CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Methodology
“Like any creative work, a Ph.D. thesis is a monologue with one’s own self as well as a dialogue with the reader. It is to see and analyse a phenomenon or phenomena that way one’s sees it and to make other’s realize that it could be seen by them too.”

- Anonymous.

I

Introducing the Phenomena

Public Health, History, Women’s studies all share an intellectual and albeit in different ways an activist or applied interest in prostitution or ‘sex work’ and this interests has been intensified amid concerns about the AIDS pandemic and global trafficking of women and children. These fields have also shared an evolution in the terminology from prostitution to sex work to most recently sexual networking and survival sex.¹

This thesis, entitled “A Social History of Disease and Prostitution in Bengal: From Syphilis to AIDS”, is a comparative and interdisciplinary study on the changing times, sexuality, prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases across a century, converging the three disciplines mentioned above, i.e., public health, history and women’s studies. The very title suggests that prostitutes and prostitution could be and have been associated with sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis and HIV&AIDS due to the very nature of the occupation and the vulnerability of the women who are living in prostitution. This work has tried to explore the relationships between STDs, sexuality and prostitution and what these relations mean to the women in prostitution in specific and people at large as well as their overall implications for issues of public health and disease control.

Sexuality could be interpreted in different ways - a necessity for reproduction, a socio-psychological way of communication, a mean to punish, an expression of power.

and so on. At the same time sexuality is not an entity that is independent of culture, society, and economy—it is both dynamic and time specific. To be precise, sexual dichotomy could be seen as private and public - personal and political-historic and ahistoric. Sexual commoditization becomes the lucrative economic arena from time to time exploiting the public and political aspects of sexuality through the market that is strangely dependent on intricate dynamics of private and personal aspects of sexuality, sexual imagination and fantasies in a patriarchal, capitalist civilization. Thus, sexuality finds it’s most lucrative market in various forms of prostitution in an ever-changing historical scenario. As the women in prostitution are treated as a commodity, and not a being with integrated body and mind, they become more vulnerable to violence in the exchange of monetary payment.

My M.Phil. dissertation, titled, “Interpreting Prostitution: Violence Commodified?” was a work on the nature, type, cause, source and impact of violence on the health of the prostitutes in Kolkata. Sexual violence is not considered to be any kind of violation as prostitutes are paid to be violated. Good health is crucial for prostitutes as ill health can lead to loss of income, expenditure on treatment, loss of regular customers, and indebtedness. Those lead to further ill health due to over work and inadequate nourishment as they attempt to regain their financial position. The study intended to develop a frame-work for understanding the construct of sexual violence within hetero-patriarchal and market oriented social and political-economic order with prostitution as an institution in which they all come together. The objectives were to identify the nature of violence faced by the prostitutes, as well as institutions and individuals inflicting violence on them taking the specific context of RLAs of Kolkata, West Bengal; get a sense of the prostitutes' perception of livelihood and well-being, as well as what they view as the means of improving their condition. The last objective led me to touch upon legalization as a means to putting an end to the violence and moving toward their perceived well-being.

This study brought forth the links of the women’s lives with the larger economic, political and cultural context of the times and gave birth to newer issues, questions and thoughts that demanded probing. As a methodology for doing so, it was thought that an enquiry of these issues at a point of time may not yield as much understanding of the complex phenomena as the additional insights that a comparative analysis across diverse contexts or across two periods of time. It was decided to study the
phenomena of prostitution and STDs in the contemporary times in West Bengal through a comparative study of the somewhat alike experience of syphilis in the late colonial Bengal.

Many have pointed to the past and contemporary public health approaches of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) as important precedents for the fight against AIDS.2 And indeed, there are significant similarities between AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) which go beyond the mere fact of sexual transmission. Like AIDS at the contemporary times, syphilis, for example in the colonial period, was both greatly feared and highly stigmatized. In the light of these analogues, the social history of efforts to control syphilis and other STDs may serve to inform our assessments of the current epidemic. But, at the same time history holds no one dimensional truth. Syphilis is not AIDS and AIDS is not syphilis. Therefore, the responses to the current epidemic would be shaped by the contemporary society, sciences, politics, and culture. Yet the history of disease does offer an important set of perspectives on present proposals and strategies. Moreover, history points to the range of factors that will need to be addressed if we are to create sensitive and effective policies.

The proposed thesis aims to find out these private-public, time specific-eternal dichotomies through the means of two sexual diseases- syphilis and AIDS –gaining prominence at the turn of two centuries, i.e. the crossroads between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries and the late twentieth and the early twenty first centuries. The work attempts to observe and analyze the interaction of these two diseases with prostitution at the above-mentioned periods.

The logic behind selecting these two specific periods is based on the assumption that these two particular periods observed certain remarkable resemblance as far as sexuality and prostitution are concerned. Both the eras witnessed a political, economic and societal transformation that in turn had it’s influence on society and culture and especially on health and sexual health. These two historical ages witnessed a rise in a moneyed class, economic disparities, a gradual emergence of an aggressive foreign culture, trade and commerce-be it colonial or neo-colonial (i.e. globalization), where the existence and sexual identity of individuals have come under thorough scrutiny

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through two landmarks diseases, i.e. syphilis in the late nineteenth century and AIDS in the late twentieth century.

However, the problem remains, defining or rather stamping a social category of women as prostitutes! This definition essentially depends on several grey zones that are interrelated and overlapped by socio-cultural and political-economic system of a particular society in a specific historical time-span. Whom could we call the prostitute? Could the woman functioning within the institution of bourgeois marriage for economic and social security/the woman getting into sexual transaction in return of some kind of favour/the girl student entertaining various forms of heterosexual dating with male partners (and at times in exchange of 'kind', if not cash)/the Devdasis and Baijis of pre-colonial India and geishas of Japan (for whom sexual services were considered one of the arts of entertainment) be called a prostitute? Does a woman, who enjoy sex with multiple male-partners purely for pleasure, to be called a prostitute? Or is it the attitude and sexual behavior of a male partner that makes a woman ‘feel like’ a prostitute?

Because of the global AIDS pandemic, ‘Prostitution’ has been the object of much research. Oxford Dictionary defines a prostitute as, “a person who takes part in sexual acts for payment”.3 While Collins Dictionary of Sociology offers quite a more elaborate and multidimensional interpretation of the term, the common usage limits itself as a practice involving sexual services for payment or other reward. Legalized definitions of prostitution are however, culturally and historically constructed, i.e., prostitution is not criminalized under all cultures and in all historical eras. In the societies where prostitution and related behaviours are criminalized, it is the prostitutes rather than the clients, whose behaviours are regulated, reflecting the double standards of society. The Marxist view perceives it as “an economic contract intrinsically equal to the practice of a man and woman contracting marriage primarily for economic reasons.”4 Marx drew comparison between the economic prostitution of the workers and the prostitutes. However, to the critics of this view, it essentially negates the sexual exploitation a woman faces in a patriarchal society just because she is a woman. But the question remains that provided the economic inequity exists even

in a matriarchy, would the exploitation and marginalization of women go? Traditional sociological studies on prostitution were conducted in the framework of deviance and crime. But contemporary studies are being conducted on the basis of work or occupation. Sociologists are increasingly acknowledging the accounts of prostitution given by prostitutes themselves, particularly who present it as part of the ‘sex trade’ or ‘sex industry’. It would not be a far-fetched assumption that calling a person prostitute depends on the gender s/he belongs to and if that gender holds the social and economic power in the hierarchy. Provided, a social system is matriarchal where women hold the economic power, then would it be possible that the men who entertain or satisfy womens’ sexual needs in return of money/reward/favour are sexually exploited or oppressed?

Naomi Wolf, in ‘The Beauty Myth’ mentions, Nigerian Wodaabes, among whom “the women hold economic power and the tribe is obsessed with male beauty, Wodaabe men spend hours together in elaborate make-up sessions and compete provocatively painted and brushed with swaying hips and seductive expressions in beauty contests judged by women”. In the given situation one witnesses the reversal of the object-subject dichotomy (i.e., men as subject and women as object) discussed by Simon De Beauvoir in ‘The Second Sex’. Like wise, among the Huli of Papua New Guinea, men are the epitome of beauty and that which is desired. As Holly Wardlow describes, “It is little boys hose cleanliness and physical appearance are carefully tended to by mothers...And during ritual celebrations, it is men-armed with mirrors and carefully inspecting one another’s appearances-who slick down their bodies with oil; paint their faces with bold yellow, black, and red paint; and don the long woven aprons that cover them in the front but provocatively provide glimpses of their thigh and gluteal muscles from the side.”

Since in the predominant Euro-American construction of gender it is the women who are the natural object of desire, it is of course the women who withhold, sell or bargain on the grounds of sexual exchange. A number of critics of this assumption

5 Ibid.
have asserted that prostitution has little to do with biologically based desire and everything to do with power. This is to imply that if women were the ones with economic and political power then they just might find themselves paying men for sex.

The fact that sex is intrinsically associated with power is reflected in the violent manifestations in the areas of sex and sexuality. Many men indulge in violent sexual behaviour not only in order to ‘prove’ their masculinity, but also to enjoy some perversion that they dare not practice with their life-partner or wife and there comes the need and demand for the prostitute women or effeminate men. In today’s world, women are gradually coming out as an equal in professional and in academic arena. This strongly goes against the heteropatriarchal hierarchy that gender socialization of masculinity has been associated with. In prostitution women could be seen as a body again and not as a competitor – it is indeed a great relief!

Some obvious queries could be raised that are essentially linked to prostitution-why masculine has to be patriarchal? Why the manifestation of sexuality in prostitution of modern times is predominated by the elements of ‘thenatica’ (from ‘thanatos’, meaning death and destruction) instead of ‘erotica’ from ‘eros’ (meaning love and pleasure creation) as described by some texts on sexuality in the ancient and pre colonial times in India and elsewhere?

To these queries, answers are partially given in bits and pieces by various scholars, theoretician and social scientists.

While researchers in international health have emphasized the prostitutes’ vulnerability to unprotected sex and the consequent implications for disease transmission, feminist literatures have been more concerned with whether prostitution should be conceptualized as indicating and reinforcing female subordination or, alternatively, whether it should be conceptualized as a potentially emancipatory practice that exposes, transgresses, and thus undermines the dominant discourses of gender and sexuality.

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9 See Chapter-II

II

Theorizing the Phenomena

Broadly, Feminist theories try to look beyond the general and legal definitions of prostitution and prostitutes. In relation to this three main theoretical schools have made substantial contribution in understanding sexuality, especially women’s sexuality and its constraints in a patriarchal society, i.e., Sigmund Freud along with Psychoanalytic Feminists, Simon De Beauvoir and Existentialist Schools of Feminism and finally, Kate Millet and the Radical Feminist school of thought. The prostitute as a sexual commodity where the revelation of gender politics is most obvious certainly occupies an important place in these schools of thoughts.

Sigmund Freud along with Psychoanalytic Schools of Feminism

Sigmund Freud’s theory of sexuality is a much debated and controversial one among his contemporaries and successive streams of scholars. In spite of many criticism, anybody interested in the area of sexuality cannot but engage with his theories, not just because he addressed the issues of sexuality—anal, oral sex, homosexuality—what were considered perversions and were previously taboo under the Victorian social order, but more because Freud has suggested through his analyses that all kinds of sexual ‘abnormality’ could be stages in development of what he recognized as ‘normal’ human sexuality.

To Freud gender is a product of sexual maturation. Because of the biological difference in sexual maturation, girls and boys end up showing different sexual traits. Children, as per his argument are ‘polymorphous perverse’ moves from perverse to normal hetero sexuality mainly through three stages ‘oral’ — during this stage infant receives pleasure from suckling his/her mother’s breast; ‘anal’— during this stage two to three year old infant enjoys controlling his/her expulsion of feces and in the third stage i.e. ‘phallic’, three to four years child discovers the pleasure potential in genital. At this time, the child either resolves or fails to resolve the so-called Oedipus and Castration complexes. At this age, overt sexuality starts and this latency in broken only at the time of puberty with resurgence of sexual impulses.
According to psychoanalytic doctrine, the transformation at puberty is a crucial juncture in a person’s psychosexual life that is marked by Oedipus (Freud has deliberately rejected the use of the term ‘Electra Complex’ used previously by Jung) and Castration complexes.\textsuperscript{11} These complexes are strongly associated with a child’s first love and sexual object – the mother. In case of boys the transformation is less complex. His first love object is his mother as she fed him and took care of him. With deeper insight in the relationship between his father and mother, the former becomes his rival as he starts desiring his mother, sexually. In his case, Freud analyses, “it is the discovery of the possibility of castration” (by father), it is precisely the boy’s narcissistic interest in his genitals – his interest in preserving his penis – which is turned round into a curtailing of his infantile sexuality\textsuperscript{12} – his mother as love object. Therefore, it could be interpreted after Freud, that it is the fear of castration that keeps the civilization going.

In case of girls, the Freudian construct proposes that the Oedipus and Castration complexes take a circuitous root. The transformation is centered on shifts in pleasure point from clitoris to vagina, from mother to father, from homosexuality to heterosexuality and finally from active to passive sexuality. In women, the main genital occurrence takes place in relation to clitoris. A girl, gradually acknowledges her castration, thus grows dissatisfied with clitoris giving up her phallic activity and other masculine traits, shifting to vaginal sexuality that is more related to reproductive role and hoping that someday she is going to get a penis. Another major change occurs when she takes her father as her love object finding her way to a feminine form of Oedipus complex. But in reality, the father becomes the inheritor of her relation to her mother, and later on it is not the father, but the mother who is replaced by a husband.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, bisexuality, as it is present in innermost core of human being as per Freud, is much more predominant in women than in men. In my M.Phil.work I have seen this phenomenon unfolding in the cases of women in prostitution at the Red Light areas (RLAs) of Kolkata. Through some of the case studies of the prostitutes in the RLAs of Kolkata, it came up that a few of the women in prostitution sometimes

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
perceive their relationships with their male clients as more of a job while relationships with their women counterparts are out of love and pleasure.\textsuperscript{14}

In the 1970s three feminist scholars namely, Betty Freudian, Shulamith Firestone and Kate Millet made Freud one common target of criticism, on the agenda, that Freud viewed women’s powerlessness and male-female inequity solely in terms of biological differences and not as an outcome of social inequality. In the “Feminine Mystique”, Freudian rejected Freud’s methodology on the ground that women, more than sexual freedom, need freedom to grow as a person. More so, Freud’s theory makes women believe that they are defective. Therefore, Freud should be rejected for making especially procreative sex as all of women’s existence. Unlike Freudian, Firestone likes Freud’s emphasis on sexuality but criticized him for his apolitical interpretation of female sexuality. Freud according to Firestone has failed to focus on power issues (Firestone, 1970). Millet, in “The Sexual Politics” resisting Freud’s biological determinism, pointed out that the concept of penis envy is an example of male egocentrism. Instead of celebrating the power hidden in women’s reproductive capacity; it was made into women’s desire to a pathetic attempt to posses a substitute for penis.\textsuperscript{15}

There are mainly, four lines of criticism of Freud in Psychoanalytic Feminism. The first has tried to do away with biological determinism; the second focuses on the pre-oedipal rather than on the oedipal stage; the third focuses on the strength rather than on the weakness of woman’s morality; the fourth reinterprets Oedipus complex, eroding the patriarchal connotation in it.\textsuperscript{16} Alfred Adler, Karen Horney and Clara Thompson present the first line of thought against biological determinism. Alfred Adler in “Understanding Human Nature” accepted the one and only biological aspect in the earlier stage of human development, i.e., the helplessness of an infant. The very existence of ‘Neurotic woman’ is a proof of woman’s oppressed situation under patriarchy because she has been frustrated at her quest for superiority by her creative


\textsuperscript{15} Millet, Kate. ‘Sexual Politics’. Great Britain: Sphere Books Ltd, 1971.

self. Privileged male for their own glory maintains all social institutions inclusive of laws, customs, and morals.17

Karen Horney emphasized on the role of a person's environment and not biology that plays the crucial part in his/her growth. Women's masculinity complex is not due to castration but due to the subordination that they face in the society - it is a quest for power.18

Clara Thompson, like Adler and Horney perceived process of human growth away from biology to the mastery over environment. If women are passive and they have a weaker ego that is because of the unequal male-female relationship in society where women are always expected to surrender. Therefore, to transform women's psychology, transformation of the ideas rooted in social, legal, cultural and political-economic set-ups are required and urgent.19

Adler, Horney and Thompson deviated from Freud on the following grounds. Primarily, they have spoken of women's psychoanalytic situation in a given social-political framework of male dominance. Secondly, they have offered not a dualistic, but a unitary theory of human development; finally they have analyzed that the concept of the self is individualistic and that it develops out of the interaction between nature and culture. There are many selves, many more than one universal normal male self and another universal, healthy female self.20

Dorothy Dinnerstein and Nancy Chodorow have emphasized on the pre-oedipal stage of psychosexual development rather than the Oedipus one to understand the construct of sexuality and why it results in patriarchal dominance. Like De Beauvoir, Dinnerstein and Chodorow have pointed out that the oppression of women originates mainly from single parenting or monopoly of mothering. Neither legal nor economic nor biological views discuss this issue as crucial. A woman can never be autonomous as long as she defines herself in terms of maternal rejection and at the same time is

unable to reject her completely.21 However, to Chodorow the difference between male and female lies in ‘how’ they are connected to their mother not in ‘how much’ they want to control her. Unlike Dinnerstein, she does not focus on anger of men and women against their infantile experience with whimsical female power in the figure of mother. Chodorow saw mothering basically as a “reductive locus of connectedness and intimacy” while Dinnerstein viewed mothering as a source of fear and rage. However, both the scholars have agreed on a point that in order to break down sexual division completely and to develop autonomous, mothering should be replaced by dual parenting.22

Carol Gilligan’s, “In a Different Voice”, mainly stands on challenging Freud’s notion that male are moral and women are immoral. She argues that both men and women have different concepts of morality. To Gilligan, women’s sense of morality is altruistic, self-sacrificial while considering the other selves equally as one’s own, but men’s sense of morality is more of an egocentric one and selfish in nature. Primarily because women look for approval as she feels she is vulnerable, and then she shifts from self-centeredness to other-centeredness, sacrificing her own self interests. And ultimately, she starts considering if her decision is going to affect others (Gilligan, 1982).23 In my discussion in the third chapter of this thesis one witness the family members of women in prostitution take advantage of this vulnerability.

Juliet Mitchell’s understanding of Freud’s theory points out that psychoanalysis is not all about “biology is destiny” but rather how the social being emerges from biological one. It is because Freud, according to Mitchell was not careful to mention that he was studying psychosexual nature of petite bourgeoisie in nineteenth century Vienna and therefore, it might not be universally applicable, anytime. However, his theory should be taken in essence and not by its features. Juliet, following Levi-Strauss’s work, points out, “incest taboo”, forbidding the sexual relations within family lead to interaction between other families therefore forming larger social organizations. This is based on exchange of people among biological families. To Levi-Strauss it is exchange of women among men. Conceptually, the moment women are exchanged

among men, men are also exchanged among women, but socially, as Mitchell adds on, that the fact that it is the men who are exchanging women, e.g., women changes her house and surname, accounts for patriarchal society. The law of exchange lies in resolution of the Oedipus complex. However, Mitchell analyses, men no longer need to exchange women to create a society. Therefore, the logic follows, since exchange is no longer necessary, the incest taboo is also unnecessary, thus the ban of this incest taboo causes the Oedipus complex to become more traumatic.\footnote{Mitchell, Juliet. ‘Psychoanalysis and Feminism’ New York: Vintage Books, 1974.}

Among the prostitutes, one could find out the bisexuality, as their relationship with the opposite-sex is of violence and pain. Psychoanalytic feminism provides the explanation of prostitutes’ marginalisation due to single parenting and also on this ground of morality-- any woman and especially a prostitute could be easily exploited as she suffers from the guilty complex of being immoral. Irrespective of the fact that she is ex-communicated from the rest of the society, her dutifulness to her family could only be an indication of her having an altruistic moral.

However, the Psychoanalytic school of thought fails to explain a woman’s and a prostitute’s place in a broader socio-economic frame-work, especially her existence as the ‘Other’ in a heteropatriarchal society that has been analyzed by Simon De Beauvoir.

\textbf{Simon De Beauvoir and Existentialist Schools of Feminism}

Without discussing Simon De Beauvoir and her ‘The Second Sex’ it is difficult to analyze and appreciate the feminist past, present and future, inspite of the grounds of criticism of her work based on over emphasis on ethnocentrism and the andocentric view, its idealism and lack of practical strategies for liberation.\footnote{Tong Rosemarie, ‘Feminist Thought: A Comparative Introduction’, U.S.A.: West view Press, 1989.}

Although Beauvoir developed her theory based on the existentialist line of thinking propagated by Sartre in ‘Being and Nothingness’, ‘Second Sex’ is her own brain child by all means. The care of human self could be divided into transcendent-self or observing ego and immanent self or observed ego. Sartre divided the observer of observed into two parts – “being for itself” (the moving conscious existence that man
shares with other humans) and "being in itself" (the constant material existence man shares with animal – plants – minerals). The third kind added by him is "Being for other". This is probably the most suitable for feminist analyses.

The quest for love is an attempt to be one with the 'other' at the same time physically and psychologically maintaining the 'otherness'. This, to Sartre, is impossible and will lead to mutual objectification. This exhaustive struggle to maintain subjectivity and freedom and at the same time desiring a relationship with the 'other' may lead to masochism. Through pain and suffering we try to identify with objectivity that the 'other' perceives us to be and more we do so more we become aware about our subjectivity, but demanding objectivity from the other at the same time. As we start looking at each other as an object, we get hold of the object only – the flesh and nothing more! 'Sadism' could be perceived as our attempt to reduce a subject to an object, but the moment we start getting surer of our success the object may turn to a subject, looking at the subject's eye and refusing to submit to the subject's will. 26

Simon De Beauvoir in her classical work 'The Second Sex', emphatically pointed out from the beginning, man has named himself the SELF and woman as the OTHER. If, ascending to existentialism, the Other is a threat to the Self, then woman is a threat to man and in order to eradicate this threat man has to subordinate woman to his will.

To her, neither biological, nor psychoanalytic nor Marxist point of View, has ever given any explanation for woman's otherness. Biological view sees the difference between man and woman rooted in reproductive roles, while psychoanalyses looks at woman as a creature who must strangle between her "Viriloid" and her "feminine" tendencies, the first expressed through clitorial eroticism, the Second through vaginal eroticism. To win this battle – to become normal she must transfer her love from a woman to a man. Civilization or relationships between man and woman, De Beauvoir argued, cannot be evenly explained as an outcome of suppressed sexual impulses. Freud's theory of women's castration complex fails to justify women's 'otherness' in society. On the other hand, Marxism sees the oppression rooted in class society and until capitalism is overthrown by class struggle – inequity in terms of class, race,

nation or sex will exist. But to De Beauvoir women are going to remain as oppressed in a capitalist as in a socialist society.\textsuperscript{27}

With the development of civilization, men developed the best way to control woman, through construction of myths. These myths serve two purposes- primarily this reflects, what man wants from woman is something that he lacks in himself; secondarily, it perceives women as a chameleon that could be altered. The saddest impact of the myth-making is that, women, internalize this mythical image as an accurate representation of womanhood.

Unlike Sartre, De Beauvoir specified social roles as the primary mechanism of self, or subject, used to control the other, or the object.

At the teenage when boys get introduced to violence through aggressiveness and competition, will to power develops, and it is just at this juncture that girls give up rough games.

For boys, De Beauvoir continues, "Violence is the authentic proof of each one’s loyalty to himself, to his passion, to his own will, radically to deny this will is to deny oneself any objective truth, it is to wall oneself up in an abstract subjectivity; anger or revolt that does not get into the muscles remains a figment of imagination".\textsuperscript{28} On the other hand, with puberty, with swelling of the breasts and with beginning of menstruation a girl is compelled to accept her body as sick, as shameful and inferior, as otherness. It is the anxiety of being a woman that devastates a feminine body, “She has no faith in a love” Beauvoir analyses, that “She has not experienced in her body; she does not dare to enter docility, to revolt, to invent; doomed to society, to resignation, she can take in society only a place already made for her - marriage and motherhood”.\textsuperscript{29} This not being able to learn the lessons of violence has a negative impact both on her physical and intellectual existence. Therefore, her service to species begins, painfully - through pregnancy, childbirth and lactation. Sometimes women play this role more in order to survive psychologically and economically than out of her free will. Women’s sexuality and eroticism too reflect the complexity of her situation. It is manifested through the opposition of organs - vagina and clitoris. While


\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
clitoris is at the center of feminine sexuality, vagina becomes an erotic center only through penetration by a man and this constitutes a kind of violation. The girl needs a man to judge her reveal her own body and sexual pleasure to her kind wherever she does accept this dominance, she becomes panic-stricken at the moments of submission as her socialization makes her unfamiliar with violence. The penetration is always a violation because as De Beauvoir puts it, “she desires caresses on lips, on breasts, or even longs for a known or imagined pleasure more specifically sexual, what happens is that a man’s sex organ tears the young girl and penetrates into regions where it has not been desired. Sex pleasure for a woman is more of a magic spell that demands complete abandon, at the fear of the spell being broken by words in movements, she closes her eyes. She wants to remain subject while she is made an object...She retains her subjectivity only through union with her partner; giving and receiving must be combined for both.”

Like her male counterpart women’s first experience to touch is of her mother’s flesh. “In her narcissism, in her homosexual experiences, whether diffuse or definite, she gets as subject and seeks possession of a feminine body...hands still long for contact with soft, smooth flesh. The adolescent boy, a women, flowers, fur, the child; a whole region within her remains unoccupied and longs to possess a treasure like that which she gives the male...It is an old paradox that the man in habits a sexual world of sweetness, affection, gentleness, a feminine whereas woman moves in the male universe, which is hard and rough.”

Although women keep on playing their social role with whatever desire underneath, there are three categories of women who deviate from the norm— the narcissist, the mystic and the prostitute. A narcissist remains frustrated as a subject as she is not allowed to engage in self defining nativities that remain unfulfilled through her role as a female. She now becomes her own object, “She gives herself supreme importance because no object of importance is accessible to her”.

A mystic wants to be the supreme object of a supreme subject. The mystic confuses God with man and man with God. In her want for God she desires the exaltation of

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30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
her object-hood because she wants to be possessed by somebody – the God who would have no other woman before him. The “Sovereign gaze fixed attentively, amorously, upon her is a miraculous godsend”.33 This ‘being – other’ or ‘subject – object’ complex is most peculiarly expressed in prostitution. On the one hand the prostitution is objectified as ‘other’ and exploited on that ground, on the other. She is the one to whom men pay tribute for her ‘otherness’. She emphasizes the point that unlike wife, daughter and girlfriend, she gets something and in case of hetaira ‘wealth and fame’ in return to what she sells. Especially for hetaira and call girls not only their bodies, but their whole personas are being paid for. At least, prostitute is a category who may use her otherness for her personal advantage. De Beauvoir demarcating between prostitute and married women seems to say, all against the ‘exclusive tyranny’ of each defends one. While one against the rest protects the other; one has seminal clients, the other is hired by one for life. While the prostitute is denied the recognition as a human being, the legal wife gets the respect of a human. But, then De Beauvoir comes to the crux of the matter – why a woman chooses to be a prostitute? The prompt reply provided by her, “The truth is that in a world where misery and unemployment prevent, there will be people to enter any profession that is open”.34 Remarkably, the causes of prostitution provided by Simon De Beanvoir at France in 1940s has hardly changed over the period and almost true in a different country like India and entirely at a different period, i.e. in late twentieth and twenty first centuries She estimates that almost 80% of the Prostitutes in Paris are from the country and most of them shifted from domestic servility to prostitution. In a city, neither the former rural identity nor conservative society nor the abstract idea of morality is a barrier to prostitution. However, at puberty many girls tend to initiate prostitute due to psychosocial crisis of that age of transformation. There are girls who are prostituted by their own family. Prostitution tends to increase more during phases of social instability like war. ‘Often enough’ observes De Beauvoir, ‘a woman may consider prostitution as merely a temporary means of increasing her income, but it has often been told how she subsequently becomes enchained. In case of ‘white slavery’, in which she is caught in the jails through violence, false promises, discipline offers of work, and the like, are relatively rare, it is common for her to be kept in the business

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
against her will. The money needed for making a start has been furnished by a pimp or procurer, to whom she is under an obligation, who takes most of her earnings, and from whom she never gets to the point of freeing herself.\footnote{Ibid.} Does not this story sound very familiar, even in today’s context while talking on client she points out, most of them would be too glad either not to pay her or to be sadistic to her.

However prostitutes for getting her money without being manhandled needs a man – a more permanent one in nature. On the other hand, they do continue with homosexual relationships. While the relationship with the former is due to sheer monetary interest, the latter (the girlfriend) is a companion in pleasure, with whom relation is free and voluntary. In spite of the jealousy and rivalry among themselves prostitutes need one – another in order to create a world of their own to regain their human dignity and identify. However, it is significant that with all her extrovert and sexually promiscuous behavior the ‘kiss’ is saved for somebody she is in love with. Although De Beauvoir started with fame and health of Hetaira, she recognizes, “Common prostitution is a miserable occupation in which woman exploited sexually and economically, subjected arbitrarily to the police, to a humiliating medical supervision, to the caprices of the customers, and doomed to infection and disease, to misery, is truly abased to the level of a thing.”\footnote{Ibid.}

De Beauvoir afterwards equates past Hetaria to the present day movie stars as sexual pleasure and beauty are so interlinked with each-other. Therefore, it is inevitable that art and prostitution are vaguely associated (If we look at Indian art in Ancient and Medieval period, we would find lots of examples in support of her theory that art and sexuality, if not prostitution, always, are so intertwined. A perverted expression of this theory could be seen in pornography).

Hetaira and stars both sail on their charms. However, Hetaira is less set in hypocrisy; therefore, she is free in her behaviour and in attaining intellectual liberty. They lead a life that is masculine. Although no man is her absolute master but their need of man is immediate and at the same time it is the man whom they make pay – her pride is satisfied. De Beauvoir decides “the prostitute who simply yields her body is perhaps...
less a slave than the woman who makes a career of pleasing the public”.37 Simply because not only is she the bedfellow, she has to put up with the patron’s presence, conversation, and vanity his friends and his whole life, while all the time playing a comedy of love.

Whether she is the wife, the mother, the career woman or she is the narcissist, the mystic, the prostitute, all women fell prey to these roles, that are not her own making, but the making of the man and the patriarchal institutions. Woman can create her own identity if she can free herself from what is holding her back, i.e., ‘Patriarchy’.

If woman wants to stop being “The Second Sex”, then there are three main strategies by adopting which, she can liberate herself. Primarily, She can work – although in a Capitalist society, she would not be let free outside home, too. And, moreover, she will end up carrying both the burdens – home and outside. But this indeed opens up new arenas to woman. Secondly woman can become an intellectual, since intellectual is somebody who thinks, looks and defines, not the one who is looked at, thought about or defined. Finally, she can work toward a Socialist transformation of Society. Sartre and De Beauvoir both believe the key to women’s liberation lies in economy.

De Beauvoir along with Existentialist Feminism could not fully place prostitution as an expression of gender politics that commodifies male violence against women, corrupting private by public in a market economy and a patriarchal culture functioning on hierarchy, questioning the existence of hetero-patriarchal sexuality as the stereotype. The Radical Feminists fill this gap as they not only analyze the problems related to prostitution as well as heterosexuality, but also suggest the ways to solve it.

Kate Millet and the Radical School of Feminism

“Look”, says the radical feminist– “for whom does the prostitution exist?”, “Who rapes whom?”, “Who harasses whom?”, “For whom does pornography thrive?” and above all, “who does take the upper hand in all heterosexual relations?” – “it is the man”.

37 Ibid.
Rosemarie Tong, in her work, “Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction”, while talking about Radical Feminists, says, they have “traditionally taken the lead not only in articulating the “highly elaborate” and “deeply entrenched” nature of the sex/gender system, but also sketching exit routes out of it ... ranged from transforming the institution of heterosexuality so that neither men nor women play a dominant role to rejecting heterosexuality in favor of celibacy, autoeroticism, or ‘lesbianism’”.38

To begin with, Kate Millett’s renowned “Sexual Politics” States, “Historically most patriarchies have institutionalized force through their legal systems ... Patriarchal societies typically link feelings of cruelty with sexuality, the latter often equated with evil and with power. Before assault she is almost universally defenceless, both by her physical and emotional training. Needless to say, this has the most far-reaching effects on the social and psychological behaviours of both sexes... The rationale which accompanies that imposition of male authority euphemistically referred to as “the battle of the sexes” bears a certain resemblance to the formulas of nations at war, where any heinousness is justified on the grounds that the enemy is either an inferior species or really not human at all. The patriarchal mentality has concocted a whole series of rationales about women, which accomplish this purpose tolerably well. And these traditional beliefs still invade our consciousness and affect our thinking to an extent few of us would be willing to admit”. However, she emphasizes, “In rape, the emotions of aggression, hatred, contempt and the desire to break or violate a personality take a form consummately appropriate to sexual politics”.39 To Millet, Patriarchy is constituted of male control over public and private and if women are to be liberated, this control has to be eliminated. This patriarchal control is particularly powerful because, due to social conditioning of women men along with institutions such as academy, church and the family appear to gain the consent of the women they oppress. If the social conditioning does not work out, then male has to inflict coercion in order to accomplish the female subordination and this eventually led to violence. Among the reactionaries, propagating the ideal of male sexual stereotype, Millet singled out D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Genet. There are two other groups who too fall into the category of “reactionary” – neo-

Freudians & Parsonian Functionalist. Neo-Freudians are criticized on the grounds that they ‘used’ Freud’s writings to “rationalize the individuals relationship between the sexes, to ratify traditional roles, and to validate temperamental differences” while, the followers of Talcott Parsons have used his work to argue the differences between male and female sexes more of biological than socio-cultural in nature. If androgyny is the true equal and worthy ideal then, she points out, it has to consist of masculine and feminine qualities that are separately worthy in themselves, e.g. arrogance (masculine) and servitude (feminine) should not form positive androgyny while strength (masculine) and compassion (feminine) are desirable androgynous qualities. Another radical scholar, Marilyn French in “Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals” has viewed patriarchy through sexism to outdo all other modes of oppression like classism and racism. French traces the root of violence in the transformation of human society from matriarchal to patriarchal. She speculates that earlier human society was matricentric as it was probably the mother who played the primary role in a group’s survival oriented activities, bond and sharing in compatibility with nature. Like nature, the representative of nature, as a reproducer of life, mother or woman was also a friend. Gradually, population grew leading to scarcity of food – nature/mother was no more considered a friend but an enemy. She has to be grilled, drugged, plowed in order to get whatever she is hiding from humans – she has to be brought under control through newer techniques. More he got control more he became separated from her emotionally and physically. This separation/alienation, to French, led to hostility, from hostility to fear and from fear to enmity. This became applicable to women who because of her reproductive role were equated with nature. Competition overwhelmed cooperation, inevitably leading to conflict and gradually subordination. To French masculine world based on the values of power-over can only accommodate the values that serve it while feminine world based on the values of ‘pleasure with’, can accommodate different kinds of values, even the opposing ones. This according to her, is “power-to”, “refers to ability, capacity, and connotes a kind of freedom” while “power-over”, refers to domination; “power-to” is constructive, “power-over” is destructive. Naturally, “power-over” leads to dominance, pain and violation.  

The third view among the radicals, is presented by Mary Daly in “Beyond God the Father” where, she points out that the oppressive gender hierarchy would be broken by dissident women who can go beyond androgyny of any sort and be able to identify themselves as ‘radical lesbian feminist separatist’. To Daly, true androgyny will arise when a woman will learn to say ‘no’ to the ‘morality of victimization’, that will give birth to ‘yes’ to the ‘ethics of personhood’.

As most of the radical feminists interpret, true egalitarian heterosexual relations cannot be achieved unless and until women’s sexuality is stopped being interpreted in term’s of men’s sexuality. Male violence is normalized as it is assumed that when it comes to sex men are going to behave in an aggressive and violent manner while the role played by women makes it exceedingly difficult to realize and develop her own sexual needs. Almost every element of female-gender-stereotyped could be violated, e.g. “Softness” is impregnable by something “hard”. “In rape - and also in incest, sexual harassment, prostitution, and pornography - a man takes a woman’s sexuality, as it is mediated through her body, and through his action proclaims that women’s sexuality is for men - for what men want and need”.

Replying on harm done to women by men radical feminist anti-pornographers have pointed out two kinds of sexually explicit descriptions - ‘Erotica’ based on mutual consent, emotional involvement, equality and ‘Thanatica’ where all these elements are absent. In ‘Thanatica’ women are treated, as mere objects while in ‘Erotica’ they are looked at as human beings. This thanatica encourages violent expression of male sexuality through pornography, wife battering, rape and prostitution. Therefore, unless and until the very cornerstone of male – sexuality is reconstructed, it is a utopia to believe and expect an equal sexual treatment from men, either in a Liberal State where the formal (legal and political) equality between men and women are established or in a Marxist state where class conflict and economic discrimination have been eradicated.

Within this analysis, over meaning and implication of sex by radical feminism, prostitution occupies a center/place. While some radical feminists do attach the institution of prostitution and pornography as corrupting agents demeaning the

importance of love based on eros and positive sex, others criticize it due to its
commercialization leading to demystification by sex and oppression of women in
general.\textsuperscript{43} Therefore, they are divided into two camps so far as prostitution and
pornography are of concern – ‘Pro-positive sex’ feminism and ‘Anti-sex’ feminism.

Pro-positive sex feminists are of the view that prostitution is nothing but domination
and violence against women that distances and complicates the subject – object
dichotomy even further. From their perspective, there are two types of expression as
far as sex is concerned – manifestation of positive sex in passionate love and violent
articulation in objectified prostitution. Chapkis quotes, Dutch feminist Ariane
Amsherg, arguing, “It seems to me that prostitution is something that only men could
have invented. Women need more of an emotional connection when they are sexually
active”. Therefore, Kathleen Barry, in her work, “Female Sexual Slavery”, argues,
that positive sex has to be built up through trust and sharing and cannot be
purchased.\textsuperscript{44} Prostitution changes the possibility of real-positive sex. Barry continues
that, with widespread publicity of pornography, even the private sexual practices are
going prostituted, bringing those in the domain of household closing the gap
between love and violence, ‘Madonna’ and ‘Whore’. This view holds commercial sex
responsible for violence against women, whether literal or symbolic. Shiela Jeffreys
in her work “The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930”,
remarks that she does not see any possibility of cleansing heterosexual relationship of
this inequality, it is only possible for the lesbians to come up with egalitarian
sexuality.\textsuperscript{45} Sexuality according to pro-positive view could be freed from patriarchy,
but may not be in the form known to us as sex. They advocate the abolition of
prostitution to stop further replacing of erotic by pornographic. They have
emphasized on commoditization of body in order to intensify objectification that
would be discussed in the next chapter.

In contrast to the pro-positive sex, who argues in favor of cleansing sexuality through
purification and abolition of prostitution, Anti-sex feminists argue in favor of
abolition of sex itself. To them, the very meaning of sex is patriarchal domination.

\textsuperscript{43} Chapkis, Wendy. ‘The Meaning of Sex’. In Williams, C.I. and Stein, Arlene, Eds. ‘Sexuality and


\textsuperscript{45} Jeffreys, Sheila. ‘The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930’. London:
Pandora, 1985
Karen Davis, in “I Love Myself When I am Laughing: A New Paradigm for Sex”, explains, “being anti-sex” is not being against sexuality per se, merely against everything that has been organized as sex, everything one has been able to experience as sex within the constraints of our culture.46 This view is largely supported by the “Southern Women’s Writing Collective”, in “Sex Resistance in Heterosexual Arrangements”. “All sex acts” they say, “subordinate women... all actions that are part of the practice of sexuality partake of the practice’s political junction or goal... Thus all sex acts (and their depictions) mean the same doing”. Therefore, sex cannot be used to do away with patriarchy because it is created for it, by it and inherent in it. As Andrea Dworkin states in “Intercourse”, “our bodies speak their language. Our minds think in it. The men are inside us through and through”.47 If sex is synonymous to male objectification of female through patriarchy, then woman is equated with whore – the natural whore. And men have the power and position to make this assumption women’s fundamental condition. Under these views, Prostitute is a symbol of woman’s utter powerlessness – an object in the market place.

There is another School called Sex Radical Feminism: They are more of a libertarian view, believes in consent than in responsibility as sexual ethics. There are two divisions in this school of thought – Sexual Libertarianism and Sexual Subversion.

Sexual Libertarians present an anti-thesis of anti-sex feminists. Both, recognizing that sexuality has to do with power, differ regarding who holds that power. To them men are haunted by female sexuality. It is men who feel powerless in front of women’s sexuality. And as per this view, in case of prostitution money is a sign of powerlessness of men.48 The view is quite similar to Simon De Beauvoir’s views on hetaira who “got” the men by “making them pay”. But, one may ask, does not this apparent show of powerlessness have a hidden agenda, i.e., the wish to command and control female sexuality? The notion of the group believing in the theory of ‘sexual subversion’ is that sex is an arena of struggle in itself. They reject either ‘purification’ or ‘abolition’, and believe in ‘subversion’ from within sexual norms and practices. To them meaning of sexual practice depends on the context of particular sexual culture.

In order to have an equal sexual culture it is necessary to have an equal distribution of resources. Practices of prostitution can also be visualized as culture of subversion rather than a culture of male domination. Whore, therefore, could be seen as a potential threat to male domination over female sexuality. The facts that 'Whore' and 'dyke' are both used abusively show that – both these categories of female sexuality are uncontrollable by patriarchy. They opine that, in a world where women's body is so devalued, making men pay for it is indeed a sign of self-determinism. Rather a prostitute sells her time and not her body by putting a value on it what a domestic woman dare not! Duggan, Hunter and Vance in “False Promise”, argued that, “pornography carries many messages other than woman hating: it advocates sexual adventure, sex outside marriage, anonymous sex, and group sex...”

Michael Foucault, Others and Public Health

While thinking of prostitution, sexuality and patriarchy in the context of a Third World nation, Naila Kabeer takes a socio-economic approach in 'Reversed Realities', “Vulnerability to sexual harassment and domestic violence, is an aspect of the gendered nature of poverty because poor women, in particular, are most exposed to the risk of harassment and least able to remove themselves from violent situations. Women may have to stay with violent husbands, or accept sexual abuse from their employers because the alternatives to such behavior are even more bleak. It is also the case that women who move in ‘public space’ are perceived to be transgressing the boundaries of female propriety and are therefore a sexual provocation to be teased, harassed or assaulted. Moreover, in a society where family honour is linked to the virtue of its female members, sexual harassment and rape are often used in property fends and functional dispute to humiliate opponents”.

The degree of manifestation and the context of sexual violence may vary from the First World to the Third World, but provided the nature of patriarchy follows the same track everywhere, it is the women who remain the eternal victims. Hierarchies

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49 Ibid.

50 Duggan, L., Hunter, N. and Vance, C. 'False Promises'. In 'Women Against Censorship'. Varda Burstyn, Ed. Vancouver: Dougaln and McIntyre, 1985

leading to domination of one sex by the other give the impetus to male sexuality and violence and institution like prostitution exists to justify it. And one observes this justification is taking even firmer foothold in the era of globalization through manifestation of different types of prostitution that go beyond the traditional/stereotypical forms.

Sex industry exists in the margins of the society where a paradoxical combination of the evils of capitalism through the commodification of women’s body and medieval feudalism in the form of sexual slavery continues to exist. In the words of R. Sunder Rajan, “the question of how to resolve the issue within a labour market, defined primarily as capitalist free-market, has received insufficient consideration” in majority of the feminist schools of thought.52

Thus, how women are placed within patriarchy, what are their bargaining powers and political-economic positions and to what extent they are empowered to take decisions and make choices are strongly related to the sexual behaviour and sexual health of mankind and therefore to the spread and controls of epidemics like syphilis and HIV&AIDS. One can assume irresponsible sexuality and sexual choices that men are allowed to make can create a situation vulnerable to epidemic of STDs, while a better bargaining power with social and political economic empowerment of women can lead to improved personal and public health practices.

In contrast to this idea and in critique of the reification of prostitution in epidemiological research, Barbara De Zalduondo discussed the illogic of using prostitution as an independent variable stating paying money for sex is not in and of itself a risk factor for disease.

She also points out, “attention and responsibility on the sellers of sex despite universal recognition that the customers of women in prostitution are ‘part of the problem’”.53 Meredith Turshen suggests, a reclassification of AIDS as an ‘environmental disease’, “much as we understand diarrheal disease to be related to poverty and an unsanitary


environment.” rather than as a sexually transmitted one. From a historical perspective, Luise White demonstrates that what has been called prostitution in Nairobi actually involved the provision of a range of domestic services that the colonial powers relied on for cheap reproduction of labour. From an ethnographic perspective, Brooke Schoepf has shown that in Zaire there are many women of different ages, classes, and marital and reproductive histories who do not identify as prostitutes but who occasionally accept money or gift in exchange for sex. Likewise, Laketch Dirasse problematizes the western opposition between marriage and prostitution by discussing seven named categories of heterosexual partnership in Ethiopia that vary in terms of domestic arrangement, duration, degree and the nature of goods and services exchanged.

In ‘The History of Sexuality’, Michael Foucault examined the relationship between the body and sexuality, critiquing the ‘repressive hypothesis’ of the Victorian era and arguing for a different conception of the relationship between changing sexual norms and the power of discourse. This conceptualisation is useful to understand the discourse of public health in relation to STDs and prostitution. He differentiated between sexual practices and sexuality arguing that it was the Victorian era that named diverse sexual practices assigning them values and meanings so that particular bodies were observed to contain particular socio-sexual identities. It was in this discourse of ‘scientia sexualis’ that powers of surveillance and regulation produced knowledge about particular kinds of bodies. Similarly, in ‘Discipline and Punish’, Foucault has argued that the disappearance of bodily torture and its replacement with institutions of discipline was correlated to the state’s need to control individual bodies, e.g., at school, military and hospitals. The institutionalization of the power to punish in this case was more effective in producing knowledge about a

pathologized/criminalised subject. I would venture to apply this theoretical perspective to analyze the discourse of prostitution and prostitutes as a pathologized/criminalized subject that in turn led to the reproduction of knowledge, at the turn of the twentieth and the twenty first centuries respectively.

To some scholars Victorian sense of cleanliness and sanitation were more of a product of the Victorian morality and respectability. The sanitary environment of the English middle classes, with wide streets, adequate housing, clean clothing and drinking water, was a moral ideal that only a better-off minority could attain in post-industrial British cities that were otherwise marked by continuing poverty and industrial pollution throughout the nineteenth century. One sees the public health theories of Sanitation and Miasma also germinating from this understanding of body and existence. Theories of ‘Miasma’ that believed that toxic concentrations of vaporous products of decay caused disease, generated from this environment. In India the British Indian medical Service followed the miasmatic theory championed by Edwin Chadwick and Florence Nightingale. I would try to show how this theory applied in the context of prostitution equated the prostitutes with filth/immorality and therefore made an attempt to sanitize and segregate them in the colonial period.

However, it is only in post-modernity prostitute has emerged as political subjects through the collectivization by the prostitutes’ rights groups. Today, at the turn of the twenty first century, human rights recommendations in public health encompass changes in institutional practices, programmes and legislations on issues pertaining to consent and testing, confidentiality, and discrimination in healthcare and employment settings. In addition recommendations for addressing vulnerabilities of women, children and PLWHA and other vulnerable communities are being addressed. So, has the conception of power of the state over the prostitute been reversed over the twentieth century?

In this work I have made an attempt to examine this question and contribute from an interdisciplinary perspective by showing how our understanding of the dominant discourse of ‘modern prostitution’ since colonial period has become saturated with modern Western assumptions of womanhood, commoditization and sexual desire because the values and vulnerabilities of the modern times we, the people of the developing world live in, are largely shaped by the colonial constructions of the world and how the way modern prostitution stands, is also intrinsically related to the epidemiological studies of STDs, i.e., syphilis and HIV&AIDS. The work has tried to reflect on the fact that though there is a cultural homogenization of the South by the North, yet there are elements of indigenous culture surviving in pockets that are to be taken into consideration to understand the meaning of STDs and therefore essential for effective prevention through policy and programmatic implications.

On the one hand, the colonial period is the beginning of a prostitute’s treatment as a criminal, curbing her freedom and reducing her to a pool of disease like syphilis at the cost of the death of an obviously vibrant culture where sexual behaviors were less of a taboo as well as less of a commodity than the colonial culture transformed it to be; on the other hand, the late twentieth to the early twenty first century is a time witnessing prostitutes to begin to get organized and HIV&AIDS seems to be performing an important role in the play. In the late nineteenth century capitalism at its early phase made sex and prostitution a commodity to create a market by criminalizing it through laws related to venereal diseases including syphilis; while in the late twentieth century, capitalism in its’ mature phase, already having a market, wants that commodity to be sold in that market under various forms of commoditized prostitution and HIV&AIDS in a way plays a role to bring the prostitute back under the focus and organizing them. In this context the collectivization of prostitutes in the late twentieth century is important provided they have a greater bargaining power dealing with male sexuality and its demands, and therefore reducing the risk of transmission of epidemics like HIV&AIDS.
Hypotheses

- Both the diseases, i.e., syphilis and AIDS, have close interlinkages, interactions and influences on prostitution.

- Syphilis and AIDS are sexually transmitted diseases at the turn of two centuries (i.e., the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries; and the late twentieth and the early twenty first centuries, respectively) where human society, culture, politics and economy have been in the process of major transformation. All these account for the transformation of human identity as well. Sexuality, positioning itself as an important part of that identity crisis, also expresses the confusion and change of the transition, representations of the sexual cultures that may be seen manifested in the discourse of the two STDs.

- In both the periods, commodification of sexuality in a capitalist market might be viewed through prostitution. While in the previous era (i.e., the nineteenth century Bengal) the indigenous, virile, folk culture is being killed by a colonial culture; in the era produced by processes over an eventful century (i.e., the late twentieth Century), the establishment of a newer sexual culture influenced by the neo-colonial paradigm could be seen through the contemporary globalization. The discourse of prostitution reflects this.

- In both the periods, public health is being used to serve the interest of colonial and neo-colonial forces and capital in a patriarchal mode in the context of prostitution. At the same time, it seems to be giving prostitutes a voice drawing attention to the conditions of this marginalized section. Thus, the discourse around prostitution and STDs could be a double aged sword with both positive and negative implications.
Objective(s)

The Main-Objective

- To understand the nature of prostitution and STDs, as well as the discourse surrounding them in relation to the social processes those shape all of these at the two historical periods.

The Sub-Objectives

- To analyze the relationship of the two sexually transmitted diseases, syphilis and HIV & AIDS with the institution of prostitution in Bengal that have lain at the two historical points of time, i.e., the turn of the twentieth century and the turn of the twenty-first century.

- To examine the importance and interaction of syphilis and AIDS with the respective contemporary cultural, societal, economic and political orders.

- To gauge the changing human identity and sexual culture as manifested through the interplay between the diseases, people and prostitution.

- To understand the nature of public health discourse and the role of public health as a provider of better quality of life for the women in prostitution.

Research Question(s):

In Bengal, the efforts to control syphilis contributed to the criminalization of prostitution in the mid nineteenth century, while the efforts to control AIDS in the late twentieth century have contributed to a discourse favouring decriminalization of prostitution –why is it so? Is public health, through syphilis and HIV&AIDS, along with other institutions, playing the role of a liberator or an exploiter in the context of prostitution?
The above-mentioned research question is accompanied by the following set of sub questions:

Female reproductive labour has always been a prerogative of male sexual need. In both the centuries, we visualize a commercialized sexual culture being addressed by an aggressive foreign power. Then, what are the reasons behind the difference of the treatments of prostitution and also what are the similarities at these two points of time? How would have the two landmarks STDs, i.e., syphilis and AIDS, associated intrinsically with prostitution, interacted with prostitution, contributing to these changes in the late nineteenth and the late twentieth to early twenty first centuries in Bengal, respectively? Are these prostitutes getting a greater voice in the public sphere? If so, is that supportive or subversive of the colonial/the neo-colonial agenda?

I would make a venture to find response to these queries in the context of Bengal through the following methodology.

**Methodology**

The growing convergence of the art-based or humanities and social science disciplines makes it feasible to study and understand both the social structures and process that shape society including its cultural manifestations. Therefore, the theoretical and methodological perspective of this work combines dual methodological approaches, namely, construction of the social history of prostitution and syphilis in the late colonial period in Bengal and a sociological analysis of the contemporary discourse on AIDS and prostitution in West Bengal at the present times of globalisation.

In order to study and reconstruct the discourse of the phenomena of STDs and prostitution at the turn of the twentieth and twenty first centuries respectively, I have applied the methods of discourse analysis. It is difficult to give a single definition of Critical or Discourse Analysis as a research method. Indeed, rather than providing a particular method, Discourse Analysis can be characterized as a way of approaching and thinking about a problem. In this sense, Discourse Analysis is neither a qualitative nor a quantitative research method, but a manner of questioning the basic assumptions of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Discourse Analysis does not provide a tangible answer to problems based on scientific research, but it enables access to the
ontological and epistemological assumptions behind a project, a statement, a method of research, or - to provide an example from the field of Library and Information Science - a system of classification. In other words, Discourse Analysis will enable to reveal the hidden motivations behind a text or behind the choice of a particular method of research to interpret that text. Expressed in today's more trendy vocabulary, Critical or Discourse Analysis is nothing more than a deconstructive reading and interpretation of a problem or text (while keeping in mind that postmodern theories conceive of every interpretation of reality and, therefore, of reality itself as a text. Every text is conditioned and inscribes itself within a given discourse, thus the term Discourse Analysis). Discourse Analysis will, thus, not provide absolute answers to a specific problem, but enable us to understand the conditions behind a specific "problem" and make us realize that the essence of that "problem", and its resolution, lie in its assumptions; the very assumptions that enable the existence of that "problem". By enabling us to make these assumptions explicit, Discourse Analysis aims at allowing us to view the "problem" from a higher stance and to gain a comprehensive view of the "problem" and ourselves in relation to that "problem". Discourse Analysis is meant to provide a higher awareness of the hidden motivations in others and ourselves and, therefore, enable us to solve concrete problems - not by providing unequivocal answers, but by making us ask ontological and epistemological questions.63

Though critical thinking about and analysis of situations/texts is as ancient as mankind or philosophy itself, and no method or theory as such, Discourse Analysis is generally perceived as the product of the postmodern period. The reason for this is that while other periods or philosophies are generally characterized by a belief-system or meaningful interpretation of the world, postmodern theories do not provide a particular view of the world, other that there is no one true view or interpretation of the world. In other words, the postmodern period is distinguished from other periods (Renaissance, Enlightenment, Modernism, etc.) in the belief that there is no meaning, that the world is inherently fragmented and heterogeneous, and that any sense making system or belief is mere subjective interpretation - and an interpretation that is conditioned by its social surrounding and the dominant discourse of its time. Postmodern theories, therefore, offer numerous readings aiming at

63 http://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~palmquis/courses/discourse.htm
"deconstructing" concepts, belief-systems, or generally held social values and assumptions. Some of the most commonly used theories are those of Jacques Derrida (who coined the term "deconstruction"), Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, J.F. Lyotard, and Fredric Jameson (this extremely brief listing of a few critical thinkers is neither comprehensive nor reflecting a value judgment; these are merely some of the most common names encountered when studying postmodern theories).

Critical thinking, however, is older than postmodern thought, as the following quote by John Dewey illustrates. Dewey defined the nature of reflective thought as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends." When critically evaluating a research project or text, one should, therefore, not limit oneself to postmodern theories.

There are numerous "types" or theories of Discourse Analysis. Jacques Derrida's "Deconstruction" would be one; so would Michel Foucault's Genealogy and social criticism and analysis of the uses of discourse to exercise power (such as his analysis of how "Knowledge" is created in our societies and with what purpose or effect); Fredric Jameson's Marxist analysis of Postmodernism itself would provide another interesting reading on the dominant discourse of our time; as would Julia Kristeva's Feminist interpretations of current social practices.

Social History of Prostitution and Syphilis

The methods of social history have been adopted to construct the discourse on syphilis and prostitution in the late colonial Bengal. The methods applied are normally methods of historical research, i.e., an evaluation of relevant data in the construction of a social phenomenon at a point of time.

The data sources for the historical part was mainly printed literature, army records, sanitary records, visual reproductions (e.g., prints and paintings etc.) and oral records (e.g., songs), available in the libraries, archives and private collections.

The empirical areas of investigation was mainly-the discourse of syphilis and prostitution from the mid nineteenth century to the early twentieth century; the

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64 Dewey, J. Experience and Education. New York: Macmillan, 1933.
contemporary socio-cultural and political-economic state of the colonial empire and
the people-prostitutes, clientele (nuveau riche and tommies), social reformers and the
colonial administrators; decline of an older culture and emergence of a newer one.
However, in order to show the historical continuity and the shift in the racial and
socio-political policies of the British Empire regarding the relationship between the
empire builder and the native community, the some of the literatures have been
reviewed reflected the times since the seventeenth century onwards. In addition to
that, works of ancient Indian literatures and texts on economy, society, sexuality and
prostitution have been reviewed.
To analyze the discourse of the society and culture of the nineteenth century Bengal I
have drawn upon the then contemporary literary works representing both the folk
cultural art forms as well as the ones coming from the Western educated elite section
of the society.
To gauge the transition of the institution of prostitution from sin to crime, academic
works on the colonial period, medicine and public health have been utilized.
Archival documents like sanitary records, army records and medical records have
been reviewed in order to construct the nineteenth century discourse of public health
in Bengal centering on syphilis-soldier-prostitute.
Besides the libraries and documentation centres in Delhi like Nehru Memorial
Library, the National Archive, CSDS, J.N.U. and C.W.D.S. library, I have also
consulted The National Library, Calcutta; Centre for Studies in Social Sciences,
Kolkata; The Asiatic Society, Kolkata and the documentation unit of All India
Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Kolkata. In addition to this I was fortunate to
have access to different private collections of individuals and scholars based at
Kolkata.

Sociological Analysis of the Contemporary Discourse on AIDS and Prostitution
To reconstruct the contemporary debate on AIDS and prostitution, secondary data
collection for analysis of literature on disease and public health discourse has been
done as a review of public health literature, covering the NGOs, the prostitutes and
people related to the institution of prostitution at the Red Light Areas of Kolkata, the
capital of West Bengal. Secondary materials surveyed and analysed include books,
survey reports, articles from journals, conference reports, exploits of various internet web sites, documentation done by N.G.O.s and other research works.

The materials used could be divided into the following categories:

Books, papers, articles and reports related to the political economic and social change at the era of globalisation as the contemporary analyses of the discourse on AIDS and prostitution has been situated in the larger frame work of the issues of societal and political economic change and phenomenon of globalisation.

Another category of materials reviewed are the ones related to law, prostitution and HIV & AIDS to gauge the responses of the State to tackle the issues of public health in the context of human rights.

To construct the society and culture of the contemporary West Bengal, I have not only made use of the relevant academic works and reports, but also analysed the contemporary literary works, i.e., short stories and poems that are reflective of the societal transformation and emerging consumer culture of Bengal at the turn of the twenty first century. To understand the woman's emancipation and the discourse of prostitution in Bengal I have analysed feminist literatures, reports and academic works. To examine the debates within the contemporary discourse of prostitution and HIV & AIDS in Bengal, I have utilised the conference reports, workshop proceedings, documentations as well as publications produced by several CBOs/NGOs in addition to public health literatures and a few newspaper reports along with the findings from my M.Phil. dissertation "Interpreting Prostitution: Violence Commodified?" Two major NGO/CBOs and a popular mass media campaign of the WB SACS have been examined for the varied nature of discourse and its implications for the WIP.

The state responses to HIV & AIDS in the context of prostitution have been built on from the annual reports, sentinel surveillance reports, evaluation reports of CBOs/NGOs, and literature on targeted interventions as well as on trends of HIV & AID done by WBSAP & CS.

To collect the above mentioned materials, exhaustive use was made of the libraries of CSMCH, JNU, CWDS, the Women Studies Library of Jadavpur University, the documentation units of two N.G.O.s - 'DMSC', 'Sanlaap' and WBSAP & CS. Materials were also collected from various seminars and Internet sites. The documentation units
of All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, UNAIDS, NICD, NML, WHO, DFID had also been consulted.

The Geographical Area

The issue, although of an international significance, yet is geographically located for this work. The geographical area of focus is West Bengal (undivided Bengal prior to the independence of India in 1947), a state in the eastern region of India. This geographical area has been selected mainly because it is felt that the specific phenomenon/phenomena under focus unfolds itself in the context of this region and its socio-cultural, political-economic dynamics and also because of the researcher’s cultural, social and professional familiarity with the region. Other than the socio-cultural affinity, I had a basic idea of people I am going to study because of my previous voluntary and research work experience in the Red light Area RLAs of Kolkata.

Chapterization

Chapter One

Introduction and Methodology

This chapter theorizes and problematizes the phenomenon of sexuality, prostitution and STDs, as well as discusses the conceptual and methodological aspects of the thesis.

Chapter Two

The Social History of Prostitution and Syphilis in Bengal: From the Mid Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries

In this chapter the history of prostitution from the mid nineteenth century to the early twentieth century Bengal vis-à-vis the then contemporary socio-cultural and political-economic orders has been discussed. The chapter attempted to analyze how syphilis had played a role in shaping prostitution and the status of the prostitutes in the late
colonial period in Bengal. In this context, the importance of public health as an exploiter or liberator of the women in prostitution has been debated on.

Chapter Three

The Contemporary Discourse on Prostitution and HIV & AIDS in West Bengal: From the Late Twentieth to the Early Twenty-first Centuries

To reconstruct the contemporary debate on AIDS and prostitution, in this chapter, an attempt has been made to understand the significance of HIV & AIDS in shaping the discourse on prostitution with an emphasis on West Bengal, India. This chapter has ventured to find out the importance and interaction of prostitution and AIDS with the contemporary cultural, societal, economic and political orders and to gauge the changing human identity and sexual culture as manifested through the interplay between HIV & AIDS, people and prostitution. Here, the role-played by public health as a conducting and motivating factor of the women in prostitution has been analyzed.

Chapter Four

Discussion: The Comparative Study

This is a discussion chapter making a comparison between the previous two chapters. Here I have compared the interactions of syphilis and HIV & AIDS with prostitution at the turn of the twentieth century and at the present times, respectively. I have also tried to reflect on the nature of public health discourse and the role of public health as a provider of better quality of life for the women in prostitution.

The Limitations

The study is reflective of two specific times in history in a span of a hundred year. It is focused at the turn of the twentieth and at the turn of the twenty-first centuries instead of studying the over all continuity of the process from the twentieth to the twenty first centuries.
The study attempts to analyze the discourse of syphilis and HIV&AIDS in the background of prostitution in a particular geographical region, i.e., Bengal or West Bengal in India. Thus, it does not really probe deep into the global discourse on prostitution and STDs (i.e., syphilis and HIV&AIDS) per se.

The study is a rigorous and complex work that can have multiple dimensions and interpretations. Here, within the time span of the thesis I have made an attempt to draw a painting that is the imitation of the vast landscape which could be explored and painted from various angles even further.