is also important to point out that a group of about 70 *hijras* (transvestites) reside in the brothel area and they congregate and perform dances in a small open space adjacent to the *Tarikhana*.

The total area covered by the brothels is about 1.5 acres. There are nine concrete multi-storied buildings and five tin-shed ones. These 14 buildings are owned by ten persons. All owners are wealthy and

powerful businessmen having strong political linkages. All the buildings in Anandabazar are directly owned by these people. The conditions in the nine-multistoried buildings are relatively good. The rooms are airy and with good ventilation. Of these buildings one is designed a little differently, the ground floor of which has a courtyard and around the four sides of which rooms are located facing the courtyard. The courtyard is used for cooking and as the main thoroughfare leading to the stairs to the upper floors. From the first floor onwards the residents can see the courtyard below. Also the residents of the upperfloors can talk to each other across the open space over the courtyard. The other buildings in general are less airy and less open. A series of rooms line the two sides of narrow corridors leading to the entrance of daylight only from the windows of the rooms. Here too, the cooking is done on the corridors. The upper floors of the houses along the Kuthibari road have open verandahs where the prostitutes stand in groups and solicit customers with gestures and verbal calls.

There are about 400 rooms in the area where around 3,500 to 5,000 prostitutes reside and carry on business. It should be pointed out here that this is based on rough estimation as a total census could not be taken due to the time constraint of the study.

In each floor of the *pucca* buildings there is on an average four sanitary latrines which are shared by the residents of each floor. There is no bathroom and the bathing is done in a corner of each room which is bounded off by a wall of about four inches

high so that water does not spill over the entire room. There is no running water in any of the floors and it has to be carried to all the rooms, from the ground floor where it is stored in big containers. A large number of men and women earn a living by carrying water to the rooms. They charge two Takas for carrying a 20 litre tin of water. Although the restaurants located inside the area use gas for cooking, no gas is supplied in the brothel buildings, where the inmates cook in kerosene oil stoves. There is electric supply in all the brothels and all the rooms have ceiling fans. Most rooms are adequately furnished. This however, varies between prostitutes of different income categories starting with just a bed in the rooms, to rooms where there are big double *Palankas* (beds), wooden almirahs, iron safes, dining table sets, dressers, sofa sets etc. In the higher category rooms, there are TV sets and expensive record players.

The high income independent prostitutes *baijis* and the high income *sardarnis* live alone in one room with a beg bed and other furniture. In the case of *sardarnis* they hire another room for the prostitutes under her. In this room there are three to four cubicles cabin-like narrow partitioned beds where the business is conducted and a double bed where the girls sleep. The lower income *sardarnis* live in the same rooms with the girls.

In the tin-shed brothels, we get a different picture. The low income prostitutes live in these and generally the standard of living is lower. The tin houses are in a decaying condition and their state of long—stan-

ding negligence might be an indication that these may be pulled down and new concrete buildings constructed in their place in future. Here the rooms are crowded with several girls and cooking and bathing are done in the open courtyard. Like the concrete buildings, water has to be carried to rooms. There is electric supply in the rooms and ceiling fans are common. There are a few common services latrines here.

Compared to Natinagar, the brothels of Anondabazar are well organised with respect to its internal management. The powerful house owners have appointed two managers one of whom is a nephew of a wealthy owner. In fact, we developed a fairly intimate relationship with them through our frequent visits. The 'regular' manager who was available most of the time escorted us whenever we wanted to visit the brothels. These managers operate from well-furnished offices with telephone connections. The most important responsibility of the manager is to collect rent for the rooms and to supervise the overall situation in the brothel area during the business hours. It is also their duty to check out-of-hand and unruly behaviour of clients and inmates alike. The manager is meticulous in rent collection and maintains proceeds with proper receipts, as he has to deposit the collections to the owners on a daily basis. Salam, a manager, draws a salary of Tk. 2,000 per month. In the day-to-day affairs, Salam is assisted by a few lesser *mastans* such as Badal. The well-organised network of managers and assistant managers keeps a sharp eye on every movement of all the prostitutes in and outside the

brothels. In this special activity of keeping a very close watch over the prostitutes, the managers operate with the help and collaboration of certain *sardarnis* who are their close confidantes. Among these *sardarnis* we have found that there are a few who are the '*keptis*' (mistresses) of the managers and the owners. And it has been said that it is through these *sardarnis* that the managers and owners also conduct the business of owning some prostitutes and appropriating their earnings. It should be mentioned that although prostitution as seen in our study is basically a female affair its operation requires strong male support. It is men who totally control its internal management and the linkages with external units such as police, courts etc. This male support becomes even more essential in the context of a patriarchal society where women as a group are looked upon as subordinates, and the condition of this particular group of women who are stigmatised for their profession may very well be called a marginal group within the women's subgroup. This marginal status of the prostitutes reinforces their dependence on men. Even though they are independent income earners they are total dependents on the men who control the brothels and creates and maintains the outside support essential for its operation.

In Anandabazar we came to know that there are clients known as *Babu* or *Bhaura* who have a *bandha* (tied) relationship with one prostitute each. If this relationship continues for a long period of time and if the prostitute does not entertain any other client then the prostitute considers this man as her 'husband.' We

have found cases where the prostitutes have children out of this relationship. We got the indication that the concept *babu* carries a complicated set of relationships between the prostitutes *sardarnis* and groups of men who are known at different times as *dalals* (pimps), *mastans* (musclemen) etc.

These men in actuality operate a business of keeping and earning through a few prostitutes with the help of their *bandha sardarnis* prostitutes whose *babu* they are. Their *bandha sardarnis* prostitutes on the other hand, depend on their *babu* for protection and support both inside and outside the brothels. They look after the interests of these women outside the brothels. In the operation of such a deal, these *babus* also act as procurers and *dalals* of clients. They may also play the role of mediators with the owners, manager, police and other *mastans*.

The 70 liquor shops are owned by the owners of the buildings, but are run by shopkeepers who lease the shops. The running of the shops and rent collection is also managed by Salam, the manager. Supply of liquor both imported and local to these shops involve different levels of interest groups such as manager, *dalal*, *mastan*, police, and customs and excise officials. In the procurement process of liquor at the lower levels such as the brothels, the manager and the associated *mastan* deal with the interest groups while at the higher levels such as the police and the custom personnel, it is handled by the owners themselves. For example, we found Matin Mia, the most powerful owner of the brothel houses meeting police officials in the local police

station several times.

As mentioned earlier, there is a gambling den inside the brothel area. An estimated amount of Tk. 25,000 is earned through the gambling sessions which operate from 7 a. m. to 9 p. m. daily. This is also supervised and the income collected by Salam who is said to get a personal cut of Tk. 50 per game. The brothels being also the hideouts for underworld criminals, it becomes an important role of the manager to ensure their protection for which he extracts money from them. At the same time, he has to see to it that these elements do not create any disturbances in the area.

In our visits to Anandabazar brothels we were surprised to come across several huge ferocious watchdogs of European breed kept inside the brothels. Although the 'management' informed us that the purpose of their presence is to ensure protection from theft at night, we suspect that they are used for checking the running away of new arrivals (prostitutes) by threatening them with the dogs. These dogs could also be used to contain possible rowdism inside the brothels. Whatever the purpose for which this dogs are kept, their presence gives another indication of the planned way of running this area.

Among the prostitutes it is estimated that there are about 75%-80% between the ages of 15-35. Sixty percent of the girls are under aged. There are around 600 to 800 children in Anandabazar. Over 1,000 elderly women provide services to the prostitutes by cooking, washing and running errands. An estimated five percent of the women in Anandabazar have been born to

prostitutes, and the rest joined the brothels from outside. There are around 300 *sardarnis* each of whom 'owns' four to five prostitutes.

Baijis/prostitutes or entertaining girls also reside here, but their number is fewer than prostitutes, because it calls for a specialised skill of singing/dancing which has to be acquired through training. It has been reported that many girls employ tutors for teaching these skills. Regular *Jalsa* or entertainment sessions of dances and songs are held in 14 designated 'halls' in the area. The rent for each of the halls for a night for such sessions is estimated to be Tk. 150. Usually the *baijis*-prostitutes are considered to be high class and have high rates. The prostitutes in Anandabazar can be grouped into several categories ranging from the lowest who charge around Tk. 100 per client to these who charge Tk. 1,000 Tk.5000 per client.

One prostitute whom we met told that she sometimes earns Tk. 25,000 a night. Apart from the girls under *sardarnis*, there are a number of prostitutes who operate independently. The independent prostitutes are usually high class, high paid ones.

Generally, the lifestyle of the prostitutes of Anandabazar are much better than those in Natinagar. On a first visit, one gets the impression of a 'middle class' lifestyle prevailing among the girls. Although the tendency of prostitutes to wear heavy make-up, gaudy dresses and hair styles is also apparent here as in Natinagar it is done much more subtly and in consistence with middle class taste. The lifestyles of some of the high class prostitutes that we came across are

so similar to upper middle conditions that initially we found it difficult to consider them as inmates of brothels. The dresses of most prostitutes are made according to the fashion of the day and the make-ups worn are in consistence with their overall appearance. Many of the girls were found to display fashionable hair styles which they reported to have done from posh hair dressing shops in Dhaka. Expensive watches and gold jewelleries with stone settings were found to be commonly worn by many girls.

The furniture used by the prostitutes are by and large of standard. The high income group have more and relatively expensive furniture such as beds, dining table, dressers, iron safes, TV sets and cassette players. Quality crockery was also found in the rooms of such prostitutes. However, the lower income prostitutes do not possess all these but do have furniture which they need. All prostitutes are regular movie-goers. The high income girls said that they frequent the posh shopping centres of Dhaka. Sometimes they hire VCRs to watch films.

Regardless of the income categories, all prostitutes eat relatively rich food such as *biriyani*, fish, meat and vegetables, milk, and fruits both local and imported. The vendors of food items specially fruit vendors were found to be selling these to the girls at a rate much higher than that in the open market. We found that although food is cooked quite regularly in the rooms, there is a tendency among the girls to eat a lot of cooked food bought from the nearby restaurants. Since the prostitutes consider health and beauty to be impor-

tant for their profession, they believe that taking milk and milk products such as *ghol*, *matha* and specially imported fruits such as apples, grapes and oranges are not only good for health but also essential for the care of beauty.

All girls smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol, and many are addicts of drugs such as *gaja* (marijuana) and opium. Also most prostitutes were found to be common users of addictive drugs such as sedatives and tranquilizers. Among the high income prostitutes drinking imported beer while dancing to the tunes of western music which they call 'disco' is common. 'Disco' music is also popular among all category prostitutes. We have found many prostitutes, specially dressed in shirts and blouses, giving company to clients in the liquor shops, often sitting on the tops of the men and hugging them.

It appears that the prostitutes of Anandabazar are apparently by and large healthy. On closer association, it was found that most suffer from common ailments and we suspect that many also suffer from venereal diseases and gynecological disorders. The high income prostitutes call in doctors to their rooms for treatment. Generally the prostitutes go to the doctors who practice in the nearby pharmacies and the hospitals and municipal health centres. The prostitutes simultaneously avail the services of local/folk healers such as *phokir* and *kabiraz* and modern allopathic medicines through doctors.

Like Natinagar, the dialect used in Anandabazar is heavy with 'obscene' and sexual connotations. All Anandabazar prostitutes are reported to believe in their

respective religious but they are considerably liberal in their outlook towards religious beliefs. They were not found to be particular or strict in the performance of religious rituals. Similar to Natinagar, their beliefs and rituals are mostly syncretic for they often take vows and give offerings in mazar (shrine). The girls reported that they frequently go to *Kadamrasul mazar* across the river Shitalakhya, and the Mirpur and High Court *mazars* in Dhaka. They regard the sessional rituals as somewhat important for they try to abstain from their business activities during *Juma* prayers, *Ramazan* hours, *Mohorram* etc. The Hindus, similarly attend their seasonal *pujas* such as *Durga*, *Laxmi* etc. and daily ones such as *shandya puja*. We have observed that most of the prostitutes are fatalists and hold traditional beliefs such as the existence of male-valent spirits. On one occasion, we were put into an embarrassing situation while showing affection to a small sick child by touching him. This act frightened the mother into abruptly pulling away the child to protect him from the evil spirit. Belief in folk healing is very common and we found most of the children displaying amulets around their necks, forearms and waists. Similar to Natinagar, in Anandabazar we have been told of the prevalence of initiation rituals for the in-born prostitutes in the form of ritual marriages between a boy and a girl or between two girls.

An estimated number of 4,000 to 5,000 clients visit Anandabazar brothels daily. Clients ranging from businessmen, traders, service holders in the private and public sectors of the civil and military units, car and

truck drivers, day labourers, rickshaw-wallas, students, to police personnel. The predominance of wealthy businessmen and traders, among the clients has been reported. The *jalsha* or the *baiji* dancing and singing sessions are said to be special, and attract many businessmen and wealthy high officials and expatriates of all nationalities. It has been told that important business deals are often made during these sessions.

Considering the remarkably high monetary transactions and the volume of employment generated in the operation of the brothels in Anandabazar, it can be viewed as an important sector of the economy. It is estimated that over one crore Taka a month is earned by the prostitutes alone. In addition, one should keep in mind the incomes from the liquor shops and the gambling board which would further inflate the number. This can very well be imagined from this information that the brothel owners pay an amount of Taka two and a half lakhs to the local police and the customs and excise departments monthly.

Conclusion

Our discussion provides enough indication that a large number of prostitutes are operating in the country and that in the future their numbers will be increased manifold. The reasons for which a large number of women enter this profession has been found to be related to the ever-increasing poverty and landlessness in the country. This pushes out the women who are already in a marginal situation in the social structure into a vulnerable position in a saturated and segmented labour

market. Again in this, the women's position becomes very marginal and pushed even further by the presence of large numbers of unemployed men. As a result, many of these women have little option left but to opt for prostitution either in a formalised way or in disguise.

The acceleration of the process of urbanisation failed to generate related rates of employment resulting in the degradation of more and more numbers of families into destitute situations, forcing many women to take up this occupation.

Our data shows that the prostitutes earn relative'y high incomes, their expenditures are also high and they also consciously save. The expenditure pattern indicates that they follow a lifestyle which is distinctively related to their profession. Also another important facet of the operation of brothel prostitution is that it generates substantive amount of employment for people other than the prostitutes. Again the total volume of monetary transaction in the brothels is very high pointing to the fact that it contributes to the total economy.

Healthwise, the condition of most of the prostitutes are below average. A majority of them have been found to be suffering from sexually transmitted diseases. The general health and sanitation of the living quarters of the prostitutes is in a deplorable state. The government agencies provide little or no services in these areas. However, we have found brothel prostitution to be linked with state agencies and with national politics.

Both Hindu and Muslim prostitutes were found to have beliefs in their religions, but they practiced

little rituals. However, they are syncretic in their beliefs and rituals.

Generally, particularly in our country, prostitution is looked upon as a pathological ? problem. Our finding shows that it is a sub-culture where a large number of people maintain a distinct way of life with a viable occupation. And we feel that it should be looked upon as such.

Further, looking into the causes which push these women into this occupation, we should give serious thoughts as to how the increasing landlessness, poverty and marginalisation of women can be contained. The containment of the root causes of women entering prostitution can only eradicate it.

In the present situation these women are not being recognised in the national census and legally they are therefore in a highly vulnerable position where they are exploited in numerous ways by the state machinery as well as the informal power wielders. Under the circumstances we strongly feel that these women be enumerated and be provided with professional recognition and legal protection.

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