

Chapter 12

Unveiling Barriers and Challenges of Brothel-Based Sex Workers in Private and Public Sphere of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The value of our society is constructed through different patriarchal organization. Sex workers or prostitutes whatever we call them literally they are stigmatized in our society. Double standard of our society influences us to play double role where a man act like a saint in front of society and at the night they are the regular visitor of a brothel but society respects them and abuse those women who provides sexual pleasure to that men. Most of the sex workers are engaged in this profession because of trafficking, blackmailing or they did not have any other way to earn. They are working in this profession as well as they are serving to the customers to fulfill their sexual demand. However the fact is that stigmatization, challenges and barriers are literally faced by those women who are working as sex workers. The intensity of their life struggle is too much among brothel based sex workers where they are confined to maintain all obligations imposed by Sordarni (Madam) or customers. Though challenges and barriers can be varied from chukri (new girls in brothel) to sordarni (experienced sex workers who control new girls), I tried to put intersectional lenses to understand their challenges. Sex workers in brothels are subjects of different kinds of violence in their public and private sphere and they are objectified as sex object. This chapter is going to show the condition and position of women by examining their barriers in public and private sphere of Bangladesh. This chapter also intends to recommend a few ways to redress these kinds of violence against brothel based sex workers.

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INTRODUCTION

Sex workers are often deprived of basic human rights due to legal ambiguities and patriarchal conservative society. They are victims of an exploitative industry that leaves them exposed to cruel conditions, extortion, violence, obligatory drug use and insufficient access to water, sanitation, and health services. While sex worker are correctly portrayed as victims, many older and experienced sex worker also continue the exploitative system. (Sabet & Ahmed, 2012, pp. 1)

They were almost completely ignored by government and civil society in the beginning of mid 1990s. Various initiatives has been taken by donor funded organization to improve the life of sex workers and the welfare of their children during the last two decades. However the standard of their life is not improving. According to a study which was conducted among brothel based and street based sex worker shows that 107333 women are working in street across the Bangladesh. Moreover the number of brothel based sex workers in Bangladesh would perhaps not exceed 60000, a number that corresponds with the conservative unofficial estimates of care Bangladesh officials. In Bangladesh, it is estimated that approximately 100000 people are involved in sex work. So this data represent a large number of people. These statistics are showing the increasing number of sex worker in this profession within 4 years. (Sabet & Ahmed, 2012, pp. 1) Yet they are not recognized as citizen of our country and unofficially they are deviant of this society. They are living their life in miserable way.

There also exist a debate among intellectuals about the recognition of them as sex worker or not. If we call them sex worker there will be a possibility to increase the percentage of taking this as a profession. If they are not recognized like now, they will be forced or be trapped to do this kind of work. (Tahmina & Moral, 2004, pp.7-10) which can increase the intensity of exploitation. As a sex worker they are facing different barriers and challenges from their community as well as from the mainstream society.

Identification of Research Problem

Sex work is running continuously in our society. The number of girls are being trafficker or used for pornography because they are trapped by someone. After writing their name in this profession there is no way to look behind. They have to leave their families and home. According to land of this Bangladesh, "Sex work is legal, Soliciting is not. Sex work is legal, running brothel is not." This is the law of the land. According to these laws illegal sex worker are legally exploited by the laws enforcement agencies. Police violently evicted Tanbazar and Nimtoli brothels on 23rd July 1990. The high court of Bangladesh issued a judgment after a written petition submitted by NGOs on 14th March 2000. This rule is the first step to recognize sex workers as citizens of our country. The High Court declared that sex workers are citizens of Bangladesh and they have enforceable rights under article 31(Right to the protection of law) and 32(Right to life and liberty) of the constitution. (Terre des homes Italia [TDH],2005) On the other hand exploitation of sex workers, their children and society's attitude towards them are not changing.

In Bangladesh context, religious and conservative values push the industry underground and marginalize sex workers while also creating demand for their services. Although many people in society would prefer a purely abolitionist approach to prostitution, Bangladesh policy reflects elements of both abolitionism and regulationalism. Although sex work is recognized as a legitimate trade and partially legalized, it is still predominantly defined by exploitation and abuse. Moreover these kinds of double standard are also accelerating the process of exploitation against sex workers. Modern day slavery can be clearly seen in the system of bonded sex workers from chukri to sordarni. Also of concern, is the

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