

YOUR QUESTIONS, OUR ANSWERS

Sex Workers' Forum Kerala

This is an exploration we invite you to take through the multi-dimensions of sexuality and our society. We are answering it with our experience of life and as we perceive it. You may disagree, fight and oppose it but this exploration will never be boring. Whatever you encounter on the way, please record and send us a copy. Let us together explore the hidden labyrinth of our society and then build a more egalitarian one. Bon Voyage...

How can you term sex as 'work'? Is that a profession?

Yes, it is a profession. In the ancient times, it was known as 'vesyavriti' in Sanskrit; 'vriti' means work. Any work is profession. We know it is work, because we do it.

It was known before as prostitution. Why now it is called 'sex work'?

As time passed by and values changed, the word 'prostitute' became derogatory. It is now used to stigmatize a person. In order to remove that stigma, the word 'prostitution' has been replaced with 'sex work'.

Is not sex an expression of love?

Sex, of course, is an expression of love. Cooking, teaching, singing, writing a poem etc., are also expressions of love as much as they are self-expressions.

In that case, is it right to sell sex?

We are part of a society where all services have been commercialized. Knowledge, talent, health services, etc., are bought and sold. Even Meditation and Yoga are taught for payment. Then, what is so special about sex?

So, sex can be sold?

Definitely, yes, it can be sold. Sex work is paid service.

What ever you would say, sex work is a shameful job.

No, you are mistaken. The working conditions are shameful. Not the work. Usually, an activity when declared illegal, will be carried out in secret and in disgusting situations, and then it will appear very shameful.

Is it so? But then nothing seems as shameful as sex work.

There are many. Take the case of alcohol. Arrack is banned in Kerala. If you consume it, it is illegal and you can be booked. But, if you consume alcohol in a bar, it is legal and has social status even. Consuming alcohol in train is a punishable activity in India but in the flight, it is served as a delicacy.

So you are saying it is the situation that makes the act shameful?

Of course. Besides that, the human tendency is to do what is forbidden or prohibited. Again, organized criminal groups emerge around the forbidden. Violence and injustice become part and parcel of it. All this is applicable now in the case of sexwork, that is why it seems a criminal activity and shameful.

How can we redeem this situation?

In the case of sex work, it has to be decriminalized.

Do you mean that sex work has to be legalized?

No, there is a subtle difference between decriminalization and legalization. When it is decriminalized, that work can be carried out by anyone (for example, agricultural activities, where licenses are not necessary). But, legalization will bring authorities along with it.

So what?

There is a problem. Take for example, the Road Transport Authority, where rampant misuse of power rules the scene. First, the licensing authority, then, the doctor who give fitness certificate and the police who execute law, all have to be bribed. Moreover, there will emerge a new section of unauthorized sex workers if it is legalized.

So you want a free for all situations?

No, it was only an attempt to highlight the possibility of corruption that could emerge as a result of license *raj*. On the other hand, better control and order can be ensured through Sex Workers' organization itself.

What does that mean?

The organization will be able to check whether the new entrant is an adult, whether s/he is entering the field on her/his own will, whether the person maintains physical and mental good health, etc. This way, the existing inhuman conditions in the profession can be eliminated. But to do this, we need a decriminalized situation.

Whatever it is, isn't it an act that causes and spreads diseases?

There are many jobs with risky working conditions. A driver, a doctor, a nurse or a mine worker, all have to be extremely alert and careful in their work to be safe and assure safety for others. A doctor or nurse can become carrier of contagious diseases and infect lot of persons. All that a sex worker has to do is to learn and practice 'safe sex.'

'Safe sex', what is that?

It means to adopt and practice non-penetrative sex or, if it is penetrative sex, to use condoms.

Is that sufficient to prevent AIDS?

Of course. This is the only possible way to prevent almost all the sexually transmitted infections. At the same time, it is unfortunate that sex workers alone are alert in practicing it.

What do you mean?

The sex workers are the only persons who learn and practice safe sex now. So coitus with sex workers is safe. But during casual sex, nobody bothers to adopt safety measures.

What evidence do you have to support that statement?

Look at the number of AIDS patients in Kerala. Most of them (98%) are men and housewives. So you could see the modus operandi of the spread of this disease.

It is said that there are many AIDS patients among the sex workers of Mumbai.**What about that?**

It is true. When AIDS reached India, there was none practicing safe sex. Another important point to be considered is that the sex workers of Mumbai did not go

anywhere to bring the illness. It is those men, who constantly travel, transmitted the disease to the sex workers and to their own wives.

Are you accusing your own clients?

I am only stating the fact and not intended as an accusation. Men take initiative in sex act. So, those who shaped a male dominated society have more responsibility to practice safe sex.

Why can't the women take initiative?

Only sex workers, not wives, can demand the use of condoms during sex. In a society, where sexuality is suppressed and a culture of silence reigns, women who take initiative for using condoms will be put to shame.

Is that the reason for stigmatizing the sex workers?

No doubt. In only sex work, women who have the right over their body to decide on how, where and with whom to have sex. In fact, free and safe sex happens only in sex work.

If that is the case, how did AIDS spread fast among the sex workers of Mumbai?

Good question. You should know that in the present situation, sex work and its premises are criminalized. Hence the brothels are all unauthorized. And, those in it, like the wives, are not free. The bonded sex workers' fate is to become wives to many.

Are you not countering your own statement that sex workers are more free than wives?

True, there is a contradiction. All sex workers are not free. There are two sections among them. One section sells themselves, while the other is sold. The former is comparatively more free and safe. The latter is in slave trade. Nobody could do anything because everything is criminalized.

When the sex workers are sold by others, shouldn't that be prevented?

Of course. It is a priority of our organization. No one should sell another. It has to be treated illegal.

Is not closing all the brothels a better option?

No, that wouldn't do. Brothels are not only just prisons; they are work places as well. To close the work place is like closing down a factory. Would you close down a factory when the workers ask for the improvement of the working conditions, such as safety and health measures, raising the salary and reducing the workload and improving the facilities?

What a comparison! You mean brothels should be continued?

They need not be continued in the present form. At the same time, it is a safe shelter for the sex workers. Its absence will affect them.

It is ridiculous! Social workers are working hard to close down the brothels and you argue for them?

It is true. They consider brothels as exploitative structures only and try to close them. Then the sex workers are *rehabilitated*, by sending them back home or put in a remand home, so that the social workers could sleep peacefully. Rehabilitation usually ends up with solitary confinement with hard labor with minimum payment for the rest of a sex worker's life.

Are you ridiculing? Why such a contempt towards rehabilitation?

It is not contempt. Isn't it those who are unemployed need to be rehabilitated? We are employed. Ours is a profession. It is true that we are being exploited. Instead of ending that exploitation why should we be treated as unemployed persons? Have they ever thought what our plight will be at home or remand home? In rehabilitation who will provide companionship in our life? We never see these social workers again. They treat us with disdain; we need love and affection, which is a forgotten chapter in their bible. We need sex, who will provide for it?

This profession has no dignity. Why do you want to continue in it?

In our opinion, this is a decent profession. How many people are there on queue for our service! Those who seek our services return contented. That is why they come in search of us again and again.

Scum of the society is coming in search of you. Isn't it so?

Is it? Head-load workers to engineers and politicians to priests are our clients. Are they all bad people? In that case, we are ready to become bad with them.

Anyway, this profession is not suitable for a decent person.

Here, the question concerned is who is decent, and what decency is. How can sex become indecent when it is carried out with mutual consent? Committing sex as a right, without the consent of the partner, is considered decent? Wonderful!

Whom are you hinting at?

Why doubt! It is the husband-wife relationship. Most husbands rape their wives. Can there be a worse relationship than this? What else is more shameful than to share one's life with a person who rapes you?

You are exaggerating too much. It is not fair.

Is it so? Is it decent to become the slave of a man whom you bought with dowry? Can it be denied that husband-wife relationship does not exist on the foundation of money? Which relationship is there without money transaction? Why court orders maintenance payment in divorce cases?

Even then isn't it preferable than to share life with many?

Here the question is about freedom. What is the use of having a miserable life with one person? No wife has the right over her body. She is her husband's property forever.

What about you? You accept money from anyone and are obliged to do whatever he or she demands.

That is only a myth. We decide on how to relate, with whom and where to have sex. We control the situation. Only sexual relationships which we like take place.

I don't believe you. Do those who are in brothels also enjoy this freedom?

Certainly not. Since sex work is criminalized, such an atmosphere remains in the brothels. We have to add that, all brothels are not of the same type. There are brothels run by the sex workers themselves. Exploitations, to the scale in Mumbai, do not exist there. Bengal has a different atmosphere than that of Mumbai.

Are you then justifying sex work and the need for brothels in the society?

In our opinion, sex work is a necessity. Those who are denied sex and those who want to enjoy variety/methods of sex should have an opportunity to fulfill their desire. What we need is *recreation homes* and not brothels.

Recreation homes? What are they?

Brothel is the degenerated form of a rich cultural legacy. It is a product of what was denied. It is not necessary to sustain them. It can be compared to bootleg instead of pure alcohol.

You were saying about recreation homes...

Yes, there should be recreation homes as expression of sophistication in culture. Every man and woman should be able to come and enjoy the spring of life over there. Recreation homes are necessary in the context of money-based and reproduction-based family relationship.

I don't understand.

Every home has a kitchen, then why do hotels exist? As the hotels offer different varieties of food, provide space to rest and hold parties with friends and cater to your stomach when you are away from your home, likewise the recreation home also have its own functions.

You mean brothels, like hotels, are necessary?

Not brothels, but recreation homes. Certainly they are necessary. When the job requirements of a section of the society demand mobility; for e.g. sales representatives, delegates of conferences, truck drivers etc, there should be ways to meet their needs. In the absence of such a system, the inhuman acts like rapes happen.

You were referring about those who are denied of sex, who are they?

The blind, the handicapped, the ugly, the aged and those who desire variety are those who are denied of sex. The men who doubt about their capacity for erection and cowards also come under this group. Does anyone bother about their need for sex? They form a big chunk of our clients.

Does it mean that only those who have some kind of handicaps approach you?

Not that way. Since the society does not care about these people's need, we were only trying to bring them to your attention. Again, those who undergo stress and having strained relationships also seek us out.

I don't understand what you say. I used to consider the brothels as places for the satisfaction of those with sexual obsession.

That's where you went wrong. If they were the only clients, the existing laws would have been sufficient to control them. If people come in search of us, in spite of the present suppression, there should be some deeper reasons.

Can you elaborate on that?

When we are children, family, neighbors, society, teachers, priests and institutions like school and religion control our sexual instincts in every step. Thereafter, the police and the court impose further control on. Monogamy is projected as the 'right' model. Our clients are coming to us after and irrespective of all these taboos and barriers. Then you should understand the reality behind this need. As the saying goes, "there is more to it than the eyes can meet".

This is surprising. I thought that it leads to sexual anarchy only. Do your clients love you?

Certainly, yes. Many of them propose to marry us. We know the meaninglessness of a married life. Hence we know that we would turn to be mutual oppressors in such a system. After experiencing the warmth in the relation, the clients want to marry us, hoping to perpetuate it. They don't understand that it will not remain in a prison like atmosphere.

Let me ask you frankly, will you send your daughter to this profession?

In the present situation, never. Who would send another person to go through the trauma, shame and imprisonment? But this does not mean that the profession itself is indecent. This question is quite similar to asking whether one would seek job in Iraq while the Americans are bombing there. If no war, one would surely go.

Your answers are peculiar ones. So, you are afraid to send your daughter to this profession?

It is nothing to do with fear, but of choice. Again the present condition is not conducive for working that is all what I meant. We have to further analyze this question. I should not decide upon what my daughter should become. But, if she selects this profession, I will explain the risks, problems, advantages, freedom and conveniences of it. The ultimate choice will be her.

Doctors and engineers push their children to take up the same profession.

That only means they are making a mistake and oppressing their children. If my daughter takes up this profession, I will instruct her how to manage the society. We are also working for a more free society for her generation. Instead of creating oppressive husband-wife relationships, we aim at creating mutually loving friends-relationships.

Does that mean we don't need families?

No; not that way. Families will be there, as a historical truth, as there are many types of families. But in the present family system and relationship, there is no democracy. The 'husband' is the one who rules. The 'wife' is the ruled and the children are slaves. This pattern has to give way to love and respect in the relationship between man and woman.

If loving and respecting relationship exist in families, what is the role of sex workers?

It's a good question. Here, it is not an authoritarian relationship based on sexuality. Now women are considered only as a receptacle to receive and sustain the sperm. The morality is exclusively attached to the paternity. 'Virginity' has to be ensured only by the women.

My question was regarding the role of sex worker...

Yes, yes, in the new system the role of a sex worker is similar to that of any other service provider, such as a doctor, a policeperson or a musician. Sex Work will not be a question of morality. People can seek it out without any guilt or shame.

Are you then advocating that there is no need for morality?

Not at all. Presently morality is a value that affirms the power of man. Hence, whether it is wife or sex worker she is a commercial product for the man. We are speaking of a new morality.

Can you explain it?

Just like food and shelter, sexuality is a taste that humans have developed. It is not merely a reproductive activity. Nor is it a process to ensure the paternity of the children. On the other hand, it is a vast world of tastes, which has not yet been completely explored, developed or enjoyed. When it is understood in that way, the present suppressive morality will have no place in our society.

I did not follow!

In other words, sex work will be an area of service like bringing up and educating the children for the qualitative development of a family. In such case, there will not be any need to suppress sexuality.

Can you elaborate further?

Like we nurture any skill and develop it with proper control measures, sexuality also can be developed. It is like learning to drive safely. Just because there will be accidents, we do not leave our car at home and walk. We learn to drive safely with expertness.

I suppose, you are trying to say something different.

Yes. It is a complex issue. It has to be approached through different points of view. Then only certain clarity can be achieved. Maybe another angle can help us.

Isn't it better to love and to live with one person alone?

It is not a question of good or bad. We have people with different interests and tastes in our society. The issue is how to live together with mutual respect in the context of variety.

Do you mean that there is no right and wrong?

Right and wrong are relative concepts. When a mutually agreed contract is violated, rights and wrongs emerge, as a rule in it and it is valid to that particular context. There is neither eternal truth nor eternal right.

Will you explain this further?

All our traditions and customs we practice today were the rights and wrongs formulated according to the needs of the society at a given point of time. Just like the laws, that are redundant need to be amended or updated, the rights and wrongs also have to be brought to the present and contextualized. But, it does not happen that way. Even the difference in context and the power structure determine the 'right and wrong.' For e.g. it is wrong to kill a person inside the country, but right and honorable to kill an enemy soldier.

Kindly elaborate

We just accept and absorb traditions with sensitivity. In this process, we don't reason them out. Great people like Buddha, Christ and Narayana Guru were able to revalue them radically. This has taken us forward from the culture of 'eye for an eye' and 'tooth for a tooth' to the culture of loving one's neighbor as one self.

I couldn't understand your ideology.

Yes, it is convenient not to understand. If you understand, you will have to change your life's perspective. It is easier to ignore or forget it. So I don't blame you, as it is the usual case for people to pretend.

Just a minute, how did you mobilize the finance for this conference?

The money that was entrusted to Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) of Kolkata, by various charitable institutions was distributed to the National Network of Sex Workers (NNSW). We are part of the network, so we use that money for this conference.

That means you are rolling in foreign funds?

Sex worker's services are not region-bound. We are international citizens. We are against boundaries and wars. We stand for love and service. So, we have no contempt for foreign money the way it is reflected in your question.

Don't try to slip away. Tell me the truth.

The distinguished service of DMSC in the area of HIV/AIDS brings worldwide help to them. They are 'workers of the world.' So, there is no question of national and foreign. Besides, they realize that such discrimination can only result in unending hatred and war.

Big talk! You are only trying to justify your foreign fund connection.

We accept financial support from any institution, local, national or international. Just as we entertain all our clients without the discrimination of poor or rich, we accept the helps too. Your patriotism can bring only death to millions and result in immense destruction.

Are you stating that patriotism is bad?

In the present form, it is bad. In the light of the philosophy of loving your neighbor and in front of the ideology of international workforce, yes of course, it is bad. Present patriotism is too bad compared to the approach, service and love, we, the sex workers offer. We respect and recognize the patriotism that is proud of one's nation while loving one's neighbor too. We don't subscribe to that patriotism, which propagates hatred and war.

Are you supporting the suppression and oppression the imperialist forces perpetuate on the third world countries?

No. We are trying to unite the First, Second and Third World countries to sow the seeds of a democratic culture in them. Imperialism can never buy us. We stand against war and oppression.

How can you boast after accepting their funds?

We don't consider it as their money. We use the money for our freedom and the development of the society. We can never be influenced for any other involvement.

Is this possible?

Any country in the world borrows from the existing financial institutions. But other than meeting their needs, do they agree to destroy their country according to the demands of such financial institutions?

Kerala government does that way by accepting loan from Asian Development Bank (ADB).

That is a subject that requires further discussion. Anyway, our funds have no such conditionality attached. Therefore, even according to your criterion, our situation is better than that of the Government of Kerala.

It is bad to receive foreign funds.

Is "foreign" bad? In that case, the things that you use, from pen to the plane are all foreign. What about that? It is only a political position. It is also an emotional issue related to tradition. It was a strategy developed by Gandhi for the freedom fight at that time. Now, when we hear 'foreign', the social psyche is disturbed.

When we accept funds, we are accepting slavery.

Not exactly. It is the conditionality along with the fund we receive, that is what is important. That is why ADB is different from other institutions. We cannot equate the funds from the people of a country with the State instituted funds.

Foreign forces are trying to mislead and control us through their financial support.

We have to distinguish between the American Government and the people of America. We should be clear on what is politics. It is political myopia to equate the help of a charitable institution in America with the strings-attached help from Bush.

Whatever you say, I do not consider getting funds from foreign countries as good.

Today foreign fund is used as a political weapon to attack each other. The Asian Social Forum at Hyderabad was organized with foreign fund. The organizers belonged to various Left parties, including Communist Party of India (M). Were they all enslaved by Imperialism?

Is there any doubt?

Yes, I do doubt. In the changing world situation the old equations are not correct. Therefore, we should evaluate the foreign help and fund on the basis of the conditionality attached to them. It is not an emotional question. It is the conditionality of ADB loan which differentiates it from other financial institutions. When ADB finance, they interfere with the governing system of that country.

Are we not deviating? I think this system of selling women should be stopped.

Again you are mistaken. It is not a women's issue. It is a profession carried out by men, women, transgender and intersex people.

I am shocked! Men? Intersex? What are you saying?

Yes, this is a profession where maybe majority (60%) of the workers is women. The remaining consists of men and transgender or 'hijaras'. So, do not see it as a system which exploits only women.

My God! Are men working as sex workers for women?

There are people like that. They are called 'gigolos'. But they are a minority in our country. 99% of the male sex workers are for men.

What about others?

Transgender and intersex sex workers render service also for men. Therefore, to approach this issue as a women's exploitation area will not help to understand this profession.

Even if it is in Sex Work, isn't it man-woman relationship that we should encourage?

It is due to your narrow perspective that you are asking such a question. The sexual dimension is wide and diverse. There are men who love men (gays), women who love women (lesbians), people in love with both men and women (bisexuals), there are trapped identities in opposite sex's body (transgender) and neither man nor woman or both (intersex) people by birth.

You are not joking, is it true?

True as our own existence. Besides the above mentioned groups, if you take into consideration, the men and women with varied sexual tastes and different methods they adopt, you would see how intricate and colorful the sexual dimension is.

I can't believe it!

There is one more thing you have to take into consideration. Historically, to ensure the paternity of men, women were forced to remain chaste. This has hampered the development of women's sexuality to take root and bloom. Along with it sexuality was confined to the needs of the powerful and it remained in the narrow realm of succession rights. If condoms were invented before kingdoms were formed, the whole idea of morality would have been a different story. Not many have to wait for their masters to come or commit suicide out of shame. So it has remained a suppressed area.

So...?

Nothing become nonexistent just because it was suppressed, rather it adopts more complicated and varied forms for survival. Just as 'life' which learns to develop different forms and techniques for survival in unfavorable conditions.

I don't understand anything?

What I am trying to communicate is that sexuality has a history, which is not linear. Like human language it has a diverse history. A language becomes more intricate, complex and subtle as time pass by and also by the depth and vastness of the subjects it handles. Similarly, sexuality is a basic need, which was made into an intricate and complicated one through the production relationships and power structures that existed in history.

Can you explain a little more?

The diversity in the case of cooking food is another example at hand. Taste differences among different cultures are immense but again if you come to the same culture, the differences are countless. From pudding to pork roast, French fries to salad and so on. The richness of sexual tastes is something akin to this. As sexuality's history is of suppression, it made people to pretend otherwise, discretion is the password and whatever done is done covertly.

Everything other than man-woman relationship was considered a crime by me!

Hold on! You are not alone. Almost all the governments and societies of the past or present see it that way and call it coyly 'against the order of nature'. Meaning, coitus for procreation is 'right' and the rest as wrong, hence illegal. But if we take this reasoning as our criterion, immediately we will find that given the number of children being two or three, a couple has to make love maximum four or five times in their lifetime. What they do in the rest of their life is criminal.

The way you explain, presents a picture of sexual anarchy before me.

This doesn't limit to sexuality alone. Take the case of democracy itself. This fear you express, even when we explore theoretically, prevented people who went to wield power, to share it with people at large. However oppressive the present system be, it is still a 'familiar' one for us. So, even when we try to change or create a new

system, it still remains unknown and unfamiliar, hence terrifying. So, even after the representatives of the people came to power, the real devolution of power has not happened. Mainly because of the inherent apprehension mentioned here and along with the privileges of power enjoyed by the selected few.

You are digressing too much.

No, not digressing, I was only fetching an example to make you understand. Like monarchy, the sexual practice familiar to patriarchal society is followed as the only 'right' with diligence by us. Actually, what we call anarchy is the real democratic system, but there is no model or precedence for it to follow. We have to create and formulate the details of it as time and process goes by. With the new democratic value and its criterion we could determine the limits of the freedom exercised and can draw a new code of conduct.

Will you, please, explain a little more?

Coitus with mutual consent, whether between man and man, man and women, women and women, transgender and others, intersex and others and between more than one couple etc. should be accepted. And also the varieties of sexual intercourse and tastes should be accepted. The criterion of 'right' exercised here is of 'mutual consent'. In public perception, coitus outside marriage contract still remains a 'criminal' act. No one really knows who is the criminal and to whom against the crime has been committed. Sex workers remain criminals without anyone complaining!

Then, should we see exploitation of children as 'mutual consent'?

Certainly not, it has to be stopped. We encourage only the adults to enter this field, that too as a free decision taken by them. But here we have to be careful in drawing conclusions. Sexuality and sex work should be understood in two different ways. Like child labor we have to understand it deeply and subtly. Everybody is against child labor now. But, to the poor, the labor done by a child is also a means of sheer existence. And also what we call traditional work, like handicrafts, all start at home at a young age.

What do you mean, shouldn't children go to school?

Yes, they should. But we should understand that today's education is also another form of labor. The culture of seeing carpet or coir making, fishing and cattle rearing and the likes only as child labor and the rest as education, is not a sane or welcome one.

I didn't get your point?

The above all are learning also. We practice to be a good musician, gymnast or dancer from our childhood. A Nadia Comaneci and Sachin Tendulkar all entered their fields of expertise in their childhood. But we never see these as child labor or exploitation. If you delve deep using the same criterion we use today, we could see that all these can also be termed as child labor.

What you are hinting at?

To be specific, the above criterion is not a good one. What is deplorable and fearsome is our effort to make everyone uniform and same. Education is not part of freedom or liberation but is only a tool for someone, especially the rich and powerful,

to use others. But we call that education. To sum up, the things we consider, abuse and trying to eliminate as child labor is not to be understood the way we do now.

What is the relevance of telling all this here?

We should understand sexuality like child labor. Nobody considers or even remembers the sexual rights of children. Sexuality, out of blue, does not appear at the age of eighteen. It is an ongoing process from childhood in every living being. We are not handling this in a healthy manner, instead we are trying to suppress it and instill fear of sin in children.

Why should we encourage or consider sexuality in children?

Sexuality is also knowledge. Like language, we should grow learning it. At the age of eighteen, suddenly we are not talking and eating but everything is practiced on the road to adulthood. So, in the sphere of sexuality, the condition of absolute ignorance and suppression is terrible. The sexually oppressive atmosphere we see around is our own creation.

But does this mean children should enter sex industry?

No. What we are trying to convey is that because of the fear of children entering sex work, we suppress all sexual feelings in children. Everybody is sensitive about children and even the topic of sexuality can never be opened surrounding children, so we are using this instance for the need of sexual education for children rather than the heavy silence around it. As we said earlier, like all other profession, only adults, with their conscious decision, should enter the sex profession.

Is it possible for you to prevent the entry of children into sex work?

Our organization is able to check the entry of not only children, but also the entry of trapped or unwilling women. Here lies the importance of our organization. If a new person enters the field, we are able to keep a watch over him/her.

What do you mean?

If we are united we could do it easily. Since this profession is criminalized, no one is able to do anything. In the case of labor unions, when a new head-load worker enters the field, the union is able to identify him, help him out in fixing his rate of the wage and also exercise some control over him. This kind of self-regulatory system is possible only in a crime-free atmosphere.

Let me ask you a different question, why do feminists oppose you?

It is yet another misunderstanding. They don't oppose it. Some of them are a bit confused. Whenever a woman tries to do any social or political service, she is stigmatized as 'prostitute' by men. Then the women are forced to hide their own sexuality and to prove that they do not have any sexual instinct.

I do not understand.

When women enter in the social field and involve in public activities, the male chauvinistic society opposes it. In order to control such woman, the men and other domesticated women, use morality and sexuality as their weapons. This forces the women activists to show over prudence regarding sex.

Are you saying that feminists are showing over prudence regarding sex?

Not just showing, they are trapped into it. It is a very delicate and subtle issue. It is like the communists in India who opposed Gandhi turned out to be better Gandhians. The model politician for the public remained a Gandhian and the communists had no choice but live a life of oppressive simplicity.

Your arguments are peculiar.

Not peculiar, but complex ones. We are just trying to show how the social situation in which you live can form and mold us irrespective of our belief system or ideology. Feminists are our friends and stand with us in our fights.

I do not think that they will agree to that.

Those who do not agree today will join us tomorrow. We will ensure the freedom and liberation of all sex workers and all women. The freedom of the most oppressed is the freedom of all. Due to this same reason, the freedom of men also is our concern.

Freedom of men? What do you mean?

Though the men shaped it, the present society is a prison to men also. Ask the men whether they are free. They are not. We know that very well. The tears of our clients prove to us how terrible our society is.

Do you equate sexual anarchy as freedom?

Certainly not. It simply means egalitarian male-female relationship, female-female relationship, male-male relationship and sexual minority relationship. Just ask any man whether he has got a good female friend. A man longs for such a friendship.

I do not understand what you are saying.

An unequal society creates people without freedom. Today's human beings are like flowers half bloomed and then fade away. They do not become flowers with fragrance. By creating a free society can only we have complete human beings.

Okay, okay but what is the role of sex workers in it?

Sex workers exist in the area of sexuality and sexuality is suppressed. Therefore, any act to attain sexworker's freedom would speed up the liberation process of the whole society. That is why our liberation is the liberation of the society.

Isn't there more to feminist's disagreements with you than what you have described?

Yes. They oppose commercialization of women in a patriarchal society. In their view sexwork is only an extension of this commercialization. Logically, it is true. But commercialization is not exclusive to sex alone. As we mentioned in the begin everything from spirituality to politics and food to space are sold in our society.

Are you then supporting commercialization?

No, commercialization is the present condition of our society. The liberation from it is neither easy nor an issue of women alone. This was the focal point of socialism, which failed world over. No nation could so far overcome the power of the market. Perhaps, it is possible that humans can have freedom only within the limits of the market.

So, you justify selling women to the tourists as in Thailand?

Your question brings us back to square one. This is not only an issue of selling women. But then Thailand is not our model. It is the condition of the broiler chicken. The shift from the brothels of Mumbai to the brothels of Thailand is only a shift from the dark cage to a clean one. This never was/is our choice. Again there is a perception that all women sitting in the glass houses are all trapped. But there are instances of people lending it. Probably it is only culture shock we experience, which leads to exaggerated experiences. We have to sift through to get to reality.

Aren't your activities a prelude for sex tourism?

This question has another side. We, the sex workers, existed before the concept of tourism developed. The majority of the clients of sex workers are from the same nation. Studies have shown that the clients of the sex workers of Thailand, the so called sex-tourism center, are from Thailand itself.

Does it mean that there is no relationship between sex work and tourism?

Just like any other service or product's relationship, sex work also has a relation to tourism. Our traditional art forms such as Kathakali, Theyyam and other handicrafts depend on foreign markets and tourism for their existence now. Tender coconuts are served to the tourists. But then, does it mean Kathakali and tender coconuts are created and made for tourism?

Your arguments are tit for tat. Are you trying to defeat me?

We are not trying to defeat you. This is a social intervention, so your defeat is also our defeat. Either we win together or fail together. This discussion was meant to make us united to break the chains that bind all of us. These answers are relative in nature, not absolute ones.

Okay, okay. By discussing we wandered all over. One more question – does government support you in your activities?

We expect the government to help us. What we address is not only our problem, but of everyone in the society. We are just taking the initiative. Again, we are not here to fight the government. But one thing for sure, we will be constantly reminding that we are here, and unless and until this issue is resolved the society cannot move forward.

This is not an end to this dialogue. If you have any more questions, do write to us in the address below. We will try to answer you personally and also will try to bring out another leaflet answering you in the next conference. You can also record your criticisms. This dialogue we began now should not end here. It has to continue. Perhaps that could show the door to freedom of our society. We have to accelerate the democratization process by delving deep into the contradictions our society hold.

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