CHAPTER IV

PRACTICE OF PROSTITUTION IN NORTH BENGAL

Sources of Recruitment:

Many social scientists believe that women become prostitutes largely for economic reasons, though other social and psychological causes also play a role. The surrounding incidents and situations occasionally work as push factors.

Prostitutes generally came from the following classes:

The daughters of prostitutes: These girls have scarcely any other life to choose. They labour under a fearful social stigma by reason of their birth and are outcast for life. Consequently a married life to them is impossible to imagine. No one, however low in caste and low in society will accept them in marriage. Bengali society offers no means of livelihood to unmarried women except that to which the mothers of these unfortunate creatures unavoidably trained them up.

Women belonging to ordinary society who voluntarily adopt a prostitute’s life: A very large proportion of the prostitute class are recruited from this source. Grown up women brought up in the bosom of their houses, come to a town and there take up a prostitute life. It may be interesting to know what are the causes or motives, which lead deliberately to prefer such a degraded and miserable life to domestic virtues and comforts. It may be desirable to enumerate the principal of them are - seduction, domestic misery, e-loss (sic) of excitement.

Constitution unfavourable to moral restraints: The extreme vigilance with which hindu society watches female propriety renders indulgence except out of its pale a matter of difficulty. Women with vicious tendencies are therefore obliged to place themselves beyond its power.

Women become prostitutes because of the lure of quick financial gain not easily available elsewhere. Much prostitution is linked with such social problems as drug use.
Women may turn to or stay in prostitution in order to pay for the drug habit. In a single word we can say, it is the easiest way to earn money for women.

Prostitution has also been noticed popping up around military bases. Meerut, Agra, Siliguri, Bombay, Secundrabad, Machhlipattanam etc. are example in India.1 Prostitution connected with tourism is the most institutionalized and the most lucrative. In the 1970s Japanese package to the Philippines Bangkok and Taiwan included hotel, golf facilities and sexual services of women at prepaid. The resorts and guest houses surrounding the Dooars in North Bengal also provide sexual service for the tourist. Media reports publish the news of sudden police raids on these tourist centres. There is a special high class prostitution catering to visiting businessmen. It is said to be part of the standard operating procedure of local subsidiaries to include these in their hosting obligation. They usually choose women from middle class families especially students in elite colleges.

The joint women programme now has the proof of the fact that girls are sold by near relations on account of acute poverty. Nearly one third of the total population of prostitutes come from this source. A mother, in lieu of a sari (one kind of dress), money, dedicate the child in her womb to goddess Yellamma in southern part of India, should the child so born be a female and thus condemned her to a life of shame even before her birth.2 A girl from Bihar who was sold just for Rs. 1000 because she was raped and the family did not want to keep a girl in the house with a stigma. On the other side of the coin is like that the prostitutes can be found at truck stands, small town hotels and road side tea stalls. They often do double duty as kitchen help and sex workers. And they have little choice when their parents, siblings and other relatives depends so much on their earning power.

Religious causes: We have already seen religious prostitutes are known by different names e.g. devdasi, khudikar, murloi, devali, basavibhavin, neikin, jogins and baisnavi etc.

Though the term devdasi did not figure earlier than Chola times (850 AD to 1280 AD). It is largely believed that the practice started about the 3rd century AD. The term devdasi literally means servant or slave. Her duties compromise a combination of a
property, ritual, entertainment to assert positive fertility and prosperity. They on account of being married to god or goddess, such as Yellamma or Mathamma were called Nityasumangai.

The system presently exists in Andhrapradesh, Maharastra and Karnataka and some of parts of Goa. A girl whose mother is devdasi usually becomes devdasi.

*Baishnavis* the loose morality of whose sect is separated by a very slight from the alter negation of feminine morality which constitutes prostitution, a live of separation which is in most cases easily and imperceptibly overstepped.

Biologically women are weak than men. A man can easily dominate a woman physically. But we can not ignore the psychological causes for adopting such a profession. The women’s attitude towards sexual behavior is also important in this choice.

Bollywood glamour is also a reason. Usually the pimps are well equipped with star-studded style of romantic images that popular television and movies have promoted. Pimps exploit girls boredom that results from traditional female socialization which leaves many young girls looking for some excitement and glamour in their lives.

Pimps look for and target young girls or women who appear to be naive, lonely and bitter and rebellious. Such girls and women are often runaways from their houses or from violent marriage. They are without jobs and normally in search of shelter. The pimp would play good Samaritan for days and weeks. For many girls it is a new experience; from neglect and scolding to caring and attention.

Other causes exist, which need to be enumerated. Young girls kidnapped from different parts of the country by men or women, the later mostly, for the purpose of prostitution.

Several young women and girls got into prostitution because they were raped and neither their family nor the society was willing to accept them. The pimps are constantly on the look for destitute willing to sell their children.
It has been seen that the girls and women belong to a reputed affluent family, are involved in this business. They hanker after money. Mostly the school, college and university going students who are living outside their homes like hostel or P.G (Paying Guest). They are not satisfied with their pocket money. Very easily they slipped into this slime. They earn enough from this flesh trade.

The dominant gender ideology constructed women as dependent housewives; the reality was that thousands of women worked to survive. Urban areas acted as magnets, nor just for men seeking jobs, but for women without guardians. Poor and uneducated, they found work as maid servants, coolies and prostitutes. These unregulated occupations flourished in the modernizing urban sectors.

Most women were forced to enter domestic services; in the cities and towns some worked in petty traders and services and increasingly in the mills and factories. Many of these occupations were synonymous with prostitution because wages were low and the fear of seduction so great. Prostitution was thought to be leisured and lucrative, an irresistible temptation to women toiling for a pittance. The factories were the most dangerous; not only were women poorly paid, but men and women worked together. Their physical proximity was itself felt to be an invitation to licentiousness.

Even amongst the lower castes, the elderly or aged widows who could not hope to remarry were thrown upon the most menial occupations, like spinning and weaving jute, for meager remuneration. Economically deprived, forced into drudgery and indignity, widows were also vulnerable to sexual abuse. The use of the word rarh to denote both widows and prostitutes indicates that widows were thought to be sexually available. The concerned moralists, officials, managers, trade union activists, professionals, and even novelists discovered that women working in the jute mills almost invariably practiced prostitution or lived in concubinage. Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay in his short story ‘Mahesh’, had said jute mills women have neither izzat (honour) nor abru (purdah). The workers of mills and factories had dual identity - worker by day and prostitute by night. These women were public women, and such were vulnerable to any kind of violence including sexual exploitation.
In 1924, ‘Mahila’, a journal, published a series of articles by Narendra Deb. According to him, many women take to prostitution secretly for extra earnings. He also identified maid servants as irregular prostitutes.

It is quite possible that some women in a few or even all of these poorly rewarded occupations sought to supplement their meager resources in exchange for sexual favours. Women were paid lower wages on the ground that their earnings were supplementary and it was assumed that their maintenance would be subsidized by fathers, husbands, and sons. It is hardly surprising that when such expected subsidies were not forthcoming, as was frequently the case, women sought other alternatives. But the more these alternatives narrowed to extra marital sexual activities or even sexual commerce, these women abrogated their claim to a social identity as a worker. Thus, in asserting that maid servants were common euphemism for prostitutes.

Sexual violence against refugees is a global problem. The wide range of abuses against refugees and displaced persons due to war or famine, frequently, rape and other sexual assault. Women refugees commonly fall prey to the lust of the males only because they are refugees, because of their floating position, actual or perceived political or ethnic affiliations, and because they are women. The use of this gender specific form of abuse frequently has political or ethnic, as well as gender specific, components. In some cases, refugee and displaced persons’ camps are relatively close to the site of the conflict that caused displacement. We may get an idea of the deplorable situation of women in the refugee camps from Sunil Gangopadhyay’s novel ‘Arjun’ (in Bengali).

In host countries, local residents and even police, military and immigration officials, often view refugee women as targets for assault. After displacement and sexual harassment these women roaming constantly here and there, and finally take shelter into the brothels of different part of the country. The lack of responsibility of the relief community, inefficiency of refugee asylum law caused the incidence of sexual assaults and displacement.

Between 1872-73 Bankim Chandra along with a number of Indian officials were asked to submit an insider’s report on the recruitment of young girls for prostitution. In
a very perspective note Bankim Chandra focused on widows and middle class women who voluntarily joined the profession of prostitution. According to him the principal causes were -

‘Seduction : unprincipled villains who seduce women from their household, often leaving them to their fate, after their novelty wears off.’

‘Domestic misery’ : the cruelty of a husband or relatives making life miserable for the woman who is forced to desert her home and finding no other shelter takes herself to the brothel.

‘Ennui and love of excitement’ : Bankim’s indictment here is directed more at the leaders of hindu society who according to him ‘tolerate no compromises and who shuts their doors forever against those who break through these restraints even but once and from whatever motive. These women are therefore found to lead the prostitute’s life for want of a better one.’

This report was being prepared simultaneously with the serialized publication of *Brishabriksha* in *Bangadarshan* (April 1872 onwards).5

Gradually ‘woman of easy virtue’ became a common term in the society. Uncertain widowhood, unhappy married life, unsuitable husband, poverty forcing a particular group of women to prostitution. In this context Sukumari Bhattacharjee had said : ‘when they did so, they found themselves in a unique position.’

To conclude, the sources of recruitment in prostitution may be revised. So it has been seen that there were large numbers of women, with no connection to religion or the arts, who were prostitutes in the conventional sense, that is, selling sexual favours for money. Most accounts agree that there were large numbers of widows among the prostitutes, which suggests that brothels were haven for women with nowhere else to go. Girls were also seduced or stolen from their homes and forced into this business. Among the ranks of prostitutes were married women who found their lives intolerable and escaped from one kind of oppression to another. Some working women turned to prostitution to make ends meet; others had drifted to the cities in times of economic hardship and were
unable to find employment of any other kind. Some women provided sexual favours in exchange for protection.

The following table shows the figure of how many women gathered in Kolkata and suburbs from Rajsahi Division to adopt prostitution during the first phase of last century:

**Table No. 4:1**

**NUMBER OF WOMEN CAME FROM RAJSAHI DIVISION TO CALCUTTA AND ITS SUBURBS AND ADOPTED PROSTITUTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts of Rajsahi Division</th>
<th>Calcutta-Suburb</th>
<th>Calcutta</th>
<th>Suburb</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rajsahi</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dinajpur</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Darjeeling</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>_</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rangpur</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>_</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pabna</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>_</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malda</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** The Census Report of India, 1911, Vol. VI, City of Calcutta, Part 1, p. 75

**Sanlaap,** the NGO, has given the following compiled chart of reasons for becoming Sex workers:

- Economic difficulties.
- Violence from husband.
- Family Problems.
- Cheated or misled.
- Came with husband/lover.
- Widowed.
- Divorced or deserted.
- Choose to come.
- Sold.
- Brought by friend/relative.
- Mother’s profession.
- Orphaned.
- Violence from in-laws
- Born in red light area.
- Child marriage.

And finally

- To escape destitution after riot.

**Role of the Pimps:**

A study on the issue of prostitution can never carry any socio-economic significance without referring to the brokers or pimps. Without explaining the role of the agent, the structure can not be understood. The pimps or brokers are playing an important role in this business from the past. *Yajnavalkya* endorses the role of the middleman or pimps in women trafficking for prostitution. On the basis of textual evidences it is proved that, issues of trafficking of women in *Gauda* country was not uncommon. During the early medieval period some women were used to make illegal arrangement for union between man and woman. Those women were known as *duti* or *Kutani*. The *Kuttanimatam* is the earliest datable work of an erotic activity. The *kutani’s* role in procuring immoral sexual relations between males and females of the society was much vital. *Aryasaptasati* by *Govardhan Acarya* states that some women took this work as their profession. They earned money from this service. They worked as middleman between the interested parties in lieu of money. *Dutis* of different categories designated by different names are mentioned in the *Kuttanimatam* of Damodar Gupta. The names are as follows - *Nisrstartha, Parimitartha, Swayamduti, Mukaduti* and *Bataduti.*
In the Aryasaptasati, Govardhan Acarya depicted in a verse a vivid picture, how a clever duti or kuttani is enticing a chaste and modest housewife to come out of her house and to enjoy with young man. The relevant verse is quoted here:

‘Rupamidam kanti-rasabayamutkarsah suvarna racaneyam
durgatamilita lalite bhramasi pratimandira dvaram.’

(Rakaravrajya, V. 492)

The poor beautiful wife who was unhappy with her poverty stricken husband but not ready to agree the reality. Though having seen that the duti was not discouraged. Rather she was repeatedly attempts to convince the poor beautiful lady with metaphorical dialogue to enjoy with unknown males without felt disheartened (free translation). The following verse is mentioned in Aryasaptasati:

‘Mule svabhabamadhuram samarpayanto rasm puro birasah
Ikssaba iva parapurusa bibidhesu rasesu binidheyah.’

(Mkaravrajya, V. 444)

The kuttani is encouraging a woman to enjoy with a paramour. She draws an analogy between a paramour and a sugarcane which is apparently hard but juicy and sweet in kernel (free translation).

Now-a-days, the kuttanis are no longer addressed as kuttanis. They are known by the name pimp and 80 to 95% of all prostitution is largely dependent on the pimps. Pimping is understood as living off the earning of a prostitute.

A close analysis indicates that pimp control their women. Rape, kidnapping, physical abuse and torture as systematically practiced as form of control over women in prostitution by en Barry - 1998.

Pimps control their women in a number of ways. First verbal abuses and psychological terror that make women feel that they are worthless. This way the pimps keep the women or girls in a state of perpetual fear.
When the psychological weapons fail the pimps resort to physical torture. It usually starts with slapping and kicking in the abdomen thus rendering her unfit to carry her business alone. According to anthropologists Christina and Richard Milner, ‘A pimp wants his woman’s mind more than her body.’

A prostitute of Khalpara (the red light area in Siliguri), stated that ‘the brokers such as leech.’ In pros-area, they are popular as ‘Bharua’ or ‘Nang’. Most probably the term ‘Nang’ came from the word ‘Nagar’. Actually they are the old customer of Khalpara, now they are working there as middleman or broker. Their income is to take a share on prostitutes’ income. On the other hand they don’t hesitate to rob the customers of the area. Mainly the local public, rickshaw puller, small shop keepers like tea, betel, gutka, cigarette, wine keepers or bootlegger - they are the brokers in this area.

Most of the pimps are typically men of twenties or thirties or women of thirties and forties who have travelled the route to the city several times and know the hotels to stay and the other local brokers to contact. The pimps frequently work in groups of two or more. Male and female pimps are sometimes referred to as dalals and dalalis, which means commission agents, who are either employed by a brothel owner directly or operate independently. Professional agents who recruit for the bigger brothels reportedly may be paid up to Rs. 6,000 per girl. But most pimps are small time, local recruits who earn considerably less. In either case, to stay in business they need the patronage of local bosses and the protection afforded by bribes to the police.

Female pimps are referred to as didi or phupu didi (literally, paternal aunt) or masi (literally, maternal aunt). Local women are also employed as recruiters. These women are exceptionally well placed to identify potential trafficking victims because they already know the local girls and their families. Women who are already in the sex business and have graduated to the level of brothel keepers, managers or even owners travel through the villages of their own and neighbouring districts in search of young girls.

A very few of the old ladies can earn a good amount of money through this method (work as middleman) but most of the old women in reality fall prey to poverty and helpless condition. As a natural rule of human biology the ladies beyond the age of
forty start to lose slowly their value as sex worker. Consequently the veteran workers suffer from a feeling of insecurity and some of them adopt the arrangement for giving their rooms in rent to the ‘chhukri’ (young girl) in lieu of that they use to take monthly rent and certain share forcedly from the daily income of the girls. Even the customers can not avoid these women as they are also to pay Rs. 200 - 300 as ‘bakshis’ to them. Not withstanding this the general condition of these women is far from satisfactory. Most of them as it is already mentioned are poor, helpless. They do not hesitate to behave in a rustic manner and to throw filthy languages to the working girls under their shelter in order to extract excess cash money from their income. Suggestively this may be stated that such type of unrefined behaviours may originate from their feeling of unsatisfied grievances and long life full of miseries.

There are other psychological issues which create pressure on these ladies of grown up age. It is frequently seen that the relations and closely associated people generally are not willing to keep close touch when they are economically weak. Those who are friends in the good days avoid the retired workers in their misfortune and even disallow them to their houses. But here one point is to be mentioned, such a state of condition is not the peculiarity of these professional women but common feature of the poor ladies engaged in different minimal jobs.

These local agents purchase girls from their families, sometimes for as little as Nepali Rs. 200, or tempt them with promises of future earnings, and take them to the Indian border where they are sold to a broker for anything from India at the cost between Rs. 1,000 - 8,000. These middlemen then sell them to brothel owners in Bombay, Delhi and elsewhere for Rs. 15,000 - 50,000, depending on the girl’s age, beauty and virginity. This purchase price, plus interest (10% of the total), becomes the debt that the women are told they must work to pay off through prostitution. Because only the brothel owner knows the terms of the debt, and most women and girls have no idea how much they owe or the terms for repayment, they often ‘pay back’ indefinitely.

Family members - uncles, cousins, step-fathers also act as trafficking agents or brokers. In many cases, the victim complained deception. According to a report by concerned
NGO namely Omar Sattur, (Anti Slavery International and Child Workers of Nepal Concerned Centre):

Girls are recruited in a number of ways. Bollywood and Tollywood glamour is also an attraction to the young generation. Village girls and their families are often deceived by smartly dressed young men who are looked liked film heroes. Those false heroes arrive in the village claiming to have come from Kathmandu and propose marriage and all the comforts of modern urban life. They go through a local ceremony and leave the village never be seen again. The girls end up in Indian brothels. Sometimes older men promise the girls employment in the city. Another avenue is through distant relatives or friends who pretend to arrange a marriage with relatives or friends in another village, but instead abduct the girl and send her to India. Sometimes a trusted individual abducts the girl on the pretext of educating her in India.

Not only prostitutes but pimps and brothel keepers were also registered. It was during this period (end of the nineteenth century) that a process of categorisation was set in motion. It reveals the ambiguities of the colonial officials regarding not merely prostitution, but the general sexual practices of their Indian subjects (always referred to as ‘natives’ in the official records).

Now-a-days in this region pimps operate in many hotels, resturents, lodges, guest houses and even arrange women for business men who order them for their business partners or clients.

A number of recruiting agencies have come up in North Bengal targeting young women and girls with the promise of employment abroad mostly in Hongkong, Singapore and the gulf countries. Initially they are recruited as domestic workers, matron or as workers in beauty parlours with high salary. In many cases the agents use internet to recruit women for trafficking. The types of sites used by the traffickers for the recruitment of victims include sites of marriage agencies, dating clubs, escorts sites and the various job offering sites like home assistance, waitressing or bartending, care or massage parlours, modeling, entertainment industry like dancers and hostesses, educational courses, matrimonial offers, tourism, work in the sex industry.\textsuperscript{11}
The interview with a pimp, popularly called Vinata masi revealed a lot of informations. She lives at Khalpara (red light area) in Siliguri. She is the former sex worker, have told that they are to follow tricky methods in order to trap the girls. From the story narrated by this woman it seems that insolvent villages are their main targets. The masis sometimes go to the village with young brokers and start to live in rent houses pretending like mother and son. Their apparent affluence and luxury in their life style naturally creates curiosity and attraction among the less educated and helpless tender hearted girls. Taking the advantage of their simplicity and unawareness the masis and brokers infatuate these girls to adopt the unnatural way of living. Besides, there are other factors of work. The greedy fathers, selfish relatives and such other immoral closely associated people often encourage the immature girls to choose this life of uncertainty. But most of them are enticed with the bait of fortune of settled married life.

The brokers roam in search of poor fathers having presentable daughters and ultimately become successful in their purpose. A broker tries to prove himself as an eligible bachelor and in this way attracts the attention of the parents as well as the girls of the poor family. Being convinced of the earnestness of the young man the parents often give their daughters in marriage to such type of people. Ironically all on a sudden, such people disappear from the village with the newly married girl and his mother. Now the tragedy starts. The simple village folk come to realize what mistake they have done. They make search for some time, go to the police and administration, the village authorities; but all are in vain.

Sanlaap (NGO) has also sum up and made a list of agents introducing women into sex trade12:

- Neighbour in connivance with parents.
- Neighbours as pimps (guardians not knowing).
- Aged sex workers from same village or locality.
- Unknown person/accidental meeting with pimp.
- Mother/sister/near relative in the profession.
- Lover giving false hope of marriage or job and selling to brothel.
- Close acquaintance/near relative giving false hope of marriage or job.
Categories of Clients in Sex Business:

According to the scriptures for the gratification of the sexual desire of the men, prostitution emerged. On the other hand it is said that the prostitutes were taken as the safety valves of a highly organized and refined society, which implies that other women of the society are somehow protected by the existence of the flesh trade. At the same time without the clients there would be no existence of prostitution or no sex industry.

A universal explanation for the existence of prostitution is the unrestricted sex drive of men. As prostitution is existed, men are able to experiment with taboo or deviant sexual preferences that they can not express with their wives. Having economic power over women men dominate the prostitute as their clients.

But from the beginning it is to be understood that inspite of reluctant attitude of the society to view such women at least with human dignity, prostitution never ceased to exist. During the colonial period the issue of prostitution practiced by the white poor girls was a source of monification to the ruling community. To the British Indian authority, it appeared to be a great insult; they took the presence of white prostitutes in the native bazars as tarnishing the image and prestige of the Raj. Even attempts were made to claim that ‘no English woman was amomg them in 1891.’

We can sense here that race rather than nationality was the matter of greater consideration. Resorting to this paradigm, we may suggest a proposition that the white Europeans especially the English people took advantage of gratifying their biological demand in association with native public women, they logically were not willing to do it publicly. In such cases, proneness to conceal it was obvious. We may draw such an instance of concealment in the famous Bengali novel ‘Saptapadi’ of Tarasankar Bandopadhyay. The novel was picturised. The female character of Rina Brown was an offshoot of such secret sex relation of a white person with a native maid.
Like the hierarchy among prostitutes there are also variations of clients e.g. poor, lower middle, middle class and the rich influential clients. As we find the kings, aristocrats, zamindars, jottars constitute the patron class of prostitutes from the beginning. There are unskilled or semi-skilled workers for example rickshaw-pullers, traders, small shopkeepers, factory workers, manual labourers or those employed in small industries.

Clients are also found among the reputed officers (govt. and non govt. sector), industrialists, businessmen, politicians, even policemen.14 These clients afford to visit women elsewhere as they do not want to go to red light areas for the unhygienic conditions and also for public image. They arrange higher call girls who do not work in red light areas through pimp. They select well known bars, hotels, lodges, restaurants, guest houses. Businessmen recruit sex workers in a very calculated way to promote their business, by providing women for sexual entertainment as part of business deal.

The men who live outside home like hostel, mess or this type of accommodation, prostitutes or call girls visiting them regular basis. As it is already mentioned, in colonial period the British officials, railway engineers, tea planters who were sent or worked in this region by British govt. used to involve in sexual relation with the prostitutes.

Surveys in red light areas reveal that men who visiting out of curiosity for their first sexual experience or as a part of night out with friends are students of different educational institutions. The clients with whom the prostitutes had special arrangement are found to be rich and highly educated.

Clients are also local anti social or hoodlums. There are also question of safety and security of the other customers because at the dark of night these hoodlums involve themselves into robbery and snatching. They snatch money, wrist watch, mobile, gold ring or chain and other valuable things. The girls of red light areas fear these clients. Some of the hoodlums are local landlords. They are inclined to be violent and claim young good looking women for themselves without the women’s consent. Not only the local but the hoodlums of other areas also come as customers. The chhukris who are in
bondage to pimps, have no right over the selection of clients. They are not able to form relationship of their choosing until they leave the bondage condition and begin working independently. These clients treat the prostitutes viciously.

Clients who come for quick sex are not known in the red light areas. They are often travellers, merchants, truck drivers. Taxi drivers, auto drivers even the rickshaw-puller also introduce new clients in brothels. The truck drivers of highways visit red light areas roughly three to five times in a month.\textsuperscript{15}

Many of the clients regularly return to the same woman but not for anonymous sexual pleasure with new woman in each time. There might be an emotional attachment develop between the client and the woman. The accepted norms of any society is that the family life with husband and son is the real dignity of a woman, which is not permissible to the prostitutes. Here the reference of Basantasena is remarkable. She was an inborn prostitute and hated herself. She had a severe attraction to a married life and progeny. The another story of king Jaypida is relevant in this aspect. Kalhana stated that the Kashmir king Jaypida entered the city of Pundravardhana in course of his expeditions over the world. Pundravardhana was then under Gauda. At that time pundravardhana was an enjoyable city. Jayapida went to the temple of Kartikeya to enjoy dancing, where his dignified appearance attracted the attention of Kamala, the dancer of the temple. Later they fell in love with each other.\textsuperscript{16}

The regular clients pay fixed monthly sums and some even live with their mistresses. Noti Binodini and Sukumari Dutta (Golap), both of them were prostitute, fell in love with their co-actors when they took entry into the world of theatre. Sukumari Dutta got married to Gostha Bihari Dutta. Though the Babu culture was as not vivid in North Bengal like Kolkata, but the jotdars and tea planters in this region had their mistresses. They treat their mistresses as their second wives. The regular clients are very organized about their visits. They fix a set time every week or every month and leave their clothes in the women’s room. When they stay overnight the women cook their favourite food. Actually they have a friendship or relationship that is very pleasant for both. Even though they might have their families they used to give presents, extras such as tips during poojas or other festivals.
In the full bloom of youth a rich person was always considered as the preferable customer to the prostitutes. When the pimps come to the prostitute with varied offers from new clients, she should prefer the highest one. But whenever the courtesans disobeyed to entertain the clients sent by the king, had to pay fine. The attention of the state was drawn to the colony of public women to bring it under the obligation of a stabilized taxation. Some of the prostitutes fell into disputes, clashes with their customers.

The courtesans used to procure money from their client’s pocket on various pretexts such as for repair of houses, celebration of birthdays, christening festivals of friends child, giving to pregnant friend or help her a mite in her treatment etc. The women of red light areas are arranging festivals like Kartick puja, Durgapuja. They give gifts to deserving people.

The fixed clients have varying levels of commitment to the women they visit. In the pregnancy period of the woman, if the client thinks that the woman carrying his child, he becomes more involved and responsible to the pregnant lady. Generally the birth of the baby mother sends the issue to the relatives in village, native land. In this case her client sends money regularly for the child upkeep. On the other hand, it is also known that a fixed client takes away the new born baby from the mother to conceal the fact that the baby was his.

Most of the prostitutes dream that one day they will be able to get rid from the profession and lead a honourable life with their children and children’s father. As most of the fixed clients have their own family, so family pressures prevent them from marrying their mistresses. The women not legally married but regularly maintained by a paramour was know in the Bengali society as Jalpatra. Now-a-days this terminology is not in vogue.

The young prostitutes prefer to visit the known clients on regular basis rather than the stranger. It is sexually safer for them. The women are also safer from any kind of violence like physical torture, disputes if the clients are known to them as their behavior is also known and predictable.
Comparatively the aged prostitutes who are financially insecure, prefer fixed clients. The permanent clients give them regular monthly sum and who might also be able to offer a satisfying relationship. Prostitutes and fixed clients in long term relationships, generally take on the same role and obligations of man and wife. The permanent *babus* (clients) expect to exercise control over the movements and activities of their mistresses. Some of them take advantage of the women’s earnings. The *babus* who are suffering from financial crisis push their mistresses to work harder and earn more money.

There are some clients who visit the floating or flying sex workers. A few prostitutes live in red light areas but work outside. The rich clients take these women out in their cars to hotels for clients. The women standing nearby and waiting may get call from the clients. These clients can afford to go to notorious bars and hotels by doing lavish expenditure for secret enjoyment.

Hotels clients are also rich locals, business magnate, tourists. They pay around Rs. 1000-1500 for one sitting. And for whole night they pay around Rs. 2000. The prostitutes who attain these type of clients, work occasionally, twice or thrice in a month. To make a lot of money some of them are kept as mistresses by the clients.

It is revealed from the survey reports on red light areas, at the time of festivals like *puja, diwali, holi, mela* (fairs) the outsiders come into red light areas. During the festival period the prostitutes become very busy to attend the customers as it is the time for them to earn quick and more money in short time.

So it has been seen that it is likely that the sex trade exists because patriarchal societies give undue emphasis to the male sexual urge and to gratifying men’s desires. It must be remembered that the sex trade where survival and gratification meet in such diverse ways, has as its objective the gratification of the needs of men. The patriarchal structure is highly exploitative and seeks justification of its hegemony on the women as a whole.
References of Prostitution in the following Districts:

DARJEELING:

As we have seen from the ancient past the Himalayan and Trans-Himalayan region serves as the hinterland in the business of prostitution. Survey of local literatures did not witness the existence of red light area in Darjeeling town. It is locally known to the people that once a red light area was located at Bawan (fifty two in Nepali) basti in Darjeeling, which is not existed now. But from the official document regarding the establishment of Lock Hospital there in Darjeeling, concrete knowledge is available about those women who had to commit to such profession.

Of the North and North-Western portion of India Vatsayana ventures the assertion that adventurous citizens amongst the people of the Himalayas used to bribe the sentinels and enter the seraglio of respectable persons to enjoy the harem ladies clandestinely.

Prostitution in Colonial Darjeeling:

One of the important British cantonment was established at Jalpahar in Darjeeling. British government showing its concern to bring under the orbit of governmental observation by registering each and every prostitute girl. From the concerns for the health of their soldiers the British govt. had taken that measure. Such anxiety of govt. has been explicitly expressed in a letter from Lieutenant-Colonel F. Roberts, First Assistant Quarter Master General, to the Government of Bengal - No. 175, dated Simla, the 19th January, 1870.

The subject of the letter was as follows:

Forwarding, with remarks, to the government of India, in the Home Department, certain rules promulgated by the commander in Chief in regard to the registration of prostitutes, and stating that the Lieutenant-Governor is willing to adopt them if confirmed by the Govt. of India.

Some light may be thrown on the issue of the establishment of a Lock Hospital at Darjeeling for the treatment of prostitutes under the British government. According to the
report on Lock Hospital at Darjeeling for the year ending 31st December 1868, the
Darjeeling Lock Hospital was first opened on 1st January 1867, the room in the old
sapper hospital having been set aside for the purpose. Fifteen women were registered at
first, but the number was reduced before the end of the year to 11. Some of the women
on first examination were found to be laboring from syphilis in its worst form, and had
to be detained for treatment. All these subsequently left the hospital after being cured.
The following correspondence is relevant to mention in this context:

From COLONEL J. C. HAUGHTON, C.S.I, Commissioner of Coochbehar Division, to
the Secretary to the Government of Bengal - (No. 488, dated Jul-pigoree, the 26th
February 1869).

In reply to your letter no. 6514 of 3rd December last, I beg to report as required.

2. There is but one Lock Hospital in this Division, viz that at Darjeeling. The report
of the Civil Surgeon is herewith forwarded.

3. The figures given by the Civil Surgeon are too small, in my opinion, to warrant
any decided conclusions. The number of patients suffering from disease at Jullapahar,
would, in all probability, be widely influenced by the fact of the arrival of a detachment
from the plains, with one or two diseased patients.

4. I concur with the Civil Surgeon in the belief that there are many unregistered
prostitutes, but the habits of the residents in the hills render it difficult for the police to
detect them. They live chiefly in detached huts, difficult of access, and not in streets as
in the plains; moreover, the duties imposed upon for the police in this respect are very
unpopular. The women too, in addition to other considerations, have the strongest motive
for avoiding registration, as it inflicts, upon them the penalty of a monthly fine.

5. It is not understood why, in 1867, the salaries due to the establishment of the
Lock Hospital were not paid in full, as orders were issued for payment immediately on
application being made to this office direction on the subject will be issued to the
Deputy Commissioner, and he will be desired to instruct the District Superintendent of
Police to use every exertion for the registration of all the prostitutes of the place.
6. In conclusion, I would beg to recommend that the transfer of the duty with regard to these persons, be made from the native doctor to Sub-Assistant Surgeon, who to my knowledge, has discharged much of it. The dispensary in charge of the Superintendent adjoins the Lock Hospital, but is some distance from the jail hospital.

During the year 1858, to which this report more especially applies, 17 women have been treated in Hospital. The number of the register at the close of the year was 13, but I am of opinion that this does not at all represent the actual number of prostitutes playing their trade as such in the station, and I feel convinced, if the police were more vigilant, a very considerable number would be obliged to register. This applies more especially to the Bhootiah Bustee, but also to the bazar. The usual plea for exemption, when a woman is called on to register, is, that she is in the keeping of some particular individual, who is produced as evidence of the fact. In the majority of instances, I believe this to be utterly false, and easy of refutation if the police exercised, as I have said before, more vigilance in the matter.

The annexed table (Table No. 4:2) shows the number of venereal cases treated in the Jullapahar Hospital (Darjeeling Lock Hospital), for the last four years. It will be seen from this, that there has been a considerable decrease in disease, since the establishment of the Lock Hospital and system of bi-monthly examination; even better results may be looked for when the plan of registration is more strictly carried out.

A sum of Rupees 70 have been collected within the year, and a fine of Rupees 2 was levied, in two instances only, for non attendance. I have not as yet forwarded the indent for Hospital furniture sanctioned, as the present number of the prostitutes is so small.

The Native Doctor attached to the Jail Hospitals performs the duties of the Lock Hospital, but I should strongly recommend the Government to sanction the allowance of Rs. 10, at present given to that subordinate, to be drawn by the Sub-Assistant Surgeon, who is not only better qualified to perform the duties, but who, from the close vicinity of the Charitable Hospital, is always on the spot, whereas the jail is situated at a considerable distance.
The servants entertained as follows:

One Native Doctor

One Cook

One Bheestie

One Maintainer

For the year 1867 they have only, up to date, received one third of their pay, viz. that portion paid by the Municipality. From March 1868 they have been paid in full, by order of the Commissioner.

At first the full establishment (except the Matron) was entertained at full rates, but this has now been considerably reduced, in proportion to the requirements of the Hospital.

The Native Doctor receives Rupees 10 per mensem.

Cook Rs. 5

Bheestie Rs. 3

Maintainer Rs. 6

B. SIMPSON, M.D;

Civil Surgeon, Darjeeling

Table No. 4:2

NUMBER OF PATIENTS WITH SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES ADMITTED INTO THE CONVALESCENT DEPOT HOSPITAL DURING THE YEARS 1865, 66, 67 and 68.²²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diseases</th>
<th>1865</th>
<th>1866</th>
<th>1867</th>
<th>1868</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syphilis Primaria</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syphilis Secondaria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonorrhoea</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strictura Urethra</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchitis (Gonorrhoea)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bubo</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Judicial Report, March 1869

CONVALESCENT DEPOT          A. S. RUSSELL, M. D;

DAARJEELING                Assistant Surgeon, R.H.A in Medl.

The 10th February, 1869.        Charge Convalescent

Depot, Darjeeling.

(Proforma for submitting the report is furnished under Appendix C)
## Table No. 4:3

Annual Return of the Lock Hospital at Darjeeling for the year 1868

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area over which the Rules are in force</td>
<td>Total number of prostitutes on register</td>
<td>Average number of prostitutes on register</td>
<td>Total number treated in Lock Hospital</td>
<td>Average number treated in Lock Hospital</td>
<td>DETAILS OF COLUMN 4 Diseases:</td>
<td>Admitted/Discharged/Died/ Total</td>
<td>Amount received from registered prostitutes</td>
<td>Amount expended including cost of establishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Jan 1868 13</td>
<td>Jan 1868 ...</td>
<td>Jan 1868 ...</td>
<td>Gonorrhoea 14/14/.../14</td>
<td>Jan 1868 Rs</td>
<td>Jan 1868 24/0/0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Febru ,, 13</td>
<td>Febru ,, 2</td>
<td>Febru ,, 1.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Syphilis (Primary) 3/3/.../3</td>
<td>Febru ,, ...</td>
<td>Febru ,, 28/2/6*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March,, 13</td>
<td>March ,, 1</td>
<td>March ,, 1.06</td>
<td></td>
<td>Syphilis (Secondary.../.../.../...</td>
<td>March ,, ...</td>
<td>March ,, 18/10/3*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April ,, 13</td>
<td>April ,, 2</td>
<td>April ,, 1.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>April ,, ...</td>
<td>April ,, 18/14/0*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May ,, 13</td>
<td>May ,, ...</td>
<td>May ,, .77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>May ,, ...</td>
<td>May ,, 26/12/0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June ,, 14</td>
<td>June,, ...</td>
<td>June,, ...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>June ,, ...</td>
<td>June ,, 24/0/0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Entry 1</td>
<td>Entry 2</td>
<td>Entry 3</td>
<td>Entry 4</td>
<td>Entry 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average for the year</td>
<td>13.08</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>17/17/.../17</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From 18th February to 30th April, there was no Native Doctor for Lock Hospital, consequently his pay was not drawn.

Source: Judicial Department, March 1869
An important correspondent preserved in the West Bengal State Archive’s record room should be mentioned in this context (Political Department for the month of September, 1916).

From - The Hon’ble Mr. J. H Kerr,
C. I. E, I. C. S, Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal

To - The Secretary to the Govt. of India, Home Dept.

I am directed to refer to Mr. Wheller’s letter no. 937 C, dated the 15th March, 1916, regarding an enquiry as to the best method of rendering aid in coping with prostitution among Jewesses in India. The Govt. of India ask for information under the following heads in this connection:

at what centre does the evil exist?

In reply, I am to state that, as regards Bengal, the answer to the question is -

Professional prostitution among Jewesses exists only in Calcutta, though a certain member of Jewish women are leading irregular lives with Indians at other places in Bengal.

**Prostitution in Post - Colonial Darjeeling**:

In Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Pakistan and Srilanka the informations produced by the non governmental organisations hovers around three themes: the girl child, religious prostitution and trafficking for sexual purposes. In India and specially in Himalayan region like Nepal the girl child discourse focuses on religious prostitution and trafficking in children for prostitution. However, the main sexual exploitation issue in Nepal is the trafficking of girls to India. The open border between the two countries makes it difficult to monitor the movements. It is also stated that, because of corruption, official assistance is given to the sale and the trafficking of specially young girls. In most accounts Bombay is the main destination. The international trade routes most frequently
mentioned are from Nepal and Bangladesh to India, and from India and Pakistan to the gulf countries.

Kankarvita of Nepal becomes the main corridor to traffic women for prostitution. Flying sex business is very profitable in Nepal. Almost one hundred fifty sex workers from Siliguri sub-division go to the hotels and lodges of Nepal in regular basis. The hotels, resorts offer catalogue of sex workers in their service to satisfy the customers.

The work of prostitution commonly is not accepted by the society. Naturally it happens that the women and their linkmen associated with such flesh business generally maintain an isolation and carry out their work. In this way some specific areas in a town develop as red light area. In this way some specific areas in a town develop as red light area. Thus Khalpara in Siliguri is known to the people as the pros-quarters area. Khalpra is located opposite to Gandhi Moidan at Siliguri (Khalpara red light area is near the S. P. Mukherjee Road and Vidyasagar Road), the most important town in North Bengal of West Bengal. Khalpara is well known for the oldest hub for prostitution. Siliguri being the busiest business town in North Bengal, flesh trade (at Khalpara, red light area) had been developed in this city since long ago. Khalpara is not simply an area for prostitution in Siliguri, it is now considered as the major wholesale trading centres for child prostitutes from eastern Nepal districts and other north eastern parts of India. Girls aged between 6 to 9 years are taken from Nepal and other north eastern parts of India to Khalpara and from Khalpara they are sold to different brothels like Sonaganchi red light area in Kolkata, Grant Road brothel in Mumbai, Pune, New Delhi and other places. It is estimated that roughly 100,000 to 160,000 Nepalese girls and women are working as sex workers in India.24

Apart from Nepal, the poor girls in Khalpara red light area are also coming from different corner of West Bengal and neighbouring states of West Bengal like Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram. There are many instances where these girls were married to strangers and after few months they were sold to Khalpara brothel by their husbands. Pimps are taking the advantages of poverty. Many girls left their home with consent of their parents to get a job but ultimately landed at Khalpara brothel. North East states in India, Nepal and Bangladesh are the main source of sex workers in red
light areas of India. The geographical location of Siliguri is such that communication between Siliguri and the source of prostitutes is easy. Communication between Siliguri and Kolkata via train and bus services is also very good. A major part of the prostitutes in Khalpara and those poor girls traded from Khalpara are from Nepal and Assam. In Indian brothels there is a tremendous demand for Assamese and Nepali girls among the clients.

A prostitute named Tara told Human Rights Watch that she grew up in Nawakot district and was trapped in prostitution when she went with two girlfriends to see the cigarette factories at Lanakpur, on the Nepal/India border:

‘‘We fell into the clutches of a dalali (agent), a Nepali dalali at that. We were three girls together, in the beginning. We spent two years together, but then we were separated. When I was captured, I could not escape or return to my home, they would have caught me for sure. If I had known what was to happen to me, I would have killed myself halfway. But leaving this life is not an option for me, I simply cannot think about it. My purity was violated, so I thought why go back to what? I may as well just stay here, if I ever catch that dam dalali, I don’t know what I would do to her.’’

Tara described her bewilderment upon arrival in Bombay.

‘‘When they brought me here, it was in a taxi. Everywhere I looked, I saw curtained doorways and rooms in this area. Men would go and come through these curtained entrances. People on the street would be calling out, ‘Two rupees, two rupees’. I asked the other Nepali women if these were offices; it seemed the logical explanation. In two days I knew everything. I cried.’’

According to the survey report of Sanlaap (NGO) as reflected in Carolian Sleightholme and Indrani Sinha’s book, a girl Bunu was brought to India from Nepal through trafficking. She was only eleven when left her village in Nepal in search of work. She was befriended by a young man who promised to help her find work and brought her to Kamathipura, a well known red light area in Bombay. He took her to meet some of his friends, and there she was sold to a woman who ran a brothel. She
was not allowed to leave the house. Kept under strict vigilance with constant intimidation and threats, she was initiated into the sex industry. After three long years, long enough to more than pay back her debt to the madam, she was allowed to return home. She gave an honest account of her story to her relatives, but they had no sympathy for her and she was given a cold reception. Having realized that she was no longer welcome at home, she returned to India. Some one told her that people in Calcutta red-light areas were kinder than those in Bombay, and that was why she came Calcutta. At the age of fourteen she understood that a red light area would be her only home. She still works in the same red-light area in the mornings, practising elsewhere in the afternoons, sharing a room and working in the *aadhiyari* system. She earns Rs. 50 to 100 a day.

The survey of *Sanlaap* estimated that roughly 100,000 to 160,000 Nepalese girls and women are working as sex workers in all over India. Roughly 20% of them are estimated to be under twenty years of age, with 30% abducted under the pretext of marriage or jobs. Five thousands to seven thousands young Nepalese girls are said to be trafficked every year to various parts of the country. Many of these Nepalese women who are brought to Calcutta will have first come to Sonaganchhi or Kidderpore and later move to other red-light areas. Studies on trafficking from Nepal to India have specifically mentioned the open border between the two countries as a major factor facilitating trafficking of women. Nepalese and Indians do not need visas to cross the border between the two countries.

**Khalpara - the biggest red light area in North Bengal:**

The red light zone of Siliguri is situated within Siliguri corporation area, the locality is known as Khalpara. The ward number is seven. Approximately 300 - 350 sex workers are residing in Khalpara. Previously the area was called Ghoshpara. Those Ghoshes left the place. Some of them sold and others gave their houses into rent.

In the period of 1960s, the entire area was surrounded by pools. The *sanko* (bridge / culvert) was the only way for communication. The area was not so much extended as it is today. Now the area extended from the Jhankarmore to Alupattimore. On the other
part, it is extended from the road opposite of Anandaloke Cinema hall to the Swastika Club. The pros-quarters are made along the side of the Vivekananda road. The inmates of this are use roads through Dangipara, Buchrapatti and the roads in front of Rajendra Prasad Girls High School. The total red light area of Khalpara is under the jurisdiction of the Siliguri corporation. Still the locality is known as Nisidhnapally i.e. prohibited zone.

The survey could not be materialized without the wholehearted co-operation and support of the NGO (Durbar Mahila Samanway Committee) working in Khalpara red light area. More or less there are now hundred houses or pros-quarters in Khalpara. According to the co-ordinator of DMSC, now there are nearly four hundred sex workers who are permanent residents of Khalpara. They are called Chhukri in the local language. This figure is being increased very naturally in the season of festivals like pujas and the very famous Baisakhi mela (fair in Bengali month of Baisakh) in Siliguri. Flying sex business is being gradually increased in this town. The spots in Siliguri from where the prostitutes and brokers find the customers are: Meghdut cinema hall at Hill Cart Road, Payel cinema hall at Sevoke Road, Salugara Market, Sukna Bazar (Market), BSF Cantonments area near Siliguri, Madhuban, Siliguri junction area, Mallaguri More, Darjeeling More, Gurungbasti More, NJP Railway Station, Venus More, Jhankar More, Karbala Moidan area, Jalpai-More, Airview Bus Stand, Gurungbasti More, Pradhan Nagar area, Champasari Road, Fulbari Truck Stand, Matigara Truck Stand, Khaprail More, Bihar More at Bagdogra, Susrtnagar near North Bengal Medical College, Baribhase area, Eastern By-pass Highway, Jaleswari Bazar, Ashigharh More, P.C. Mittal Bus Stand or previously known as Dooars Bus Stand, Baikunthapur Forest, Tenjing Norge Bus Turminous. The following informations are collected from the surveys at the red light area of Khalpara in several times.

Adhiyari Business:

Adhiyari Business is very popular in Khalpara. One kind of stool is sold there at Rs. 200 - 250. Morah i.e a wicker stool to sit or stand to attract the attention of customers. So it may be said the purchase value of the space is Rs. 200 - 250. The masis or the owner of the rent houses sell this Morah. The Chhukris who live inside the narrow lane,
they come to the front side, sit on the stool and wait for their customers. They are to wait on gate looking for their customers. They are used to stand at gate around 4 p.m in afternoon. Their make up and dresses generally very loud so as to draw the attention of the customers.

**Accommodation:**

The accommodation of the prostitutes is not good and hygienic. The inmates of this area are facing various problems. They have sanitary problem. The lanes inside the brothel area are narrow. The drains are not covered, with full of dirty water and garbage. The small pros-quarters are stuffy for living. The doors, windows are dense for passing air and light. Though electricity and tube wells for drinking water supply from Siliguri Corporation is available. In rainy season, the narrow lanes inside the colony go under the rain water.

**Daily Life:**

The daily life of the prostitutes is hectic. Through the entire morning the women at red light area spent a very normal life like the ordinary house wife with their domestic works. From the early morning they become busy to maintain their domestic life. Much of them keep special look to maintain their house and children. Some of them are very neat and clean also. They sweep the rooms and courtyard, do cooking, wash clothes, utensils, prepare children for school. Sometime they enjoy their leisure gossiping their group sitting at the end of their daily work. They also enjoy T.V. (Television) serials, Hindi movies, songs, ludo, cards and other indoor games. Some of these women possess noticeable skill in weaving, embroidery etc. Generally the girls come to market for purchase of their necessaries in a group but certainly back their quarters before evening as it is their time of *dhanda* (business).

**Pros-quarters:**

Pros-quarters are not well furnished. As it is mentioned the rooms are stuffy with a few plastic or wooden furnitures. Cot, bed, dressing table, dressing stand, rack, almirah showcase, chair, table, portable television set, tape recorder, radio etc. are common.
Showing all these things in her room, a woman said, her condition is far better comparatively to a domestic maid servant during the interview was going on with the present writer.26

Religious Belief:

It has been seen the religious belief of the prostitutes is very strong. The sex workers of Khalpara are still standing on their traditional belief. The photos of hindu god, goddess (like - Durga, Kali, Ganesh, Laxmi, Shiva, Hanuman), picture of mosque in Makka are seen in their rooms (see Appendix F, p. XXXI). Not only the Hindus but also Christian (mainly the tribal girls), Muslim, Budhhist (the Nepali girls) are living there. They have a great devotion and respect for god and religious rituals. Kartick puja is considered as their own festival. A festive look is seen at the celebration of Kartick puja in the entire locality. There are two houses where Kali puja is celebrated with huge grandeur. They enjoy Diwali with crackers. Manasa puja is also popular in few houses. Even they observe sanjam before the day of Manasa puja. On the days of religious festivals in their house they do not engage in business.

Background Story:

More or less the background story of the women in Khalpara is common. Mainly the girls of this area, have come from poor families of the remote villages, mofussil area. Financial crisis, poverty forced them to move in this business. Many of them have come in this profession not directly. They were appointed as maidservant, in the houses. Somehow they were exploited there or sometimes the male people of the houses cast sinister look on them. Few of them were raped by the owner of house. And the civil society denied to give them any shelter. Ultimately the pros-quarters became their shelter.

Occasionally the innocent girls fall into the trap of their false lovers. The seducer boy enjoys few days with the girl and when she conceives the lover flees. Here it can be mentioned that the ancient scripture recognized the illicit sons.27 But the present society do not accept the illicit child. However, when the girl becomes pregnant she is left alone in this indifferent society. The red light area at Khalpara, becomes her final
destination. Very often the drunken and lascivious husband sells his wife in the brothel. We get literary reference Bengali novel like ‘Uttarfalguni’ which was also picturised.

Some times some girls from poor family to give relief to their parents, came to the city in order to earn some money. Such girls are fascilated by ideas that there are many scope to get job in the flourishing city of Siliguri. But Siliguri could not give them security as well as could not protect their sanctity. Slowly and deleteriously they sank down into the dark world.

There are many girls in Khalpara who left their home willingly. The obstinate and indomitable girls who could not adjust with their family flee from home. They have taken shelter in Khalpara. Many of them wanted to earn huge money within a short time. They know that the prostitution is the easiest way to earn money for women and it is practiced from the long past.

There are few girls whose families have migrated from Bangladesh. Many of them were sold out in the border area to the brokers. Some of them have lost their family and been taken into red light area. In one case it is found that some women are missing from a group of mason working in Siliguri.28

Sometime the bitter relation within the family or misbehavior from step-mother drag the minor girls to this immoral line.

**Other Business**:

The surveys also revealed that now-a-days the sex workers do not depend on prostitution only. They have link with other business like smuggling. They smuggle cocaine, opium, drugs, brown sugar, betel nut, etc. They brew wine and other intoxicants.29 The *masis* are also engaged in this brewing. They smuggle these items from Kakarbhitta, the border area of Nepal. Very often they are entangled in police case. But they are able to free them from this type of problem. It seems that they have good connection with persons of different capacities in the administration.
Mahzani System:

A survey was undertaken in the red light area in Siliguri. From the interviews with the sex workers, the present scholar came to know some important system and practice of sex trade prevalent in the area. It is known from some persons, well aware of the situation in the area that there prevails Mahzani system in the locality. The mahazans practice usury. Sometimes the girls take loan from mahazans for which they are to pay interest in high rate. It is called Mahzani system. So it can be stated that poor girls are exploited at different levels of their works.

Customers:

There are 50-70 customers in red light area at Khalpara, who are the permanent citizen of Siliguri. Government, non government job holders, reputed businessmen are the permanent babu of Khalpara red light area. In the season of festivals, the figure of regular customers is increased. At the time of puja, holi, mela (festivals) the outsiders come to Siliguri. They come every year. Gradually they become familiar in this area. The young boys of reputed family in Siliguri and adjacent of Siliguri are well known as regular customer in Khalpara.

Slip System:

As it is already mentioned frequent robbery and snatching in red light area become a cause of headache to the customers. For this reason the regular customers do not carry a huge amount of money with them. They introduces slip system to give the payment to sex workers. The bharuas collect the money from customers by showing the slips on behalf of the sex workers.

Flying Sex Business:

Now the flying sex business is increasing by leaps and bounds in Siliguri town. The well known hotels on Hill Cart Road and Sevoke Road and different prominent points near Bagra kote, Matigara Truck Stand, Fulbari Truck Stand, Siliguri Junction Area, hotels, lodges, guest houses near Pradhannagar, Pati Colony, Shantinagar are marked for flying business. According to the opinion of the sex workers the police harassment, the
oppression of brokers, masis and mahazans force the girls to shift their business from the red light area. And that is why they incline to flying business. The business in hotels has been started nearly from the end of nineties. The house wife belongs to reputed family, students of ladies hostels are involved in flying business. They hanker after money for their pocket money. Some of the rent flats, beauty parlours, spa and body massage parlours in Siliguri are the centres of flying business. Frequently the police raid on these parlours, hotels. The police arrest the accused. After the raid the flying business are postponed for few days. But while the police and administration get busy into another matter, they continue the flying business. The growing state of flying business due to some difficulties mentioned above is a marked feature of the profession now in the city.

Surveys in Truck Stands:

The surveys in Truck Stands were very fruitful to explore another side of prostitution of this area. Two important truck stands in Siliguri is situated at Matigara and Fulbari. The trucks come at these stands from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab, Hariyana, Rajasthan, Gujrat and even from Bangladesh. The destination of these long distance vehicles are Assam, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura etc. These trucks are basically loaded with bamboo, tobacco, cane, chemical items, cement, medicine, rice, wheat, petro-chemical goods, and raw materials for various industries. The line hotels and dhawas are being mushroomed on the route. The truck drivers and khalasis (assistant of driver) take rest at that dhawas. The food and lodging system of these line hotels are not bad. The customers are also supplied other items for their entertainment. The prostitutes maintain good contact with the owners of line hotels, dhawas and petrol pumps. This is another reason for the increasing growth of this profession. From the quarries made to the drivers, coming from outside the state, it appears they have some knowledge about venereal diseases and Aids. They were much reluctant to cooperate the author.30

An interview with a truck driver from Gurgaon in Hariyana, gives the information that some times these peoples come into contact with the sex working girls and the reason behind is their long detachment from their conjugal life.
The owners of the nearby line hotels and *dhawas* of the truck stands at first denied the flying business in that area. But gradually they confessed. They accepted that they were forced to stop the business after the police raid. They agreed that this business get much boom from the flying business of prostitutions.

**Trafficking Areas:**

The remote village, moffusil, localities detached from the towns of Meghalaya, Khasia, Nepal, Kankarbhita, Assam, Bangladesh, Cooch Behar, Bihar are the trafficking areas from where the girls come in the red light area of Siliguri. The main sexual exploitation issue in Nepal is the trafficking of girls to India. The open border between the two countries makes it difficult to monitor the movements. It is also stated that because of corruption, official assistance is given to the sale and the trafficking of young girls. In most accounts Bombay is given as the main destination. The international trade routes most frequently mentioned are from Nepal and Bangladesh to India and from India and Pakistan to the gulf countries.

**Daughters of Prostitutes**:  

History tells us that once the prostitutes prefer female child to son as the daughter can continue her mother’s profession. To obtain this profession the daughters of prostitute were trained from their childhood. The mother used to take special care for her health and beauty. Very often the mother choose the client, fix the meeting, collect the money from the customer; even the mother used to protect her daughter from oppression of brokers. The mother was reluctant to give her daughter in marriage. The daughter was learned that marriage, husband, children, love, family life was forbidden for them. Actually their mothers wanted to spend her old age being dependent upon their daughter.

But the most important fact is that, now-a-days the view has been changed. Now the sex workers do not want to drag their daughters in this flesh trade. They send their daughters to school. The girls of this area go to Rajendra Prasad Girls High School, Hindi Girls High School as their brothers also go to Hindi Boys High School,
Krishnamaya High School and so on. But exceptionally some girls willingly accept their mother’s profession.

There are some proud mother in red light area who have given their daughters in marriage. Those married girls are happy with their husband and relatives. The mothers also maintain good relation with their son-in-law and their relatives. All these reportings are available from the workers of DMSC as well as from the women of Khalpara red light area.

There may be some exaggeration in their statements but all the information suggest that women of this localities don’t want to accept their fate as inevitable destiny, rather they want to come out of this deplorable situation. They are ready to fight and ensure a dignified life of certainty to their daughters. With this end in view they try their best for their educations and other trainings for upliftment.

**Problems :**

Surveys reveal that the inmates of red light area are suffering from various problems. Some residents of Borapotti and few young boys of ward no. 6 frequently attack on pros-quarters. They suddenly make raids on them and harass the girls. They demand for money and forcefully collect *hapta*. The girls protest and complain to the police; but the police do not take any step. Police interference is the another vital problem in this area. Police also frequently raid in red light area; harass the girls as well as the customers. The women complain to the police for their problems. But the indifferences of government as well as the local administration is a major obstacle in this field.

**Contribution :**

If we look back to ancient past, we see the contribution and dedication of the prostitutes. They constructed temples, pillars, inns, wells, planted trees beside road, helped the poor people, pregnant mother and so on. These benevolent activities of the *ganikas* are not limited to the ancient period only. The workers of this profession, we get instance never ceased to show their generosity and benevolent attitude even in the later years. Similar instance may be collected from the history of the women of
Khalpara. Their religious feeling is very much strong. The survey reveals that the sex workers contributed a large amount as a donation for making the Hari Mandir (temple of god Hari) on Vivekananda road. But it is the misfortune of these sex workers and their children they are deprived from entering into the temple and taking prasad (food offering to a deity). It seems that the common people with common middleclass values do not favour their free access to this temple.

It is heard that in 1945-46, when the scattered sex workers of Siliguri did not start to live in an organized sector at Khalpara, they donated their income to arrange the function for bard-poet Mukunda Das.31

JALPAIGURI:

Situation of prostitution in Colonial Jalpaiguri:

It is already mentioned that Jalpaiguri had been the head quarters of the Raikot family since the second decade of 18th century. The Raikots celebrated some festivals with grandeur. In ‘Himalayan Journal’ Sir Joseph Dalton Hocker described the holi festival (festival of colours) at the royal palace of the Raikot. At evening on 8th March, 1849, Hocker entered the palace to celebrate holi. The fair on that occasion seems a big market to Hocker. The entire field was covered with canopy. The professional female singers and dancers were performing. Dust covering the field. Musicians accompanied the dancers. Hocker did not like all those but he observed the people encouraging the dancers. Hocker did not like all those but he observed the people encouraging the dancers.32

At the festival of Durga puja, the female dancers came to the royal palace from different parts of the country. Popularly the dancers were called Khemtawali, Gaurangini Dasi, Sailabala, Bodiujjomar - all those came from Natore. The ostad (teacher) also came with them. Khemtanaach33 was very popular at that time. The whole day the dancers passed sleeping as they had to perform the whole night. On the occasion of royal marriage the ‘Khemtaoyali’ namely Giribala, Binodini came from Rajsahi with musician Kanai Das. The prostitutes of Dinbazar came under the leadership of Khiroburi Kasabi who was also a prostitute.34 They also took part in singing and dancing. In 1917
‘Sangeet Samaj’ established at Jagadindradeb Raikot’s room in Raikotpara, formerly which was known as ‘Jalsaghar’. The baijis performed in Jalsaghar.

During the festival of Punnyah a group of khemtawalis came from Rangpur. The leaders of that group were Hemantabala Dharmami and Nagendrabala Khemtawali. The name of their ostad was Jadunath Bhowmik. Three khemtawalis namely Badiujjama, Subhashini, Golapbala came from Dinbahar. Ustad Taher Ali Md. played with them at the time of their performance.

A list of expenses of Raikots on Khemta dance and other amusement had been collected from the royal account book of Raikots. They paid 86 taka (Rs.) for transport, food and khemtawali who came from Rangpur. They purchased one bottle wine at 2 Rs. The azura of khemtawalis of Dinbazar was Rs. 20.

In 1354 (Bengali year) the total expenses for ‘Khemta’ dance was Rs. 300 out of Rs. 375 and 4 Ana which was the total Punnyah expenses.

The prostitutes started to come to Jalpaiguri from the period of Barnish Saheb. According to Abdur Rohim (the witness of case no. 16, 1903) the term ‘Khoriya’ means town. There were two Khoriyas, namely - Nagar Khoriya and Taluk Khoriya. The present prostitutes’ area was situated in Taluk Khoriya, the north western part of Dinbazar. At first the prostitutes lived in Kaiyapotti. King Jogendradeb (1865-78) established Kaiyapotti where the Marwari merchants settled down. Later it was shifted to Dinbazar.

Polygamy was practiced by the Raikots. In social marriage ‘Sahachari’ (female companion) was given with bride. An unmarried woman or ‘Sahachari’ is brought by the Raja and kept in the baren as his wife. No ceremony is performed in this marriage. They women were called ‘Kanya-patri’. Similarly a widow is brought by the Raja and kept her as his wife. The widows were called ‘Danguya’ at those days. After marriage in royal family, they became ‘Dasirani’. Dhaneswari, Poromesari, Nayaneswari were Dasirani of king Rajrajendredeb. Dasirani Duleswari’s nick name was Dhulfi. The Rajas and other members did not take any food touched by them except water. We find the reference of another lower graded women ‘Khaskirani’, who were paid Masohara. Sarbodeb Raikot was attracted by the beauty of Jamuna, who was a daughter of poor
milkman. Her father’s name was Baisagu and mother’s name was Masani. The king purchased Jamuna from the fair of Tetuliya at Rs. 10. After *gandharba* marriage Jamuna was regarded as ‘*Khaskirani*’ of Sarbodeb Raikot. Makarandadeb was their son. Dewan Durgadeb was the son of Raja Sarbodeb and Sarbeswari. It is mentionable here that Sarbeswari formerly was a dancer. As Durgadaeb was a dancer’s child, could not claim for throne. Bibosadi, mother of Rajrajendra deb, was unmarried. She was considered as ‘*Sahachari*’ or ‘*Khanki*’ or ‘*Dasi*’.

The Raikot used to keep women as ‘*Rakshita*’ (kept). Their children were considered as ‘*Kachhuya*’. ‘*Rakshitas*’ were given some property, land in exchange of sexual relation.

From 1857, after the establishment of British cantonment the British soldiers as well as civilian started to come to Jalpaiguri without their family. In such a mosquito, malaria and jungle oriented area like Jalpaiguri, the British employees felt lonely and hankered after entertainment and sexual flavour. Khan Chowdhuri Amanat Ullah stated the custom of women selling in Baikunthapur. Women were sent to Bhutan, Eastern Assam, South Bengal for this purpose. Women were sold at local fair and *haat* such as Jalpesh, Tetuliya. In every year at Banskata fair in Patgram (now in Bangladesh), the prostitutes used to gather. People indulged gambling and prostitution.

In 1932, a voluntary group of congress started movement to stop prostitution and other immoral activities under the leadership of Keshab Dutta, the famous peasant leader of Patgram. The fair organizing committee called the police. Police came and fired. One of the member of voluntary group had died.

Similarly Debananda Roy of Bhitorgarh should be remembered in this context. He was posted in a forest bit. In 1932, he left his job and engaged himself in congress movement. He used to ride on a pony. Debananda collected voluntary members from villages in order to stop prostitution, gambling etc.

Mr. H. B. Erorkar, the Superintendent of Bauxa Dooars Tea Company had established a *Kali Mandir* (temple of goddess Kali) at Hamiltonganj in the market area of Kalchini almost in the decade of thirties. In each year, at the time of *Kali puja*, the organizer
arranged a fair. *Baijinaach, Khemtanaach*, gambling all the source of amusements were available at that fair in *Diwali*. The garden remained closed for those days.⁴³

At Moraghat tea garden the poor labourers sold their daughter for money.⁴⁴ *‘Koina Becha’* prevailed in this district. The girls were sold at *‘Ek Kuri Taka’* i.e. Rs 20 may be the people are still carrying features of the whites begotten from biological meet of Indian female and white male. Historically, inter-racial relationships in India were, ……., essentially sexual in nature, involving, miscegenation between white man and Indian wife or *‘bibi’*.⁴⁵

The arkanthis playing the role of pimp in tea gardens. The arkanthis tried to allure the innocent tribal of Santalpargana and Chhotonagpur with false hope of prosperity and happy life in the tea producing places. How the picturesque description of the arkanthis created allurement in people’s mind about Bhutan, may be understood from a popular folk rhyme:

‘*Ayo baba gali delay*

*Chalu bhatu nikel jang*

*Bhotang raije kire bhatu*

*Nana kisim kam….‘*⁴⁶

Being rebuked by parents a girl was thinking that she would go to Bhutan with her elder brother-in-law because there was scope of various types of jobs (free translation). Next, we find that the girls in course of time has become popular for her physical beauty in her garden society. She has changed a lot in the new environment. This is nicely depicted in the following:

‘*Koriyati patar chhudi*

*Dharame slip saree*

*Gore hawai chappal*

*Dhada patar chhati chakar.*⁴⁷
It means, the black girl is slim in body and wearing a slippy (synthetic) shari, and putting on hawai slipper. She is narrow wasted and blosomy (free translation).

This shift in her appearance in fact hints the reality of tribal women’s ultimate fate of sexual exploitation which often takes place in the garden life. The women coolies were source of physical pleasure of the gardeners and the brokers as well. Specially birth of a beautiful girl in coolie basti (slum) considered as a curse.

The moral character of the gardeners and their managers was worst. The song composed by Hemanga Biswas how rudely they hit by throwing bottle in drunk:

‘Chirip chiripke bagichar chaa-haabat
Chorap khai pelale chichi.’

In this respect two parts from ‘Kulokahini’ by Ramkumar Vidyaratna is mentioned:

“Shouting as brandi brandi, shampen shampen the Sahebs entered into the assemble hall. Dinner was already served for gentlemen. Some of them joined dinner, others still drinking in standing posture, or kicked the servants to show up their strength, breaking the plates and glasses, throwing food elsewhere, shouting meaninglessly …….. Some of them slept on the chair or top of the table ……. Thus their Christmas party ended. Who had a little sense, they returned by calling bogi (horse carriage or any other vehicle).’

‘Kritartha is now fully young, beautiful. Nobody can’t help to love her. One day she was working and Saheb saw her. Having seen her Saheb tried to provoke Kritartha. But he did not get success …… Then Saheb ordered no one can stay unmarried among the coolies within garden and who would not obey his order should be punished …… Saheb advised his beloved sardar Radhu to get marry with Armoni’s daughter Kritartha. Saheb also promised to carry all the expenses including marriage. Radhu was said to keep Kritartha in his bunglow. After marriage Radhu would be given Rs. 20 as his award. Even Saheb bribed him with Rs. 10 when their conversation was going on.’

“The women of those colonies where the coolies lived, were treated as sex commodity by the Saheb. The birth of beautiful girl in colony seemed as a disaster to
their parents. As it has been already mentioned the accommodation of the coolies was very poor and in-hygienic and insecured as well. The *chaukidars* kept watch on them. The number of girls decreasing in the colonies as they were the victim of sexual exploitation of the gardeners. But the account of *chaukidars* was always correct and they used to say ‘*sab thik hai*’ i.e. everything was fine."⁴⁹

To protect the young generation from adultery and the others bad habits *Arya Natta Samaj* was established in Jalpaiguri town. In a conversation with Ananda Gopal Ghosh and the present writer, Ghosh has mentioned *Arya Natta Samaj* was booked for Star Theatre of Kolkata in 1928. But the booking was cancelled as the prostitutes were going to play there. Finally they performed at Beguntary near Sona Ullah School under awning.⁵⁰

Samaresh Majumder in his childhood memory namely ‘*Ghore Fera*’ (in Bengali), has referred Dinbazar red light area as ‘*Kharap Para*’. He reminisced, one day he entered that area through Kamarpara accompanied with his childhood friends. He observed at evening the girls were standing and waiting for something. Having seen the troop of young boys one of them called: ‘*Khokara, pockete taka thakle chole eso*’ (boys, if you have money in pockets, come ahead). The group of friends paddled their cycles fast and crossed the area.⁵¹

It has been documented that the prostitutes of Dinbazar contributed to India’s freedom movement. Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das and Mahatma Gandhi came to Jalpaiguri on 29th May, 1920 and 14th June, 1925 respectively. They addressed to the people of Jalpaiguri at the field of royal palace of *Raikots*. The prostitutes gave them one guinea (gold coin), two bunches of money and rice.⁵²

**Prostitution in Post - Colonial Jalpaiguri:**

According to D. S. P. Crime, Jalpaiguri, there are three *red light areas* in this district - *Dinbajar at Jalpaiguri, Samajpara at Alipurduar and Mosolapotti at Falakata*.⁵³ Dinbazar is the busiest locality in Jalpaiguri town, in the Ward no. is 4 of the Jalpaiguri Municipality. Like any other border area, Dinbazar also faces the cross border trafficking and prostitution. Nearly one hundred sex workers are living in the narrow lane of
Dinbazar, which is known as Tinkunia More. Most of the prostitutes in Dinbazar are second generation prostitutes. The ratio of Child prostitute at Dinbazar is comparatively low to other brothels. Almost half of the workers at Dinbazar are within the age group of sixteen to eighteen years. Most interesting feature is that, BSF and police are major clients in this area. Nearly one fourth of the sex workers of Dinbazar, are suffering from gynaecological diseases. The picture of the brothels are as usual clumsy and narrow. Most of the houses are emaciated. There are also few two-storied old buildings. The owners of these buildings have given their houses in rent.

A list of house tax (last fifty years) paid by the owners of Dinbazar red light area is given here:\(^5\).

**Table No. 4:4**

Quarterly Outstanding List of Taxes of the Holdings at Dinbazar Red Light Area (up to March, 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>HOLDING NO</th>
<th>RS. QUARTERLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alokabala Dasi</td>
<td>1/218</td>
<td>500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiyabala Dasi</td>
<td>5/236</td>
<td>108.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonakibala Dasi</td>
<td>6/239</td>
<td>240.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usharani Dey</td>
<td>8/242</td>
<td>108.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anima Sarkar</td>
<td>10/246</td>
<td>218.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bela Das</td>
<td>12/241</td>
<td>64.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nilu Karmakar</td>
<td>14/217</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakuntala Das Pradhan</td>
<td>15/233</td>
<td>164.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manu Sarkar</td>
<td>17/235</td>
<td>116.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radharani Ghosh</td>
<td>16/232</td>
<td>57.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saraswati Saha</td>
<td>20/229</td>
<td>91.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hena Das</td>
<td>23/225</td>
<td>241.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumati Saha</td>
<td>20/A/229</td>
<td>59.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doli Roy</td>
<td>22/230</td>
<td>66.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case Study:

The survey by the present writer giving the details of Swapna Singh (40 years old) came from Changrabandha (in Cooch Behar). Her native land is Dinhata. Fallen in love with a Punjabi, she came to Dinbazar. Later her babu left Swapna with their son. Swapna has sent her son to Medinipur. She is to send Rs. 7000 in each month as her son has been studying at Royal Academy, a reputed English medium school. Swapna is carrying out prostitution from her rented house in Dinbazar. She did not make her own house.

Sadhana Ghosh (45 years old) and her mother Sandhya Ghosh (70 years) both are living in Dinbazar. Sandhya’s babu was Sambhu Ghosh. Sadhana is Sambhu’s daughter. They came from Falakata. For few years they stayed at Khalpara in Siliguri. Sadhana’s daughter is married and living at Ghogomali in Siliguri. She said her business is not going well, as the young girls attract the clients. She is suffering with her sick and old mother. They do not get any government and administrative help.

Mamata (30 years old) has come from Bakshirhat (Cooch Behar). According to her flying business is not prevailed in that area. She has referred the incidence of pimp murder in Dinbazar. A girl committed suicide at the house of Tiya masi. Pinky, a teenager hanged at the house of Saraswati’s house. No investigation was launched for this case. There was an evidence of murder of a police in red light area at Alipurduar.

Though the present counsellor of red light area, Jayprakash Sha (popularly known as potuya) said Bridhha-vata (old age allowance) for some old prostitutes is being started. Voter cards and ration cards issued for some women of red light area. Crimes like murder, theft, robbery are comparatively less in these brothels. At the mid of Baisakh (Bengali Month) the prostitutes collect fund and organize Kali puja. They celebrate Kartick puja delightfully.
Someone known as Bengi *masi* was very famous in Dinbazar. She had no issue. She left her profession and house. Now she is living at *Anukul Thakur’s Ashram* (hermitage) in Berhampur. Bengi *masi* was well known to all, as her name was mentioned repeatedly by different people from police station, Municipality and counsellor’s office during the survey was going on by the present scholar. Once, registration of the prostitutes to Jalpaiguri *Kotowali Thana* was mandatory.

Besides Dinbazar, a few pros-quarters are scattered adjacent to Jalpaiguri railway station. Flying business is also going on at the hotels, resorts of Jalpaiguri. Railway Junction Station in Alipurduar is considered as red light area. Prostitution is practiced in Falakata also.

**COOCH BEHAR :**

Cooch Behar was the only native state in Bengal. So its situation had some distinctive characteristic features in several aspects. The institution of *devdasi* in fact was patronized by the rulers of Cooch Behar and it is known that the Koch king Naranarayana while inaugurating the temple of Kamakhya in 1550 after its renovation, dedicated girls as *devdasis* to the temple. This indicates temple prostitution was practiced in Koch dynasty.

**Prostitution in Colonial Cooch Behar :**

In 1809, Dr. Bukanon Hamilton reached at the Kamtapur debris from Rangpur. He noticed a small brick built house near the famous ‘Volanather Dighi’ (pond). The pond is situated at *Shitolkuchi*. It was also popularly called ‘Haribola Haater Dighi’. It is heard that the house was a muslim construction. *Baiji Lalbai* lived at that house. She was patronized by the army commander of *Hussain Shah*. Probably the commander attacked Kamtapur from this place. Local people called Lalbai’s residence as *Bhulkabhulki*. Nearby market is also called Lalbazar.\(^{57}\)

Reba Roy, a communist worker had written, due to the famine in Rangpur (1350 BE), the girls from Singamari Devalay, Dojore and Kholarpur of Kathalbari union in Kurigram left their villages and adopted prostitution.\(^{58}\)
The view of Dr. K. D. Ghosh (the Officiating of Rangpur) was that: ‘It is possible for a Mohammedan prostitute to marry and enter the Zenanh again or to live with a man as his wife. …… A Hindu woman who goes astray once is never again received back into society nor is marriageable according to the Hindu Shastras (scriptures).’ It acted as a source of supply when widows were seduced from the Zenanahs and were compelled to take up the profession when left after being seduced.

How much Prostitution was pervasive in Cooch Behar, is reflected in the following data:

**Table No. 4:5**

List of Persons sold in Cooch Behar From 1256 to 1269 (in Bengali Calender):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Sale</th>
<th>Sellers</th>
<th>Sold Persons</th>
<th>Sold by Whom</th>
<th>Purchaser</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14th Aswin 1257.</td>
<td>Mutiya Noshya</td>
<td>Alta (15/16yrs Old).</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>Krishnamoni (Prostitute).</td>
<td>Naraianee Rs. 25.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Bhadra</td>
<td>Nalita of Behar</td>
<td>Nalita (Prostitute).</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Dhun</td>
<td>Naraianee Rs. 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st Ashar 1258</td>
<td>Hawda Noshya of Patakura of Capital Cooch Behar</td>
<td>4 yrs old</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Joumoni</td>
<td>(Prostitute)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15th Baisakh 1258</td>
<td>Pancham Bewa of Kaliburighat</td>
<td>22 yrs old</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Gauri</td>
<td>(Prostitute)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13th Bhadra 1258</td>
<td>Suryamoni of Deviganj</td>
<td>7 yrs old</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Besho</td>
<td>(Pimp)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month of Ashar 1269</td>
<td>Birendu Noshya of Patcura in Cooch Behar</td>
<td>11 yrs old</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>Chuni</td>
<td>(Prostitute)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28th Ashar 1269</td>
<td>Baji Md Noshya of Kharimala Khagrabari</td>
<td></td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>Suryamoni</td>
<td>(Prostitute)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11th Magh 1269</td>
<td>Nuji Nasya of Village Kuchni</td>
<td></td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>Tulsi</td>
<td>(Prostitute)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Swapan Kr. Roy, *Manush Kenabechar Bazar: Prachin Coochbeharer Haat in Bhowaniganj*

Bhowaneegunge was the Government registered market for selling and buying of men-women.
Table No. 4:6

LIST OF PERSONS SOLD TILL FALGOON 1270 B.S. IN HAT BHOWANEEGUNGE, NJI
BEHAR, DTD. JOYET (JAISHTHA, BENGALI MONTH) 1271 B.S.:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE OF SALE</th>
<th>NAMES OF PERSONS WHO SOLD, TOGETHER WITH THE NAMES OF THEIR SELLERS</th>
<th>NAME OF PURCHASERS AND THEIR RESIDENCE</th>
<th>PRICE</th>
<th>NARAIHEE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B.S. CHEYT 1270.</td>
<td>Dulee Noshya, of Fusaldanga, sold his Wife, Mussamat Gool.</td>
<td>Gonesh, Prostitute of Behar.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4TH JOYET 1271.</td>
<td>Fuleth Noshya, of Bhowaneegunge, sold his wife, Mussamut Beelatee.</td>
<td>Rajeshury, Ditto.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6TH JOYET 1271.</td>
<td>Baharoo Noshya, of Naka Shib Baree, Hat Bhowaneegung, sold his wife, Mussamut Pagbealias Manjun.</td>
<td>Bhendee, Ditto.</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9TH JOYET 1271.</td>
<td>Kadir Noshya and his wife Hebo Bewa of Abootera, sold their daughter Kanchee.</td>
<td>Vookhutre, Ditto.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGISTER NUMBER</td>
<td>DATE OF REGISTRATION</td>
<td>NAME AND RESIDENCE OF SELLER</td>
<td>NAME AND RESIDENCE OF PURCHASER</td>
<td>REMARKS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>23rd Assar, 1256.</td>
<td>Kaltoo Noshya, at Present residing Behar.</td>
<td>Moonjure, Prostitute.</td>
<td>1 Bisho aged sixteen years, was sold by her husband at Narainee Rupees 20.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>25th Bysack, 1257.</td>
<td>Kanto Bewa of Goodam.</td>
<td>Pearee, Ditto.</td>
<td>1 Kanto Bewa aged sixteen years, sold herself according to the permission of her husband Bhool Noshya, at Narainee Rupees 45.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Father/Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
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<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>27th Bhadro, 1257.</td>
<td>Akil Noshya, Of Jebra Baree, Kawali Doho.</td>
<td>6 or 7 yrs</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>14th Assin, 1257.</td>
<td>Mutea Noshya.</td>
<td>15 or 16 yrs</td>
<td>Husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>15th Assin, 1257.</td>
<td>Doolal Dass Of Davagooree.</td>
<td>7 yrs</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>15th Bysak, 1258.</td>
<td>Puncham Bewa of Kala Burear Ghat.</td>
<td>22 yrs</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>15th Srabun, 1258.</td>
<td>Prem Kumar Bewa of Behar.</td>
<td>7 or 8 yrs</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>19th Srabun, 1258.</td>
<td>Haoranee Bewa of Borai Baree.</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
<td>Ditto.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Name and Location</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>13th Bhadro 1258.</td>
<td>Soorjomonee of Debigunge.</td>
<td>Besur Ditto. 1 A mother sold her son aged seven years at Narainee Rupees 15.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>17th Bhadro 1258.</td>
<td>Sodaram Dass of Bularampur.</td>
<td>Dhako Ditto. 1 Phoot aged five years was sold by her father at Narainee Rupees 12.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>24th Magh 1258.</td>
<td>Nassir Mahomed of Chilakhane.</td>
<td>Doorga Ditto. 1 Chuk aged twelve years was sold by her husband at Narainee Rupees 22.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>10th Assin 1259.</td>
<td>Keta Noshya of Moamaree.</td>
<td>Bhote Ditto. 1 Deb aged seventeen years was sold by her husband at Narainee Rupees 16.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>7th Cheyt 1259.</td>
<td>Mungloo Noshya of Moamaree.</td>
<td>Pano Ditto. 1 Dhunee was sold by her father at the age of twelve years at Narainee Rupees 24.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53.</td>
<td>29th Falgoon 1260.</td>
<td>Pheka Noshya of Singeemaree.</td>
<td>Neela Ditto. 1 Joina aged eighteen years was sold by her husband at Narainee Rupees 15.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>9th Bysak 1261.</td>
<td>Jatree Bewa of Khagraboraee.</td>
<td>Panmonee Ditto. 1 sold herself at Narainee Rupees 16.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Father's Name</td>
<td>Sale Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>18th Srabun 1261.</td>
<td>Hodu Noshya of Junglea Kootee.</td>
<td>Auntessuree Ditto.</td>
<td>1 Koch aged eight years was sold by her father at Narainee Rupees 15.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>21st Poos 1261.</td>
<td>Jhusoo Noshya of Khurimala Khagrabaree.</td>
<td>Pudum Monee. Ditto</td>
<td>1 Hatooranee aged sixteen years was sold by her husbnd at Narainee Rupees 40.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>21st Assin 1262.</td>
<td>Bhendu Noshya of Atarokota.</td>
<td>Chumpun Ditto.</td>
<td>1 Sreenash aged eight years was sold by her father at Narainee Rupees 19-8.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>21st Assar 1262.</td>
<td>Haoda Noshya of Patakoora.</td>
<td>Joymonee Ditto.</td>
<td>1 Khundororee aged four years was sold by her father at Narainee Rupees 20.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.</td>
<td>21st Assar 1262.</td>
<td>Nalatoo Noshya of Behar.</td>
<td>Bhagya Ditto.</td>
<td>1 Kootanee aged sixteen years was sold by her husband at Narainee Rupees 40.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1st Joyet 1264.</td>
<td>Dhor Mohamed of Deenbat.</td>
<td>Parbutty Ditto.</td>
<td>1 Nobanee aged eleven years was sold by her husband at Narainee Rupees 25.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49.</td>
<td>6th Magh 1266.</td>
<td>Nujee Noshya of Ghoogomaree.</td>
<td>Rookhinee Ditto.</td>
<td>1 Phoolmutee was sold by her husband at the age of 15 years at Narainee Rupees 35.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Name of Person</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72.</td>
<td>4th Falgun</td>
<td>Shona Noshya</td>
<td>Ditto, Ditto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1266.</td>
<td>of Boropukhihaga</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>19th Srabun</td>
<td>Gookool Noshya</td>
<td>Dhakoo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1268.</td>
<td>of Khubeneala Kagrabaree.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ditto, Ditto</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Assar,1269</td>
<td>Birendoo Noshya</td>
<td>Choonee Ditto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>of Patakoora</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>28th Assar</td>
<td>Bazee Mohamed Noshya</td>
<td>Soorjomoni Ditto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1269.</td>
<td>of Khurimala Khagrabaree.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>15th Kartic</td>
<td>Ghenghur Noshya</td>
<td>Shona Ditto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1269.</td>
<td>of Kotabaree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>11th Magh</td>
<td>Nujee Noshya</td>
<td>Tulsi, Ditto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1269.</td>
<td>of Koochnee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>12th Srabun</td>
<td>Kulee Noshya</td>
<td>Chundun Ditto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1270.</td>
<td>of Ghoramara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>16th Bhadro</td>
<td>Kandoora Noshya</td>
<td>Alta, Ditto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1270.</td>
<td>of Alta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If we go through the above mentioned tables minutely, we can see that almost all the purchasers were either prostitute or pimp. The sellers of the women were their near relatives either parents or husband.

We get a clear proof of transaction between the seller and purchaser often through the mediation of the brokers. For our clear understanding one such evidence of agreement is reproduced here.

TRANSLATION OF A BILL OF SALE OF A FEMALE CHILD:

Ganghonee Bewah, village Lotamookh, at present residing at Chomar Poltea Pergunnah Hajo, do write this bound of assignment of my daughter in 1771 B.S to the effect that on receiving Rupees 20 from Mussamut Sona Nultee of Nuttallah of the same Pergunnah, I give up my daughter Roho to her who will remain with her according to her wishes and custom of the country. To this I have no objection if I make any it will be entirely false. Sona Nauttee says that I voluntarily adopt this girl as daughter. I will give her no inconvenience or trouble. She will remain with me and behave according to our profession and to this I have no objection and therefore I voluntarily retain her.

Witness

Debakur Surmah Bur Dearee

Joymut

Dhiroo Coach
As prostitution was going on from the long past, the reference of venereal disease is mentioned in the Medical Report of Cooch Behar:\(^{66}\):

The Report is submitted by Dr. A. D. Mackinnon who filled the post of Civil Surgeon with effect from 15th Sept, 1893……….

..........Syphilitic diseases are, I regret to observe, on the increase.

The total number of outdoor syphilitic patients was 190 and 232 in the year of 1892-93 and 1893-94 respectively. On the other hand the figure of indoor patients was 16 and 26 in between 1892-93 and 1893-94 respectively. Eight patients became cured and nine were relieved. The number of discharged syphilitic patients was eight. An analysis of the table in the Appendix A reveals that the total number of syphilitic patients attended the hospital was 206 (190+16) in 1892-93 and 258 (232+26) in 1893-94. So large number of people came to be affected with VD.

**Prostitution in Post - Colonial Cooch Behar**:

At present the red light area in Cooch Behar town situated at Kalabagan. The area is apart from the main heart of the town. New Cooch Behar railway station is close to the red light area. The trafficked victims from Assam, Barobisha, Jorai, Tripura, Agartala are easily bought to Kalabagan.
Another important red light area in this district is situated at **Changrabandha**, which is very near to the border of Bangladesh. The area is known for Indo-Bangladesh cross border trade. Everything including women and girls are used in cross border trade. Changrabandha is surrounded by Maynaguri, Alipurduar, Mathabhanga. It is located at 76 kms away from Siliguri. A large number of sex workers of Changrabandha come from Bangladesh and a huge number of such girls have been trafficked, lured by either promises of jobs or marriage.

In the red light areas of Cooch Behar district the majority of the sex workers are teenagers. Amongst the prostitutes 88% are below the age group of 18 years. BSF and police are the major clients of the prostitutes. At the festival of ‘Raasmela’ (the famous fair of Cooch Behar), the clients from outside come to visit them.

**MALDAH / MALDA :**

Nihar Ranjan Ray had described how the aristocrat society of Gaurbanga drowned into women connection. The damsels of royal family made sexual relation with brahmin employees and servants shamelessly. Biswanath Joarder referred the ceremony of ‘Vairab Chakra’ organized by Ballal Sen in Gauda.67 The prostitutes and the women belonged to lower community participated in that ceremony.

After the possession of Gaur, Mughal Badsah Humayun spend leisure hours in Gaur. And most of the time he was accompanied by the prostitutes. Those prostitutes entertained Badsah by dancing and singing.

**Samsuddin** was attracted by the beauty of a young widow, who lived at the village Brazajogini, near Subarnagram. The woman belonged to a Brahmin family. Samsuddin forcefully abducted her. This incident went against the duty of a king. The hindu Foujder appealed for her release. Badsah (king) declared, if a brahman could marry her, he would release the lady. Otherwise Badsah himself marry her. Finally the woman was married to Badsah. She came to known as **Fulmati Begum**. After his second marriage, Samsuddin confined his first wife and children into the fort at Pandua. Samsuddin’s first Begum (wife) scolded Fulmati as veshya (prostitute).68
In *Saptasati* by Gobardhan Acharya (shloka 133), we get reference of *Hattabilasini* in Gaur. The *sloka* (hymn) is:

‘*Mrigamoder utpotti-sthan aranya*

*Kunkumotto choliya jay krishoker batite he hattabilasini,*

*Tumi eka pourojoner sorboswo.*

The Bengali translation is done by Sri Jahnabi Chakraborty. It means, wine get in forest…….. the *Hattabilasini* i.e. ‘market-prostitute’ attracts all the attention of the people of town (free translation). The last line indicates the rigorous practice of prostitution in urban life.

There are places Miragram and Mirapara in jurisdiction of Manikchak police station. The J. L. Nos. are 65 and 73 respectively. Previously that locality called chakla village, where resided some Amarnath Nayratna. His young and beautiful wife was Amrita. Sultan Samsuddin Yusuf Shah took away Amrita in his *baijimahal* (place of dancers). He named her *Mirabai* and gifted Chakla village. From then Chakla came to known as Mira Taluk. In later, Mira Taluk was divided into Miragram and Mirapara to make revenue collection easier.

There is a mosque called Loton at the road side of Mahadipur in Gaur. The rumour is that, the mosque is named after *Loton, a dancer*. On the other hand, Dr. Blokh opined, when the light reflected on the gilded design of the brick-mosque, it looked like a dancing woman. That was why the mosque called Loton, nothing else.

F. I. Alexander, officiating Magistrate of Malda observed that the fact that Muslim prostitutes were few in number was due to the fact:

‘that a Mohammedan woman who takes to prostitution does not loose her own community in the way a Hindu woman who follows that profession does. The Mohammedan prostitute can be restored to her caste and even marry. The Hindu prostitute after taking such course of life becomes an outcast and can never on any account be received again into her former family and caste‘.
Prostitution in Colonial Maldah:

On March, 1892, ‘Bamabodhini Patrika’ published a news with the title ‘Kapat Sannyasini’ (fraud nun) should be mentioned here. According to the news, a woman namely Giribala trafficked three women into Kolkata from Pandua. In disguise of a nun, she convinced those ladies to take away for ‘Srikhetra’ (pilgrim) after having the sacred bath in Ganges. The wicked woman had the intention to send the ladies in Coolie Patty. But all her efforts failed. She was arrested and send to prison.

On 1st Aswin in 1334 (in Bengalee calendar), the retired Deputy Magistrate of Maldah, Girishchandra Nag, published his autobiography ‘Deputir Jibon’ (life of Deputy). The references of prostitutes from his autobiography (in Bengali), is trying to describe as follows:

Girishchandra Nag arrived in Malda on September, 1894 with full family. He was posted as the Road Cess Dy. Collector and Official Vice Chairman of District Board. He was given the charge both of Foujdarı (police) and Excise Department. J. C. Price, the I. C. S. was the Collector at that time. Mr. Price was in judicial separation with his wife. His moral character was not such good. He had a kept ‘Nistarini’. Some people used to bribe Collector by sending gifts to Nistarini. Basanti, sister of Nistarini, was also a kept of a Muslim Sub-Deputy. During that period, moral character of Maldah was sinful. The officers, lawyers used to go to brothels and maintained good contact with their kepts. Prostitutes lived at elite locality.

One prostitute, namely Nistarini, was trying to make relation with Girishchandra. Sahadeb paare, was the peon of Vice Chairman. Sahadeb used to take bath in river. On his way, Sahadeb was introduced by Nistarini. One day Nistarini met him and told her desire. She sent invitation for Girishchandra through the peon. Sahadeb did not dare to tell the message to Girishchandra, but casually told Sharat, wife of Girishchandra.

Girischandra always ignored Nistarini. For his ignorance Nistarini made a plan to take revenge. One night, some officers gathered at Nistarini’s house. Suddenly Mr. Price arrived. Nistarini sent Mr. Price in another room. She announced Deputy Girishchandra came at her place and requested other guests to leave. Nistarini got fun from that
incidence and told the entire story to her sister Basanti. Basanti also told the story to her permanent client, the Sub-Deputy Collector. Incidentally, next day, Sub-Deputy Collector disclosed the fact to Girishchandra infront of all their friends. Having heard that, all of them laughed over it.

A heart-touching incident is mentioned by Girishchandra, when he left Maldah, it was in 1896. It is already said that prostitutes lived within *bhadropally* (elite society). Girishchandra lived at a two-storied building beside the main road. The owner of that house was an old woman. Her name was **Panchami Boshtomi**. She was a kept of a rich businessman, who donated her few houses in the town and other properties. Panchami had a daughter, who was also a kept of rich people. Panchami, aged nearly fifty five or sixty. She did not expense much on herself. She had four golden *bau* (bangle) in her hand. Panchami always donated money for good deed.

Panchami assisted in the household of officers. She spent her time in gossiping with their wives and children. Once, Sharat (wife of Girishchandra) felt sick. Panchami looked after her as a nurse. She was always there with Sharat as her friend or maid. She never took food outside of her own house. To take care of Sharat, she also spent night at their house. Panchami loved to Bimal, who was the son of Girishbabu. Bimal was seen at her lap or playing with Panchami. She pampered Bimal. To make fun Panchami used to introducing Bimal as her husband and in that way she connected relationship with Girishchandra and his family.

At the time of their departure, Panchami was waiting at steamer *ghat* with lots of gifts like mangoes, sweets etc. Having seen them Panchami cried loudly. She took Bimal at her lap and started to say, ‘where are you taking away my husband? I don’t leave him’. It caused late to start their journey. After a long efforts, she left Bimal. Steamer started, Panchami was still crying, standing at *ghat* (bank of river).

Prostitution was the open secret in the fairs of Maldah district. At the fair of Manikora in Maldah, people enjoyed to drink *hariya* (local wine). *Ramkelimela* was the most important festival in Maldah. It is held in the ruins of Gaur near the Sona Mosjid (mosque). It begins on the 1st *Jyesth* (Bengali Month), lasting for four to five days. The
fair is largely resorted to for purposes of business by people from all parts of the district and particularly by the Deshis (indigenous) and Rajbanshis who profess Chaitanya’s doctrine. Traders come not only from different parts of West Bengal but also from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Cattle and all sorts of articles are on sale, the most noticeable of the later being the Jangipur blankets from Murshidabad. The business done is calculated at sums amounting to Rs. 2,00,000 and the daily attendance at about 8,000.74

One of the most important features and attraction of Ramkeli Mela was the Baishnavis. Baishnavis, the loose morality of whose sect is separated by a very slight line from the utter negation of feminine morality which constitutes prostitution, a line of separation which is in most cases easily and imperceptibly overstepped.

In a detail study, it is a popular religion of Bengal. Vaishnavas were devotees of lord Krishna. The Government records in West Bengal State Archives have identified vaishnavas as:

“Having access to the interior of Hindu houses they often enticed women mostly widow or even unmarried out of the house. They ultimately landed up in the bazzar (market). This form of practice in this religion brings male and female devotees closer to each other. Regular house-holders could practice this religion. The male mendicants or ‘bairagis’ were called ‘Babajis’ and the female mendicants or ‘Bostomis’ are called ‘Matajis’. Though the house-holder vaisnavites are ordinary devotees, much can be said against the mendicants. If … proper inquiries be made, it may appear that they have in their society many ex-convicts, criminals who have eluded the pursuit of the police, and persons who have been ex-communicated by their castemen for unholy love making.75

The District Magistrate of Murshidabad observed that Vaishnavism was the only form of Hinduism, which was open to outcast and high castes alike.

Bhugwan Chandra Bose, Deputy Magistrate of Brahman Bariah noted that “bad and outcast women of all castes are received in akrar temples of Vishnu and converted to vaishnavism, and then from the moment of such admission a male vyragi is assigned to
each of them. The original intention of this institution was a righteous one namely, the reclamation of the lost ship but it has since been distorted.76

Official views, therefore, held that vaishnavism and prostitution were complementary to each other. The prostitutes used it as a religious cloak, but the positive side of the religious practice had been overlooked. Religion and caste was no bar for entry into this religious sect. A large number of the vaishnav mendicants at Nabadwip and other resorts of pilgrimage were undoubtedly hailed from retired members of prostitute class. They had to pay a small fee to be enrolled in the sect.

Kaliprasanna Singha in ‘Hutum Penchar Naksha’ (in Bengali), noted that the gossains (the gurus or the teachers) made disciples from low castes and prostitutes alike. The extract (given below) from this book gives a more or less, clear picture about prostitute - vaishnavi nexus.

‘...Sudurachari byektio bhagbat-bhakt hoileo sadhu padabachch hon-e kotha satya; kintu je sakol patita tahader nirlajja britti chalaitche, diksha grahanante pesha tyag kore na tahadigoke sishya kora je kotodur sangato taha bujhite ki bilamba hoi? Kintu boroi akhyeper bishoy, probhura ihadigoke sishya koriya probhuto ortho uparjon koren.’

The above extract means, it is true that, a very wicked person is considered a good man if he is a God worshipper. But it is difficult to understand why prostitute who has not given up her profession even after an initiation? It is a matter of great sorrow, that the preceptors (the gurus) make a great monetary profit through these disciples (free translation).

Deputy Girishchandra had mentioned the custom of Kanthibadol77 (exchange of chain) in Ramkeli Mela. The vaishnav selected vaishnawi and paid Rs. 1.

In course of time prostitution became the inseparable part of the society. Maldah district imported ‘Babu-culture’ from Kolkata. Rangmahal, baijinaach, prostitution etc. were scattered everywhere. Prostitutes of Maldah town used to go to B. De hall (theatre) to see drama. There was separate seats for the prostitutes.78 Venereal disease also spread out.
Prostitution in Post-Colnial Maldah:

The red light area in Maldah town, located at Hansagiri Lane. The brothels extend from the northern part of Gosaituli to Indranath Chowdhuri Lane. The brothels are very consisting. The trend of flying sex business is going on in Malda town. According to the media reports the hotels across the National Highway of 34 are indulging to the sex business. The women who are engaged in sex business come from Kolkata and different districts of North Bengal to these hotels. On the basis of survey report of the NGOs working for sex workers, the inmates of the brothels at Hansagiri Lane are very poor. They are suffering from poverty. As a result, comparatively the young girls of that area, are inclined to move into flying sex business.

DINAJPUR:

The Ramcharita speaks of youthful heavenly courtesans (called as devavaravanita) who were dancers. The existence of courtesans is also testified by V. 9 of the Edilpur copper plate inscription of Kesavasena and verse 10 of the Calcutta Sahitya Parisat inscription. The village bearing the name Amati located to south of Itahar police station in the district of North Dinajpur, has aroused much curiosity among the scholars. The scholars are advocating to identify Amati with the ancient Ramavati, which was established by the Pala king Rampala. N. R. Ray, has given his view that the ancient Ramavati and Ramauti mentioned in the ‘Ain - I - Akbari’ are identical.79

A.C Chakraborty is in favour of identifying Ramavati, the capital of Rampala with Amati village, two miles east of Mahananda in the north of Malda district, but not within Dinajpur.80

To find out the history of Dhaladighi (pond), the name of king Koykaus came out. Dhaladighi was located near Debkot. We find the reference of Debkot in the Bangarh copper plate. Previously the region was called kotiborsho. After the muslim occupation, it is known as Debkot, according to Nihar Ranjan Ray. King Koykaus was the son of Sultan Giyasuddin. Koykaus was notorious for his lasciviousness. Not only that he was drunkard and addicted to women.
Prostitution in Colonial Dinajpur:

We get the reference of Debi Singh in previous chapter. He was playing the role of an agent, who supplying women to the British Indigo planters. The nilkuthi (indigo factory) of Mandovil at Dinajpur sadar was the lock up for trafficked and sacked ladies. The ‘Angana khoyar’ (women shed or pound) was made for amusement of Mandovil Saheb.81

To protest that vulgarity Thurrom Sardar, Bairjanarayan Barman, Rajib Mandal, Huna Sardar, Kriparam Sarkar, Ramnarayan Mandal and many others attacked on the indigo factories and the office of British East India Company.82

The naming of the river ciramata (srimati) in the district of North Dinajpur is also carrying a history. This small river has no vibrant flow. Its origin is from Bangladesh, ultimately empties in Mahananda. It is said that the river has evolved in connection with a beautiful dancing girl Srimati, in a village from where the river originates. The prince of Patirajpur, near Kaliyaganj, fell in love with Srimati. He dug out a canal from the stream upto Mahananda with the purpose of making easy way to the village of his beloved from his palace. The prince one day came in a boat and married the dancing girl in a temple of Mahakal Bhairava. But the news of this marriage somehow reached the king. The prince was arrested and brought to the palace. Under the instruction of the king the girl was paid with a ghastly penalty for her audacious dream of getting the prince as her husband. She was tied to the boat and drowned alive in the water of the river. Later when the prince became the ruler, he named the canal as Srimati to commemorate his love. The village also came to be known by the name of Patirajpur i.e. the village of the lord of Srimati. The name Srimati is changed into Ciramati in colloquial tongue. Both these tales probably are not too old.83

A specific information regarding the prevalence of devdasi system in this region is available from Bangarh stone inscription of the time of Nayapala which is now in the custody of Balurghat College Museum. The village Bangarh is regarded as the same as the ancient city of Kotivarsa also called Banpura i.e. the city or capital of King Bana.
The village is situated about one mile to the North of the Gangarampur police station in the district of present South Dinajpur.

As townships and cities arose along the trade routes in northern India, internal and maritime trade flourished in these, and towns and cities became centres where courtesans plied their trade and attracted money from travellers, merchants, soldiers and men of various traders. Such a place called Bandor emerged in North Dinajpur, near Raiganj.

There is a village called Bindol, near about 23 to 24 km far from Raiganj. A terracotta brick temple is found in that village. The temple is being seen from the childhood of some aged local residents of Bindol. The temple is known as Vairabi. The village was in a very prosperous condition at a certain period. The aged local people said, a few prostitutes lived in Bindol, which indicates the village was truly much prosperous. It was a rumour, they heard from their ancestors.

During the Tolabati Movement, the zamindars called prostitutes in the local haat in order to violate the chastity of the peasants. It is described that, the prostitutes made their own tent in the local markets in Lahiri hat, Patiraj hat, Harirampur hat, Fulbari hat in Dinajpur district. It was a convenient time for the prostitutes to earn money from the fairs, organized annually in Nawabganj, Parvatipur, Bochaganj and various other places in the district of Dinajpur. To stop prostitution and gambling in fairs, several movements launched. Few of those movements were partially successful.

In the year of 1872, British Government commenced a survey in all over India to find out the number of women involved in prostitution. According to the survey report it comes out that, the poor people of Dinajpur used to sell their daughters to the prostitute on the basis of proper procedure, giving their signature on stamped paper. This practice was called ‘Kone Bechaya Khaoa’.

‘Mayabandhaki’ should be mentioned in this context. It was one kind of opera, prevalent in Krishnabati village and the adjacent areas of Dinajpur district. It describes how the poor family used to sell and mortgage their daughters in condition of severe poverty. Some of the interesting characters of this opera are - Rangiya, Dhala, Gheru
Gheru, Kerkera, Petpaku, Mosku, Nosku etc. Kiran, one of the character of the opera, saying:

‘Swami (husband) tomra kemon manchhi

Mayatok (woman) bonaisen swami jinis bondhoki

Bako juge nai suni mui

Noya noya kotha

Mayatok bondhoki thuiya swami

Ke chhechhe seba.’

It describes the incident where the husband mortgaged his wife and spending a relaxed life (free translation).

Poor mothers herself recruit their daughters into prostitution. Girls from Dinajpur as well as from Jashohor, Netrakona, Faridpur were taken to appoint into prostitution.

The oppressive landlords, jotdars treated the peasant women as prostitute. They fixed the schedule in which night whose wife stayed with them. The affluent persons purchased the chastity of the village women. They could marry more than one. Those ill-fated women are called as ‘Veeti Pakano Bete Chhaoa’. They were appointed to serve the outsiders, visitors. The dhenas (unmarried man) were attracted by the ladies and gathered in those honeycomb.

From the long past of history, we have seen and heard about the dedication, sacrifice and contribution of the women belong to the community of prostitute. They constructed temples, roads, wells, planted trees etc. In this respect it will be not irrelevant if we mention the name of a professional prostitute of Balurghat in South Dinajpur district, Sarala Sundari, who donated her all savings in Swadeshi Movement of India.
Prostitution in Post-Colonial Dinajpur:

The largest red light area in Dinajpur district is situated at Islampur (North Dinajpur). The locality is called Champabag. The activists working in Bangladesh on the issue of women trafficking have reported that the Bangladesh border is not open but quite easy to cross even without the proper papers. The border areas in Dinajpur like Hili, Tapan are used as land crossings for women being trafficked for prostitution from Bangladesh to India. The practice of prostitution in Dinajpur district has been changed in course of time. The women who are engaged in this profession do not have any interest to confine themselves into red light area; rather they are shifting to flying sex business. The hotels, dhawas (Lodging and fooding arrangement besides High Ways), guest houses, line hotels, lodges in this district encouraging them to operate sex business from those shelters.
NOTES & REFERENCES:

2. Ibid., p. 8.
8. Ibid.
9. Interview with some sex workers of Khalpara, with Smt. Mithu Chakraborty, the Co-ordinator, DMSC, Siliguri on 10th September, 2006 in Siliguri.
10. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Bagchi, A., Social Situation of Women of North Bengal through the ages : Ancient and Early Medieval Period, Centre for Women Studies, University of North Bengal, 2007, p. 51.
18. Interview with Arbind Singh (School Teacher, Darjeeling Hindi High School), on 27.03.2014, in Darjeeling.

19. Lock Hospital: Sexually transmitted diseases which was known as venereal diseases (VD) remained a headache of the Imperial government became British troops stationed in India were often infected with the disease and became sick. In India where two third of officers and big number of army men were unmarried, it appeared impracticable to impose restrictions on the persons to visit prostitutes. The military authorities chose instead to target the prostitute and possibly as early as the 1790s, regimental brothels were established for the benefit of troops in which prostitutes were subjected regular medical check up. But early attempts were sporadic and even discontinued. But continued anxiety over drain of military power led to the re-introduction of regimental brothels on a more systematic basis in 1868, under the Contagious Disease Act.

20. Home Department, No. of Proceeding 112 - 114, Date of Proceeding 15th March, 1870.


22. Ibid., p. 194.

23. Political Department, Proceeding No. 2652, P. - D dated Darjeeling, the 28th August, 1916.


29. Interview with Smt. Saswati Sarkar, Superintendent of Central Excise and Service Tax, Panitanki, Darjeeling, on 27/11/2015, at her office.

31. Interview with Sri Bimal Paul (social worker and communist party worker of Siliguri), 13/07/2006 (according to Sri Paul, the famous social worker of Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti, Smt. Snehalata Chatterjee reminiscenced that incident which had been reported in ‘Basumati Patrika’).


33. Khemtanaach: Khemtanaach was a popular dance of West Bengal, which was in vogue almost thirty years or forty years ago. Presently, it is no more performed. This entertaining dance may also be called the rural version of the urban dance of baijis or professional dancers. Khemta dance used to take place in the courtyards of the houses of big zamindars or land lords. This form of dance was very popular during the celebration of births, marriages. It was also performed at festivals like Durga Puja or Holi.


36. Punnyah: It is the ceremomial rite for paying tribute and taxes to the king.


41. Ibid, p. 111.
44. Interview with Late Kalyani Dasgupta, (social worker and communist leader of Jalpaiguri), on 17.08.2008, at Raikatpara in Jalpaiguri.
47. Ibid., p. 137.
49. Tirkey, M., op. cit., p. 137.
50. Interview with Professor Ananda Gopal Ghosh, (Department of History, NBU) on 12.03.2008, at NBU.
53. Interview with D. S. P. of Jalpaiguri, on 22/04/2013 in Jalpaiguri.
54. Quarterly Outstanding List of Taxes, Jalpaiguri Municipality, (collected by the present writer on 13/05/2013 from Jalpaiguri Pourosabha).
55. Interview with the sex workers at Dinbazar in Jalpaiguri on 06/05/2013.
56. FIR NO. 1030, Date 19. 10. 2008, Alipurduar Police Station.
58. Mukherjee, K., Narimukti Andolon O Amra, NBA, Kolkata, 1993, p. 70.
59. Judicial (Judicial), October, 1872, NOs B 252 - 335.
60. Zenanah : In India and Iran zenanah means the part of the house for the selusion women. It is an urdu word.

62. Noshya : The Rajbanshi people who accepted Islam as their religion and fallen from their earlier (Hindu) religious status, commonly known as Noshya.

63. Narainee Rupee : Maharaj Naranarayan, the Cooch Behar king, introduced Narainee Rupee or coin. History written in Persian language refers Narainee coin. Narainee coins of Cooch Behar bear four different kinds of symbols. A symbolic dot (.) was inscribed at the bottom of ‘N’, the first letter of the name of king.

64. Bewa : The widow women are known as Bewa in Rajbanshi language.


67. Joarder, B., Purono Kolkata Anno Sanskriti, Digangan, New Delhi, 2009, p. 239.


71. Ibid., p. 350.

72. Judicial (Judicial), October, 1872, op. cit.


75. Judicial (Judicial), October, 1872, op. cit.

76. Ibid.

77. Kanthibadal : In Bengal Gandharva form of marriage was sometimes confused with vaishnava form of marriage prevalent in the said province by Kanthibadal and or exchange of garlands. It is a special form of marriage which is validated by the custom among the Bairagis.


86. Chowdhuri D., ‘Paschim Dinajpurer Lokonaty - Ekti Samiksha’ in *Madhuparni - Paschim Dinajpur Zilla Sankhya* (North and South Dinajpur combined), Balurghat, 1399 BE, p. 434.