

PREFACE

What began as a young student's quest out of curiosity soon turned in to a moral commitment - a professional responsibility; and the present study is an outcome of the same.

I first learnt about the existence of red-light area in Surat while I was browsing through the literature for selecting a topic for my M.S.W. Dissertation in 1979. I had hardly known that Surat, my birth place, had one of the oldest red-light areas of Gujarat. Until then, I was aware about the existence of brothels only at three places - Bombay, Calcutta and the Hindi cinema ! My first exposure to the life of prostitutes in late seventies was shocking and disturbing. It brought me close to the realities of the plight of the victimised women and girls who lived very much in the world of my own and still so much away from me ! I also learnt about the apathy of the community, local and state administration and above all, the intellectuals and elites towards this socially shunned class.

My first study completed in 1980, but I decided that I shall keep my contacts alive with them and shall try my best to contribute whatever little I could in their struggle for survival and justice. Since then, I seized every opportunity to study and work for them. Over and above brothel based prostitutes of Surat, I also explored the life of street walking prostitutes of Baroda and brothel based prostitutes in Rajkot - sometimes directly and sometimes through my post-graduate

students. As a result, I was invited to participate in the state administration's efforts to chalkout rehabilitation plans for them as a member of the Gujarat State Advisory Committee on the problems of child prostitutes and children of prostitutes. I am glad that the state government has now accepted the moral responsibility of supporting their rehabilitation.

Documenting the field realities and updating the same from time to time was the best way I could contribute as a professional social worker active in academics and hence I decided to focus my Ph.D. study also on the same target group.

I owe my sincere gratitude to my research guide Dr. M.D. Vyas for his encouragement, support and insightful guidance right from the stage of conception of research design to the completion of research study. Dr. Vyas and Smt. Rashmi Vyas generously tolerated my frequent unplanned visits for consultation at their residence, even during vacations.

I also wish to place on record my sincere thanks to Prof. Varsha Anjaria, the then Dean and Head, for facilitating our long awaited registration as Ph.D. students. Prof. Navle, our present Dean and Head has ensured fulfilling necessary procedural formalities, for which I acknowledge his support with gratitude.

I express my thanks to all my colleagues who have contributed in one way or the other. Smt. Thrity Vaswani, who inspired me to take up my first study in to this challenging field in 1979, deserves a special mention.

The librarians of H.M. and F.S.W. Libraries (M.S.U.), Baroda, Narmad Library; Surat, Libraries of TISS, Bombay and of Department of Socialwork, Delhi University and Shri Desai of Surat Museum have helped me to collect relevant literature on the subject. I thank them for their whole hearted co-operation.

Smt. Smita Shah, Asst. Judge, Nadiad and Shri Nalin Thaker, Director Social Defence have supported this study by sending me relevant judgements of the Supreme Court. Smt. Chandrika Vyas, a co-committee member from social defence department also gave her valuable suggestions. I am thankful to all of them.

The Surat police personnel have facilitated my field work by providing a lady escort and by guiding me to the right “contact persons” without whom the study could not have materialized. I express my thanks to them. Smt. Bhagat, the aaganwadi worker and Dr. Ms Kikani from the corporation run health centre too contributed selflessly in my endeavour for which I thank them.

How can I forget mentioning the support and help I received from my family members - my husband, children and parents ? They, besides giving me care and support, tolerated my burnt/overcooked dishes, laughing them off as “Mamma’s Ph.D. special recipe” to save me the embarrassment !

I express my thanks to Smt. Rama Devi for helping me with data processing. Her efficient and timely support smoothened the most burdensome and tiring process of my study.

Last but not the least, I express my heartfelt and respectful thanks to my less fortunate sisters in the red-light area, who smilingly welcomed me at their door steps and patiently responded to my questions. I assure them that their contribution in conducting this study will definitely go a long way in turning a new, brighter page in the history of gender justice.

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