

# Chapter 3



Chapter III

**Prostitutes and Clients**

**3.1. Introduction:**

Entire sex industry is based upon demand of one element, 'the male clients'. Without them, the industry would have no existence. They act as a driving force of this industry. A universal explanation in this regard is that a sex-industry exists due to the 'uncontrollable sex drive' of males. This sex-industry provides males with an outward source where they are allowed to express their desire exert the passion and lead a normal healthy life. The second assumption is that in the marital relationship men are not always able to 'experiment with taboo or deviant sexual preferences' with their wives. It means sex is always in high demand other than getting involved in straight sexual relationship with commercial sex-workers. The implication of the two arguments is that the existence of sex industry safeguards the other women in the society.<sup>1</sup>

**3.2. Class Structure of the Clientele of Prostitutes:**

There are more men than women in India. The sex-ratio is more 'skewed'/distorted in the urban areas than in rural areas. In 1991, the sex ratio in urban India was as follows:

**Table 3.2.A**

Areas and Places	Number of Women per 1000 Men
Urban Areas	893
Delhi	797
Calcutta	819
Bombay	836

Due to the rapid growth of urbanization, industrialization and new means of commutation, a large number of male, both un-married and married, start migrating to urban areas in search of jobs leaving their wives and children in the distant villages. The dislocation of the traditional economic structure in the rural areas and rising population had been major factors due to which men got attracted to the urban areas. But it led to the severe sexual disparity in the proportion of male and female which caused the growth of prostitution in the urban areas. These male migrants constitute a large proportion of the clients of female sex-workers. The clientele of male sex-workers is not

<sup>1</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree, Kolkata*, 2002,p.112-113

homogenous group. Clients of sex-workers comprise of men with different occupation, age, marital status and socio-economic background.<sup>2</sup>

The clientele of prostitutes has always been heterogeneous throughout the twentieth century. Meghnad Gupta offers a description of the nature of clientele of prostitutes during the early twentieth century Calcutta. Not only the Subarnabanik traders, marwaris or *hatath* babus were included in the clientele of the prostitutes but there were also the judges, magistrates, barristers, lawyers, attorneys, doctors, non-cooperators, orators, scholars, editors and writers. Even the persons who raised the vigorous opposition against the presence of prostitutes within the city in the open public meetings were included in the list of clientele of prostitutes. Meghnad Gupta asserts that he had personally seen the most respectable persons of the Hindu, Christian, Muslim and *Brahmo-Samaj* communities in the brothels of *Sonagchi* and *Rupagachi*.<sup>3</sup>

The autobiography of Manoda Devi entitled '*Shikshita Patitar Atmacharit*' (Autobiography of an educated prostitute) also gives us a similar kind of picture of the clientele of the prostitutes. Once Manada had visited Rajbala's place, finding her leading a luxurious life. Rajbala's room was furnished with beautiful furniture; bed was beautified with expensive mattress. She was also adorned with newly made beautiful jewelries and already got rid of Rani *mashi's* debt. Moreover, Rajbala also saved some money for herself. A prostitute living in the Kholar-ghar can earn so much of money was beyond imagination of Manada. On Manada asking Rajbala the secret of luxury life, Rajbala replied:

There are various kinds of people who visit prostitutes/brothels. Sons of rich zamindars visit prostitutes openly with their friends without bothering about any public criticism or social stigma. Drinking and cultural performances like dance, songs etc constitute one of the major source of their entertainment for them in the prostitutes' quarters. The clientele belonging to these classes never step into the Kholar-ghar. Rambagan and Sonagachi are the areas frequented by this class of people. There is another class of libertine who holds prestigious positions and due to that enjoys immense respect in the society but who always feels scared of social-stigma. This section of clientele visits brothels secretly. Fulfilling sexual-lust is the only motto of their visit to the prostitutes. Inclination to have any cultural entertainment is totally absent in this case. They come secretly and also return in the same way. Thus, their prestige in the society remains untouched of any stigma. Poets, literates, social reformers, eminent lawyers, schoolmasters, professors, political leaders, semi – leaders, officers of govt. offices, Brahmo Mohamohopadhyay Pandit, Adhyapaks, honoured with the epithet like Bidya Bhushan, Tarkabageesh etc comprised this class of people. A famous lawyer of High-Court who belongs to an aristocrat family nowadays visits my room and has now become my client.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Moni Nag, *Sexual Behaviour and AIDS in India*, Vikas Publishing House Private Limited, New Delhi, 1996, p.64-65

<sup>3</sup> Meghnad Gupta, *Rater Kolkata*, Pratik, Kolkata, 1991 (first Publication 1923) 14

<sup>4</sup> Manada, Devi, *Sikshita Patitar Atmacharit*, (autobiography of an educated prostitute), Chirayat Prakashan, Kolkata, 2004. p.58

Manada continues:

...During the Puja and Christmas holidays the lawyers, the officials of the government come to Calcutta from the mufusal areas. During that time they visit us. Businessmen or zamindars can come at different time. Many of them used to send money every month to their prostitutes. I used to get money from Raibahadur from Noakhali, a zamindar from Burdwan, a rich druggist from Dhaka and a lawyer from Rangpur every month. I have a friend named Prabha, daughter of famous jeweler of Chitpur. A lawyer from Manmoysingh is her *babu*; she has relationship with the businessmen of Dhaka as well. In this connection the businessmen from Dhaka used to come to me.... This way I used to spend my days in Sonagachi.<sup>5</sup>

The prostitutes belonging to the high class were quite selective respecting their clients. They often would refuse the clients to enter into the brothel if they were not found up to the mark. In this cases the status of the client i.e. whether they were *bhadralok* or *chohtolok* used to be taken into consideration by such high profile prostitutes. Even if a *chotolok* client was ready to pay a higher amount he was not allowed to enter the house of the prostitute.<sup>6</sup> Manifest of the social ordering in general here social status becomes superior to the economic stature.

In the *Chitpur Road* area, the prostitutes used to solicit clients while standing on their *verandah* (balcony) and because of the darkness it was difficult for any man to distinguish between the beautiful and ugly women. The clients depended on their luck to select the prostitute partners. Most of those dingy rooms even on full moon nights remained pitch dark, and the men *could not* make out whether the girl concerned was ugly or pretty. Some patient fellow would resort to a trick to have a look at the girl. The smart one would light a cigarette while still standing at the entrance. In the light of the matchstick he would get a glimpse of the profile beauty of the girl and then decide the price.

Generally during settling of price, the conversation between the prostitute and her client would be as follow:

*Babu (Client)*: Hello, do you entertain a client?

*Bibi (Prostitute)*: How long would you like to?

One client might stay one or two hours while another might stay the whole night. 'To a woman's refrain he fee for one hour is four rupees'— the *Babu* would quote 'two rupees'. If the rate for the whole night was quoted as eight rupees, *Babu* would bargain for four rupees. After a lot of wheeling dealing some amount in between would be finalised. If the man was too stingy, he would get a snub by the girl; 'No sir, it wont be here, better go to the *kholar-ghar*' (brothel room of country-made tiles

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.p.76

<sup>6</sup> Meghnad Gupta, *Rater Kolkata*, Pratik, Kolkata, 1991 (first Publication 1923), p.38



where cheaper prostitutes used to live). And saying this she would turn back to the balcony to stand again with a hope of getting another prospective client.<sup>7</sup>

Generally in Sonagachhi and Rupogachhi, unless the prostitutes were starving, they did not bother to strain their legs standing on the balcony. Mostly through friends and acquaintances used to get regular clients. And there were those outsiders who used to come occasionally, escorted by pimps or middlemen who would fix the rate beforehand. The pimps used to get one-fourth of the rate fixed. In cases of a middleman's involvement, the rate went up. In order to raise his share, the pimp would quote the 'eight rupee-girl' at ten rupees. Other than the rate for the flesh, *Babu* would have two more fixed expenditures, *paan* or betel-leaf and tips to the girl's bearer. Sometimes, a clever woman would haggle and manage to get the cost of food for her and her mother too. Moreover, during the summer time 'beliphool' peddlers (a fragrant flower garland) could be seen in the brothel areas and the prostitutes often would ask the client to purchase the same for them.<sup>8</sup>

A streetwalker prostitute used to entertain more than one client every evening. The fee was fixed at hour by rate and varied from a few *annas* to several rupees according to the beauty and the qualification of the girl. In case of a low class prostitute, she was forced by the *bariwallis* to entertain a dozen or more clients even in cases they were not in a position to entertain even a single client.

Though young men used to be predominant in the heterogeneous clients in the brothel area but the elderly men were also not uncommon. Most of the clients visiting brothel were not rich men. Lower class and labourers living a forced bachelor's life in the city used to form the major part of clientele of the prostitutes. These men were the people who *could not* afford to keep their wives with them.

However, there were many clients who had good-looking wives. Many young men in their teenage used to visit brothels in the evening and return home before 8 in the evening. Their parents were generally satisfied with their answer that they had gone for a visit to the bioscope. The more daring young men used to profess to go to a theatre and passed the night in the brothel. Sometimes these boys used to become 'incorrigible' and did not even hesitate to steal the ornaments of their mother and wives to provide funds for visiting prostitutes.

Sometimes several friends used to visit a prostitute on co-operative or collective basis. A fee of rupees two was settled for an evening and four friends would visit the same woman at the same time. This way, the cost of the visit would come to only eight *annas* per head.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.p.30-31

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.p.31

<sup>9</sup> S. N. Mukherjee, *Prostitution in India*, Das Gupta & Co, Calcutta, 1936. p. 258-61

The prostitute who used to solicit standing on roadside or on the lane generally lived in the dark one-storied *kholar ghar*. Their client included porters and poor *chhotolok*.<sup>10</sup>

The *bandha* prostitutes used to be visited by her *bandha babu* (regular client). These *bandha* prostitutes often used to be given an honorarium ranging from rupee one hundred and fifty to three or even four hundred a month by these rich *bandha babus*. In some cases the honorarium would go up to hundred, seven hundred and exceptionally as high as rupees one thousand per month. The *bandha babu* or *lok* or client of such a prostitute used to visit on particular days of a week and that too on a fixed time and in the remaining days of the week and time, she (prostitute) was free to entertain *chhoto* clients. In some other cases, *bandha babu* or *lok* used to come every day at a particular time; and excluding that time, she could invite any client of her choice. The *babu* visiting prostitutes on specific dates and times were known as *timer babu* i.e. clients who maintain time.<sup>11</sup>

The relationship between a *bandha babu* and his *bandha khanki* was always a temporary one. But there were several cases of life-long relationship. The *bandha babu* quite often used to be changed by his *bandha khanki*. *Bandha babus* consisted of rich men – zamindars, landholders, Rajas or wealthy merchants.<sup>12</sup>

In today's red-light areas, the clients range from poor to lower middle to middle class men. They are basically un-skilled or semi-skilled labourers ranging from rickshaw pullers to traders, small shopkeepers, labourers who work in small industries. The clients also comprise policemen, local anti-socials or so called *dadas*. If clients are economically strong, they could avoid visiting the red-light areas, as these places are basically unhygienic. In such a situation, the rich people can afford to get a woman and will take her somewhere else or their sexual desire can be fulfilled by visiting a floating sex-worker who is not based in the red-light areas or they can arrange a higher class call-girl by the help of a known person or a pimp and take her to a place like bar or hotel.

Some red-light areas provide service to a specific income group of clients whereas the larger areas can serve to a diverse income group. For example, *Loker Math* accommodates fifty-five to sixty women to work in its twenty-one houses. The average income group that visits this place fall in very low category and they can hardly pay more than twenty-five rupees per visit. *Sonagachhi* is the only red-light area, which serves to high-income group. All India Institute of Hygiene & Public Health

<sup>10</sup> Meghnad Gupta, *Rater Kolkata*, Pratik, Kolkata, 1991 (first Publication 1923), p.28-29

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p.29

<sup>12</sup> B. Joardar, *Prostitution in Nineteenth and early twentieth century Calcutta*, Inter-India Publications, New Delhi 1985.p. 29

(AIH&PH) found that in the population of clients, the main occupation was mentioned, business whereas the 'service' (referring to as the government jobs) group was the second largest occupation among these clients.

Here are some of the facts and finding of AIH&PH:

- 45.5% of clients were having monthly income of less than rupees 1000
- 13.6% with monthly income over rupees 2500
- 8% of the population was of Students
- 87% were literate and 25% with higher educations
- 74.3% of the babus were literates and only 9.1% with higher education.<sup>13</sup>

On the basis of the nature of visit of clients to the brothels, clients can be classified into two groups:

a). Occasional clients b). Regular clients.

#### **Occasional Clients:**

Clients in the form of travellers or men who visit the red-light areas with sheer curiosity are the clients who come for swift sex and these kinds of clients are unknown in the area and they are known as temporary clients. Clients like young men who are curious about sex will not become regular visitor because they do not develop the habit of regularly visiting the prostitutes. They will visit and disappear once they acquire some experience or when their curiosity is over. For the wealthy men who come for their first sexual experience, it is their driver who introduces them to the prostitutes. Like the drivers, the rickshaw pullers, the taxi drivers also play part in introducing new clients in an area. For these one-timers, the attraction is purely dispassionate. Clients like truck drivers, who move from one city to another visit sex-workers on the highway. According to a survey in Uluberia (in West Bengal) about 94% truck drivers visit commercial sex-workers and most of them visits three to eight times a month! The survey also found that none of the truck drivers disclose this to their wives. According to AIH&PH most of the clients visit sex-workers once or twice a week.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta*, Stree, Kolkata, 2002, p.114. We find almost a similar picture of categories of the clients of female sex-workers in the work of author Moni Nag: Non-skilled and low-skilled workers in manufacturing industries located in urban areas. Many of them live away from their families for a major part of a year and have no opportunity to satisfy their sexual urge except by visiting female sex workers. Low level workers in various types in the transport industries such as, road (truck, bus, taxi, auto-rickshaw, cycle-rickshaw, manually driven rickshaw), railways and shipping. Construction workers, agricultural workers and other manual labourers living away from their families for a length of time. Traders and customers in periodic markets in both rural and urban regions. Visitors to fairs, festivals and pilgrim centers. Defense personnel living away from families. Business travelers College and high-school students.... Indian male students usually don't have their female peers as sexual partners. Pimps, procurers, brothel owners and law-enforcement personnel who have some control over female sex-workers. Traders and service providers in red-light areas. Professional blood donors. Moni Nag, *Sexual Behaviour and AIDS in India*. Vikas Publishing House Private Limited, New Delhi, 1996, p. 65-66

<sup>14</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta*, Stree, Kolkata, 1996, (Reprint 2002), p.114-115

**Regular Clients/Fixed Clients and Babus:**

Many clients regularly visit the same sex worker. This visit can be for few months or for years. In long-term relationship gradually it takes the form of a husband-wife relationship. Sometimes prostitutes are paid fixed monthly amount by these clients and some of these clients are even found to live with their mistresses.

Some of the regular clients are found to be very organized regarding their visit to the sex-workers. They visit the women at a fixed time every week or every month and the women concerned are paid a fixed monthly amount by them. Sometimes these fixed clients are seen to leave their own clothes in the room of the women. They also sometimes stay there overnight, and women prepare their favourite food for them. In this way a friendship is developed between them. But this friendship does not necessarily bring emotional attachment to each other. Women are paid less amount per visit by the fixed client compared to the temporary client. Because women having fixed clients feel financially more secure. These fixed clients often give little extra money if asked, like tips during *puja* or other festivals. This sort of money they can not easily get from the temporary clients.

The customers visit in the same women regularly gradually gets emotional attachment with those women and develop a close relationship within them. These clients might have their own families but despite that they continue their relationship with particular women. Often this relationship is maintained for many years until they leave that woman or get attached to another woman. The women are probably paid a fixed monthly amount along with presents, money for their clothes/dresses or sometimes they are taken to a holiday trip and even some other treat. But the emotional involvement may or may not always be reciprocated. There are several other issues which regulate the relationship between a *babu* and sex-worker – 'his claims on her (whether or not he likes her to entertain other clients), and how financial side of the relationship evolved, are details that and individual couple work out.'

Clients who are inclined to have oral, anal or other non-straight sex from sex-worker prefer to visit the same women every time. Because in this it becomes easier for the customer to carry out the 'whole transaction' as the sex-worker is already known to him and she agrees to perform his sexual preferences.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p.115-116

Srikarna classifies *babus* into three-and-half categories in his book *Babuder Andar Mahaltheke* given as under<sup>16</sup>:

i) **Timer babu:** These *babus* come to visit sex-workers at a fixed time and go back at a fixed time. That is why they are called *timer babus*. Though these *babus* are called *timer babu* but in real sense they are not *babu* but their position is placed in between the *babus* and customers. Because the criteria required to be a *babu* are not fulfilled by them. A *babu* supposedly stays with the *bibi* (sex-worker) most of the times. He is supposed to stand-by his *bibi* whenever she faces any problem, at times *babu* needs to play the role of her husband etc. But these *timer babus* neither take any responsibility of the sex-worker concerned nor do they fulfill any of the criteria mentioned above to become *babu*. Therefore, the emotional involvement is always absent between *timer babu* and *bibi* (sex-worker). But as these *timer babus* are fixed customers therefore they always enjoys special treatment from the sex-workers. Thus, they fall in the half category.

ii) **Sahosi Babu (Brave Babu):** After becoming *babu*, this *babu* gets married to his *bibi* (sex-worker) and takes her to his home where she is introduced as his wife. A *babu* takes his *bibi* to other rented house when he is unable to take her to his own home. But in this marriage neither they get any support from their family nor do any family members participate in their marriage. Therefore, if any problem arises between them they do not find any guardian to solve the problem. In the course of time it results into a big problem or big tussle between them. Gradually the man started repenting on his decision of marriage and this feeling gets aggravated when his family members and relatives start avoiding him. The *babu* now starts thinking that his decision of getting married to the girl is nothing but his greatness. And thus his *bibi* starts loosing her dignity in the relationship and starts getting undermined by her *babu*. The *babu* starts physically and mentally torturing his *bibi*. Gradually this exploitation becomes unbearable for the *bibi*. And lastly, no option is left with her but leaving everything behind. She runs away from the *babu* and returns to the red-light areas.

iii) **Aristocrate Babu:** These *babus* can not take their *bibis* to their own house or any other places but they keep them as their mistresses. The former bear latter's entire expenses with the condition that the sex-workers will not entertain any other customer.

In most of the cases *babus* become unable to bear the huge expenses of the red-light areas. Gradually the *bandha meyechele* (kept-woman) gets freedom for two to three hours to entertain other clients. These *babus* are known as '*bherua*' because of permitting their own *bibis* to entertain other clients.

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<sup>16</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, (The life, passion & inner conflicts of 'respected' fixed customers of the sex workers), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.22-24



অ্যারিস্টোক্রাট বাবু।

**Aristocrat Babu**

(Source : Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke)

Here it should be mentioned that in the red-light areas '*bherua*' means '*bhera*' (sheep). Because apparently they do not permit their *bibi* to entertain other clients but infact do not oppose. This turns the *babu* into a '*bherua*'.

(iv). **Khawa-Mocha Babu:** *Babus* in this group are unemployed and totally dependent upon the earning of the sex-workers. Due to this they can not oppose their *bibis* entertaining other clients. These *babus* do all the house-hold works of the sex-workers concerned which include cooking, washing, taking care of the house etc. For this reason they are not given any importance in the red-light areas. Their opposition against any injustice in the red-light areas does not carry any weight instead they are dismissed as '*bheruas*'. As a result these *babus* start suffering from a feeling of inferiority and get frustrated.



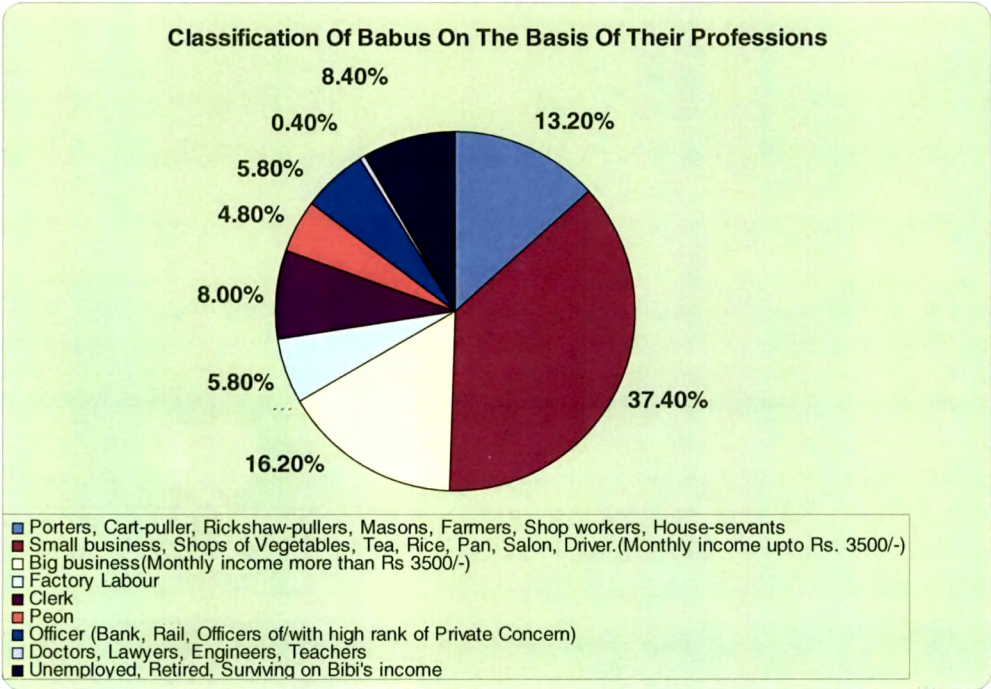
খাওয়া-মোচা বাবু।

**Khaowa Mocha Babu**

(Source : Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke)

Table: 3.2.B

CLASSIFICATION OF BABUS ON THE BASIS OF THEIR PROFESSIONS		
Professions	Number	Percentage (%)
Porters, Cart-puller, Rickshaw-pullers, Masons, Farmers, Shop workers, House-servants	66	13.2%
Small business, Shops of Vegetables, Tea, Rice, Pan, Salon, Driver. (Monthly income upto Rs. 3500/-)	187	37.4%
Big business (Monthly income more than Rs 3500/-)	81	16.2%
Factory Labour	29	5.8%
Clerk	40	8.0%
Peon	24	4.8%
Officer (Bank, Rail, Officers of/with high rank of	29	5.8%
Doctors, Lawyers, Engineers, Teachers	2	0.4%
Unemployed, Retired, Surviving on Bibi's income	42	8.4%
TOTAL	500	100%

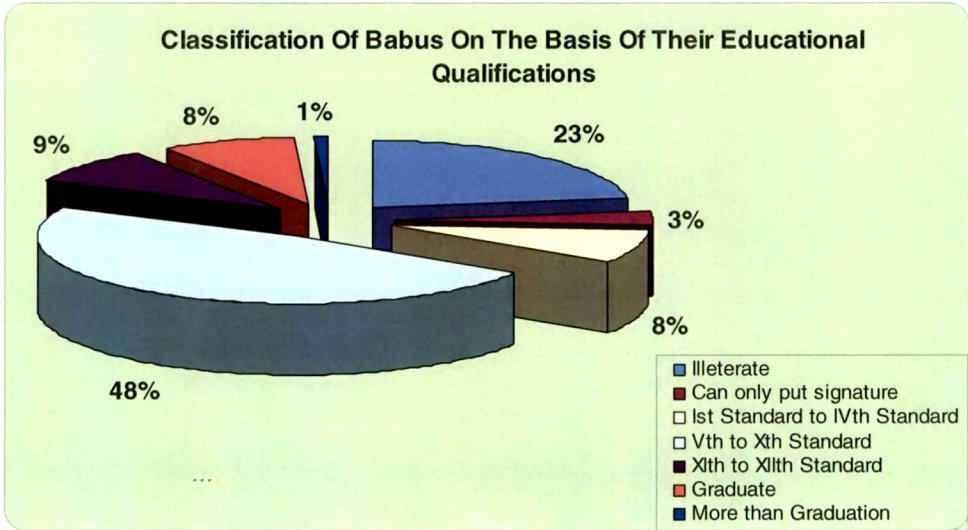


Source: Srikarna, Babuder Andaramahal Theke, p.26



Table: 3.2.C

Classification of the babus on the basis of their Educational Qualification		
Qualification of the Babus	Number	%
Illeterate	114	22.80%
Can only put signature	16	3.20%
Ist Standard to IVth Standard	41	8.20%
Vth to Xth Standard	240	48.00%
XIth to XIIth Standard	43	8.60%
Graduate	42	8.40%
More than Graduation	4	0.80%
Total	500	100.00%

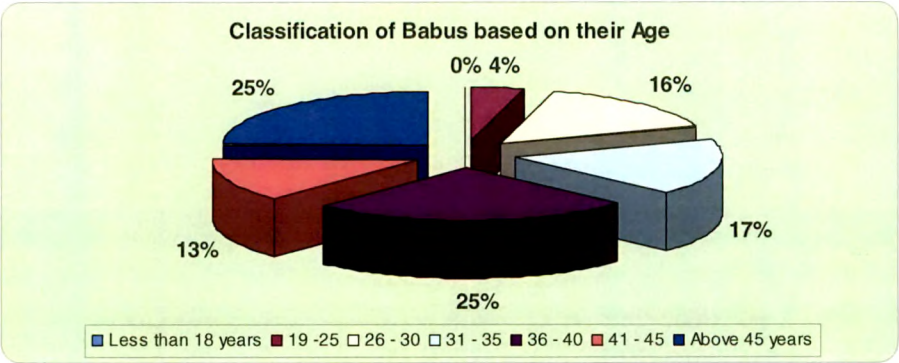


Source: Srikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke, p.61

Table: 3.2.D

Classification of Babus based on their Age		
Age Group	Number	Percentage
Less than 18 years	0	0.00%
19 -25	21	4.20%
26 - 30	78	15.60%
31 - 35	86	17.20%
36 - 40	126	25.20%
41 - 45	65	13.00%
Above 45 years	124	24.80%
Total	500	100.00%





Source: Babuder Andarmahal Theke, p.18

3.3. Authority and Control:

‘Power and Control’ are two determinants, which regulate the inter-relationship between the sex-workers and fixed clients. According to this, power and control the relationship between sex-workers and fixed clients vary. In long term relationship between babu and bibi the relationship gradually takes the form of a husband-wife relationship. In most cases, it is often found that the movements of the mistresses are attempted to be controlled by their long-term babus. These roles of babus to exercise control over their mistresses are generally accepted by many of the sex-workers. Here the traditional aspect of the man-woman relationship is very much prominent, where men possess supreme authority over the women and the women are compelled to accept that.<sup>17</sup>



<sup>17</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree, Kolkata*, 2002, p.120



**Pictures Depicting Different Moods of the *Babus***  
(Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke)

In this regard, one incident should be mentioned here. Srikarna (the son of a sex-worker) has narrated the incident of 'Tapati', a sex-worker of Kalighat red-light area:

Tapati is an important leader of our sex-worker's movement. She understands the organization so well that she has kept the whole locality tied together. Before there were huge problems regarding money taken by the local heads. It was a norm to give a sum to the 'dadas' of the locality whenever a new girl came. It was for Tapati's objection that the boys of the club were forced to lessen the amount to fifty one rupees. For that reason, starting from the office – in – charge of the police station to the councilor and the M.L.A, all treat Tapati with regards/respects. Tapati has had some problems with her 'Babu' Manoj. And that the problem is fighting, there remains no doubt about that. I have this natural experience by virtue of staying in this locality. To go into the fights of the babus and bibis means voluntarily taking the trouble on your shoulders. That is why I did not go to Tapati's place that day with the excuse of another chore. But whatever trick I might have adopted didi clearly understood that she has been avoided. For which I had to take digest some words of also mixed with hard feeling the next day. At last, to calm down didi, I took my office assistant Madhabi along to go to Tapati's place in the evening. Tapati was sleeping in her room. She was in tears as soon as she saw me. Her face had swelled up unnaturally. The portion below her right eye has darkened so much that it seemed to be a black birth – mark. The things inside her room were all scattered. Both the glassed of the almirah/cupboard were broken. The colour coating of the refrigerator damaged in few places. The only thing intact was the television set. It was saved because of being near the goods and goddesses. It did not need any mention that it was Manoj who had beaten up Tapati. But I because very inquisitive as to how a thin man could beat up a woman whose lecture work wonders, who is respected by the police and hooligans alike. Firstly I gravely consoled her like a brother – does anyone beat up someone like this? At this Tapati pressed the joints of her fingers aloud and angrily said making a face, 'he shall face destruction. He will go to the Keoratala burning –ghat. Worms will eat up that hand, with which he has beaten me up,' and she was in tears again.

I asked her the reason of the quarrel and the fight while sipping at the drink having the dry fried rice and grams along with onions and green chillies. Finishing off one strong peg, in one gulp, Tapati started the two days back story. The day before yesterday a heavy shower came while returning home from the executive committee meeting at the office. Tapati's house is at least ten minutes walking distance from the bus stand. There was no way to

come in a rickshaw. The entire stretch from the bus stand to her place had been dug up to fix underground drainage line. On top of that she has worn a new sari from the cupboard today. She felt pity to wet this sari. She stopped at a shop waiting for the rains to stop and when she was ready to walk home, she saw it was nine O'clock at night. Due to water logging up till her knees, she had to get the sari wet. Washing it, when she was about to spread the sari to dry, suddenly Manoj appeared from nowhere abusing her. She heated up in anger. Heavy shower and there was no umbrella. Then the road was dug up. In spite of this he suspects me, tell me dada, can I control my temper? He says that I roam around with sari-sellers. Okay, even if I roam around, then why outside? I will throw you out and have him in. As soon as I said this he started hurling punches on me. I gave him one blow with the stick I use to spread my clothes to dry. He threw me to the ground on my back and see, beat me with the grinder stone. Saying this Tapati started crying again. At some places in her head I saw some soft swellings. I felt sad somehow at seeing this. Do give me a written note to the complaint cell committee in the office. Because if a worker from our office or a babu being a part of women's liberation movement beats up his women then of course complaint comes first against him for breaking the discipline. That is why I asked her to submit a written complaint in the office the very next day. Let me mention as a matter of fact that Manoj works in our office. You write it down just now, I will sign it – Tapati forced me. Not in the frenzy of a drunkard, give it to me with a clean mouth tomorrow, and giving her enough assurance I returned home. A day, two days passed. On the third day I gave her a reminder about the letter but letter came. After about fifteen days I went to Tapati's place and saw Tapati and Manoj sitting together on the verandah drinking liquor with fried fish. Seeing me, Manoj poured a peg of liquor and offered it to me. In anger and sorrow I finished off the drink, returned home and promised of not further getting emotionally involved in the quarrels of babu and bibis of the red –light area as the two got mixed up like mango and mille and we are rolling like seeds in the middle.<sup>18</sup>

Srikarna has mentioned another incident in this context:

In talking about Tapati the drunken Kalpana came to mind. I will never forget the incident that night. After watching the news on TV after my supper I was just about to go to sleep. It was around eleven at night. Kalpana came and started playing her same record, 'Dada, when I will get the job?' No matter how much I said, you have given the exam, have patience. Let the results come out, we will know it then. But who listens. Kalpana needs the job right then. More than the need of money what had attracted her more was wearing the green apron and badge and roaming around her own locality along with the doctor didi and her friend and with that explaining everyone about AIDS and condoms.<sup>19</sup>

When Srikarna asked her, 'what is there in that green dress that you want to work? The money is also less. A duty from ten to two each day would earn you at the most thirty rupees.' Kalpana replied with smile, "look Dada, money is not the most important thing to me. Actually, from the first day I got into this line (profession of prostitution) I think, 'we cannot do any job other than the job of fucking.' But now seeing the green apron – clad didis, it seems that we can do all jobs equally. 'And see, the didis are asking not to take in men without condoms. The reason, without condoms secret deceased and AIDS can be transmitted. On saying this to a customer yesterday he laughed

<sup>18</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003, p.63-67

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.p.67-68

it away. He said, 'I am literate, you do not have to explain to me all these. Nothing will happen to me.' But when those green apron – clad didis said the same thing to that customer in the same way as me, strange, meekly agreed to do the job with me with condoms. That is why it occurred to me that this green dress has a kind of magic mixed in it. Money is not important to me. I want to wear this green dress once."<sup>20</sup>

Kalpana Das is an ordinary sex worker. She lives in the red light area of Kalighat. Her full name is Kalpana Das. That night Srikarna somehow sent her home. Two days later she came in the early morning with the same request: 'Dada, will I get the job?' Srikarna therefore says, 'That is why whenever I saw Kalpana coming I used to be a bit afraid.'

Srikarna goes on:

Ten to twelve days have passed. Kalpana does not come, I too have forgotten about her. One day I suddenly saw a notice which had come from the Kalighat to our clinic. There I saw that along with three other girls, Kalpana too has been selected as a peer educator. Immediately we sent for Kalpana, but she was not to be seen. At last, impatient, I had to go to Kalpana's place. Seeing me Kalpana quickly came out of her room and said with a grave face – 'I was about to come to your place, why did you call me?' When I gave Kalpana the happiest news, that is the news of her being selected, her eyes filled up with tears. 'Why are you crying, Kalpana? You have got the job for which you have been searching like hell all these days. What is the reason for tears?' Saying this, when I kept my hand on Kalpana's head she looked at me and started crying. What I finally heard from her was that Kalpana will not to the job. Because her babu has quarreled with her the whole day about doing this job. He has threatened her, 'either the job or me'; you have to choose anyone from the two.<sup>21</sup>

Kalpana's friend Soma, a bit too straight and open with her words was standing nearby. Listening to the whole thing she commented: - 'If people come to the *'magis'* (slang for women) room there is no 'crime in that, all the sin is if you do the work. Dada, actually the pet is afraid.' The writer says: 'I could well make out that Kalpana's babu has understood that if Kalpana joins the job she will get educated and learn to understand who is cheating her in what way. And once Kalpana learns this then her 'brilliant babu' Ranjit would no longer have his work done. It is for this reason that he is objecting to this work.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.68-69; At the start of the Sonagachi project the founder of the project Dr. Surojit Jana was worried as to who would work in this project? Experienced people advised that since this was sensitive field, well educated, calm and intelligent people were needed for this. But Dr. Jana somehow felt that all project do continue this way. Therefore, he decided to start off this project a bit differently. Ignoring all debates Dr. Jana had decided that except for extremely important fields, it is the community members or the sex workers and their children who would work in the whole project. There was after this a call for sex-workers for setting up medicine centers and clinics, distribution of condoms, information regarding AIDS and reaching out to fellow workers. When Kalpana had given her interview, by then about ninety sex workers were already working as peer educators in Sonagachi and nearby red-light areas of Kolkata. Seeing this, Kalpana too wished to work wearing that green dress of the didis. Ibid. p.69

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p.69-70

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p.70

The case of Soma as an example stands very much relevant in this regard. She has a fixed client or Babu from whom she is regularly paid. Though she entertains other customers but she is very much dependent on her babu and emotionally attached with him. Soma started taking training in karate classes and her babu did not object to this. After some time, while she started attending drama workshop organized by Sanlaap, which was being prepared to present a play for International women's day, the objection came from her babu. Her babu disliked this idea of her performance in a play in public and she was asked to stop. Despite enjoying the workshop Soma could not afford to make her babu unhappy and deviated from the idea of performing in the drama. The fixed clients or Babu who are generous and 'pay for their relationship', even then, they cannot get themselves free from patriarchal attitude.<sup>23</sup>

Thus along with these blackmailing, domestic violence is a common problem faced by many sex-workers living in the red-light areas. There are many sex-workers as well as their children who come from violent homes and later on enter into violent relationships once they become the part of the sex-industry. The dominant portion/the numbers of sex-workers having babus are dominant in the sex-industry, many of these babus are financially dependent on the sex-workers, in this regard Indrani Sinha states the miserable condition of Champa who is subjected to this domestic violence of the violent relationship with her babu 'Dilip'- "Champa is such a woman who had a violent partner. She has a mother and a sister who are both sex-workers. Joining the profession herself, she moved to a different area where she could earn more-money. There she had two sons by a local hoodlum who had become her babu. After a quarrel they split up and she moved again to keep out of his way. After sometime she met Dilip who ran a *pawbhaji* and *bhelpuri* stall at the maidan and also sold illicit liquor. He moved in with her and she had two more sons by him. She continued to work as a sex-worker. Things began to turn sour where the hawkers were removed from a part of the Maidan to build a fountain. All of Dilip's equipment and pots were smashed by the police and he became unemployed. He started drinking throughout the day and then he would come to Champa and start beating her up for money for his drinks. She gave him food but tried to stop him from coming into her room. Now he visits her two or three times a week and threatens or beats her for money. Sometime he visits late at night, climbs over the wall of the courtyard and enters her room, shouting abusive languages if the door is locked. The older children flee and the younger ones cry when he comes – he has also beaten the children in the past. Champa continues to entertain clients but now a days take the risk of operating from outside a public monument that is a tourist attraction, going with the rich clients who come in cars, she earns Rs 150 – 300 per customer, and more if she goes

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<sup>23</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Street, Kolkata*, 2002. p.120

to a hotel with them the risks are greater but needs the money for herself, her sister, her four children and for Dilip's liquor. She is unable to stop the harassment because Dilip leads a group of hoodlums around the monument that could stop her business. Dilip has started earning a little money playing the priest and doing pujas for tourists who visit the monument, and she says he also steals. He tried to rape her sister once when he was totally drunk, and was regular counselling from Sanlaap and two of her children attend our crèche. She also wants us to counsel Dilip."<sup>24</sup>

To talk about the violence which the prostitutes are subjected to often by their babus through various ways, Swapna Gayen's story also stands very much relevant. In her own words:

After coming into this profession and setting in Lokhar Math I fell in love with a boy named Dilip. Gradually our love grew deeper and he became my permanent 'Babu' (fixed customer). He used to sell country liquor at Lokhar Math. Used to get a daily salary of Rs. 60/-. Even I used to earn 70 to 80 rupees per day. We rented a room in Chetla at Khuku bariwali (landlady – usually renting out rooms to sex workers) to live together. Even though I stood at Lokhar Math from evening to night for customers, the rest of the time I spent in Chetla. I handed over all I earned to Dilip in good faith. I noticed after a few days that Dilip was not giving me any money; in fact he was spending all the money I gave him. On enquiry I found that he got hooked to another girl also known as Swapna. Though I heard about it earlier, after going steady with him and settling down I developed faith in him and did not pay heed to rumors. One afternoon, while I was sleeping, a friend of Dilip came and informed me that if I went to a movie hall 'Rupali' immediately I could catch Dilip red-handed with the other girl. I was then five months' pregnant. In that heat of summer I took a rickshaw and went to 'Rupali' hall. I stood there until the show was over – and found him coming out of the hall with his 'love', laughing and chatting. Seeing this I was boiling with anger from head to foot. Somehow controlling myself I came back home. After sometime Dilip and his friend Swapna came back to Lokhar Math separately. We started an argument Dilip started abusing me and said 'You bring so many men as customers, I never object'. In reply I said 'that is my profession; there is no love involved in it. If you too take it as profession and cater to female customers, I will have nothing to say. But if you mix with a girl like this, it means having a love affair. It means spending money on her. I am ready to leave this profession if you can fend for me.

However loud I was in speaking out the truth Dilip was not ready to listen, he started beating me severally. After two days of this violent incident the child in my womb was miscarried. Spending four days in the hospital I came back and found that Bhabani masi had taken another girl as tenant in my place. Another lady named Usha masi gave me a room. I was still bleeding after the abortion. But without caring for that I started taking in customers with vengeance. Even after all this Dilip did not care for me at all. On the contrary, he got used to beating me up at the slightest pretext, once he boxed my ears so hard and it started bleeding profusely. People came in to take me to the hospital. The doctor straightaway asked "Who has beaten you like this?" To save Dilip I said, 'I fell down at the toilet and hurt my ear' I saved Dilip from the police. Since then I cannot hear properly with my right ear. In spite of all these beatings I could not leave Dilip. I had some kind of a soft-corner for him. Moreover, the local young men told me that Dilip belonged to that place and there was no point going against him. This landlady named Khuku had put lots of conditions. She used to fine for not following her rules. For example if anyone entered the house after getting drunk from outside there was a fine of Rs. 10/-. If anyone entered after having sex outside, be it

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p.86-87



summer or winter, one had to take bath immediately on entry. For all these problems, I started searching for another house. At last through Madhabi, a friend of mine. I took a room on U. K. Mondal Lane at Rs. 12/- per day and started earning. If any customer spent a little more time in my room, Dilip would start abusing him, along with that he would start thrashing and kicking me. On days he drank more than usual he became a devil. He would pull me by my hair, get me inside the room; after locking the door, he would switch on the T.V. or tape recorder at full volume so that nobody could hear my screams. 'Let me see who can save you' – he said. At that stage I would helplessly hold on to his feet and beg him to forgive me, had I done anything wrong. But he would not be in his sense. He would first strip me so that I could not open the door and run away. Then he would beat me up with the wooden bar of the door like beating a cow. I was sickly from childhood and had once suffered from TB. One slap would have been enough for me. Such brutal beatings would make me lie on the ground and thrash about like a beheaded goat. Sometimes I felt I was dying. For three or four days at a stretch I would be bedridden after this sort of torture. But to earn money and for the fear of more beatings I had to get up and start going to the street after a visit the doctor. After coming to this new place, there was a police raid in Lokhar Math and the brothels closed down. So I contacted the local goons like Panchu, Lal and Labudada and managed a job for Dilip. After he started earning money, Dilip became more suspicious and would start beating me up on hearing rumours, suspecting me of keeping another Babu.

One year on Durgapuja Saptami morning I went out with other girls to see the puja after spending the whole night with customers. When I returned, Dilip started beating me doubting that I had gone out with some babu. He bashed me up so badly that my face – my mouth and nose became disfigured. The right eye became blood-red. I became injured to such an extent that for the next few days I could not come out to get clients. I consulted many good doctors. But even now, I cannot see properly with my right eye. The torture I got from Dilip was not only physical but the exploitation he carried out daily was financial and psychological as well. After he became my babu, he took me as his wife to his native village. I became friendly with his relatives. He used this opportunity to extract money from me. When he asked for something in front of his other family members I could not refuse. Sometimes money was needed for his niece's wedding, sometimes for other small or big household necessities. Whenever he asked for money, I gave him. Just a few days back when I had trouble with the goons of Tollygunge— Lal, Labu and Panchu, Dilip's elder brother fell ill all on a sudden. I had to bear the total cost of hospitalizing him. Unfortunately his brother died and he pestered me for doing all the funeral rites; just to save his face I withdrew 12000/- from my bank and spent on the 'Sradh' ceremony and fed the people of the entire locality. On the day of 'Sradh', the number of guests was beyond expectation, Rs. 3000/- more were needed. It was 8 o'clock in the night. There was no time to go to town, withdraw the money and come back. I told Dilip to take money from a local moneylender at a high rate. Dilip asked his relatives for money. Finally his sister agreed to give Rs. 3000/- at an exorbitant interest rate of ten rupees per Rs. 100/-, per month. After six months when I went to repay the loan, the interest accrued was Rs. 1800/-. I came to know that of the 1800, Dilip would take Rs. 900/- as his commission. It came to me as a shock – can you imagine – trying to extract money at the death of one's own brother and cheating one's own wife! Brother and sister's money-lending business by deceiving people? While staying at Lokhar Math after I lost my baby, I became pregnant again by Dilip. After the child was born, one day Dilip suspected that the child was not his. The baby was a result of some other man's relation with me. He even spoke about testing the baby's blood. I could not bear it and asked him, if you have such doubts, why do you stay with me? If you are so particular about this you could keep me just as a kept? After hearing this, he did not ask about the child's parentage any more. At that time, our 'Usha Co-operative' was not started yet. So,

along with others I went to open a savings account in the United Commercial Bank, Hazra branch. I found Dilip standing behind me in the queue; he had somehow got the news. Lastly to save my home and my honour, I had to open the account jointly with Dilip. Whatever was saved in the account was taken by Dilip regularly. After this, through a friend's babu, I went to purchase a small plot at Kabardanga. To my utter surprise, when I went to the Registry Office for the purpose, I found Dilip waiting there for me! But I did not repeat the mistake this time. For that I got a lot of beatings though.

After coming to Tollygunge, I saw sisters in green aprons working among girls like us – explaining about diseases and treatments, talking about the organization. At first I did not pay much attention to them. Later, after speaking to some of them I gradually developed a faith in them. As advised by those sisters, I went to attend a field meeting and learnt a lot about diseases and how to protect ourselves from them. I used to listen to their words intently and think 'was it really possible'. After getting closer to the sisters I started going to the meetings more often and sometimes even went along with them to processions. Those days were days of pure happiness for me. My life took a new turn. In the year 2001 there was the general body election of the organization in the University Institute Hall. Requested by one of the sisters, I went to see the election; to me it was like going to a fair. As per plan, office-bearers were supposed to be elected there on that day. I do not know what our leader Ms. Sudipta Biswas saw in me, with the slightest consent from my part, she selected me as the president of the organization. She also gave a powerful lecture in my support telling the audience to vote for me and elect me so that they would get a suitable leader in future. Fortunately the same day I got elected as the President of the organization. When I returned home, all the men folk of the locality including my babu turned their backs towards me. They later went on instigating me to leave the organization. One fact I realized was that before this, all the girls of U. K. Mondal Lane were under the leadership of the woman named Mumtaz; she was the kept of Lal-da. Now the couple – Lal and Mumtaz could not tolerate my presence as their rival. That was why they were so fierce. After becoming the president I got a chance to act in a film directed by a well-known film director. Almost at the same time I represented the organization at a Conference held in Bangkok. Dilip announced that if I joined the film, the people of his family would come to know that I was a whore. That was enough reason for me to drop the idea of being a film actress. When the news about going to Bangkok spread, Lal-da, the famous country-liquor dealer asked me with whom was I going to Bangkok? I laughed and said that I was going with Dr. Smarajit Jana and Nandini Bandopadhyay. Hearing this, Lal-da said 'Do you know that they are taking you there to sell you off in Bangkok.' Hearing this I made a plan. Next day I told Lal-da – "look, I am new here. Mumtaz-di is working for a long time here. I told this to Sir (Dr. Jana) suggesting him to take Mumtaz in my place, Sir told me that since I was the president I could do as I wished. So Lal-da, it is my wish that Mumtaz-di should go to Bangkok." I gave her passport to the office and told Lal-da after two days – "Now, if they sell Mumtaz-di in Bangkok? What then?" He started stammering. Again he tried in his own crooked way to convince Dilip that Dr. Jana was taking me because he wanted to have fun with me. As a result, on the eve of my foreign trip, I got a dose of severe beating from Dilip at night.<sup>25</sup>

Mrinalkanti Dutta depicts the uncertain pathetic lives of these prostitutes and narrates how the authorities of babus are ruthlessly exercised upon them:

Since the number of fixed customers is very low here, there is a constant tension about 'tomorrow'. Whenever there is a dearth of clients, the worries about landlady's rent, food for the child etc haunt a common prostitute every single day. One aspect is certain in the life of

<sup>25</sup> Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005. p.175-181



a whore. She can manage the landlady for a day or two. She and her child can survive on salt and rice for a few days. But the 'Babu', has to be fed properly. He is the king, who demands his pocket money for drinks and the plate of rice with his favorite dish of delicacy on the right time. Getting slaps and kicks for any omission is normal. He does not hesitate to throw the plate with the rice at her head at the slightest pretext.<sup>26</sup>

Some men after becoming babus do pay the monthly rent of the room along with allowances. But in most cases the babus invest a very small amount here like that in a business. The only intention of spending this small sum is to show the girl that he has status and money. From then on they start eating off the girl's money throughout their lives until the girls run away to some other locality. On top of that they force the girl to pay them daily allowances ranging from rupees twenty to one hundred. Generally the babus buy tea, bidis, cigarettes etc. with that money. Moreover, they have the habits of gambling, drinking and or sneaking into other girls' places.<sup>27</sup>

An incident of 2002 throws light upon the fact of exploitation of prostitutes by their babus. It shows that how dangerous it can be for the prostitutes when they fail to fulfill the demand of their babus and as a punishment her babu does not hesitate to attempt to murder her setting in the fire. Husband of a prostitute of Sonagachi tried to set her off in fire because she failed to meet his demand of money. The husband was arrested by the Baratala Police on charges of 'attempt to murder' his wife. The prostitute was admitted in critical condition to R.G.Kar Hospital, where she was fighting with her life. The accused husband was presented to the Bankshal Court after his arrest. The 25 years old beautiful prostitute, Puja Mondal was living in the third floor of the Imam Baqsh Lane of Sonagachi. She hails from Kanthi of Medinipore. A 22 years old person, named Sourabh Mondal, was living with Puja for the last 2 years. The residents of the red-light area knew Sourabh as Puja's babu like other babus of the prostitutes, who depends on the earning of the prostitutes. But Puja introduced Sourabh as her husband to her parents. Sourabh was a vagabond and completely unemployed. He used to enjoy using the earnings of his prostitute wife, and if Puja failed to meet his expectation of money, then she was subjected to heavy beatings. Since Puja was having tremendous willingness to have a family, she could not separate herself from her husband, Sourabh despite these tortures. She never hesitated to provide thousands of rupees to her husband, who was younger to her. But in one Wednesday night, when Puja was unable to meet his demand of hefty money as she had a bad day in her business, Sourabh brutally beat her. And then he poured kerosene oil on her body and set her off in fire, he also tried to kill her by strangulating her. Without hesitating, he kept the half-burnt body of Puja and fled away. Though the neighbours came in and extinguished the fire on her body, by then 80% of her body was already burnt. At

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p.98

<sup>27</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.13-14

around 6 O'clock in the morning, police officer Suprio Kumar Pal and the officer-in-charge of the Baratala police station, Asim Ghosh, ran to the place of incident. From the prima-facie, it was known that, 'Sourabh Mondal' was not his original name, using which he was staying as babu with 'Puja Mondal'. His original name was 'Sohraab Uddin'. He was living in the red-light area by en-cashing this name. After searching the entire North Calcutta, he was arrested from 'Hedua' by the police.<sup>28</sup>

There are various reasons for this objection, anger, fighting, fear and all sorts of exploitations. The vulnerable condition of the sex-workers compels them to tolerate all these injustice. It has been mentioned before that the women keeps babus for the need of sex, to save themselves from monetary pressures of the local heads and for a husband's name while getting their children admitted to schools. Taking advantages of such weaknesses the babus blackmail these women in many ways. Even after fifty-four years of independence, the sex-workers and their children are still marginalized. They are considered as untouchables in the society and top of that some exploitative, people mark out these places a 'red-light area' prohibiting ordinary people from entering them. For this reason, protest is a far cry, the consciousness do not even get to know about the injustice and tortures done in this area. The torture and exploitation here turn the sex-workers almost to slaves. In spite of not wanting to, these sex-workers are forced to commit misdeeds under adverse circumstances. Now it would be widely discussed that how the low socio and economic condition of the sex-workers make them vulnerable to the exploitations of their babus and what the ways they are performed.<sup>29</sup>

The sex-workers are economically and socially very weak.<sup>30</sup> **Social problem:** - (I). As sex-workers play the combined role of father and mother they face various problems. To open a bank account, to apply for ration card, to seek admission to school, father's name was essential. Just visiting a government hospital meant filling in a form with the father's name. To fulfill this requirement, the mother would often lie or her present partner's name was to be used. But mentioning the partner's name instead of putting in father's name could create complicated situation later on. Gradually, due to the rising consciousness slowly the term 'guardian' was slowly being introduced to replace 'father' in some areas with the motto of topping this discriminatory attitude against 'single-parent families'. In 1988, a notice was sent by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education to all schools ordering that the admission form should be changed from 'father's name' to 'Name of

<sup>28</sup> Staff Reporter, *Taka Na Peya Jaunakarmee Stree Ke Puriye Marar Cheshta*, Bikeler Protidin, 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke* (The life, passion & inner conflicts of 'respected' fixed customers of the sex workers), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.70-71

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p.71

Father/Mother/Guardian'. It cannot be denied by schools by law to accept child admission; even they fail or become unable to provide the name of the father. This law was passed after Supreme Court was challenged by the Delhi sex-workers in 1992.<sup>31</sup> Previously it was mandatory to admit kids to school with the father's name and that created several problems.<sup>32</sup> In this regard one sex-worker said:

The problems range from the refusal of school heads to grant admission to our children. Further, we are unable to furnish names of a male guardian as usually demanded.<sup>33</sup>

But presently it isn't that much a compulsion to admit with the consent and name of the father after a judgment of the Supreme Court. If necessary, it is enough to give the name of the 'husband' or 'babu'. It is not mandatory anymore for the father to be physically present. But even a few years back, the pictures was completely the opposite. Then it was compulsory for the father to be physically present and sign in the admission registered as the guardian at the time of admission.<sup>34</sup> For getting a father the mother had to pay a dear price and had to silently tolerate several tortures. With the slightest mistake, 'I will go and reveal everything to the headmistress and push off' – saying these he would make the mother a prey to continuous blackmailing and thus taking advantages of her helplessness.

(II) Another major problem is regarding staying at home. In these areas the babus do not get much importance from the landladies. The reason is, if you give importance to the babus, you have to give the bill. For that reason the bibi has the soul right as the tenant. But if for some reason this renting out is through the babu and bibi, there is no escape for the sex-worker. She gets exhausted by being continuously exploited by that babu. Since the name of the babu comes first as the tenant, the bibi cannot protest at anything. On any protest, she receives a threat of being driven out of the room. Sometimes the babus actually throw them out to bring in a new bibi or the babu gives away that room in contract using it for his own business purposes.

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<sup>31</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree*, Kolkata, 2002. p.105-106; The organization, named Bharatiya Patita Udhhar Sabha, appealed to the court for allowing the children of the sex-workers of different places to get admission without their father's identity. Statement of Khairati Lal Bholia, the President of the Bharatiya Patita Udhhar Sabha, goes, 'few years back these children were not allowed to get admission in the school. We have gone to the Supreme Court taking this matter and currently about 7½ lac children all over India have got admission in the school without their father's identity.' In 1988, Bharatiya Patita Udhhar Sabha appealed to the court in this matter. According to them, on the basis of availability father's identity this partiality is not accepted. This organization termed it illogical even asking whether the child's mother is a divorced or of a sex-worker at the time of admission in the school. After 5 years of Bharatiya Patita Udhhar Sabha's appeal, Supreme Court gave attention to this matter and in 1993, the highest court of India gave its verdict that at the time of admission in a school, either father's or mother's name can be used, only father's name is not mandatory. Staff Reporter, Jaunakarmeeder Shishura Aaj'o Andhakar Jagat'er Basinda, Anonda Bazar Patrika, 25<sup>th</sup> October, 1996

<sup>32</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.71

<sup>33</sup> Societal Violence on Women and Children in Prostitution: A report by the National Commission for Women, 1995-96, National Commission For Women, Government of India, New Delhi. p.32

<sup>34</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.71

(III) Now the problems of the bibi's village home can be discussed about. It is very necessary to have a husband to go to her parents' home. Because to prevent social ostracization in village it is not only necessary for the parents to say that their daughter has been married off in the city, they have to show the husbands as a proof to all. As a result, it goes without saying that once a man is made the husband, he becomes the permanent customer for the girl. For that reason there is a proverb— 'The temporary job in red-light areas is to become the babus to the women.' The job becomes permanent on the day he gets the right to go to her village home. Once this right is earned, there is no looking back, he controls the woman as he wishes. If the girl refuses to listed to something or protests for some reason, the babu refuses to ho with them to their homes as husbands. If that does not suffice, they threat the girl continuously of revealing everything to the village *panchayat* or head, making her a prey to continuous blackmailing.<sup>35</sup>

**Economic Problem:** For those girls under the control of aristocrat babus, their customers gradually drindle other women for not taking them in. On top of that the girls become completely dependent on the babus for it is they who take care of all the daily necessities. The babus who are good remain dear forever. But some babus take the advantage of the girl's helplessness and demand several sex works. On not listening they threaten them with learning them. These girls not being able to deny the long habit of association, for the worry of their children's life and most of all to pay their rents to the landladies, are forced to have unprotected sex with these babus.<sup>36</sup>

All these blackmails are considered by the bibis as ill fate. Here a question arises – whether there is any escape from these tortures or not. The ones who get the taste of freedom are the ones who are bit courageous. If some brave sex-workers, not worrying about their food give a return threat of getting their kids admitted to schools with the name of new father or not caring about their village home tell them 'do whatever you want to', then such babus are seen to curl up in fear and strangely they become silent. 'Just like stray dogs after barking at strangers lie down with their tails curled in crying after getting a hit with a stick.'<sup>37</sup>

Many of the babus live on the earnings of the sex workers often they take advantage of being economically supported by the sex workers and become less bothered to earn for their own survival and for this they start inflicting pressure on their mistresses to work more and earn more money. The babus also do not engage themselves in house hold work or nourishing children in return. The

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p.71-72

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p.72

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p.72-73

*babus* also do not engage themselves in household work or nourishing children in return. The sex-workers refer to *babus* as those people who 'give-money' and those who 'eat-money'.<sup>38</sup> Snatching away money from her after she comes out serving a customer is a very usual act of the *babus*. If that does not suffice there is emptying the *bibi's* bank account showing many reasons. The foremost blackmailing of the *babus* is of course directing her according to his wishes.<sup>39</sup> But it is not the end, giving assurance of making wealth and for that buying land and showing her dream of making family are other ways of torture. This is the very reason why land is bought in both of their names (*babu* and *bibi*) otherwise that will lead to another quarrel. After that, *babu* starts becoming the owner of that land. Finally, the situation reaches to such an unbearable level, where if the sex-worker can safely get out that trap, that becomes more than enough. In most of the cases, it has been seen that ultimately *babu* becomes the owner of those lands or houses.<sup>40</sup>

Srikarna has cited two such situations portraying the unbearable situations of the sex-workers:

I was in class six at that time. The class of Hemer sir, the English teacher of our school goes on from seven in the evening to nine. Although all students left by nine, I stayed back till ten with excused like home-work or something else. I have to enter my house or my locality by ten thirty in the night by any means. This had two reasons. First, our house is in Kalighat. There the timings of customers are mainly from six in the evening to ten thirty. If someone from the school or some teacher gets to know that I stay in the red-light area, I will be immediately ostracized from the school. In fear of that I used to enter my locality after it got a bit empty or if there were police raids and everyone was running away in fear of them, I used to follow the police with my bag and go home. ... That night I returned home a bit late, I saw my drunker father was beating up my mother. Ma is tolerating that, crying. I am usually of a calm temper but if a man beats up woman then I cannot keep my head calm. On top of that it is my mother. ... I will not call it protest, on merely shouting and holding my father's collar, my mother who was so far silently tolerating my father's beating took up a fiery image suddenly and started beating me. I was the most hurt when I heard from my mother 'do you want to set my house on fire?' Not finding any language of protest I turned speechless and said that you are cooling down the matter (***Tumi Vashme Ghee Dhalcho***). Because just my father's family means getting a place in the household, in the meantime my mother bought five bighas of fertile land in the village in my father's name. For some unknown reason my father was on the verge of losing his job. After a long case in the high court although he has been re-recruited to his job, my mother had to give away her mantasha, Krishnachura, solid pair of gold bangles, neckless, sitahar, jhumkas and pashas of her ears totaling twenty seven bharies (all gold jewelleryes). As reward for this my mother got a chance to go to my father's village house a few times. Although my grandmother, aunt and uncle heartily received the new bride, my chhoto ma, that is my step mother and the rest did not speak to her. But what does that matter. 'The unfortunate lady got heaven in that' and she was overjoyed about it. The reason behind today's quarrel is making a concrete house in my father's village. Soon after my grandmother died my father broke down the mud house and put his mind in making a concrete one. Because this was my

<sup>38</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree*, Kolkata, 2002. p.121

<sup>39</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.71

<sup>40</sup> Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005p.117-118

grandmother's last wish. My uncle is superb in giving this plan. He was a first class in making my father 'Khudiram' without paying a single paisa. My younger uncle was unemployed. They made their ends meet from the produce of a plot of land. Where will he get the money from? At least seventy to eighty thousand bricks were required to build the house. And for that ninety thousand bricks will be burnt in the plot. To Punjab truck of coal had to be bought from Raniganj and for that Ma has to supply the money in the role of Lakshmi. Tonight's quarrel between my parents is regarding giving this money. No matter how much I explained that there is no end to it, it was for no good, my mother did not understand. She believes that I am jealous of my father. Ma had to bear not only the cost of the bricks but the entire cost of making the house. One is reminded of old zamindars (landlords) at seeing the grandeur of bricks making. Ma has given the money for making the house. But the bricks were coming out from the dice with the name of my father, elder and younger uncle. In pain and anger I did not say anything to my mother. I do not know why I felt that maybe Ma is doing the right thing. Ma spend so much money for one reason only 'a room of that house will be mine'. And my father did make substantial effort for that. Since my father looked after the week being of the family, none dared to speak against him even if they wanted to. My father used to take me to his village home every three to four months. He has his eye on my step-mother behaving properly with me. But after a few years we became pauper with the death of our father. Because he had cancer and my mother had to bear the entire cost for it. She spent money for his funeral in the village as well. Soon after that was over, my step-mother, step-brothers all got together and literally drove us out of the house. We tried to protest. But to whosoever we went for justice, all of them went against us for the majority. Someone even said that he had kept shut so long because his brother was living. 'You two have no place in our society.' What else to do. Losing everything we had, we returned to our old home, Kolkata. I started giving tuitions to the local children to maintain my family. A new battle started for us. The extreme suffering is beyond my explanation. In the dearth of money we sometimes even ate half meal a day. But I noticed a strange thing after that. Ma, who never gave importance to my words or did not have faith in my opinions, started believing in me all the more.<sup>41</sup>

Srikarna has mentioned another incident in this regard:

It's a five year back incident.... The room opposite to mine belonged to Sabidi.... My room was locked for which I had to go to Sabidi's room to get the keys from Ma. I got stuck up in a mess after going. Sabidi's babu Totada hold my hands and said, please tell me where the necklace will look good. Sabidi continue to request the same thing from me. Sabidi gave me the box of necklace. On opening the box I saw a Sitahaar, at least twelve inches long and that too latest design.... The weight of the necklace was bit more than thirteen grams and the making charges; tax etc. had in all made its total price six thousand five hundred and twenty two rupees.... but marriage gift of the night, that's is whose wedding was it. On asking this Totada arranging his dhoti said, 'Dilip's'. Dilip was the son of Totada's brother. Generally on the day of reception of the bridegroom side, the gifts come from the home of the bride. Then was the boy's or the bride's uncle sending the gifts? On asking, Sabidi answered that the person who I cared for right from the childhood, who calls me mother, whose entire cost of money I bore, down to giving a bribe of twenty five thousand for his job, in his marriage, and with this she laughed and looked at Totada. On sudden fading away of the smile from her face I looked at Totada to seen that he was staring at Sabidi with glaring eyes. I could not but silently pay my respects to Totada for eating off as well as controlling someone to get the benefit of both. I had thought that Totada cannot do any work because

<sup>41</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, (The life, passion & inner conflicts of 'respected' fixed Customers of the Sex-workers), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata p.76-80

Totada never used to work while at Sabidi's place. He used to eat Sabidi's income. But I can swear and say that if Totada is given a job in a mental hospital or a counseling center as a counselor, then he can easily beat and surpass qualified counselors. After about three years, very late at night, Dilip came to give the news that his uncle was no more. Totada was suffering from various deceases for the past three to four months. He already has blood sugar; on top of that water was accumulating in his chest. Sabidi did not fall short in spending lots of money to buy costly medicines prescribed by good doctors. She has also stopped going outside to look after his deceases. At last he clearly said one day that he did not feel like staying there anymore. Incidentally I was present there on that day. Better doctors were required, they had to be brought home if necessary; but they wouldn't come to this house. With this excuse Dilip managed the permission of taking his uncle back home. After this, Sabidi, just like that in the visiting hours of a hospital, got a chance to enter that house from four to six in the evening everyday. A few days back Sabidi went and saw that Totada was completely bed-ridden. He had no strength to even stand up. Doctors were far off thing. In fear of tuberculosis, except Dilip, no one, even his own brothers and his wives did not enter Totada's room. Only yesterday he had wanted to return to Sabidi at not getting water to drink even after asking for it repeatedly. But he never came back. Everything was over before that. Giving him water at the moment of his death was far, Sabidi could not even see him for the last time. That Sabidi whom everybody makes fun of for being talkative, that Sabidi whom everybody believed that she could put all to a ten minutes of sleep if she is put on stage once – after hearing this news that Sabidi's voice was completely silenced. She could control her waits but not tears. Her sudden cries sometimes, her sigh made it seem that the relationship of twenty two to three years had been ended in one stroke by someone. Totada's first name was Achintya Chatterjee. Totada could easily have a family with the money he earned by working in a cinema hall. But no one at his place gave their consent for the marriage because he had loved a girl of a different caste. In anger, pain and sufferings, Totada's would-be wife departed with her father in the name of going to her village but Totada could never find her out again. Then came repentance, drinking with friends, then coming frequently to the red-light area, he got settled in Sabidi's room. Fifteen days later after the funeral got over, I had just come home from office and sat down to rest suddenly Sabidi wailed aloud – 'I have lost everything.' I very well that if I ask something now I will get nothing as a reply but those tears. Therefore I patiently gave her time to cry. On calming down I came to know that Sabidi had about one lakh fifty thousand rupees in her bank account quite a few days before his death. Totada had come and withdrawn that amount along with Dilip. I was startled at hearing that. Not one or two, but a full one lakh fifty thousand rupees had been cheated. I felt worse on thinking about the last days of Sabidi. Sabidi was more than forty-eight years old.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p.80-83



পরিত্যক্তের পর একটা কাস্টমারের আশায় হা-পিডোশ করে বসে থাকা ছাড়া  
আর কোনো উপায় থাকে না।

**After the age of 45, the sex-workers are left with no choice but to wait long for a customer**

(Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke)

The actual age for retirement of women in line was forty five. They have to make whatever savings they can by then. After this they still have their bodies, their minds, even the strength to work but there are no more customers. As a result no other way remains other than waiting for a customer for daily needs, giving the rent of the rooms and so on. Earlier everyone used to eat out of spending their savings or selling their jewelleries bit by bit. Now many of them get monthly interest from their own co-operative or small monthly savings schemes of the post office. Some straightway try to get into the business of money lending amongst the girls eating from the interests. But that has huge risks. The conditions of those who lose everything over the babus are the most dangerous. They have no other way than to beg or work as a maid-servant in people's houses.<sup>43</sup> Shrikarna says,

Mitrababu, a customer of Sabidi was the chief accountant of that bank. It was Mitrababu who told Sabidi one day that the account that Toto and you have is not a joint name, it is either or survivor. The problem in this is that anyone can withdraw the money anytime he or she wishes. But Sabidi could never imagine that Totada would cheat of her money this way. It is said that even without marriage, if two people live together for twelve years, they can be considered having a relationship like married couples. The relationship between Sabidi and Totada is of at least more than twenty five years, which means two ages. That Totada whom Sabidi has not only loved but she has participated in all social gatherings of his family; she has loved Totada's brother's children like her own, had given away her hard earned money for their future with a smiling face; till his death she hasn't let Totada suffer from any financial inconvenience giving him bit by bit her savings. The question is why did Totada cheat such a person like Sabidi?<sup>44</sup>

To furnish better details about this, Shrikarna has divided the babus into three groups at their last days of life. The elaboration and explanation of babus during their old age explore the dynamic

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p.83

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p.85



relationships between the sex-workers and their babus. It further throws light upon the psychological aspects of the babus and according to that dealing with their bibis.

দিনান্তে বাবু



**Babu in old age**

(Source : Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke)

(i). The **first group** is ordinary. They spend their last days together like other husbands and wives. Both their money is usually finished by then and so they spend their days by giving away their rooms in contracts or half-ownership to other girls. For those babus and bibis who do not have rooms to rent out to girls they usually work as domestic help for young women spending the last days of their lives this way. If the bibi dies later, the babu does not face much problems because, in these areas the landladies rent out their rooms to women. But if the bibi dies before then the babus have to face several problems apart from that of the room.

(ii). The **second group** is that of the mediators. These babus try their best to give a place to these bibis in their family. It has also been seen that they have spent most of his bibis savings on that family for giving her a place there. But the real thing is that, the family to enter which both separately sacrifice their interests to some extent that very family deny to admit then in their last days making then a prey to extreme deprivation. Exemptions to this are also seen. But in that case the bibi is relieved till the babu lives that she will not have to face any obstacles. The problem is created if unfortunately the babu dies. Soon after the babu dies, the bibi is driven out of the house with several abuses and if that does not work with threatening of 'we will reveal everything about your reality', that the bad name of a 'Khanki' (prostitute).

(iii). The **third group** is the most dangerous. They derive their extreme pleasure from the treachery in their last days. They are of sentimental natures. Although they accept their bibis taking in regular customers or joke and laughter enjoy music for their professional purpose, this group does not only suffer pain mentally, extreme anger gets accumulated in their minds. Not being able to control this anger some even go to the extent of quarrelling a fighting with their bibis the next day. In such cases the main demand of these babus is not let in the customer the next day – 'let that man not enter your room a second day.' The bibis several times accept such demands due to love or due to blackmailing. Many babus, even if they do not show much objections regarding those, if a customer gives more money or comes regularly then out of a jealousy or fear of uncertainty of not remaining a babu, they press for not letting that customer in. For most girls it is not possible to submit to such unjust demands of the babus. Then these babus apply several tricks to stop that man from coming. In most cases the babus emerge successful. Those who fail, they become extremely revengeful and cheat everything this way to make the girl a pauper, deriving satisfaction out of this.<sup>45</sup>

Like domestic violence all over the world, in red-light areas also it is considered as a private issue, outsiders often show no interest to intervene in these matters. Whoever once intervene in the matter of domestic violence are often disappointed when the re-union of the couple later on. As Indrani Sinha says, "A woman, we know, requested another to help her throw out her live-in-babu after she could bear his abuse no more. They sent him away, but after a few months he was back and living with the same woman. Her friend says she is very disillusioned. 'Women take this abuse because they love their babus and they need that love. They do not report domestic violence to the police. It is a private matter.'" <sup>46</sup>

We have already got a vivid picture of babu-bibi interrelationship in this writing. It has been clearly seen how the phenomenon of 'power & control' regulates the relationship between Babu and his bibi where mostly bibis are subjected to the various forms of violence are left with no choice but to surrender themselves to these violent situation. The low socio as well as economic conditions of prostitutes cause the undermined position of prostitutes in their relationship to their babus to a larger extent but emotional attachment and desire to have a steady relationship also play a vital role with regard to the babu-bibi relationship for which prostitutes generally are seen to compromise. In this regard one incident narrated by Shrikarna is very much relevant:

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p.85-87

<sup>46</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree*, Kolkata, 2002. p.87

This is an incident of a night of August. Stuffy heat. Then fan is going on turning, although there had been some rain sometime back. The heat of the room hasn't lessened. The clock struck twelve a few moments back. The continuous Hindi songs playing in the tape recorder of the neighbouring house seemed bitterly boring. Suddenly there was a noise of throwing utensils. A groaning cry from a female – 'Ma – go' (O Mother.....!). And the sound of a male's abuse along with it. I could clearly understand that something has happened in the room next to the one beside ours. I went and saw Selimbhai continuously slapping, thrashing and punching Jeena. And Jeena, positioning her hands in several ways was faintly trying to ward off the attacks. On me rescuing her, Jeena strengthened, began to abuse Selimbhai. It was late night. The others were sleeping. My scolding made the two go quiet slowly. I was down having splashed water on my face. This and that though were coming and going. Suddenly I heard the faint cry of a girl. 'Mona, will not you eat?' Who is calling by this name? There is no one in this house by this name. Naturally, interested, I got out of bed and came out on the verandah. I saw Jeena, a pot of vegetables in one hand and a bottle of 'Bangla' (local liquor) in the other was telling this to the sleeping Selim standing by the side of the bed. 'Mona will not you eat?' Selim was actually pretending to sleep. Probably his senses came in alive at seeing the liquor bottle. Not being able to control his anger anymore he thought of an excuse after being called seven to eight times. 'Why did you abuse me in the name of my mother?' As a reply Jeena showed Selim the dark blood clot below her left eye made by his punch. Her left eye has reddened also. Jeena broke to tears while showing him the signs of other injuries. Selim was determined too. He did not care that he had beaten her so much. Since Jeena had abused him she had to ask for his forgiveness holding his feet at the end to make him eat.<sup>47</sup>

Another incident narrated by Shrikarna is found to be interesting which further explores the dynamics of the Babu-bibi relationship like the above Jeena's story. In this relationship, if by chance, a bibi takes upper hand over her babu (though it is found rarely) she can not exercise this authority over her babu constantly but surrender to his emotional blackmails and therefore, to hold on the relationship with her babu she is found in a position to constantly attempt to convince her babu. In this process even the bibi does not even retreat from apologizing her babus or convincing him through various other ways. Though mostly babus make mistakes and exploit their bibis but despite their all miss deeds they always expect to be elevated to the supreme position as they can not help themselves but to be patriarchal.

Last year one evening I returned from office and sat with the boys with their studies. Suddenly I heard that a pearl necklace was oozing water. Along with this miracle, Manasi-di was abusing loudly and saying that whatever she did was under the influence of this magic necklace. Other tenants as well as my wife started commenting on the incident. They spoke ill about another neighbour Ganga-dida who had bought her this necklace to weave black-magic. She intended to Caste an evil spirit on Manasi ... etc. A veteran sex-

<sup>47</sup> Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p 13; There are various factors which leave no option for sex-worker but tolerating/toleration of violent relationship; (i) lack of alternatives, (ii) Fear, (iii) desire to maintain a stable relationship, (iv) need for protection and love self-esteem, if the babus are members of gang of hoodlum or political groups, they can easily use forces and influence the sex-workers frightening herself. Naturally sex-workers are left with no other but remain silent in these cases leaving violent men often lead to the miserable consequences for sex-workers, leaving the area completely become necessary for them in these cases and to avoid such violent relationship many sex-workers are seen to move from one red-light area to another. Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slighthorne, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree*, Kolkata, 2002. p.87

worker Ganga-di was an ex-whore from the British times. She was about 60; fair and tall and was stooping due to her height and age. Even then her voice was still musical. When happy with some extra earning, she still hummed a few lovely notes from old movies and entertained the whole house. She was unperturbed even if she had no money. Another great quality was that she would never steal or try to make a few paise as commission or make money by keeping the change after a purchase. I was rather hurt to hear Ganga-di being blamed for evil eye. At this time my enthusiastic young child came running and said "Daddy, it's not water; it is oil that is dripping." The elder one cautioned him not to go there. The smell might spoil his health, he guessed. I came out into the balcony and found Jaga-mama, Manasi-di's babu standing rather desolately at the door and watching the sight silently.

..... On the eastern side of the porch Manasi was sitting in front of a fire made by burning paper and holding a pearl necklace over it with the end of an iron rod. The chain was melting and dripping on the fire and aggravating it. Suddenly Jaga-mama started filthy abuses towards Ganga-di. I went mad with anger; more so when I smelled liquor on Jaga-mama's mouth. I went towards Manasi-di and smelled the burning necklace. What was thought to be pearl was nothing but plastic beads. When I was about to ask Manasi-di straight about the nonsense that was going on, she looked at me and winked slyly. I realized that she wanted me to keep quiet. I knew there was something fishy about the whole thing ... when I told my wife about the wink she explained to me. For the last few days Jaga-mama was being difficult with Manasi-di. Things that usually all the babus accept was refused by Jaga mama. So, to teach him a lesson young Manasi-di was beating up middle-aged Jaga mama for a few days. Yesterday the beating was a little on the high side and as a result Jaga mama's forehead broke. He was rather hurt and wanted to go away. So Ganga-dida was called for her rescue. She took fifty bucks and gave the magic necklace. She also digested the abuses of the entire household. I could not follow anything. My wife explained to me that everyone except Jaga mama knows that it was a plastic chain and the beads were melting in fire. But this hoax was to make the drunken Jaga think that whatever Manasi-di did was under the influence of black-magic, she was not in her real senses. Only this would pacify Mama and he would not leave Manasi-di. This 'got-up' quarrel was only to calm down Jaga mama's anger.<sup>48</sup>

Various kinds of physical, sexual and emotional violence from babu and clients are very common in the lives of prostitutes which have already been discussed. In this regard, one prostitute said, "A customer bit me once." Another prostitute expresses her agony: "I feel deeply hurt when the customers abuse me and say, '*Eta haramer taka naki* (this money has not been received effortlessly)'." Another prostitute expresses her emotional set-back from babu in her own words: "My babu (lover, special client) left when I had Hepatitis B. He said, '*Oi morake ekhaan theke niye jaa* (Take this corps away from here)'."<sup>49</sup>

In 2004 April, a sex-worker was brutally tortured by two drunken jawans of the Armed forces. It was alleged that, those two jawans denied paying after spending the time with the prostitute and instead

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. p.38-39

<sup>49</sup> A Study on Children In Prostitution In Kolkata', Conducted by ATSEC, West-Bengal, Commissioned by CINIASHA (Urban Unit of Child in Need Institute), April – May, 2005. p.53

they brutally tortured her. The area became tensed due to this incident. These two jawans also beat a police officer, who wanted to calm down the problem. The police had a tough time to bring the situation in control in Khidirpur due to this incident. After they were brought to the Watgunje police station, at around 1:30 in the night, these two jawans were handed over to the Provost Unit of the Western Command of the Armed Forces. The two accused jawans were, Lance Habildar Sanjeev Kumar and Lance Nayak Harvinder Singh, aged somewhere around 30 to 35 years. Sanjeev was from 53, Engineer Regiment and Harvinder was from 102, Engineer Regiment. Both were working in the Fort William. According to Officer-in-Charge of the Watgunje police station, Chanchal Sarkar, "they denied to pay a prostitute and physically tortured her. We have filed all the allegations. But, any action according to law will be taken only by the Armed Forces." According to police, "they were taken away from the spot after whole lot of negotiation; they were not ready to listen to anything. They were saying, 'we are from the Armed Forces, why we have to pay money?'" Wing Commander Sumitnath Mukhopadhyay, spokesperson of the Armed Forces said, "I have not yet heard about this incident. But these kinds of incident do happen in the Armed Forces like it happens in the big societies. In order to have the system under control, we usually give punishment which sets example for others." The No.12 house is the residence of this young girl. In her own language, the incident of that night is excerpted here:-

After finishing their job, they said, 'we will not pay'. When I shouted, they put me on the bed and hold me by my throat and said in Hindi, 'we will kill you, we are fauji, above the police (father of police). Police will not be able to do anything to us.' The lady said that the two culprits have scratched on her whole body, bitten her and with all force they have broken her bangles which has resulted in wound and bleeding in her hand.

She continues,

From the closed door of the top floor, no one could hear my shouts. Then anyhow I managed to open the door near the bed side.

Another tenant of the house, Ayesha Begum said,

When I went there hearing her screaming, the jawans threw me out. Then I called at the police station.

From the police, it was known that Lance Habildar Sanjeev Kumar and Lance Nayak Harvinder Singh were there in the room of the prostitute in Munshigunj from 9 in the evening to 10:30 on Saturday night when the incident happened. The girl told the police that she had an agreement of Rs.300 with the jawans. They said that they will pay before leaving. First they both drank in the room and then after having the drinks, the man who was having turban, went outside the door and the other was at home. The prostitute said, finally, she did not receive any money from them. The lady who has come

from Barasat, her husband is missing. Her entire family, which includes aged parents, one blind brother and three children, are dependent on her only income. She said,

My family knows that I work as a maid-servant in Calcutta.<sup>50</sup>

According to the report generally made by sex-workers of Calcutta, that the actual violence from clients is not common. Once they get initiated into the sex-business the most violent experiences come across from local hooligans and land-lords. In a workshop on violence against women, the violence and harassment from clients was ranked as 'least common'. In this regard the role of land lords, local anti-socials or hoodlums, babus and Police were ranked first. The women at risk from customer violence are those who go out of the red-light areas with clients in a car, boat, to a hotel or to a 'Kali Kuthis' or vacant houses.

"A Nepalese woman working in Calcutta was approached by a client. She knows the young man – he was wealthy and came in a car. She agreed to spend the night with him else where and he drove away with her. After sometime, they reached another suburb of Calcutta, where they were joined by three of his friends. She remembers being sexually tortured by them, and then waking up in the government hospital later, covered with slashes. She had been knifed on the neck, chest and face-her arms and hand alone were covered with twenty-three slashes. A nurse warned her that some young men had been hanging around and asking for her, so with the nurse's help she quickly left the hospital and returned to her room. Our room-mates informed our staff and a FIR was lodged with the Police. She was treated by a Doctor from AIH & PH. Soon after, the men returned to her area. She recognized them and mobilized some local activist who managed to catch one of the men and took him to the local Police station. The case was referred to the suburb where the original case had been lodged. The following day, however, they learnt that the young man had only been charged with a petty crime and later released on bail. They returned to the Police Station along with the victim and showed her injuries to the Officer-in-Charge. After filing a second FIR the man was arrested and charged with attempted to murder. The woman has not been able to work since the attack. She is lucky because she lives with two other sex-workers who are very supportive, and her land-lady is also sympathetic. We are helping her out financially until she is able to work again. The main concern is how she will cope with the trauma of returning to work after being almost killed by a client."

Thus, there are high risk factors for sex-workers in going away with clients, mainly in car or in two-wheeler, mainly if there are several men in the car. There are also several sex-workers who simply

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<sup>50</sup> Staff Reporter, *Jaunakarmee'ke Nigroho, Matto Dui Fauji Dhrito*, Aanonda Bazar Patrika, 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2004.

refuse the proposal of going away in cars with customers after coming across terrible experiences. Some experiences have left 'the women with permanent sears from physical abuse, to say nothing of the mental trauma'.<sup>51</sup>

### **Role of Durbar:**

As domestic violence has always been considered as a private matter, therefore, while Durbar (largest organization run by sex-workers) took attempt to raise voice against all sorts of violence exercised upon the sex-workers by their babus, it was not so easily accepted by all the people of red-light areas. In 2003, the supervisor of 'Durbar' Ms. Putul Singh was badly beaten up by her *babu*. With the encouragement of 'Durbar', she made diary at the local police station. Many girls came forward and there was a general consensus that in future all such cases of physical abuses would be reported and legal steps would be taken. Many opposition groups termed this agitation as 'over enthusiasm' and started anti propaganda and direct threats on the girls. Finally the abusive *babu*, Mantu Singh was arrested and surrendered at the court and asked for pardon.

Before this last incident, in Khidirpur, babu Ratan Singh had beaten up and broke the head of his mistress, supervisor Mala Singh. Ratan was himself a staff of 'Durbar' and he was immediately suspended after the incident. Six months after his arrest and suspension he was reinstated on the decision of the special committee of 'Durbar'. Since then, the *babus* are thinking twice before raising their hands on the girls. The fear of punishment was the natural outcome of the formation of women's forums in different areas to fight for women's rights and to prevent maltreatment. It was a positive step towards building self-respect among women who were earlier treated like animals by their *babus*, and the girls learnt to protest more strongly.<sup>52</sup> But, it can not be claimed that the misbehaviour and torture of women by their babus has been totally uprooted.

The legal clause, according to which living on earnings of sex workers is illegal, is often not supported by the sex-workers. They do not agree with this clause as according to them it is morally wrong. Because, they feel that they should have the rights of supporting their babus, as husbands should have rights to support their wives. According to most sex-workers, outside the sex-trade a respectable life can be acquired with marriage, where this respectable status of a traditional housewife can be acquired only at the cost of loss of their self dependency which they defined as a 'compensation' for the loss of the independence of their life. Renu was practising as an independent sex-worker without a mashi or pimp. After getting married to her fixed client she stopped

<sup>51</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree*, Kolkata, 2002.p.89-90

<sup>52</sup> Mrinal Kanti Dutta, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005. p.118-119

entertaining other customers. Her husband is a driver and earns enough to bear their living expenses. His family is in Bihar and has not much influence over him. Renu describes herself now as a housewife, she states herself lucky as she has found a man who loves her so much. Though she had been practicing the profession independently and was capable enough to support her earlier but after marriage she did not hesitate to give it up for a 'respectable life'. They live in the room where she earlier carried out her profession as a sex-worker because the room is cheap and they are accepted in the area. To live outside the area she would have to 'keep her previous life a secret'.<sup>53</sup>

Lakshmi points it well:

Tomar biye hoi ni? Kabe korbe? Ek din tomar o biye nishchoi habe. Bachha habe, ghar habe. Aami jodi tomar bari jaai, tomar dada, baba, maa sakale dekhe ki bhabbe je eto baro meyer sinthi te sindoor nei! Jato din baba maa aachhen tatodin e sab kichu, baba maa more gele sab shesh! Biye dite gele-o eto eto takar darkaar. Maa baba chhara ke debe sei taka? Aar taka na dile biye-i ba hobe ki kore? Takhon chhele jigyes korbe na ki enechho baap-er baari theke?

Are not you married? When will you get married? One day surely your marriage will take place. You will have family, kids. If I go along with you to your residence, your parents, brother and all, what they will think of me by looking at my forehead that there is no vermilion at this age! Till the time parents are alive, everything is fine; the moment they are dead, everything will finish. It requires whole lot of money for marriage. Who will provide that money apart from parents? And how marriage is possible if they don't provide money for the same? Will not the groom ask what all you have brought from your parental home?

She asked one of my friends few things. The conversation is very much self explanatory and explores the psychological aspects of a sex-worker. The conversation is as follows:

**Lakshmi:** How old are you?

**Tapati:** What do you think?

**Lakshmi:** Should have crossed 30 years.

**Tapati:** I have crossed 40 years.

**Lakshmi:** Then you will not get anyone to marry you. (*Tomar to aar biye habe na!*)

**Tapati:** I will not get married.

**Lakshmi:** Then what will happen, if you get pregnant? (*Aar jodi pete bachha chole aase?*)

**Tapati:** That is impossible. (*Seta habe na.*)

**Lakshmi:** Do not you have boy friends? (*Tomar chhele bandhu nei?*)

**Tapati:** Yes, I do have. (*Ha, aachhe.*)

**Lakshmi:** Then? (*Tahole?*)

**Tapati:** They are only friends. Nothing will happen like this. (*Tara shudhui bandhu. Erokam habe na.*)

<sup>53</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree, Kolkata*, 2002, p.121



Lakshmi smiled and her facial expression clearly had shown that the answer given by Tapati did not make sense to her.

The above statements of Lakshmi undoubtedly explore the strong desire of a sex-worker for marriage and marital life. Marriage is considered as the social sanction to her. To become mother, husband's stamp is most important to give the father's name to her child. Father's name secures a child's future most – this general notion prevalent in the society is also indirectly very much reflected in Lakshmi's version. The dowry system which encroaches women's right and suppresses women is very much exposed to her statement. The vulnerable condition of women in the patriarchal society is largely focused in her expression. A girl can live independently without having any sort of sexual relationship with any guy, it is quite unbelievable to a sex-worker. That is why Lakshmi exhibited a cool approach towards Tapati's answers.

But when asked if she was provided with alternative avenues to earn money, would she quit the profession her answer was, 'how can one leave the rent-controlled room in the red-light area. Rents of the rooms are very high in the red-light areas.' (*'rent-control er ghar ki eto sahaje chhara jai? Red-light area te room er bhison daam!'*)

Though initially she had expressed her eagerness,

Take me to your residence, give me some job. I will cook food, will look after your aged parents. Will you take me along? (*Amai tomar baari niye chalo, kaaj dao. Aami ranna kore debo, tomar buro maa baba ke dekhbo. Jaabe niye?*)

But, then immediately she changed her mind and gave the answer explained above. It is very much clear that being the victim to non-stop cheating they cannot trust people easily. That is why they do not desire to lose their self dependency so soon.<sup>54</sup>

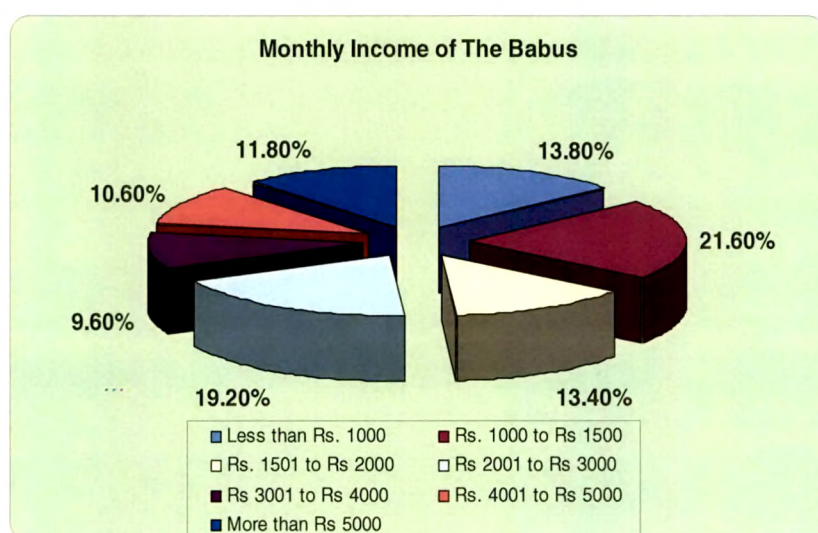
The great irony is that in long term relationship between sex-workers and *babus*, the latter starts behaving 'like husbands'; though a larger number of the sex workers have joined the sex-trade after having bitter experiences with their husbands in their earlier lives but with the growing age, however, 'the women need and value the emotional and financial stability of long term relationship and so emotionally invest more in their fixed-clients'. Sex-workers rely more on these fixed-clients than any other clients to become the father of their children with this hope that they will take some responsibility of her children, which is important to the sex-workers. 'This is ironic as sex-workers' experiences with clients put them in a privileged position to understand the hypocrisy behind so

<sup>54</sup> My interview with Lakshmi. Lakshmi Das, Harkata red-light area, Premchand Boral Street – 73 No, House – Ground Floor. Approx Age – 45, Category – F1, Independent Prostitute, Education – Illiterate. Class – Independent.

many supposedly monogamous relationships.' But it is their financial insecurities, which leave them with no choice but to go for a similar relationship.<sup>55</sup>

Table: 3.3.A

Monthly Income of the Babus		
Monthly Income	Number of Babus	%
Less than Rs. 1000	69	13.8%
Rs. 1000 to Rs 1500	108	21.6%
Rs. 1501 to Rs 2000	67	13.4%
Rs 2001 to Rs 3000	96	19.2%
Rs 3001 to Rs 4000	48	9.6%
Rs. 4001 to Rs 5000	53	10.6%
More than Rs 5000	59	11.8%
Total	500	100%

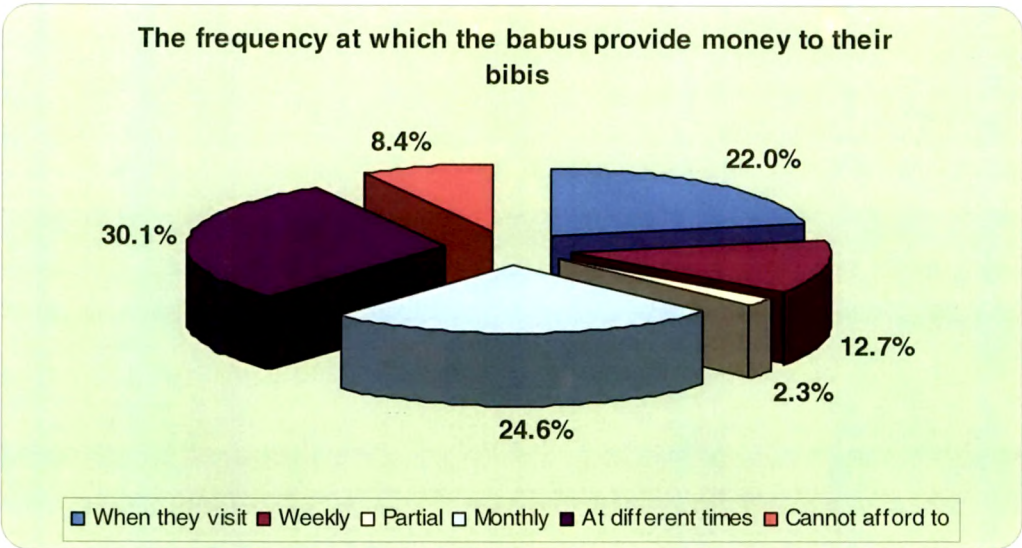


Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke, p.26

Table: 3.3.B

The frequency at which the babus provide money to their bibis		
Duration	Number	%
When they visit	76	22.0%
Weekly	44	12.7%
Partial	8	2.3%
Monthly	85	24.6%
At different times	104	30.1%
Cannot afford to	29	8.4%
	346	100%

<sup>55</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree*, Kolkata, 2002, p.123



Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke, p.27

Table:3.3.C

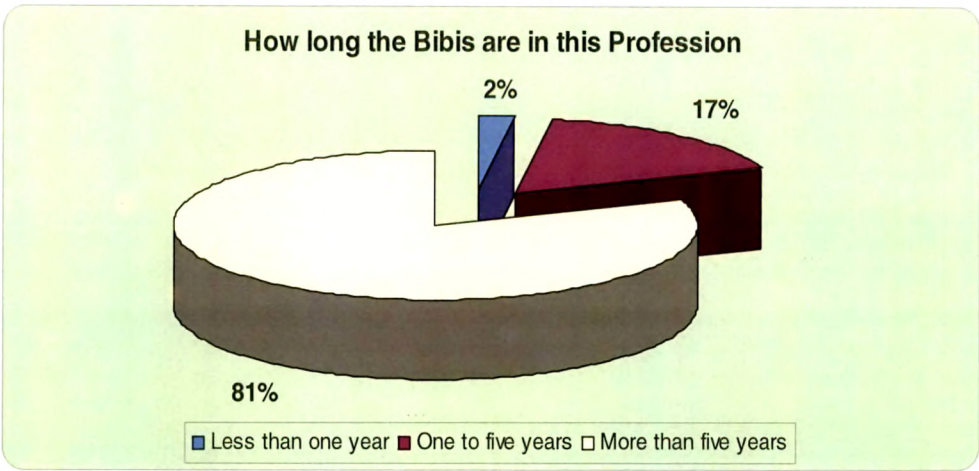
How frequent babus visit their bibis		
Types of visiting	Number	%
Stays along with them	234	67.6%
Regular	43	12.4%
Once in a Week	25	7.2%
Two to three times a Week	12	3.5%
Three times in a Month	2	0.6%
Twice a Month	17	4.9%
Once in a Month	7	2.0%
As per their time	3	0.9%
Not sure	3	0.9%
Total	346	100%

Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke, p.27

Table:3.3.D

How long the Bibis are in this Profession		
Duration	Number	%
Less than one year	11	2.2%
One to Five years	86	17.2%
More than five years	403	80.6%
Total	500	100%

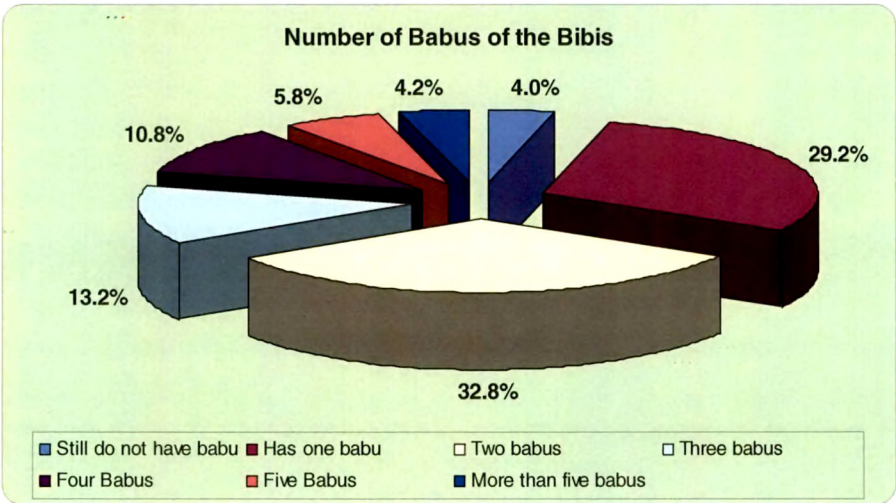




Source: Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, p.73.

Table: 3.3.E

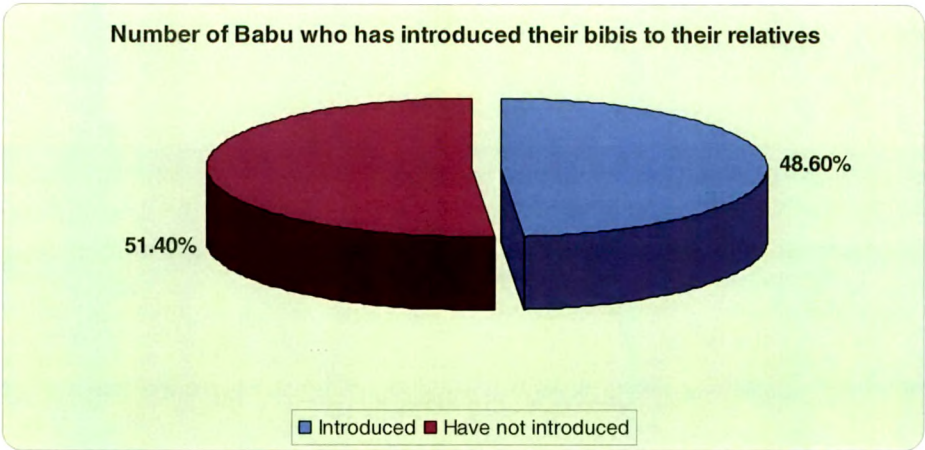
Number of Babus of the Bibis		
Statement	Number	%
Still have not made Babu	20	4.0%
Has one babu	146	29.2%
Two Babus	164	32.8%
Three Babus	66	13.2%
Four Babus	54	10.8%
Five Babus	29	5.8%
More than five Babus	21	4.2%
Total	500	100%



Source: Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, p.73

Table:3.3.F

Number of Babus Who have introduced their bibis to their relatives		
Statement	Number	%
Introduced	243	48.6%
Not Introduced	257	51.4%
Total	500	100%



Source: Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, p.87

Table: 3.3.G

To whom they have introduced their Bibis (Total number of such babus 243)		
Introduced with	Number	%
Parents	184	36.8%
Siblings	111	22.2%
Wife	51	10.2%
Other Relatives	69	13.8%

- Among them, 1.7% has introduced their bibis to each member of the family.
- 2.9% have introduced bibis to parents, siblings and wives.
- 6% have introduced bibis to parents, siblings and other relatives.

Source: Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, p.87

Table: 3.3.H

Babus who have not introduced with their relatives and reason		
Reason	Number	%
Afraid of Wife	25	5.0%
Situation will worsen if children come to know	12	2.4%
Do not want problem at home	194	38.8%
Lack of courage in going againts Social Value system	26	5.2%
Total	257	51.4%

Source: Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, p.88

3.4. Nature of Sexual Intimacy:

To understand the sexual behaviour of *babus* it is important to discuss the sexuality of all kinds of males visiting prostitutes. It is surprising that customer has to be discussed first while discussing *babus* in this regard. Customers mainly enjoy sex because of their financial ability. Apart from

straight sex, customers are classified into six different categories on the basis of other sexual behaviour:

1. Those having sex in different postures.
2. Those who get sexual pleasure by watching nude body of the sex worker.
3. Sadist or masochists. These people get aroused by listening to abusive, filthy languages or even after being beaten up.
4. Those getting pleasure by sucking the vagina of the sex-worker.
5. Those having oral sex by getting their penis sucked by the sex-workers.
6. Having anal-sex.<sup>56</sup>



**Sexual act of the babus**

(Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke)

i) The customers in the first group are those who like to have sex in several positions like by standing, lying down, sitting and taking the woman on top – meaning they like sex in the postures of several *asanas* (yoga postures). Through these postures they reach the extreme level. Since the possibilities of injuries and cuts in the vagina are more in such sex, the customers have to pay a lot of money for such sex through these postures and *asanas*.

ii) The seconds are those who derive sexual pleasures from seeing. Such is their pleasure at seeing the nude bodies of women that without any physical union, just by seeing or mere touch, many men ejaculate. Their problem is that, since they do not touch the women or physically unite with them, the women laugh at them, taunt them, and even satirically abuse them for being uncivilized. Some take advantage of this situation and get their body massaged by the customers. As a result they start suffering from various inferiority complexes. Failing to sexually satisfy themselves through the sex-workers, they gradually get attracted to pornographic books and blue films.<sup>57</sup>

In this regard two incidents described by Srikarna in his book are of very much importance which describes the sexual relationship between the clients and the sex-worker:

<sup>56</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.49

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p.50

... To make the most of that opportunity, meaning not being able to control the temptation of chatting a bit more with Shabana, I entered her room. As soon as I entered I asked, 'will you go out on the streets?' It was eleven O'clock in the watch. The mood was down due to India's loss. ...I was slightly drunk. On top of that my voluntary entrance into the room – all these did not let me control the temptation of having a lover close to me and even before Shabana could say anything, like being sure of a railway confirmed ticket, I lay down on the bed. In the midst of talks after supper I saw Shabana drinking glass after glass of water and understood that tomorrow, very early in the morning Shabana had to go with a customer either to Digha or to Diamond Harbour or to Tarapith in the Janata Express. This is because the women working in this line drink water in this way instead of using an alarm clock to make their waking up at dawn a certainty. So that they will have to go to the toilet early in the morning. That's why naturally I asked, 'where are you going tomorrow morning? And if you are going, why haven't you packed your bag now?' She smiled and replied immediately, 'it is not what you are thinking dear. I am not going anywhere'. 'Then are you having acidity? At my question she gave such a smooth reply that a chill ran down my whole body. What she said as a reply was this – the next a customer would come. He won't do anything. Shabana would stand and pee, naked on the bed. And the customer, standing on the floor seeing that spectacle, would drink the whole of it not letting a single drop fall on the ground. The more the urine the more the money and this is the pleasure of the man.<sup>58</sup>

Srikarna has another incident the time of Durga Puja during 1995:

... Jyotsna...in the tone of riddle said alta-sindoor is today my Lakshmi (goddess of wealth). It is that alta sindoor which will work out. After all this time I seemed to return to consciousness. I could understand very well that she was joking with me. That's why on giving a disgusted grunt '*dhat*' Jyotsna said you do not believe it right? Okay then peep through the back window hole when the customer enters and see what works out for what. On straightway asking her to play the game without introduction, Jyotsna made a straight move. She said come inside the room if you want to hear. And saying this she held my hand making me sit on the bed. She began with the petticoat. She asked the colour of her petticoat. I said red. And my brassiere? And so saying she again removed the cloth covering her chest and put it on the table. Without letting my eyelids close for a single moment I said red. What is the colour of my feet? I said red. And on my head? I went on saying red. 'Do you know that after sometime a red *babu* will come, he likes red colour a lot. Do you know what he will do?' I ask what? First he will make me stand in various postures with my petticoat and brassiere. Then opening my petticoat he will make me the living goddess Kali. He will relish on my nude beauty sometimes himself becoming Shiva making me stand on his chest, sometimes making me stand on the bed he sitting on the floor, sometimes with one leg on the chair and another as usual on the floor. Finally holding me while in his arms tight he will rub his face on my shampooed hair and drop his 'finish' or 'maal' (semen). No touch, no connection – saying this she started laughing aloud. In moments Jyotsna's pinkish white face flushed. Her smile became all the more lively when her teeth shone from the corner of her lips.<sup>59</sup>

iii) The third group is sadists or masochist. They gradually get excited through listening to abuses and being hit by the women. And then they get sexually united. Of course the women get fun out of these. Many, afraid of adverse results after beating cannot hit them and thus show them the door to go out on the roads.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p.43-44

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p.44-47

iv) The fourth is that group of customers who derive pleasure by licking or sucking the different sexual organs of women. They are of two groups. For one group this is the extreme of sex and they ejaculate. The group has sexual intercourse after this. One of course needs a lot of courage for this, that is has to win over repulsion for dirtiness. But once this opportunity is used to perfectly it has seen that the women get quickly excited and start breathing heavily. For those who remain limited to this, that is finish their ejaculation after this, in spite of not being able to say anything for the sake of money, grievance, deprivation and disgust in born in the woman's mind. Many a time they have to bring in customers at lower rate to clam down their heated body. And for those who have sexual intercourse after this and are able to satisfy the women by kicking for long, it is they who are acknowledged as the best player by the woman and adjudged as her sexual partner or the '*babu*'.

v) The fifth group is complete opposition to the one before. They derive satisfaction through oral sex or sucking. The main problem here is that, those who make women suck them cannot give any pleasure to the women. As a result these customers continue to remain merely customers.

vi) The sixth are those who get pleasure from anal intercourse. This mainly has two reasons. Firstly the anus is lighter than the vagina. On top of that the anus takes the shape of a funnel at the time of such sex that is on the penis entering it the outer anal hole gets widened with gradual narrowing down of the inner part. As a result a pressure is felt at the mouth of penis. Secondly, many find pleasure in the back of the penis. And such sex creates greater excitement is them. The reason is – although the penis, the vagina and for the sake of the argument the anus are sexual organs, the real sex drive is created from the brain. It is the brain which helps to decide which kind of sex is pleasurable.

The foremost fear of the women in such kind of sex is that the skin in the being softer than the vagina has greater risks of cuts and raptures. These are severe chances of AIDS and sexually transmitted deceases if such sex is had without condoms. As a result women usually never have such sex.<sup>60</sup>

It has been found in a study by AIH&PH in 1992 that straight sex (peno-vaginal) is universal among commercial sex-workers. 74% of these sex-workers said that they were also involved in oral sex, although in an evaluation study by the same organization in 1993, these figure dropped to 38.1%. In 1992, 27.3% used to have group sex but again there is a variation found in 1993 evaluation study,

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p.50-51; \* Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, (in Bengali), Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995, (1401, *Maagh*). p.48



which is 48.7%. It is very difficult to collect perfect statistics on sexual behaviour and cannot be always considered as a 'reliable indicator'. In this regard, Indrani Sinha says:

...different findings were mentioned in one in-depth qualitative study in Seti Bagan where most sex-workers reported that the demand for oral sex was increasing. All the surveys do reveal that customers engage in sexual behaviour with sex-workers that are taboo within marriage. Evans reports that oral, anal and vaginal sex are demanded by clients, as well as masturbation and the indulgence of men's fantasies. This information seems to support the argument that some men visits sex-workers for activities that are unacceptable within marriage, although the most common sexual behaviour between sex-workers and their clients is still straight peno-vaginal sex.<sup>61</sup>

We get further information about the sexual behaviour of Female-Sex workers from a study conducted in 1993 in the Rambagan red-light area of Calcutta.

In order to collect data about different sexual behaviour, one hundred female sex-workers in the Rambagan area were surveyed using printed cards which used symbols (instead of words) for different kinds of sexual act performed by them everyday for 10 weeks. In 10 weeks, out of all sexual acts 89% were Peno-Vaginal and condoms used for only 32% occasions. Oral sex accounted for 11% of the all the acts and 25% were involved in the use of condoms. Oral sex was often practiced as a pre-coital stimulant and reported by FSWs as a practice learnt mostly from pornographic video-cassettes. Data also shows the fact that elderly prostitutes were reluctant in oral sex but sometimes they had to yield to their client's demand. Oral sex and its demand was very low and demanded mostly by non-Bengali clients. Due to the health awareness and educational programs, the use of condoms in the Rambagan area has increased in the recent past but the data showed that it was still low and one of the reasons for this was the reluctant nature of the clients to use it as they feel that it is an obstacle in having their sexual pleasure.<sup>62</sup>

Another community based survey was carried in the red-light area of Sonagachi (April – June) 1992, where about 450 randomly selected sex-workers (out of 3664) were used as sample. The following are some facts out of that survey,

- Average number of customer per FSW per day was 3.3;
- Peno-vaginal sex was most commonly practiced sexual act,;
- About 3/4<sup>th</sup> of FSW reported peno-oral sex;
- Majority of the sex-worker would wash their genitals after the act\*;
- About 1/4<sup>th</sup> of them took regular contraceptive measures to avoid pregnancy and half of them used to take contraceptive pills.

<sup>61</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree*, Kolkata, 2002, p.119-20

<sup>62</sup> Moni Nag, *Sexual Behaviour and AIDS in India*, Vikas Publishing House Private Limited, New Delhi, 1996. p.59-69

Interestingly, 81% of them reported to have suffered from one or the other sexually transmitted disease but only 1% reported use of condoms! 1% ( 5 FSWs) of them were found HIV positive.<sup>63</sup> Immediately after the completion of the survey in Sonagachi, an intervention project, coordinated by All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health (AIIPH&PH) was started with the objective of health awareness and services to FSWs. It involved training them and using them as part-time peer group educators to spread awareness about STD and AIDS along with free distribution of condoms. This project had a huge success and in less than a year, 24 peer group educators this project distributed about 30,000 condoms per month. The follow up survey in (Nov-Dec) 1993 showed that the use of condoms went up to 47% and prevalence of STD decreased to 59%.<sup>64</sup>

When we talk about condoms, pills to prevent pregnancy etc. it is very much important to mention that this transformation in the sexual behaviour occurred after Second World War. These transformations have been termed as 'sex-revolution'. The main objective of the use of condoms, pills etc. were to reduce the probability of unwanted pregnancy and thus it had shown the way of having a safe sexual relationship between man – woman. Also this revolution has another facet that is to make an effort to legalize 'abortion' in the cases of unwanted pregnancy of the women.<sup>65</sup>

Actually the needs of clients acquire a complex character than simply sexual release entertainment without having any emotional involvement. There are various kinds of people who visit sex-workers with different motives. Some section of men visit sex-workers for quick sex. This section visits mostly out of curiosity for gaining first sexual experience or they spend night outside with a group of friends. 'Visits are usually planned beforehand or are part of routine,' sex-workers are used in a calculated way by businessmen. The latter provide woman for sexual entertainment as part of a business deal. Male migrants living in all –male hostel accommodation (almost) have habit of visiting sex-workers. But these visits not just to fulfill sexual desire but for the fulfillment of other emotional needs that the sex-worker are able to do.

Except these factors there are others social factors which influence men to a great extent, such as men's economic power over women, media-images of women's bodies as commodities often bomber male's sexual desire and being a part of the patriarchal social system which

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 60; \*(After each sexual act, the women wash their vagina with water. If someone has more customers, the other's jealousy calls this 'drying of the hand' instead of 'drying of the vaginas'. (From *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, p.44))

<sup>64</sup> Ibid p.61

<sup>65</sup> Yoshodhara Bagchi, *Jaunata: Naaribaader Aaloy*, (*Sexuality: In the light of Feminism*) in *Jaunata O Sanskriti* (A collection of essays on Sexuality and Culture by eminent writers and intellectuals) edited by Sudhir Chakraborty, Pustak Bipani, Kolkata, 2002. p.142-143

authorize/empowers/allows men buying sex. The inter-relationship between clientele and FSWs is not always only sexual. The conception of romantic love is mostly absent in traditional marriage in India. Rather being based on romantic love, the institution of marriage is based on fulfillment of mutual needs, security and carrying out obligations to the husband's family. The concept of romantic love is, however, idealized in popular culture. The relationships between men and women as portrayed in popular culture are quite liberal/freer than in most people's lives. But in reality such relationship is not present for most of the women but men have the opportunity to go out and have these experiences with mistresses and sex-workers. Many clients who frequent sex-workers often form a relationship with those sex-workers though here usually the long-term commitment is absent but they shared life styles beyond simply having sex. In these cases social, sexual as well as emotional factors play a major role. It is often seen that there are many clients who do not visit each time sex-workers to have different sexual pleasure but they are found to visit regularly the same woman. Some of these visitors develop an emotional attachment to the women they visit and some visitors start living with those sex-workers concerned, despite/ignoring the fact of getting already married or having other relationships.<sup>66</sup>

Let us take up Lakshmi Das' case. She is a sex-worker, resident of 73 No. Harkata red-light area – Premchand Boral Street. She has a fixed customer or *babu* who works in a Govt. Bank and is living with Lakshmi since last 25 years. He is married, having children and grand-children. He bears up all the expenditure of Lakshmi and her one mentally disabled brother. Her *babu* visits his home in Baruiপুর every weekend and during each festival. But his family members are not aware of this relationship. According to Lakshmi her relationship with her *babu* is almost like a husband – wife. Her *babu* is very good by nature and totally devoted to her. Thus they are having a pleasant relationship. But Lakshmi doesn't hope for life-long relationship. She says,

He has not married me in traditional way. He has a family, wife, kids and grand-children. Tomorrow he can go away. Will he be always with me? Even if he goes, what can I do?

To a question whether it will hurt her or not? Her answer was,

Even if it hurts, what is the solution?<sup>67</sup>

This means, despite having everything, the dependency factor is absent in most of the time. There is uncertainty in everything. This is why despite having a relationship of more than 25 years, *Lakshmi* is very much concerned about this uncertainty and she knows that there are no other

<sup>66</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta*, Stree, Kolkata, 2002, p.113

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Lakshmi Das, Harkata Red-light area, Premchand Baral Street, House No. 73, Ground Floor, age approximately 45 years, Education- illiterate, Class- Independent.

alternatives but to accept the reality and she is ready for that. Thus no concrete plan or aim for future exists in the life of *Lakshmi*.

### **The Repercussion of Prostitutes on their Sexual Relationships with their Clients:**

There is a popular belief that the prostitutes are hyper-sexed. But in reality the picture is totally different. In fact they are not over-sexed and in most cases they do not get sexual satisfaction from their clients.<sup>68</sup> It is evident from my sources that the sex-workers do not have sex with any customer. They even do not let them kiss or touch their breasts. Surely there are exceptions but for that one needs to spend much more money, some remain so cold after the customer sits on their bodies that several people are seen sadly saying, 'I got on top of a dead body'.<sup>69</sup> In this context the statement of Anima (a sex-worker) stands very much relevant:

Oh! No. I never enjoyed 'the game' with anyone of my clients. I am sure of it. Off course, except during the days of my first entry into 'the game' when I enjoyed it but that too only for few days. It's now a mechanical process to me.<sup>70</sup>

But as one gets more skillful in the profession, she learns various tricks. That is, one who learns to act well in sex with customers earns success in this profession. The acting means that it must seem to the customer as if the sex-worker is deriving more pleasure out of this sexual intercourse than the customer himself.



অন্তরঙ্গ মুহূর্তের আগে।

### **Moments before their intimacy**

(Source : Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*)

<sup>68</sup> B. Joardar, *Prostitution In Historical and Modern Perspectives*; Inter-India Publication, New Delhi, 1984. p.151

<sup>69</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.15

<sup>70</sup> B. Joardar, *Prostitution In Historical and Modern Perspectives*; Inter-India Publication, New Delhi, 1984. p.151

The one who are perfect in this get more customers. One cannot succeed in this profession if she cannot give the customer his sense of self-satisfaction. For this reason some less attractive girls get more customers than more beautiful one. Because giving the customer self-satisfaction does not depend on your beauty. One has to be adept in several sexual arts to give sexual pleasure to the customer.<sup>71</sup> In this regard, Manada's expression truly upholds the above facts. Manada says:

I said, 'Ranimasi, I have lost my glamour; I am now thin and my limbs are dried up. My hair does not have the earlier lustre. Can I work in this line any more?' She explained to me 'For a whore, beauty is not the ultimate thing. Debauched men are not attracted by mere beauty. You will notice, very ugly whores earning more than the pretty ones. God only knows who seduces whom. When these lewd men roam around the dark alleys of the pros' quarters, the love-god Cupid confuses them and blurs their vision. Ranimasi taught me a few tricks. How to drape the Sari, how to stand, how to speak and walk seductively; all things that attract men folk she showed me. 'Even if you are very sad, you should talk pleasantly with a smiling face to the client. Pretend to love him so much that he would not realize that it was false. If the lover was a drunkard, to please him you should hold the glass in such manners that he would not make out that you are only pretending to drink.' All this I learnt. The debauched men folk should be satisfied in whatever way it pleased them. Like this I learnt pretensions; and a new Manada was born in my place. I could sing well. My voice was quite sweet too ... this is an art that is very useful for a prostitute. Ranimasi kept a veteran tutor to teach me music. He said your "*Brahmasangeet*" (Religious Songs) or patriotic songs won't do here. You have to learn Hindi *ghazals*, light classical music. ('*Khayal*'/*Thumri*) etc. fit for these prostitutes' quarter. '*Keertans*' will also do'. Within 3/4 months, I showed substantial improvement. It took me some time to learn '*Keertans*'. Along with pretensions, I had to learn how to recognize people's characters. We had to discern by seeing their faces.

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Quarrels as well as black magic come in regarding getting more customers. Sometimes the situation reaches such a point that the girl is blames for black magic over the whole house snatching away the subsistence of the other girls.<sup>73</sup>

Actually sex is such a thing that to get it completely, both the partners should have mental equation. If there is any parity in the thoughts of the two, then instead of getting pleasure it gives bitterness and from there it takes the shape of anger, conceit, worry and these become the reason for many uproars in their married life. It has been seen that despite having beautiful wife at home, someone tends to spend his time with a C-category prostitute.

There is a proverb that says, '*having sex with the prostitutes is same like having meal in a used plate*'. In this regard, Srikarna has explained:

This is true that in the course of time due to dealings with so many customers, the prostitutes become skilled in this trade and in this she defeats her rival, meaning the 'house-wives' very easily.

<sup>71</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.15-16

<sup>72</sup> Manada Devi, *Sikshita Patitar Atmacharit*, (autobiography in Bengali), Chirayat Prakashan, Kolkata, 2004. p.56-57

<sup>73</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.16

How a prostitute defeats a house wife, Srikarna brings in the famous Bengali proverb:



অন্তরঙ্গ মুহূর্তে।

#### Intimate Moments

(Source : Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke)

It is said about the girls that *come what may, a woman will digest everything but she will not speak up (Book Phatey Tabu Mukh Phate Na)* – and due to this ‘not speaking’ many a times they are unable to understand what her husband wants and this is why she fails to fulfill the husband’s need. Lets us elaborate this. Sex is a game of two and in this both the partner should be equally involved. Normally, in most of the cases, the husband always calls for this and wives follow the same. Slowly the husband loses interest and also due to same act everyday, the wives also get bored out of this. If in this case, a woman, for a change, calls for this then it creates a new height of excitement and enjoy. And top of that if she says, ‘fuck me hard ...’, then no wonder it will have tremendous pleasure for both of them. The one who can call their husband for this act with ease, they are lucky. The one, who feels shy and cannot do this, normally their husbands are not satisfied. If this is one of the reason for getting dissatisfaction of the husband, then the second reason is that if for some reason, on one day due to early discharge of her husband the woman says, ‘you can’t do’ then only on this, the husband breaks down in pain. Whenever he sees his wife, he feels that pain - ‘you can’t do’ and he will not feel excitements in his genitals. The difference of a prostitute from normal women/wives is that, she is not only skilled in this; she also helps the man to get into normal sex-activity by acting and counseling. So she can understand what the man wants by just looking at his face or through expressions. This is the reason why a person who is shy away from his wife for sex, enjoys sex with a prostitute to the core. And if he is a permanent customer or a *babu*, then there is no problem, whenever he wants, whatever way he wants, his woman – the prostitute – is ready to serve him.<sup>74</sup>

But all sex-workers also have sexual urge. And so ‘bibis’ keep ‘babus’. ‘Babu means shelter; means love, babu means husbands to the prostitutes’.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p.39-40



বাবু মানেই 'সাহারা', বাবু মানেই প্রেম, বাবু মানে যৌনকর্মীদের স্বামী।

**Babu means shelter; means love, babu means husbands of the Prostitutes**

(Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke)

Money, looks, physical appearance, art of communication, he-man image, and supportive attitude or shelter are the factors, which is prerequisite to become *babu*. But the major driving factor is surely sex. The person who can sexually satisfy the sex-worker can easily attain the place of *babu* in her life. Or in other words, one who wins in this sexual event, meaning one who can continue the sexual intercourse longer earns the right to becoming *babu*. That is why despite having all the qualities the 'short-discharge' customers can never become the girls' favourite *babu*. For financial support, the sex-workers sometimes accepts these kinds of customers as their *babus* but in his absence she sexually satisfy herself with her lover or *upa-babu* (*sub-babu*). For that reason in spite of possessing all qualities, the short discharge customer can never be good *babus*. They just become decorated *babus*. Meaning due to his monetary power, although the girl makes him her *babu*, when he is out for his work the girl hold of and have sex with her real lover or secondary *babu* to quench her desire.<sup>75</sup>

Here the question comes as to why one requires having sex secretly. Why can't she be satisfied in having sexual intercourse with a short discharge *babu*?

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p.16.



সেক্সমাল ইভেন্টে প্রতি রাতে জয়ী হবার জন্য অধিকাংশ বাবুই মেশাস্ত হয়ে পড়ে।

**Most of the babus get intoxicated before their sexual act to win over their women**

Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke

To make the matter clear Srikarna has given an example –

Heavy loads numb down the shoulders. That portion hurts a lot than the rest of the body. Likewise with customers everyday, the genitals of women become such that to ignite them sexually it takes a lot of time, and so naturally the *babu* has to kick her vagina longer. To win in this kick or sexual event, most of the *babus* get addicted.

Everyone knows that consumption of alcohol, siddhi (Leaves and shoots of hemp, bhang) or grass stops the grain like cerebellum in the neck from working. This not only hampers the balances of men, it numbs down the sexual instincts also. That's why an addicted person (*babu*) can kick or have sex longer than an ordinary man. And probably that is the reason why alcohol, siddhi, grass etc are intricately linked to the red light areas.<sup>76</sup>

From *Rater Kolkata*, written by Meghnad Gupta, we find an interesting description of a romantic moment between *babu* and *bibi*:

After nine o' clock, the scene changes entirely. The *Babus* turn from first peg to the second and the world changes color in their eyes. They see pink everywhere and by the time they are into the third, they are into their second, virile youth. Both sides of the street resound with the noise of music, mainly the harmonium; and along with it the men folk shouting in loud applause. In some room, the dancing girl balances a glass on her head, and dances on with appealing movements, raising her eyebrows sexily and smiling; her *Babu* is at the harmonium, while his yes-man is at the *tabla*. This entire scene is again watched through the window by a large curious gathering outside on the road. In the mean time, *babu* suddenly gets up to join the dance. He holds the end of his dhoti over his head in a girlish pose and sings in his gruff voice. While in his excitement, he grabs the girl and makes futile attempts to kiss her; the obvious result is the falling and smashing of the glass from the girl's head.

"Wow, my glass is broken!"

"Let it be, you carry on dancing"

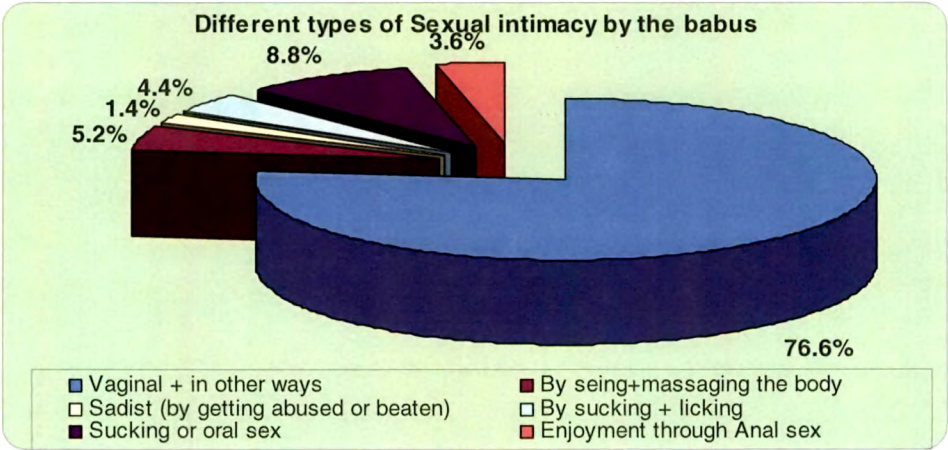
<sup>76</sup> Ibid.



“Oh, oh, my new glass!”  
“Fuck your glass. What do you think of me? I will get you ten more.; bearer, o bearer!”  
“*Huzoor*” The bearer enters.  
“Go, get a dozen glasses” He throws a ten-rupee note. The bearer exits with a suppressed smile.  
“Now, you come to me, let me...” He brings his mouth close to the girl  
“Ah! What are you doing?”  
“No, I swear, you are killing me”  
“Oh, you drunkard; there are people in the room.”  
“Damn it, people? Hey, all of you close your eyes. What happened? Close I said or I will throw this soda bottle at you”.  
“The *tabla* player, his yes-men and friends quickly shut their eyes. Some faint noises give out signs of a few fervent kisses being exchanged and the companions open their eyes.  
“Sing one more song dear!”  
“What song....in this noise?”  
“No, no, here now I’ll be quiet, I won’t talk any more.”  
Again music started—  
“The kite of love isn’t flying any more,  
Why do you hold on to it again?  
One tug made it clear, how sharp your varnish is”.<sup>77</sup>

Table: 3.4.A

Different ways of Sexual intimacy by the babus		
Ways	Number	%
Vaginal + in other ways	383	76.6%
By seing+massaging the body	26	5.2%
Sadist (by getting abused or beaten)	7	1.4%
By sucking + licking	22	4.4%
Sucking or oral sex	44	8.8%
Enjoyment through Anal sex	18	3.6%
Total	500	100.0%



Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke, p.51.

<sup>77</sup> Meghnad Gupta, *Rater Kolkata*, Pratik, Kolkata, 1991 (first Publication 1923), p.33.

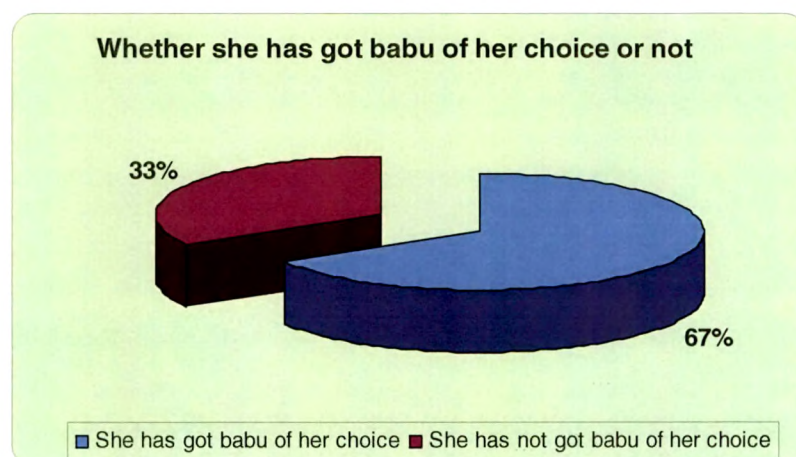
Table: 3.4.B

<b>Addition of the Babus (Number of Babus - 500)</b>		
<b>Addition</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Smoking	<b>395</b>	79.0%
Chewing Bettle leaf	<b>247</b>	49.4%
Tobacco	<b>111</b>	22.2%
Gutkha	<b>143</b>	28.6%
Khaini	<b>163</b>	32.6%
Gunja	<b>120</b>	24.0%
Sidhi	<b>60</b>	12.0%
Alcohol	<b>428</b>	85.6%
Heroine	<b>12</b>	2.4%
Drug (injection)	<b>4</b>	0.8%
Charas	<b>14</b>	2.8%
No addiction	<b>14</b>	2.8%

Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke, p.17.

Table: 3.4.C

<b>Whether she has got Babu of her choice or not?</b>		
<b>Opinion</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
She has got babu of her choice	334	66.80%
She has not got babu of her choice	166	33.20%
Total	500	100.00%



Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke, p.19.

Table: 3.4.D

<b>What are the Qualities required to become perfect Babu?</b>		
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Definitely fulfills sexual needs +		
Handsome	55	11.00%
Provides money according to demand	94	18.80%
Always been by my side	119	23.80%
Intelligent	22	4.40%
Loves my children	44	8.80%
<b>Total</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>66.80%</b>

Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke, p.19.

### 3.5. Love Relationships and Expectations: Desire and Desolation

It seems that most of the prostitutes hate the male community. The absence of faith is naturally found in the character of the prostitutes. Being subjected to the mechanism of fulfilling the lust of men, gradually, they acquire a suspicious as well as negative attitude towards the male community of the society. But it also cannot be denied that still prostitutes also have the desire for love. Though the legitimacy of their love relationship are always subjected to the questions and uncertainty as society remain always hostile to this sort of relationships because women in this profession are considered as marginalized as well as ostracized community in the society. Therefore, most of the love relationships of prostitutes do not succeed at the end. But some relationship work and marriage takes place though the success of these kinds of marriages is rare. And in this case the life of the girl after break-up of her marriage is extremely pathetic. After the break-up, the girl would have no choice but to return to the brothel. According to one *mashi*,

Fallen girls do get babus for their marriages. (*Rendi meyechheler biyer janya babu jute jai.* )

When it was asked whether such girls are stopped from getting married? Her reply was,

If she clears all the dues to everybody, she can go. But the desires of the babus to 'free' the sex-workers get over within two days. After this when these girls return to the old profession, this 10 rupees worth *maagi* (sex-worker) goes to the slums and her rate gets reduced to the five rupees 'shot'. Therefore, at last she is left with no choice but to commit suicide because of her dire poverty and taunts of others that she suffers from the first day of returning to the old profession of prostitution after the failure of marriage. (*Sakaler dhardena, bakhra mitiye dile chhere deowa hoi. Tabe patita udhharer 'sakh' dudinei kete jai babuder. Tar par phire ele 10 takar 'maagi' takhan bastite khate 5 takar 'shot-e'. Abhab aar titkirir taronai takhon mara chhara upai thake na.*)

Let us take up the case of Maya. She had some earnings from a room rent out in a red-light area so she used to entertain just a couple of men as clients. Both the clients became her fixed clients and fell in love with her. The first client was a shopkeeper ('a paying client') who always promised to get married to her. But lastly he failed to keep his words and got married to someone else chosen by his family under family pressure. Maya continued to entertain the second client and which started making the first client feel annoyed. Maya became pregnant by the first man and he wanted her to be faithful to him despite the fact that he was already married. Her statement in this regard was that she would only be faithful to him if she was taken away by him from the red-light area and given 'respectability of being in a 'proper' relationship.' Then the two men started fighting over her. But she was not scared of; her repercussion to the situation was that, as long as she remained in her own area she was quite safe. She had more hoodlums upon whom she could easily rely than her two

clients, because they were the outsiders. But she still had the desire to leave red-light area if she could be accepted in a proper relationship with respect with anyone of her two clients.<sup>78</sup>

There are a few brave men found, who fell in love with the sex-workers after coming to the red-light area and married them. But such marriages contain mixed results and in most cases, the outcomes of these love relationships are not very pleasant.

- According to the information provided by a *dalai*, one of his friends, engineer by profession, came to the brothel for fun and fell in love with a prostitute. He married the girl and took her along with him to his work place. They are living happily with their two kids.
- The story about the girl Golapi was different in nature compared to the above and the issue of mental mismatch was present in this case. Golapi's husband, Amit was an ideal student of a university who married Golapi. He took this decision with full of enthusiasm after being overwhelmed by the concept of liberating prostitutes from their profession. But from the very beginning, Golapi found it difficult to adjust with Amit's family environment. The relationship between men and women always meant to her just as a relationship of fulfilling sexual desire, because from her very childhood she had experienced this brutal act of male community and she had grown up within this culture. But, in the case of educated, cultured Amit, it was totally different. He believed that 'love depends on mental relationship'. These differences in attitudes caused the mental mismatch between them. And resultantly, even before getting accustomed to the new environment totally, their relationship broke-up and this left no other way for Golapi but to return to the red-light area.
- In the case of Rekha, the problem was little different. Rekha's regular customer, Raju got married to her and then converted her into simply a house-wife, whose life was confined only within the four walls of kitchen. But for Rekha it became very much difficult to adjust with that monotonous family life because earlier she was enjoying financial independence as well as leading a life with full of freedom. Therefore, gradually, she felt attracted towards the outward life that was not acceptable to Raju and hence, immediately the relationship broke up and Rekha had to return to the brothel.
- A person named Chandan came to the brothel with the motto of social service and he fell in love with a prostitute, called Protima. He secretly married Protima with the help of his brother and

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<sup>78</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree*, Kolkata, 2002. p.117-118

sister-in-law without informing his relatives and friends. But along with her, she also brought some of her bad habits, bad languages and some bad manners. On sheer negligence, she started using slang languages or her odd behaviour in course of time made few close relatives feel suspicious about her. They started suspecting or expressing their doubts on the nature of Protima. At times, Chandan also observed the presence of the feeling of hatred and greedy nature in her. Slowly Protima started losing the respectable position of a wife. After scrutinizing her daily life, the promiscuous nature of Protima was exposed this caused a tremendous mental set-back to Chandan. In place of love, slowly hatred, doubts, misbehaviour took place. Finally, *Protima* was thrown out of that family and returned to the red-light area.

- The incident of false-hood is also not absent here. After his regular visit for long ten years, one fixed babu married her fixed bibi and took her along with him to a different place. The bibi had lots of savings that comprised of cash and jewelries. Within a year the babu attempted snatching all those savings away from her. The bibi realised that the babu married her not because of love but to snatch her wealth. When she denied the accumulated wealth, the babu started torturing her. One day the babu tried to kill bibi by setting her on fire. With the help of the locals, she was saved that time and she was provided with medical treatment. Though she was able to recover from these physical injuries but after returning to the brothel, she was succumbed to the mental trauma.<sup>79</sup>

The case of *Urmila* is also miserable. *Urmila* was not ready to accept a situation where she was kept by a man as his mistress in the red-light area. Her one regular client fell in love with her and promised to marry her. She left the red-light area with him and got married to him. But the problem arose very soon when it was found out that she would not be accepted by his family. The man rather confronting his family suggested *Urmila* to return to the red-light area where she would be maintained by him and he would visit her whenever he could. She felt extremely hurt with her husband's activities that how easily he could send her back to the red-light area. *Urmila* thought that if she would not be given the position of a respectable wife living with him in respectable areas then it might be better to carry on as before and entertain other clients. Centering this issue there was a clash between them and her husband lost his temper and injured her with a knife. 'He returned another time with his family and some other men and threatened her'. She asked police for help who 'Padlocked' her room for a month. At this time she found her shelter somewhere else. After one month she returned and started with her profession again. Later on, the problem with her

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<sup>79</sup> Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995, (1401, *Maagh*). p.92-93



'husband' was resolved by her. Her husband continued to visit her and despite being legally married had been relegated to the status of one of those other fixed clients of *Urmila*.<sup>80</sup>

Incident of *Anita Haldar* from Sonagachi is entirely different and devastating. Dire poverty drove her from *Baharampur* into prostitution and in Sonagachhi. There she met *Gautam Majumdar*, who was an employee of a private firm and slowly fell in love. Then they left the red-light area with a dream of getting into a family life. But in the so-called *bhadralok* society she received only disgrace and torture. *Heeralal Majumdar*, a known person to *Gautam* assured him of getting a room in *Sales Garden* area of *Kashipore*. But getting room was far from reality. *Anita* was brutally tortured in the hands of *Heeralal's* son, wife and other relatives. She was made naked and was brutally beaten up by rods. Her secret organ (vagina) was also ruthlessly hurt. Both *Heeralal* and *Gautam* were not present at the time of that incident occurred. Later, *Gautam* was also beaten up brutally. His only crime was just to desire of getting into the *bhadra* society, *Sales Garden* with a prostitute for settling a married life. *Heeralal's* wife was a local leader, so she did not even hesitate to threaten them. This experience shook *Anita* heavily into mental trauma and she was shocked seeing the ugly face of the society that talks about rehabilitation of the prostitutes. But despite having such a bitter experience and facing so much of humiliation, she did not give up her dreams of settling down into a family life with her husband. Let us capture *Anita's* voice. *Anita* said in the office of Durbar

Both of us thought of getting into a family life and for this last 26<sup>th</sup> July, we went to Sills Garden of *Kashipore*. *Gautam's* friend *Heeralal* assured us of getting a rented house there. When we went to his rented place, leaving me at home, he took *Gautam* with him and came towards *Sinhi*. After this time, this brutal incident took place. His wife *Soma Majumdar* and her son came back. They started beating me at the very first glance. They took out my sari and hit me badly with the iron rod. When I shouted in pain, his son suppressed my voice. Even using that iron rod, they hit in my secret organs several times. I even asked them to forgive me and listen to me, but they refused to do so. They abused me by calling her husband's 'bed-partner' and increased their torture. In the meantime, she called her mother over phone. *Soma* and her mother cut off my long hair with this blame that I attract men using my hairs. *Anita* was crying heavily while she narrated the whole story.

While showing off some of the wounds made by the iron rod, this young woman, who desired to have a family life, was suffering in pain.<sup>81</sup> But what was the correct reason of beating *Anita* by making her nude in the Sills Garden? What was her crime? Did she go along with *Heeralal* to *Kashipore* for the purpose of her profession - prostitution? To know the answer of all these questions, when the accused *Soma Majumdar* was approached with these questions, she was irritated and answered, "*Sills Garden* is *bhadra* society. Why the girls from red-light area will come

<sup>80</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree*, Kolkata, 2002. p.118

<sup>81</sup> Krishnakumar Das, *Nagno Kore Prohaar Sansaar Pat-te Chaowa Sonagachhi'r Jaunakarmee-ke*, Sanbaad Protidin, 4<sup>th</sup> August, 2004.

here? Why they will look for rented room in this area? These all are stories.” – Then why she is not accusing her husband, *Heeralal*, who brought *Anita* to their place? When this question was asked, her reply was, “I will not give any clarification to you on this, whatever I have to say, I will say that to the administration, I will speak to the police. Remember, I am a political leader.”



**Sambad Pratidin, Kolkata, 4th Aug, 2004, Wednesday**

**Anita's husband Gautam Majumdar is showing how she was physically tortured**

When *Soma Majumdar* was asked about why she did not inform this to police? Then this 'political leader' refused to comment. Officer-in-Charge of Kashipore police stations, Anil Jana had the same question, “if the girl was at fault, she should have been handed over to police rather beating her in public. And if this lady (*Soma Majumdar*) has tortured *Anita* to this level, why *Gautam* did not come to police on the very same day? It means, both the parties have not followed the rule. Anyways, police has taken their initiatives into the investigation on this matter.” But when *Anita's* husband was asked about the reason why he did not inform police after the incident, he said, “I was very much scared! Initially, I thought since I got married to a girl from the red-light area, this may be the reason for all these tortures and I felt may be it was my fault. Moreover, *Soma Majumdar* imposed a false accusation upon me, marking me as a pimp of the red-light areas and I became a victim to a tremendous physical torture thrashed upon me by her. Next day when I came with my voter identity card, she still refused to free *Anita* and captured my identity card too.” While her husband was narrating his story, *Anita* started crying and said, “they beat me because I am a fallen-woman. But, what is about *Gautam*? He just wanted to take me to a normal life. Was this the only fault for which he has been accused and suffered from this torture?”

Regarding this incident, Mrinal Kanti Dutta on behalf of the 'Durbar Mahila Samanbay Committee said: “When the national leaders are talking about and suggesting rehabilitation for the prostitutes, at the same time this kind of humiliation and inhuman incident can never be accepted. Basically, in

reality, rehabilitation of a single woman can never be the solution to this problem. For this which is mostly needed that is the collective rehabilitation along with the labour rights.”<sup>82</sup>

Many unfortunate incidents in the red-light areas reverberating the notion of '*Ek phool, do maali*', which means two lovers and one girl. In this regard the following incident stands very much relevant. When a babu is in love with a bibi, if he finds her to get intimated with others, then it makes him furious and the sex-worker is concerned becomes the victim to his aggressions. Twenty-six years old Shila Das (a sex-worker), resident of Munshigunj red-light area was the victim to such an incident. Mukta Singh (28), a constable of South West Traffic Guard, stabbed his lover Shila because he found it unbearable to see his bibi with another person in her room. Injured Shila was admitted to the SSKM Hospital. She recovered her wounds, though she had to fight with death at the beginning. Mukta Singh was arrested in the Wattgunje police station. He was married and his wife and four children live in Adra. Shila hailed from Bilaspur of Madhya Pradesh. It was an incident of 1995.<sup>83</sup>

In one Wednesday night of 1999, Mala Dey, a resident of the Masjid Bari Street under Baratala Police Station, committed suicide injuring herself with a broken glass on her throat. At the time of this incident, her bariwali, 'Sundari Mal' and Mala's babu, Abhhijit Das, was present in the room. After seeing her in bleeding condition, her babu started screaming and then when they took her to R.G.Kar Hospital, she was declared dead. According to police's investigation, Mala committed suicide due to hot talk and clashes along with her babu, Abhijit Das.<sup>84</sup>

Though in this way, in many sex-workers' lives, happiness comes and then suddenly disappears before taking into a concrete shape. But there are also some stories of sex-workers who got the opportunities to get back to the normal life and lead a comfortable life after coming in touch with some honest, dedicated and daring persons.

- A boy from a joint family of central Calcutta, in society who was regarded as an 'extremely spoilt' guy, married a girl from the Harkata red-light area after falling in love with her. He fought against his family and got the permission. The girl was sent to her native village for a year to accustom with family life and finally he married this girl. After his marriage, this youth never

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Staff Reporter, *Permik Police-r Kirti*, Kalantar, 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 1995. Also see Staff Reporter, *Nishidhya Pallite Hamla, Constable Geraftaar*, Anonda Bazar Patrika, 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 1995. See Staff Reporter, *Premika-ke Chhuri, Constable Suspend*, Sandya Aajkaal, 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 1995.

<sup>84</sup> Staff Reporter, *Sex-worker commits suicide*, Bartaman, 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1999.



visited the brothel and he concentrated himself in the family business. He was never seen expressing any doubt about his decision.

- There was another person who fell in love with a sex-worker at the very first sight and in order to marry her, he paid all her debts to her mashi and servants. Though his family refused to accept this marriage, but without bothering all social criticism and oppositions he settled down with her and was leading a happy life with their child.
- Third one was a doctor. He fell in love with this girl when he visited her for the purpose of treatment. Afterwards, he used to visit this girl regularly. One day, he decided to marry her and they got married. They were living in a rented room located in a place adjacent to that particular red-light area. For being an orphan, the doctor did not have to face any family pressure. He got full support from his friends in this regard.

The incident is of 1996. Pampa, resident of the Avinash Kabiraji street of Sonagachi (red-light area under the Baratala Police Station), got married to Biswanath Haldar, a youth from Rajarhat in complete Hindu tradition. This is indeed a unique feat as for 99% of the girls of this area, this remains as unfulfilled dream. For most of the girls of red-light area this dream is shattered even before they get into their youth. Pampa was bit lucky in this case. Her marriage was more so same compared to any other marriage in the society. It had all the traditional activities like any other marriages. The invited guests had their dinner. Above all, even the Municipal Commissioner and Minister gave their blessings to the couple. But in this marriage, Pampa's mother and grand-mother were absent because they were against this marriage. The ceremony was held at the residence of D.K.Sarraf of Salt Lake, who played the part of bride's relatives. On the marriage sit, Pampa started crying and she had only one thing to say, 'I can't believe. I am feeling very good.' Biswanath was a shop-boy in a jewelry shop in Jorabagan. He realized that he has taken a big risk by falling in love with Pampa, when the mustangs and goondas of the red-light area started creating nuisance when Pampa's mother and her grand-mother came to know about this relationship. But Biswanath's reaction in this regard was very strong. Rather getting into back foot because of these threats, he went to Baratala Police Station along with Pampa. On the day of marriage in the bridegroom's dress, sitting by the side of Pampa, he said, 'we are known to each other for the last seven years. She (Pampa) used to come to a dance school near Jorabagan. We first met there. Initially there was resistance from my family but later on they have accepted this relationship.' Biswanath's mother was looking after Pampa from the evening of the marriage day. She said, 'there will be questions, but I am not going to bother about those criticism. At least we have saved one girl's life. Have we done anything wrong?' Biswanath's father too accepted the marriage of his eldest son

whole heartedly. In the journey from their resident in Rajarhat to Salt Lake, he accompanied with the '*barjatri*' and acted as a leading representative of bridegroom in this marriage. But the Police played an important rôle in this entire episode. The Deputy Commissioner (North) of the Calcutta Police, B.B.Thambi said, 'we intervened in this matter as soon as Biswanath came to us with the proposal of marrying Pampa. We enquired in the Rajarhat. Last week we handed over Pampa in the custody of Biswanath's father.'<sup>85</sup>

Commerce Graduate, Amit Samanta, resident of Howrah's Chunabhati area under the Najirgunj Police Station, who worked as an agent in the ICICI bank, because of regular visit to brothel, came into close contact with Sonali Singh, who came from Lucknow to that brothel. Sonali was abducted from Lucknow and at first she was taken to the brothel of Mumbai and then she was brought to the brothels of Calcutta. There was news that in order to bring Sonali to Calcutta from Mumbai, lakhs of rupees were spent. After getting introduced to each other, Amit fell in love with Sonali. After that, one day, he took her to their Howrah's resident by managing to escape from the clutches of pimps of that red-light area. Amit's father, Ganesh Samanta, was an employee of the Hoogly Block and Port Engineering. When Amit shared everything to his parents, then they agreed to accept Sonali as their daughter-in-law. Because of this, there was a hue and cry in the red-light area in the north Calcutta. Especially, the 'pimps' got agitated because of this. So, they came to the Najirgunj police station of Chunabhati, being accompanied with the gang of notorious criminal Sitaram Shankar. Getting the news of their arrival, Amit fled away along with Sonali through the back door of their house. After this, the group of pimps and followers *gheraoed* the house with weapons in their hand. The neighbours of the surroundings closed their doors and windows looking at this. The pimps and their gang threatened Amit's parents that if they fail to return Sonali to the brothels within 24 hours, they will see the bloods of the Samanta family. Amit went to one of their relative's house in Shibpur along with Sonali. Amit's parents also vowed that whatever may be the consequence; they will not change their decision of making Sonali as their daughter-in-law. A powerful and helping nature person, Sumanta Bagchi, soon got the news of this incident and assured of being by the side of the Samanta family. He informed everything to the female Officer-in-Charge of the Najirgunj Police Station, Iradevi, and sent a group of his boys to the Samanta family for security purpose. The Officer-in-Charge, Iradevi also extended her departmental help in this regard. Then Amit brought Sonali to their house and in 2003 on 26<sup>th</sup> April, Amit Samanta and Sonali went to the registry office in order to marry Sonali according to the law. The people from whom they got support, they were Howrah's powerful socialist Sumanta Bagchi and his group, Durbar Mahila Samanbay Committee,

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<sup>85</sup> Staff Reporter: *Biswanather Premier Satpaanke Nishidhhapallir Pampar Udhar*, Anonda Bazar Patrika. 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1996.

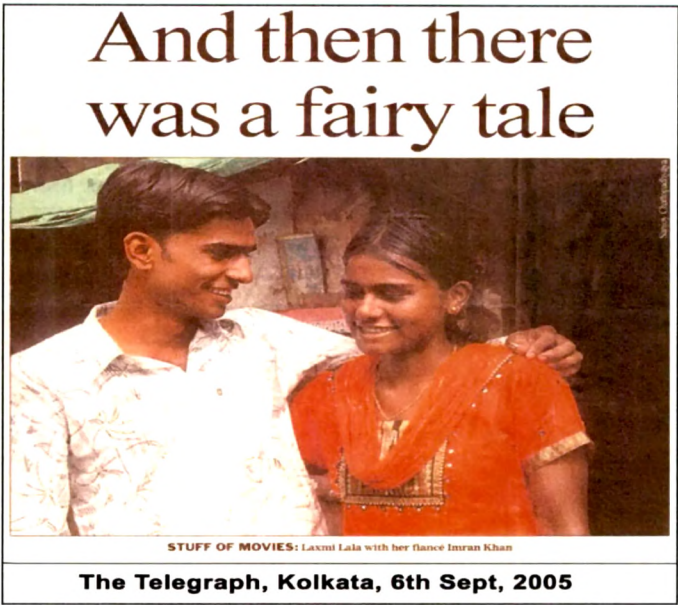
female Officer-in-Charge of the Najirgunj Police Station, Ira Chatkhandi and her police personnel and above all, her daring parents.<sup>86</sup>

Another incident took place in the year of 1995. This was the love story of '*Laxmi-Lala* – a nineteen year old girl from Calcutta slum, who was lured with the promise of a job and sold to a brothel in Pune and *Imran* Khan, a twenty-two year old retailer of steel kitchen furniture in Maharashtra', who helped *Laxmi* to escape from the brothel. She recalls the memory of 'dim blue light of the night bulb in the dark, dingy room where every evening she had to wait her turn to be chosen by a 'customer''. *Laxmi* says, "The men would be seated there and we would have to stand in front of them so that they could take their pick. This boy, whom I had never seen before, was seating there with his head down. He was with four or five other men, who were regulars at the brothel, and they were telling him to select one of us. But he just kept looking down, so his friends were laughing at him. It was obvious that he had been coaxed into coming there and that it was the first time that he had come to such a 'dirty' place." For *Laxmi*, it was love at first sight! He was so different from the others who come there. After seeing him, *Laxmi* thought he might be convinced to help her out to escape from the brothel, "I used to plead with all my customers to help me get away but no one did. I tried to run away several times, but each time, I got caught. They bit me and locked me up. And this boy looked like he needed help himself. So I wanted to take him to my room and comfort him." When *Imran* finally looked up, after his friends chose their partners and went to the different rooms with them, there were only two girls left in the room, *Laxmi* and another one. *Imran* called the other one. *Laxmi* recalls, "I was so angry with him. But fortunately for me, the other girl decided to play hard to get. She just left the room." After this, *Imran's* first reaction was to *Laxmi*, "Why did she reject him?" Then *Laxmi* asked him, "What was he so scared of? *Imran's* reactions were again with a question, Am I going to get AIDS?" Thus, the journey of their friendship begun with these interactions. According to *Laxmi* this friendship gradually started filling up her loneliness/voidness from which she used to suffer for being away apart from her parents for long time.

She often desired to see them, I used to long to see my parents. *Laxmi* says *Laxmi's* father was a rickshaw puller and mother Dolly was a domestic help in Calcutta. *Laxmi* says, "I yearned to come home, and be with people who loved me. But when *Imran* came to visit me, I felt happy. He liked being with me too and dropped in often. He bought me perfumes and jewellery. I saved money from what I earned and bought shirts for him."

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<sup>86</sup> Staff Reporter, *Nishidhhapallir Narak Theke Chandatalay Sonali*, Bikeler Protidin, Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> April, 2003.



Lakshmi Lala with her fiancé Imran Khan

After getting emotionally involved with *Laxmi* one day, *Imran* expressed his desire of buying *Laxmi* to the brothel keepers and offered them Rs. 35,000 for her. But brothel keepers were not ready to leave *Laxmi* and they told *Imran* to stay away. But refusal to the *Imran's* proposal and restraining him to stay away from *Laxmi*, strengthen more their plan to runaway. *Imran* opened his mouth first time, he says, "If you want to flee from a red-light area, don't do it in the dark. Wait till its light. When the rest of the world awakens, everyone goes to sleep in a brothel." Therefore, they had to wait till the morning. It was 7:30 in the morning. On, May 22, 2005. Gradually, all the customers left one by one and the inmates of the brothel went to their respective rooms to sleep for a few hours. But *Imran* did not leave. He hid in *Laxmi's* room, waiting for the opportunity to runaway. "He peered nervously out of the creaking window of her tiny cubicle which opened out onto a long corridor. It was empty except for one 'aunty' who was spreading out bedding on the floor, at the end of the corridor, blocking the entrance – and exit – to the main landing of the staircase." *Laxmi* says, "After arranging her bedding on the floor and before going off to sleep, she was in the habit of going to the loo. We knew that was our only chance to make a run for it." Recalling the situation *Imran* says, "I was gripped by fear." *Laxmi* jokingly says, "Yes, for a moment, it seemed like I was rescuing him."

But *Imran* Khan, who once refused to look up, after this incident, had been recognized as hero in the eyes of everyone. They decided to move to Calcutta after the escape as *Laxmi's* parents were in Calcutta. After they came to Calcutta, they were taken under the wings of the NGO – *Diganta*. The

social worker, Director of Diganta, *Utpal Roy* said, 'we will be organizing their wedding next month. A tale of courage such as theirs deserved to have a happy ending.'<sup>87</sup>

From the above incidents, it is very much evident that to accept a sex-worker as a life partner, one must possess daring attitude to fight against all sorts of social opposition and ignore them at best. It is also very much important to accept the girl offering her full cooperation and understand her mental condition, who has already spent a long time in the red-light area. Apart from that the presence of loving and liberal attitude with full of respectability towards her is also essential. Just being swayed by sheer enthusiasm of the agenda of saving one's life from the red-light area, one should not marry any girl just for the sake of rescuing her and feel great! Thus, they should never get married under any sort of moral pressure until they get that drive from within themselves. And if someone marries the girl from the red-light area, for just fulfilling social responsibility, then the girl should be given fare chance to have a mental preparation to get reincorporated in the society and adjust with the new environment. Education, love and care etc. constitute as important elements to be a part of the way of dealings with the girl in order to make her flexible to understand and accustomed to the new social environment which is totally different from her previous life conditions. In addition, one more thing which is most important is that the ability to choose correct person as perfect partner because often the mental mismatch causes difference in opinion leading to the mental clash and gradually it results into the break-up of that relationship.

But despite all these apathy towards marriage, it can never be denied that most of the sex-workers desire to have a relationship that can provide them with love, affection and security. May be from this desire the babu-bibi relationship takes shape.

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<sup>87</sup> Dola Mitra, *And Then There was a Fairy Tale: It's Wedding bells for a former Sex-worker and the client who rescued her*, The Telegraph, Calcutta, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2005.





**After wearing new ornaments in front of god, it is the ritual in the brothel to take the blessings god and *babu*,**

(Source: Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*)

Due to too much emotional involvement in the relationship with *babu*, the sex-workers sometimes can't tolerate the depression if they get certain emotional setback from their *babus*. In this regard Sri Karno in his book, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke* has mentioned how *Jagamama's* (*babu's*) libertine character brought a tremendous emotional setback to *Lakshmi Mashi* (*bibi*). And out of sheer depression at one night she set herself on fire by pouring Kerosene oil on her body and attempted to commit suicide. But unfortunately, though she survived but her face was totally burnt and came to be known as *Mukhpuri* (with burnt face) *Lakshmimashi*. So she had no choice but to retire from this trade as the only capital of the sex-trade, beauty was no more with her. But her *babu*, *Jagamama*, didn't pay any attention to her and easily moved to another sex-worker where he became again her (new sex-worker, *Manashidi*) *babu*.<sup>88</sup>

An interesting description found in the book *Rater Kolkata* by Meghnad Gupta during the early twentieth century throws sufficient light on the *babu-bibi* relationship, the emotional involvement of a prostitute in this relationship and how the prostitute suffers from the emotional setback showing that prostitutes are not devoid of human emotions.

Most of these prostitutes have their own pet men. They are their Man Fridays. Among these yes-men there are many so-called gentle folk. These wretched women earn money to feed them and keep them under their custody. There are instances when these pet 'dogs' get too much pampered and sit on top of their mistress's heads. They even boss over them and

<sup>88</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.37-38

turn abusive. But these hapless beauties cannot do without their pets. Such is the affection of a prostitute! Sometimes in spite of all the comfort and free board and lodging, these men desert the women and go for greener pastures. Then the women go mad in grief; there are instances of committing suicide even. Instances of suicide are very common among prostitutes. That shows that in spite of their vile profession, they are not quite so heartless. After all they are also human. They are not totally devoid of common human emotions like love, affection, mercy and tenderness.<sup>89</sup>

Rabindranath Tagore in his poem named '*Patita*' (The Fallen Woman) has delicately presented the human side of a so-called fallen woman or prostitute.

*Hridoy bolia kichhui ki nei?  
Chherechhi dhorom ta bole dhorom  
Chherechhe ki more akebarei?  
Nahiko korom lojja shorom  
Janina jonome shotir protha  
Ta bole narir naritto tuku  
Bhule jaoa she ki shohoj kotha?  
Ami sudhu nohi shebar romoni  
Mitaley tomar laloshakhudha |  
Tumi jodi ditey pujar orghyo  
Ami shopitam swargosudha |  
Debotarey mor keho to chaheyeni  
Niye galo shob matir dhela,  
Dur durgom manobonobashey  
Pathailo tarey koriya hela*

Do I have no heart at all  
I have left the divine path,  
But has divinity left me in total?  
I have no work, no shame at all  
Have no idea what's chastity—  
But I am a woman all the same  
Is it easy to forget that?  
I am not only a woman to serve you;  
to feed your hunger for lust.  
If you had given me your worship  
I would have showered my heavenly riches.  
Nobody wanted the divine in me  
They just took away my earthen form  
Away into the distant, in mindless exile,  
You have shooed her away in disdain.<sup>90</sup>

The regular visit of a large number of men to the sex-workers is considered normal. The sex-trade exists in order to fulfil the needs and desires of men. There is a constant attempt from men and women to 'maximize their interest'. One side spends money and the other side earns money and their relationship always gets regulated by their different and unequal interest in each other. It

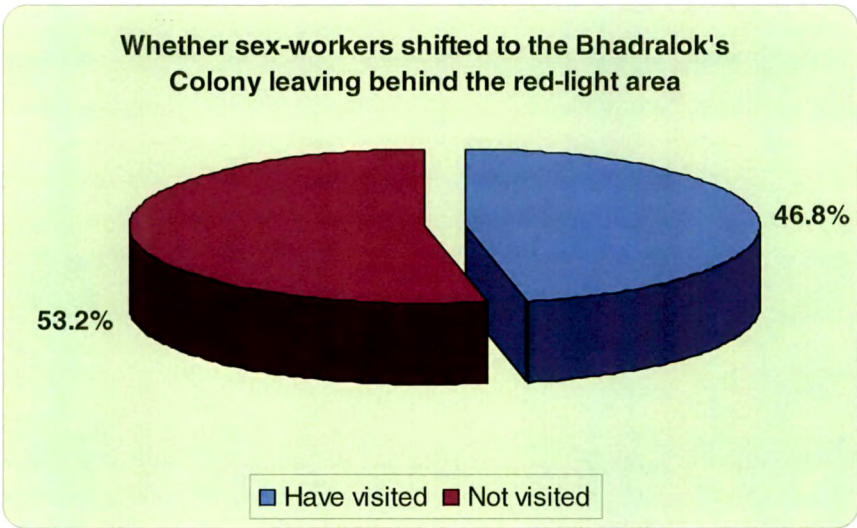
<sup>89</sup> Meghnad Gupta, *Rater Kolkata*, Pratik, Kolkata, 1991 (first Publication 1923), p.29

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p.30

should be mentioned that 'the sex-trade, where survival and gratification meet in such diverse ways has as its objective the gratification of the needs of men.'<sup>91</sup>

Table: 3.5.A

Whether sex-workers shifted to the <i>Bhadralok's Colony</i> leaving behind the red-light area		
Statement	Number	%
Have visited	234	46.8%
Not visited	266	53.2%
Total	500	100%



Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke, p.28.

Table: 3.5.B

If they have visited <i>Bhadralok's Colony</i> , where they have visited?		
Place visited	Number	%
To babu's own family	31	6.2%
To other rooms taking in rent	159	31.8%
To the house of babu's relatives	44	8.8%
Total	234	46.8%

Table: 3.5.C

What was the reason to come back to their own area?		
Reason	Number	%
Income of their babus were very less (it was tough to run family)	104	20.8%
Babu used to torture very much	31	6.2%
Babu's parents refused to accept me	47	9.4%
Babu already had a wife of previous marriage	35	7.0%
Babu got married again	9	1.8%
Did not like my children and misbehaved with them	8	1.6%
Total	234	46.8%

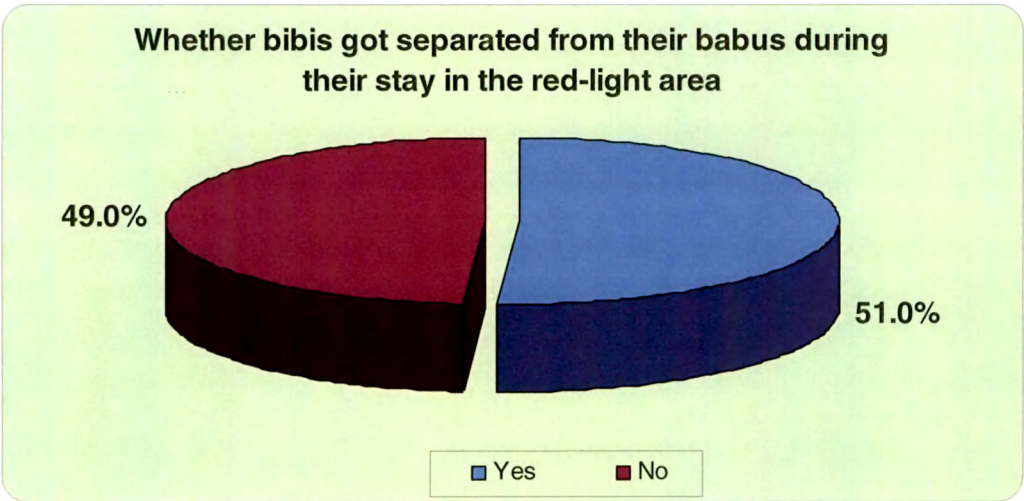
Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke, p.28.

<sup>91</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree, Kolkata*, 2002, p.123



Table: 3.5.D

Whether bibis got separated from their babus during their stay in the red-light area?		
Statement	Number	%
Got Separated	255	51.0%
Not Separated	245	49.0%
Total	500	100.0%



Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke, p.88

Table: 3.5.E

If they got separated, what was the reason for separation from their Babus?		
Reason	Number	%
Was not paying money	61	12.2%
Used to live on my income	54	10.8%
Has harmed me very much	31	6.2%
Used to beat me/torture me	76	15.2%
Used to demand sex in unusual ways	10	2.0%
Used to hate and abuse my children	23	4.6%
Total	255	51.0%

Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke, p.88

3.6. Babus: As the Sensitive Partners:

The inter-relationship between babu and bibi is regulated by two determinants – ‘power and control’. In exercising authority and control over sex-workers babus’ dominating and ruthless suppression are often visible| but in long-term relationship, babu-bibi relationship gradually takes the form of husband-wife where often these roles of babus to exercise control over their mistresses are gradually accepted by many of the sex-workers as the traditional aspects of the man-woman relationship, where men possess supreme authority over the women and the women are compelled

to accept that.<sup>92</sup> But behind the curtain in some cases these babus have also a sensitive sides for their relationships where like the husbands they feel extremely bad to share their bibis with other clients and work hard to support bibi financially so that she does not need to entertain clients. Failure to do so mostly leave no option for bibi but to entertain other clients and this makes babus extremely depressed. In some cases babu-bibi possess a fair understanding between each other with regard to this matter.



**Sensitive aspects of the babu's nature**

(Source : Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke)

"It was a dark evening of *Shravana* (usually the month of August in English Calendar). The darkness of the evening was more than normal because of the cloudy atmosphere. It was raining lightly and in the midst of the drizzle, Srihari Samanta was sitting on a stool in one of the corner of the roof." In both sides of the roof, there were five rooms, each measuring 8 to 10 feet. Srihari's room was locked from inside. His 'wife', Lakshmi was inside for the last half-an-hour with a customer. How long he would have to wait in this fashion, it was unknown to him. Because the more time the customer spends inside, more is the income. Nowadays, Lakshmi is not getting customer regularly. With a bitter smile along with the smoke of her biri, she said, '*Pai to tirish taka. Bojhen to, maal thobra hoye gele rate kome jai* (I hardly get rupees thirty. You know, when you loose shape, your rate also decreases!).'

<sup>92</sup> Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree, Kolkata*, 2002, p.120

Almost all the houses in the narrow Dayal Mitra Lane are double storied. One or two of them are three- storied, some part is open and some part there are few rooms too. Srihari and Lakshmi are fortunate to have airy room in the top floor instead of very suffocating room in the ground floor. In one hot and humid evening, both of them were relaxing in the terrace and discussing the old days. Exactly at that time, an old customer came in. Lakshmi took the customer inside and Srihari was sitting alone in the terrace. There is no other way but to entertain customer as customer is always considered as god and therefore, he can never be ignored. Because after all business stands most important thing above all in the line of prostitution. In this regard, Srihari's statement stands very much relevant, which throws immense light upon this aspect where he recalled one of the most prevalent sayings in the red-light areas, '*maron aar khadder kakhon je aashe, taar ki kono thik aachhey?*' (death and customer, is there any certainty when they will come?).'

Leaving one's own wife in this fashion with someone else, did not cause his mental pain? Srihari's answer to this was:

I know her since last twenty-five years. She used to solicit standing by the lane. I was also a regular visitor to this locality. My frequent visit to her gradually brought us closer to each other. I am her babu and Lakshmi is my bibi. I have just a small business. With one's earning, it is not possible to survive. Due to this reason, Lakshmi is continuing her business from the very beginning. We have to fulfill our needs; she has to send money to her parents and also has educated her sister's son bringing him to the city. From the very beginning, we had that understanding to each other that I will do my business and she will be continuing her profession as well. Even if she married me after spending two years in this profession, would she have become a *sati*?

It almost looks like the prototype of the concept of 'living-together' prevalent in our society. In the 'red-light' areas their understanding and the freedom to each other for their career reminds the modern society's 'leaving a space for each other' culture. Did this concept evolve from the red-light areas only? This question automatically comes to our thoughts. Here for husband you have babu; for wife it is bibi. But in this babu-bibi relation, their everyday life is no different from the conventional husband-wife relationship.



**Anandabazar Patrika  
28th Aug, 2004**

**Babus and bibis are involved in close relationship**

Manu babu and Golap met each other for the first time in the red-light area only. Though they are not a married couple but due to have a babu-bibi relationship, Golap does not hesitate to use Manu's surname, '*Haldar*'. Golap was born in Bongaon. She came to Sonagachi when she was barely 15 or 16 years old. After spending a year in this line, she met Manu babu and they started living together as babu-bibi. They got their daughters married to *Jalpaiguri*. Son is the youngest one, both of them dream of his good career in study. In the absence of Manu babu, Golap accepted openly and said, "I will not lie, he does not know and please do not tell him, I do entertain client at times. Means, for example, during the afternoon time he does not stay at home and my son goes to his school, I do entertain customer during that time. Can we survive if I do not? Expenditure is not less. He will be angry if he comes to know about this, this is why I do not tell this to him."<sup>93</sup> This babu is somewhat different and he is not willing to provide 'space' to the career or business of his partner.

In the case of Rekha and Deepak Bhattacharya (Secretary of the organization of the babus, '*Saathi Sangathan*'), the situation is slightly different. Rekha gave up her old profession from the very first day of their initiation into the babu-bibi relationship. But to fill-up the dearth of income, they have

<sup>93</sup> Gautam Gupta, *Sansar Simante: Mahila Jaunakarmider Thake Ghar-Sansaar, Aache Swamir Matoi Kacher Manush. Se ki Janmo Janmantarer Bandhan?* Ananda Bazar Patrika, 28 August 2004.



come out with an alternative to meet their financial needs. According to Deepak, "we have one 'chukri'. A young girl from Sonarpur. She comes everyday in the evening. When she comes with a customer, we vacate the room and both sit outside. Since it is rainy season, we have covered that outside area with a tarpaulin. For this, we have to pay the landlord rupees 15 per day. The girl gives us 10 percent of whatever she earns."<sup>94</sup>

Mrinal Kanti Dutta alias Srikarna, son of a sex-worker, resident of Kalighat red-light area, is the first person to write a book on the 'babus' of the sex-workers. He has vividly narrated two incidents in which the babus' mental tension and their helplessness are clearly brought home. As per Srikarna, the story of Radhapisi and her babu Satyendranath Mukherjee goes like this:

I still remember the incident. I was in class nine or ten. Before the start of evening, the garland hawker's 'need flower, need flower' shouting in the red-light area is like the first bell of the play, which indicates the women to get started with the make-up. I was studying Life-Science. In the reproduction chapter after reading about the menstrual reason of the female, I was so happy and felt like getting the recognition of untimely adulthood. Suddenly one unknown rhythm, and the voice from that rhythm was clear 'bhajamano bhajomano Ram-O-Narayana, Bhajamano, Bhajamano Ram" song, which mesmerized the thought of getting adulthood. In the red-light area I have heard Hindi songs, heard Kawallis, I have heard all the hit songs as and when they came, heard all types of slangs, heard the sexual expression of Uh! Uh! during the night with their babus to the sound of the cot during the foreplay. And have heard the crying of the girl in her inability to participate in her sister's marriage after helping in all forms because of the fear of marriage getting broken. But I have never heard the Gurubandana in the evening in red-light areas. Leaving my study, I saw that Mukherjee brother-in-law, means our very own Radha aunt's babu Mr. Satyendranath Mukherjee is singing this by closing his eyes in the verandah. I can very well understand by seeing the lit house of Radha aunty that she is inside with a customer. I was a good drummer (using the *pira*), after seeing me, he gave me the *pira* to company him in rhythm. I was giving rhythm along with the song, suddenly, the noise of opening the door came in. The customer came outside first and then Radha aunty cleaned the bed using the broomstick and then stroke the broomstick three times in the *chaukath* and then she switched off the light and came out. As soon as she did so, the song stopped. On my request to sing another song, brother-in-law said he is feeling sleepy and went to sleep. Though I was not having courage to tell anything to him, but I could very well understood, the song was not for virtue, this song was not for happiness, this song was that song which is sung to suppress the inner feeling.<sup>95</sup>

Srikarna narrates another incident in this context:

Let me recount another incident. It was five or six years back. I had come back after a night show movie, had dinner and had gone to bed. It was a hot summer night. I could not sleep and got up to go to the toilet. It was 1:30 am in the night. The whole area was dark. Only the room that belonged to Sonadi beside the bathroom had lights on. Doors and windows were shut tight. But through the small gaps between the walls of tin sheets, rays of light betrayed the light within. I was about to put on my slippers when I noticed a shadow in front of

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.20-21

Sonadi's room lying on its stomach on the ground. I was never scared of ghosts. So in spite of the sudden shiver, I took control of myself and started guessing – who can it be? First I thought of Ranjan-da – Sonadi's Babu. I rejected the idea outright. It was the custom of Babus to sleep on the front balcony if his girl had any other visitor. Then, was it some drunkard sleeping? Then I noticed the head of that shadowy figure moving towards the gap in the tin wall. At once, it was clear to me that someone was watching the activities taking place inside. But who was it? Was it a woman or a man? With disgust in my mind I tiptoed and clasped the person's hand. It was none other than Ranjan-da himself! Once upon a time Ranjan-da guided me and taught me to live with dignity even while staying in this area. He helped me like a tutor in my studies; as a friend he took me to circus, cinema and various functions. Catching him red-handed I myself felt embarrassed. First he started trembling. Then this usually jovial man broke down in tears. I took him by the hand and brought him in the living room. Between many things he narrated that his factory was under lock-out. So Sonadi had to again start standing on the streets for money. He could not tolerate this fact. On top of that this was a night-customer! He wanted to watch how much he exploited and tortured Sonadi.<sup>96</sup>

After seeing a customer in his girl friend's room, the lover Krisnakumar could not withstand his emotions. With pain and agony, he chose to commit suicide. This incident occurred in the city of Calcutta during 1995.<sup>97</sup>

### 3.7. Crime and Clients as well as their Vulnerabilities in the Red-light Areas:

It is not true that the clients visit red-light areas only for sexual fulfillment. Many a times 'clients' have different objective for their visit. There are plenty of incidents when they visit the prostitutes as a client to steal, rob and to fulfill such objectives, they even kill the prostitutes. Many cases in the 20<sup>th</sup> century red-light area indicate how the brothels become the shelters for the criminals.

The dead body of the prostitute Rose Brown was found in Amherst Street on the 1st April, 1868. Stuart Hogg, the Police commissioner that time, for the first time felt the necessity of setting up a detective department that day. And the detective department of police was set up that day basing on the murder of the prostitute. The commissioners changed over the years and working methods also changed in the detective department but murders of the prostitutes has not stopped.

In the brothels of Kolkata presently there are various types of crimes such as stealing, snatching, rioting, oppression, rape, girl selling and trafficking, selling of illegal liquor and other addictives etc. For all these things these red light areas are the ideal places. These red light areas are the free roaming places as well as secured shelters and the source of income for the murderers, dacoits, thieves and *gundas*.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Pinaki Majumdar *Priyar Ghare Khodder, Premik Krishnakumar Atmaghati*, Sandhya Aajkal, 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1995.

The dacoits driven out from other states by the police also take shelter here. The notorious dacoits of states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh were also arrested here. Two suspects of committing double murder in the year 1990 escaped from Sealdah court and took shelter in Harkata Lane. And police arrested them from there. The dacoit of fishery dam of Tiljala also was arrested by the police from Harkata Lane. Two marked *gundas*, Babu Mitra and Subal Kundu were also arrested from a brothel near Park Street by the police. The very familiar block maker K.B.Sen in the decade of forties took shelter in a room of a prostitute to save himself from the crime of making false notes. And he was also arrested from there. There are incidents of dacoity in the red light areas in the decade of thirties. Laxmirani Dasi(50) was sleeping with her daughter Nanibala and her grand daughter in Imam baksh Lane of Sonagachhi. The dacoits killed Laxmirani, made Nanibala half dead and stole 25000 rupees. In the bench of the Chief Additional Presidency Magistrate of Jorabagan Mohammed Fazul karim, both the killers Rahim and Mujibar were punished.<sup>98</sup>

Though the instance of killing prostitutes for robbery in consecutive months in the same process by the same group of people in the year 1929 is very rare, an elaborate description of these pre-planned murders can be found in the book "Murder of the Prostitute for Gain" written by Satyendranath Mukherjee. The first incident took place in November 1929. In dire financial crisis two Bengalis, Amulya and Atul decided that they would gather money by robbing the prostitutes. They planned it like this: they would first go the brothel, would talk and make fun with the girl and then they would poison the girl's drink. And when the girl would become senseless, they would escape taking all her money and jewellery. After hearing this plan another Bengali young man Mahendra joined them.

**Experiment on the dog :** 4/5 days before going to the first girl they put potassium cyanide in a piece of meat and gave it to a dog to eat. And the dog died right then. They decided to proceed this way after the experiment on the dog was successful.

**The first catch :** Rajbala of the Karbala Street became the first victim of this plan. Amulya and Atul came to Rajbala's room with a bottle of wine on the evening of November the 4th. In the midnight Atul took the girl away for a while doing some kind of deceits and in the meantime Amulya poisoned the girl's glass of wine. That glass went to Rajbala's hand from Atul when they came back. After drinking it Rajbala first became senseless and then died. They took all her jewellery and escaped. In the next morning with the help of another boy, Rakhal, they melted all the jewellery.

**The second catch:** The second incident took place one month after the death of Rajbala. On 6th December Amulya, Atul and the new participant Mahendra arrived in the room of Bagala Dasi in the

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<sup>98</sup> Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, (in Bengali), Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995, (1401, *Maagh*), p.77-78

night with a bottle of wine. When Bagala Dasi was almost completely drunk they had advised her to take a glass of sherbet. They made her understand that if she drank the sherbet her intoxication would go away. When Bagala Dasi agreed to take sherbet, they mixed poison in it. She lost her sense right away and then they pushed a handkerchief in her mouth and strangled her to death. In this case also the robbed jewellery was melted with the help of Rakhal.

**The third catch :** The third incident took place on the 29th January. Another Bengali boy Ramesh also joined them this time. This time Atul, Amulya, Mahendra and Ramesh went to the house of Kiranbala in the Upper Chitpur Road. They made Kiranbala Completely drunk like they did two other times. But this time they made a mistake due to extra greed. They pulled Kiranbala's neckless before she became totally senseless. Somehow Kiranbala managed to ring the alarm. Mahendra was caught in the hands of the people in the house. Amulya and Atul Managed to escape somehow.

**The fourth incident** took place in a brothel in Kalighat on 6th February. Amulya and Ramesh were arrested there. Atul escaped to village before. He got arrested from there.

All the stolen jewellery was rescued while the investigation was going on. A suitcase with files of potassium cyanide was found from Atul and Mahendra. The fingerprints that were found in the rooms of Rajbala and Bagala Dasi also fully matched with Atul and Amulya. According to Mahendra's statement all of them were taken to the court for judgment. Even after having so many proofs all of them were released by the trick of law.<sup>99</sup>

The incident of murder of seven prostitutes from September 1917 to December 1919 is very shocking. Police was completely confused and had to face a lot of difficulties to solve the mystery. The mode of operation in this case was similar. The killers used to go to the room of a particular rich prostitute for few days and after that the girl was seen dead either with a noose of sari in her throat or strangled by a towel or something like that in her mouth. Her jewellery also used to be missing.

It could seem the cases of suicide but all of them were actually cases of murders by strangling. The list of murders of these 7 prostitutes is as follows:

- Manada of 307 Upper Chitpur Road, 1st September 1917;
- Surabala of 40 Shivatala Lane(Dhakapatti), 20th February 1918;
- Christa of 295 Upper Chitpur Road, 4th June 1918;
- Nani of 44 Brajadulal Street, 9th April 1919;
- Sukumari of 139 Maniktala Street, 8th September 1919;
- Jamini of Kalighat Satyapirtala, 4th October 1919;
- Suhasini of Rambagan Dayal Mitra Lane, 13th December 1919.

The culprits of the above mentioned murders were caught and sentenced to jail for life.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p.78-79

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. p.79



Manada Devi, in her Autobiography of an *Educated Prostitute* mentioned about such kind of dacoity in the red-light areas in the section where she explains the unbearable livelihood of the prostitutes.

There is a group of people who regularly visit brothels to steal and rob. Sometimes they kill the whores too. So a fallen woman has to carry on her business with constant fear of death. For a meager amount, say five rupees, she gives her body to a complete stranger, who might turn out to be a traitor, ready to stab the girl and steal all her ornaments and cash. This has been the fateful punishment for many a 'fallen woman'.<sup>101</sup>

The number of prostitute-killing is not any less these days in the brothels. But the incidents of killing prostitutes in the same way for robbing them as in the decades of twenties and thirties are absent in the police files. 2/4 prostitutes are murdered in different red light areas. Death becomes inevitable in the case of 'one flower and two gardeners' (*Ek Phool Do Maali*).

The prostitute Shyamabai was stabbed in the hand by a person named Babu Mitra inside her own room in one night of March of 1985 at 144 Kalighat Road. The person escaped. And the prostitute died in the hospital.

The incident of a prostitute getting killed by a certain *babu* can be found in the March of 1986. Although the exact reason behind the murder was unknown. The local police rushed to 2B Avinash Kaviraj Street on 25th March at 3:45 in the afternoon after getting the news from someone. The dead body of the prostitute Laxmi Dasi alias Laxmi Saha was rescued from inside the house. In the investigation it was revealed that the dead woman brought a customer the previous night and stayed with him through the night. They spent next morning and afternoon together also. Next day around 3:30 in the afternoon that customer ordered the servant of the dead prostitute to bring tea. When the servant came back after a while, he saw Laxmi Saha lying dead and the *babu* missing. Later it was known that the *babu* was a resident of Dwarik Jangal Road of Uttarpada and the police arrested him from there.

There are incidents of murders of *Babus*, local anti socials and even street passers-by along with the murders of the prostitutes. According to the information from someone, the local police went to Rakhal Das Auddy Road And rescued a bloody dead body of an unknown person on the west side of Kalighat bridge beside Talinala in October 1985. During the investigation, the prostitute of 144/4 Kalighat Road, Mamata Roy identified this person as her fixed *babu*, Mohan Roy, who had been living with her for last four years. It was revealed in the investigation that the dead person was associated with a group of anti socials of Kalighat. One person was accused of murder and arrested

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<sup>101</sup> Manada, Devi, *Sikshita Patitar Atmacharit*, (autobiography of an educated prostitute), Chirayat Prakashan, Kolkata, 2004. p.57

by the police.

A bloody dead body of a person with strikes of chopper in his throat was found in 3 Raghunandan Lane, the room of the prostitute Sarada Pramanik alias Koushalya in the early morning of 5th May 1990. Police also found a chopper tinged with blood from beneath the bed. It was known that the name of the dead person was Rajkumar Halder according to the investigation. He used to work in a local wine shop and had been coming to Kauashalya for last ten years. According to the version of an eyewitness, there were disputes and quarrels going on between them. The last night Rajkumar Halder was seen to have entered in the room of the prostitute. The next morning he was found dead. But the prostitute Sarada Pramanik was not found there in the morning. That day another dead body was found in the Addashradhya *ghat* of the river Ganga without any wound mark. That dead body was identified as the dead body of Sarada Pramanik. Nobody was arrested for this. The incident is still under police investigation. Though the picture becomes clear from the incident is that Sarada Pramanik chose the road to suicide after killing Rajkumar Halder.<sup>102</sup>

The *babus* and the fixed *babus* who go to the red light areas have to face risks beside the scare of losing their lives and the fear of bad name. They have the fear of getting arrested during the police raid. Those who are habituated to come here regularly are a bit less scared. They develop a good relationship with commissioner of the local police station as well as with agents and *gundas*. They caution the *babus* whenever they hear the news of police raid; they also make arrangements for *babus* to escape. The newcomers most of the times become victims of these police raids. A minister of Bihar got caught in the hand of police in the time of raid in a brothel near Park Street.<sup>103</sup>

A man named Subhas Das had been a fixed client or 'babu' of a sex worker named Putul Das of Kalighat red-light area for ten years Subhas Das had his own family comprising of his wife and children residing somewhere in the Tollygunge area the name of his legal wife is Gita Das. For some reason police arrested Subhas Das from this area and taken later he died in jail as the result of torture meted to him.<sup>104</sup>

Besides, there are other dangers that a visitor to the red light area has to face. Losing everything

<sup>102</sup> Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, (in Bengali), Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995, (1401, *Maagh*), p.79-82

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p.82; 'What is police raid?': Since the prostitutes are non-government recognized, they are considered as non-registered. 'As a result whenever the policemen are in need of money or for some reasons there is dearth of cases in the police station, then they have an easy way. They meet up that demand by arresting prostitutes or their customers. Those who can give a bribe of one-hundred fifty (Rs.150) to two hundred rupees are set free in the name of bails. For those who can not give so, they are seat to court the next day with a pitty case that is in the name of street-trashes, being drunk on the road or peeing on the streets. They are given bails free of cost if the judge is good. If not, then they are fines rupees ten or at the most twenty.' - (Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p. 76)

<sup>104</sup> *Jaunapallir Chalchitra* (A Pen Picture of Brothels/Red-light areas), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2001. p.65

while drunk, blackmailing of the opportunists and cheating of the girls are very natural scenarios. The *babus* do not hesitate to give their all for the fear of their lives, if the *gundas* scare to kill them a little bit. It does not take any time to steal ring, button, wristwatch etc while they come back after taking the drunk *babu* to the taxi. But *babus* are guilty of losing their everything - 'will be the night bird, make nest in other's room and will not be losing anything - is that ever possible'? Sometimes the prostitutes work as thieves in disguise. They snatch from the pocket when the *babu* gets drunk. It's a means of their additional income. The same incident can be observed in the red light area of England as well. G.R.Scott writes in his book 'Ladies of Vice' about this "...women make a practice of robbing their clients while they are sleeping or whenever an opportunity appears, specially does this apply where the man is drunk." <sup>105</sup>

In this context, the description of the red-light areas of Calcutta given by Meghnad Gupta in his literary piece *Rater Kolkata (Calcutta by Night)* during the early twentieth century, stands very much similar to the above facts. He says,

These brothel areas are the playing fields of all the miscreants of the city –thieves, cheats, robbers and murderers. The reason is that, all the nocturnal birds that temporarily nest in these brothels invariably come with fat purses. Empty-pockets have no entry here. To rob these rich guys only, all the crooks and bandits gather around the place at night. Such a night is rare when there is no instance of crime in any one of Kolkata's notorious night-haunts or brothels areas. Mercenary goons and murderers are also common here---those who get paid for beating up or killing people. In connection with women, one rival group employs them against the other.<sup>106</sup>

The red light area being an ideal place for snatching, nights are very fruitful for the *gundas*. It's very rare to get a night when not a single case of snatching took place in the brothels of Kolkata. The case of snatching is so common and happening everyday that even the police do not think about it much. So the case of snatching is very rare to find in the police reports. Today the police is indifferent about the cases of stealing, snatching and dacoity. The criminals do not get any punishment. But it was completely different in the age of Kautilya. He mentioned stealing, dacoity, snatching and robbing as punishable crimes in his Arthashastra. If a male was guilty of stealing the prostitute's jewellery or any other wealth, things of the house or her remuneration, that person had to give eight times more the money or wealth he had stolen.<sup>107</sup>

The Bowbazar red-light area is always eventful – full of news relating to tortures, murders, extortions but a political incident which took place in 1990 can suppress all these incidents. Continuously for forty two days there were riots, Bombings, fighting and operation by the police went on without any

<sup>105</sup> Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, (in Bengali), Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995, (1401, *Maagh*).p.82

<sup>106</sup> Meghnad Gupta, *Rater Kolkata*, Pratik, Kolkata, 1991 (first Publication 1923),p.36

<sup>107</sup> Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, (in Bengali), Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995, (1401, *Maagh*).p.82

breakage, the hookers, their babus, the customers and even their young children were all in trouble – they became the target of the police. The call-girls could not even imagine of their business at that time. It became very difficult for them to meet up with their minimum requirements of food and shelter. Even today the very thought of those days are just terror to them.<sup>108</sup>

Red-light areas are not the only sites of criminal activities carried out by all kinds of miscreants, sometimes innocent people also become victims. Such an incident has been portrayed in Meghnad Gupta's '*Raater Kolkata*' during the early twentieth century Calcutta:

Red-light areas are not only predominated by the criminal activities of social miscreants but many times innocent people become the victim to the extreme dangers or false accusation. This is very obvious! Close association with one sin undoubtedly leads one to commit another sin. As an example, therefore, I am mentioning here one incident! The lead character of this incident is no more, but the name of this renowned personality is not unknown to the world of literature. While having dinner along with two of his friends, Satinbabu with a joyous mood unconsciously consumed excessive alcohol on that day. It was late night – not less than 1am. It was not possible for him to return home in this condition, what the family members would say! So lastly, it was decided to spend that night outside home. Three friends then started walking on the road in that drunken condition; destination was the quarter of any beauty queen (here it means some prostitute's quarter). But, during this midnight, most of the rooms of goddesses (prostitutes) were already pre-occupied with their worshippers (clients)/devotees (clients). Few rooms, which were not occupied till that time, also refused Satinbabu. Prostitutes generally do not entertain

<sup>108</sup> *Jaunapallir Chalchitra* (A Pen Picture of Brothels/Red-light areas), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2001. p.61; Searching the answer for this question one finds that lonely, helpless and insecure life of the prostitutes incite *gundas* very easily. One decade ago the prostitutes had no security of the money they saved. Because they had no other option but to keep the money with them or with the *mashi*. Thieves used to be very much aware of their savings. Sometimes these dacoits had a secret consultation with the *mashis*, they used to enter the brothels and stole everything, giving *mashis* their shares. At present the prostitutes save their money in banks or keep it with the *babu*. For these reasons the rate of killing the prostitutes only for the sake of robbing them has decreased a lot. Though it can't be said that this problem is completely absent. Because still the prostitutes have to give company to a lot of unknown girls who mostly come for robbing the prostitutes. For that these girls initially behave nicely with the prostitutes and establish the identity of a good girl and then they escape killing or robbing everything from the prostitutes when an opportunity arrives. Sometimes the dacoits make themselves attractive by being well-dressed. They give the identity of an aristocratic family. They primarily create their image by spending a lot of money and increase the intimacy with the girl and then rob everything from her when an opportunity arrives, they don't even hesitate to escape, killing her. Sometimes these murderers and dacoits come as friends of the customers and they gather all the knitty gritty information about a particular girl. Then they do their work when they have the opportunity. A lot of times the *gundas* do these kinds of robbing and murdering with the support of the agents. Sometimes the local shop owners of *paan/biri* provide the information about the whereabouts of a particular prostitute to the *gundas*. A lot of times intimate relationship between a prostitute and a criminal can be observed. The criminals easily get shelter from the prostitutes to save themselves from the law or the police and in return the prostitutes get a share of the stolen money. Sometimes a customer or some other prostitute get killed with the support of a prostitute and that prostitute tries her best to help the killer to escape. Sometimes the owners try to suppress the incidents of murders even if these happened in front of their eyes. Murder has come into practice because while the dacoits make the prostitutes drunk in order to rob them, they can't be sure of their state. Generally they attempt to kill them by chopping the throat with knife or by making them breathless by pressing a cloth or something like that in the mouth or by strangling with a rope in the throat. The prostitutes get habituated to tolerate the oppression of this dark world without any resistance. Though some light of hope in this dark life is shown by the courageous steps of a prostitute like Asha Sandhukha and the honest suggestion, cooperative mentality and personality of a brave and honest man behind. (Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, (in Bengali), Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995, (1401, *Maagh*).p.86-87)

strangers, mainly drunken people in the midnight after 12pm because they are very much afraid of their life threatening. Thus, Satinbabu was in a big problem. Way to home as well as stay back outside, both the options were closed for him. But he remained optimist and did not retreat from non-stop approaching the other quarters of the prostitutes. Gradually, they were moving towards the northern side of the Chitpore road. Once they reached near to Shovabazar, suddenly a female statue standing in a standstill position in the terrace of one house was noticed by them. Satinbabu expressed his desire of getting inside the house to that female through his gestures from the road itself. The female agreed and asked them to come inside showing positive gestures. Satinbabu and his friends were very much relaxed and entered the house. Securing a shelter after so much of struggle make them feel delighted. Her room was at third floor. Without any sort of argument, they had a fair bargaining with her. After fixing the rate, they entered her room and sat on the bed with relaxed mode. Then they took the initiatives to get introduced to the beauty queen. But it was not materialized much. As if, the woman was lost in some thoughts. In absence mind, she answered few of their questions and suddenly closed the door and went outside saying, 'be seated, I will be back soon.' Satinbabu waited for some time, but she did not return by that time. He called her two – three times, but there was no response from her side. Then he tried to come out by opening the door, but he could not as the door was locked from outside. Amazed with this behaviour, Satinbabu was thinking something; all of a sudden his attention went on the bed of the room! As if someone is sleeping on the bed, top to bottom of the person wrapped with bed-sheet! And what kind of spots are on the bed? He came close and bended to see ... it was blood! ... Suddenly he became afraid! He called both of his friends and drew their attention to this. One of them lifted the part of the bed-sheet and screamed. Satinbabu got frightened and asked, 'what have you seen?' Almost in dry-voice, he replied saying, 'dead body! His throat is slit!' Then all started shivering. – all of a sudden they came out of their alcoholic drowsiness! By anyhow, controlling himself, Satinbabu asked, 'is it a male or female?' 'Male!' was the reply. Now what to do? Inside the room there is a dead body and door is locked from outside! Definitely, someone has intentionally tried to put them into trouble. It is not safe to be here, but there is no other way out to escape! Satinbabu went to the balcony and looked outside [?]. There was another terrace of the adjacent house. He called his friends and anyhow he reached the adjacent terrace by jumping from the balcony and his friends followed him too. In this way, they crossed few terraces and finally they came down of a house using the stairs, which was also another prostitutes' quarter. Although they were strangers, but no one suspected them. After reaching the road, they observed that a group of night watchman was approaching towards that house where the incident took place. If Satinbabu and his friend had stayed a little more time inside the room, they would have got into trouble by these night watchmen. Most probably, the murderer has left by committing the crime and to be on a safer side, the woman was trying to put the blame of this incident/impose the case of false accusation upon these innocent persons. None other but she only had informed the police!<sup>109</sup>

### 3.8. Babus and their Diseases:

Now-a-days, a medical centre is run in the '*Palatak Club*' of Sonagachhi everyday from morning ten to one o'clock. For the girls it is known as a clinic. But the real name of the clinic is 'Sonagachhi Project'. Through this project mainly three types of services are offered to the women of the area. Firstly, free medicines are distributed for the treatment of sexual diseases. Secondly, an awareness

<sup>109</sup> Meghnad Gupta, *Rater Kolkata*, Pratik, Kolkata, 1991 (first Publication 1923), p.37-39

program is carried out to educate the girls through peer-educator group. They use clip charts or picture books to make sex-workers aware of the deadly disease like AIDS. Thirdly, to make the use of condoms compulsory, the benefits of condoms are explained and to create a habit of using condoms, free condoms are distributed.<sup>110</sup>

To come to the topic of sexually transmitted diseases – since no treatment or preventive medicine has been invented to treat AIDS, the main job is to make people aware of this disease and to treat all types of sexual diseases without delay. These two aspects are seriously addressed among the sex workers. The reason for the spread of sexual diseases is contracting the H.I.V. virus.



**Babu suffering from disease**  
(Source : Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke)

The possibility is high in two ways. One, through blood; if without testing one takes blood from a diseased person; he or she would instantly become afflicted. That is why in blood banks all blood received nowadays is first tested and stamped as free from HIV and then stored, secondly, through semen or vaginal fluid. Blood and genital fluids contain HIV virus. Any kind of sexually transmitted disease like syphilis, gonorrhea and herpes, etc. which are usually types of sores which make the skin so tender that a little pressure creates bleeding of these wounds. This bleeding creates the contamination of the partners blood during sexual acts. Whether the carrier is a man or a woman, if they are involved in sex without condom, the partner has a very high risk of getting HIV attack. That is why in Sonagachhi proper treatment of all sexual diseases is very important.<sup>111</sup>

Under the 'Sonagachhi Project', along with treatment regular follow-ups are carried out to check whether the patient has fully recovered or not. If it is found that medicines are having no effect or having other side-effects, immediately the medication is changed. Sometimes we notice that as

<sup>110</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.89

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. p.89-90

soon as the problem subsides a little, the patient stops taking medicines. Then the virus in the body does not get fully eliminated. Some germs of the disease remain and multiply. Then those viruses acquire immunity to the medicine and further medicines do not have much effect. Then the dose or the power of the medicine has to be increased. So to get completely cured, the specific course of medication has to be completed. Another specialty of this project is that after supplying the drugs, follow up is made to check each patient to ensure that they take the medicines properly. If anyone... fails or refuses to take medicines, counseling is done to make them follow the instructions. Even the sexual partner of a patient is advised and encouraged to come to the clinic for a check up. Otherwise, even if one is cured, the disease would again spread from his or her partner.<sup>112</sup>

While running the clinic, it was noticed that the main disadvantage was that “those who come to the clinic to take medicines are getting branded as ‘diseased’”. In this ‘red light area’ if anyone ever gets known to be suffering from ‘sore’, she would lose customers. So along with sexual disease, all other ailments are also treated here.



“জামাতেই জাদু”—শেষে সবুজ জামা পরা দিদিদের কথাতেই কাস্টমার কভোম নিতে রাজি হয়ে গেল।

**Peer educators wearing green apron, succeed in convincing client to use condoms**

(Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke)

Moreover, daily routines are fixed in the mornings between 10 and 10.30 when the peer-educators are trained by the coordinators regarding the days' subject of teaching or counseling.” The word ‘Peer-educator’ means a teacher belonging to the same class as the pupils, in other words, those who get training from outside to teach his or her own fellow men or people of the same community. In Sonagachhi Project, the sex-workers themselves work as peer-educators.<sup>113</sup>

Srikarna has described an incident in this context:

When the coordinator was explaining the day's work, telling them whom to talk to and what to teach, it was noticed that Radha Singh had not come to work. Anyone can be absent, but

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p.90-91

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. p.91



Radha Singh's absence on that day was like a thunderbolt. After some time when the time allowed for 'late comers' also passed, Kaushalya was sent to Radha's house. At about 10.40 Kaushalya came and informed that Radha was not at home. Nobody knew where she had gone. Here, without Radha we could not open the almirah as the keys to the almirah was with her..... In that case it would not be possible to run the clinic. It increased our anxiety. .... Suddenly we saw Radha-di coming towards the clinic with her bunch of keys. Every body in unison shouted at Radha Singh 'Why you do not you hand over the keys if you cannot come!' ..... After five minutes of clamoring, what we gathered was that Radha-di had not gone anywhere. She was just moving here and there hiding from her *Babu*, afraid of getting beaten up. *Babu* was sleeping in the room. So she could not enter the room and get the keys. Once when her *Babu* got up to go to the toilet, she quickly took the keys from under the mattress and came running. Why, what was the problem with the *babu*? And why should he beat her? What have you done? All started asking her. Finally the reason Radha gave made us roll in laughter. In Radha's blood V.D.R.L. was positive. In other words, she had syphilis. So her partner should also get checked. Otherwise after injection even if Radha got cured she would again contract the same from him. So, along with Radha-di, her *babu* also had to take 2.4 million penicillin injections (?). As a result *babu* Swapan-da got fever and severe pain at the injected spot. He feels, for no reason he had to suffer this and is now very angry. His pain and anger have reached such a stage that if he sees Radha-di now, he may chew her up whole!<sup>114</sup>

Another incident in this context has been described by Srikarna:

From morning battle started as if between Ram and Ravan. It looked like a battle field with its shouting, screaming and abuses. ... Who likes to wake up in such an atmosphere at 6 in the morning? I too woke up and screamed at the two opponent parties Rina and Jharna. 'Why, *could not* you find a better time to fight? As it is there was no sleep in the night.' But none listened to me. I pricked my ears to gather the issue for such a fight. I heard Rina's dialogue – 'you could not feed me, at last you had to poison Bapi's father? You bitch; you have to suffer for this! The hand you used to poison him will be eaten away by worms. When you were vomiting blood, nobody looked after you. It was I who took you to the hospital – do not you remember? And now you are harboring enmity with me? Ok, if you had anything against me, you could have poisoned me? Why him? Hey – do not you call him brother? Has he ever harmed you? .... Jharna cried between her sobs – I love Badal-da as my own brother! Why should I poison him? Immediately Rina protested – why did you offer him *paan* after feeding him sweets? That too not once, twice! What had she fed him, poison? I thought and went inside to meet Badal-da. He was lying on the cot, listening to the quarrel and smoking his *bidi* intently. I asked him – O, Badal-da, what happened? Instantly he blew out a deep sigh and removed the blanket – saying – see dear, I have some irruption on my whole body. I switched on the light and saw really his whole body was covered with reddish patches of ring-worm-like irruptions. Some had points oozing pus and were shining. Before I could ask what were these, Rina-di loudly explained 'See dear, how your brother has been poisoned by that bitch? She has poisoned him with mercury. First she gave sweets. Then, not relying on that alone she gave him *paan* with mercury. Just see, how that mercury is oozing out from his body!<sup>115</sup>

As soon as she spoke about 'Mercury' (*Para* in Bengali), Srikarna remembered that once the Doctor-in-charge had informed while training the 'peers' that in the 'red-light' area, 'Para' meant

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p.91-92

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 92-94

secondary Syphilis. He looked at him again and understood that it was nothing but secondary Syphilis. He describes:

I told Rina-di – hey, this is not mercury. Can mercury be fed? You may not know that mercury may become liquid when heated but in the open it gets formed into tiny beadlike balls. But who would listen to me? However much I explained to her, Rina-di went on saying that Mercury mixes like liquid with sweets and *paan*, which increases its power. So, this was nothing but the bad effect of consuming mercury. After all this fight Badal-da had to take some herbs, put it inside a banana and eat it as a treatment of the alleged mercury-poisoning. He went to the Temple of Sheetala had bath and swallowed the medicated banana in his wet clothes. Within seven days the eruptions vanished. But surprisingly, within two months again the 'mercury' rashes came back.<sup>116</sup>

Among all the common diseases suffered by the *babus* of the 'red-light' areas, the most common are fever, pneumonia, bronchitis, tuberculosis, venereal diseases and Cirrhosis of liver.

**Tuberculosis** comes mainly due to malnutrition and for not taking proper food along with alcoholic drinks and drugs. The primary symptom of TB is continuous fever along with light cough. If it is neglected for many days, along with cough slight hint of blood becomes visible. Later the patient starts vomiting blood along with cough.

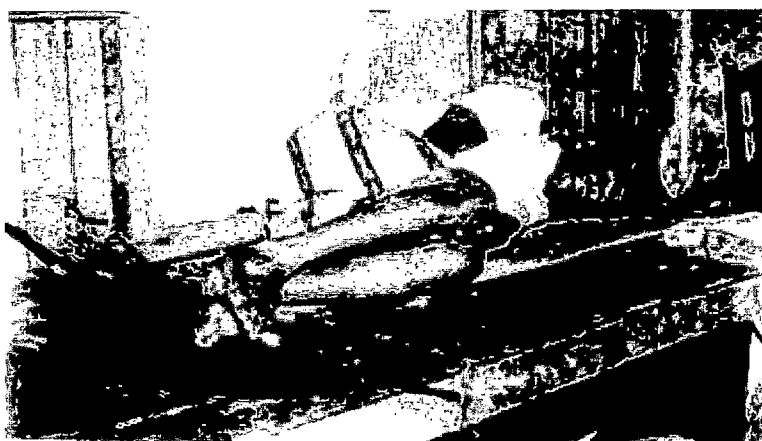
The common reason for **fever** is due to catching cold. If the patients do not continue the full course of medicine and stop midway after the fever is gone, the fever is sure to relapse.

Now let us find out why the *babus* so commonly suffer from *fever*. Actually whenever the girls take in night-customers, the *babus* are pushed out from the rooms and are forced to sleep on open terraces, balconies or even on open yards. Even though their paramours make nice beds for them outside with mats and mattresses, the ousted *babus* suffer from mental agony whenever they see night-customers.

To suppress their anger the only medicine the *babus* know of is alcohol. They either start drinking to control themselves or beg the girls not to take customers at night. If the '*bibi*' does not agree, they start having unpleasant arguments.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 94-95



‘দিনে রাজা রাতে ফকির’—নাইট কাস্টমার এলেই বাবুদের ঘর ছেড়ে অন্য জায়গায় শুতে হয়।

King in the day and *fakir* in the night – once there is any night customer, *babus* have to spend night outside the room,

(Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke)

So then, to avoid trouble the girls bribe their *babus* with liquor as soon as they get clients for the night. Sometimes without distributing the customer, they bring glasses of drinks under the pretext of offering them to ‘*masis*’ or servants. At times, if the girls cannot come out under any excuse, they make the *babus* drink with their own money. These drunk and tottering *babus* fall and sleep anywhere out in the open and get not only cold and fever, even *pneumonia* and *bronchitis*.

**Cirrhosis of liver** is a disease caused by excessive drinking. When a person starts drinking, in the beginning, a small quantity of liquor is enough to make him drunk. Gradually when he continues his drinking habit, he increases the quantity of liquor step by step. After that there are other reasons like mental stress due to the entry of night-customers or other factors; or it may be excessive happiness which calls for celebration that prompt these *babus* to drink again. So much so, that they can barely walk. Moreover, other than a few nuts and chips or some fruits along with drinks they cannot eat anything solid, as drinks make them flat in no time. So, their livers are affected gradually. The symptoms of these diseases are – in the beginning lack of interest in food, thereafter-severe loss of appetite followed by jaundice and complete damage of the liver. At this time there is swelling on face and hands. The stomach bulges out like a fully pregnant woman. Any intake of food causes vomiting. The patient becomes weak and finally dies.

Next to discuss about **Syphilis and Gonorrhea**. This disease is the most common disease in the ‘red-light’ area. It is difficult to find a *Babu* in the brothel area who never had sore in his urinary tract

or who never had pus oozing from the tip of his penis before or after urinating. These diseases are known as **Venereal diseases** or **Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD)**.<sup>117</sup>

Therefore, to define a venereal disease it can be said – '*diseases that are commonly transmitted through sexual intercourse are known as venereal diseases*'. It is said 'commonly' because some diseases can be transmitted even without sexual contact. This is usually seen only among women. For example a pregnant patient of syphilis can transmit the disease to her unborn baby. Similarly a pregnant AIDS patient can give birth to her child with HIV virus. Similarly using the same syringe used for diseased people can spread these diseases to unaware and innocent victims.<sup>118</sup>

**Candidal Ballanitis** is mainly a male disease. Its symptoms are reddish swelling at the tip of the male sex organ with acute itching sensation. This ailment can come through sexual activities as well as through diabetes. Diabetic patients can contract it on their own.

**Candida Vaginitis** is a similar female disease. Here the vaginal opening itches and acquires a red swelling. It too can come with diabetes or sometimes with excessive use of antibiotics or steroids.

Now the reason of the disease of **syphilis** can be explained. During intercourse, cuts and bruises due to friction can spread this disease from one partner to another. One particular aspect of syphilis is that this dangerous sore does not cause any pain. From the wounds, instead of pus, a transparent, sticky discharge comes out. It hardens as soon as it comes into contact with air outside and 'forms a crust.' Without any medicines, the wound dries up within a few days. For this, initially the *masis* advice the infected girls to wash the genitals with saline water or 'Dettol' but even though it dries up, the infection spreads into the whole body. This stage is the *primary stage of syphilis*. In the beginning if it is not treated, within 2 to 3 months of drying up of the sore the beginning of the secondary stage starts. At this time the whole body except the face is covered with small reddish rashes. It does not itch, but it appears more on the palms and the soles of the feet. This is known in the 'red-light areas' as 'mercury poisoning'. '*Para*' is mercury in colloquial Bengali. At this stage, as a side effect there is an uneasy feverishness. Some have swelling of glands. The warm and wet parts of the body like the sides of the rectum get blister-like eruptions. These particular blisters do not itch. Even without medicines, they vanish within a few days. Like this they may appear 2 or 3 times in some patients. If it remains untreated at this stage, the disease reappears within ten to twelve years in an advanced form. This is the tertiary or the *final stage of syphilis*. At this time, there appears a particular type of boil known in medical term as *Gamma*. After a few days of this

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. p.94-97

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. p.97

the soles of feet become numb. If one walks, it feels like walking on soft cotton wool. After this, if untreated, the heart and the brains get affected. If heart is affected the patient dies; if it is the brain, the patient becomes a lunatic.

**Gonorrhea.** It was known as '*Garmi*' (Heat) in the 'red-light area' as the symptom was acute burning during urination. The *masis* of the brothel used to prescribe cool diet –like coconut water, barley water, sugar water etc. Before and after urination sticky white pus would ooze out. These are the symptoms of Gonorrhea. At this time, urination becomes very painful. Sometimes the urinary tract gets blocked and the opening gets stuck and urine stops. Thin steel wires are used to clear the opening. If that too does not work, it needs to be operated. Even the operation is painful. Sometimes there is fever. After a few months, knees and other joints suffer swelling. If gonorrhea is not treated properly, a person loses the ability to procreate or conceive babies.

Now the disease **Herpes** would be explained. Herpes looks like bunches of blisters. Herpes of the body is not a sexual disease. But those in the sex organs are venereal disease. It is very tough to get rid of this disease completely. Oral sex can transmit Herpes of the genitals to the mouth and vice versa.

Now **Warts or Moles** would be discussed. One is warts like pearls; these are called *molascum contagiosum*. Another one is like cauliflowers. These are known as *condiloma-aqui-minata*. These warts do not come without sexual transmission. The infection is under the skin. So, the treatment is to burn or cauterize the growth one a week. To burn, medicines like benzene mixed with *podofilnie* or diluted acid is used. After using benzene, the area is washed after 3 – 4 hours. Otherwise the place will get badly burnt and sore. Without a doctor's supervision this treatment should not be carried out.

**L.G.V.** known as *Bagi* in local language has its full name ***Lympho Granuloma Venerium (L.G.V)*** is a sexual disease. All growths or *bagis* in the crotch or the thigh joint are not L.G.V. The blisters or boils that are wavy or corrugated are **L.G.V.S**. If not treated in the beginning, it goes on swelling and turns huge. It cannot be operated upon. It should be treated by pulling out the pus with a syringe from the side simultaneously with a prescription of oral medicines. Only then it can be cured.

**Hepatitis B** is a type of jaundice. It comes from virus. Like the effects of other viral hepatitis, the symptoms of this also are – yellowing of the white portion of the eyes, urine and skin of the body. If it is severe jaundice, urine will look like mustard oil. Along with this, other physical discomforts that

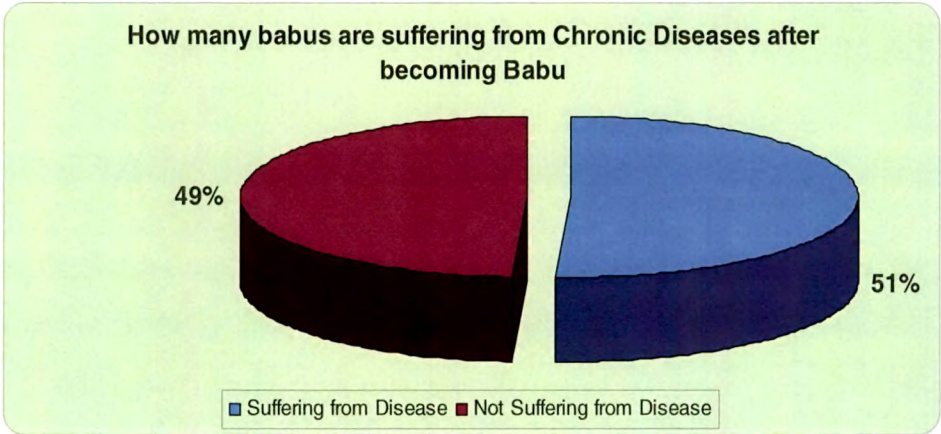
accompany are –extreme fatigue, nausea, catching cold and cough, loss of appetite etc. Moreover, the liver enlarges and pains.

**Sangroid** is also a kind of sore. On the tip or the head of the penis small sores appear: they are in different sizes; along with that, there is slight swelling. Sometimes even the full crotch area is sore. Around it a thin red line is visible. This is extremely painful and is accompanied by fever.<sup>119</sup>

All these diseases have specific symptoms. If no disease is evident from the symptoms, it is difficult to identify sexually transmitted diseases in anyone. Only from the sores one can guess their existence. So, for any sexual interaction, the use of condom can stop the spread of venereal disease. The chances of contracting diseases in such cases of ‘safe sex’ are almost NIL. One more thing is to be noted – that other than AIDS, all sexual diseases are treatable. But sometimes men and women are ignorant about this. The most difficult aspect is that due to ignorance and shyness, most people hesitate to go to the right doctor. So their diseases never get cured.<sup>120</sup>

Table: 3.8.A

How many babus are suffering from chronic diseases after becoming babu		
Statement	Number	%
Suffering from Disease	254	50.8%
Not Suffering from Disease	246	49.2%
Total	500	100%



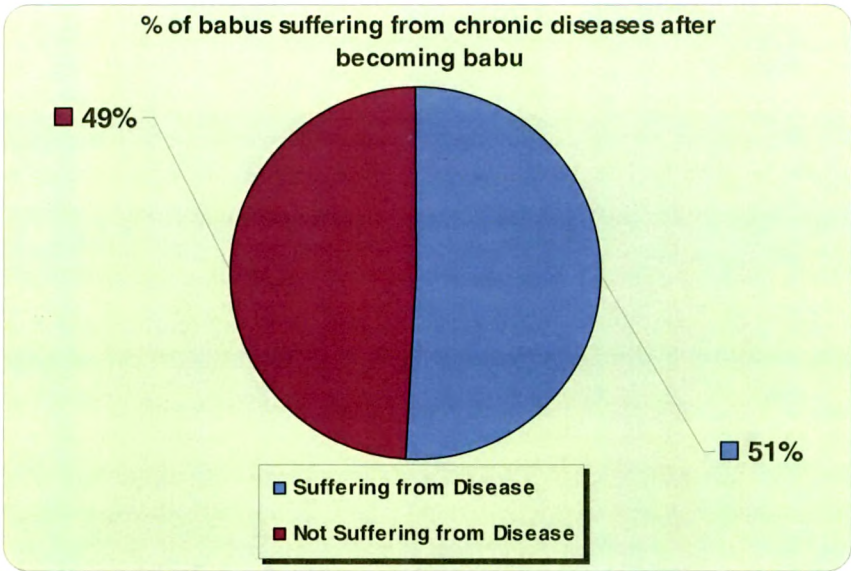
Source: Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, p.100

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. p.97-100

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. p.100



Table: 3.8.B

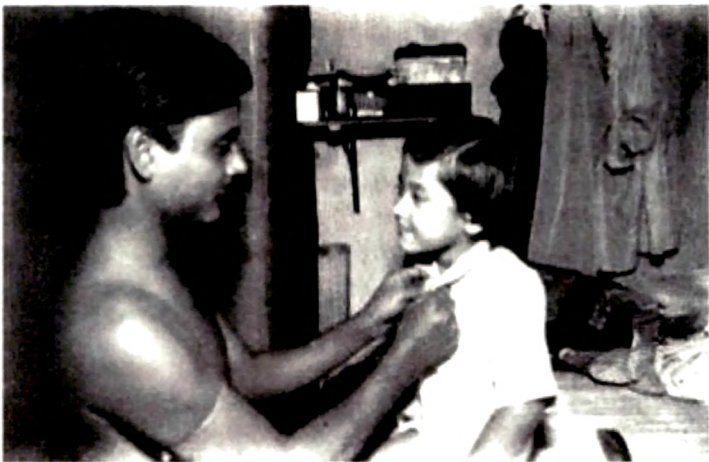


The Diseases from which the babus are suffering most after coming here		
Statement	Number	%
Fever	93	18.6%
Stomach Pain	44	8.8%
Jaundice, Hepatitis B	38	7.6%
Tuberculosis	19	3.8%
Venereal Disease	52	10.4%
Others(rheumatic pain, Sugar, Pressure and mental disorders)	8	1.6%
Total	254	50.8%

Source: Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*,p.100

3.9. Interconnection between the Children and Babus:

An elaborative account about the role of babus of sex-workers in the lives of their children is found in the writings of Shrikarna. Shrikarna, is son of a sex-worker himself.



A Babu plays the role of father

(Source: Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*)



The influences of inter-relationship between babus and bibis (sex-workers) in the lives of the children have been vividly picturized through the descriptions of various true-life incidents. The story of Bina – Amiya Babu's relationship and its influence over their child Bhombol is interesting. Srikarna puts it:

This incident took place only about a year back.... I heard Bina's son howling and crying loudly inside the house. Bina's son Bhombol studied in class seven; he was fifteen. Two years ago he had to leave school as he became known to be a whore's son. After sitting at home for one session, Amiya-babu came and admitted him to another School. Bhombol's father Amiya-babu had left Bhombol's mother seven-eight months ago. He used to stay with his sister. Whenever needed Bhombol used to visit his father there. He used to bring from his father the expenses he required. Amiya-babu (his full name Amiya Nath) was a well-known rubber-technologist. He was even awarded the President's Award for inventing a special kind of damp-proof rubber. ... Earlier, India was importing this kind of rubber. But after years of research Amiya Nath was able to produce the same quality rubber in India. For that, three years back he got the President's award.... As a result of studying in a Convent School, Amiya Babu could speak fluently in English. Though he was above fifty, he had a child's heart. If there was any child visiting the house he would get automatically attached to Amiya-Babu. And the kids at home were always with him. Sundays, from morning till night uncle would take care of them – eating, playing and fighting – all with Amiya uncle. He would also be ready with biscuits and chocolates etc for them and get busy playing with them. One day, Bina had objected to letting children into the house, and the old man left home for three days in anger. After three days he returned, and cried like a child holding Pinky and Suman in his arms.

The fact was that every morning sharp at eight an ambassador car with the name of a famous rubber company displayed on it used to be parked in front of our house to collect Mr. Amiya Nath. One evening I saw him returning home 'dead-drunk'. Other days the office car used to drop him home, what happened today? Moreover he was drunk, something might be wrong. Bina asked the old man. He said clearly 'I have left the job. Which Company would offer this kind of salary and such perquisites? Bina started cribbing immediately. He was in a poetic mood and chanted in Hindi – 'Daro mat!' (Do not fear!). Bina too, was not one to leave easily; she exclaimed – 'You pig-head, what about your luxury? What shall we eat from tomorrow?' She went on. But the old man was flat by that time. Even five years back, Amiya-da used to earn more than ten thousand rupees a month including overtime. Among his luxury, other than drinks and costly cigars was horse-racing too. He used to spend much more on races than the other things. Even if he made a pittance by winning some race, we used to have gala parties at home with drinks, meat, video-shows and what not! I personally tried to advise Amiya-da. Please control yourself. Try to save something for Bhombol; he has his future. But who listened? In spite of earning so much he had to borrow money every month....

... Bhombol was otherwise a very quiet boy. He normally does not mix with other bad boys of the locality. He is rather busy with his studies. I had never heard him crying out so loudly for any reason. While washing my hands and feet and pondering over this I suddenly heard Bhombol abusing his mother Bina in a foul language. Bina too was about to hit him along with another round of abuses, and immediately Bhombol gave one slap on his mother's face. His mother might have made some mistake, but to beat one's mother, who has carried the baby for ten months! Anger rose inside me. I ran into Bina's room, separated them and gave three-four tight slaps to Bhombol. The boy who was so badly abusive became quiet after my beating and broke down in tears. In between his sobs, I heard him

say – uncle, I cannot carry on any longer. I have to take poison. Hearing about poison, I was taken aback. I stood for some time trying to fathom the situation but could not hear anything but cries. I came back to my room disgusted ... I asked a few neighbours about the matter. What I heard was that Amiya-da was always a heart patient. Last summer he had suffered a sun-stroke. Along with other restrictions, doctors had told him to quit smoking and drinking. But he never followed. Recently his blood-sugar also increased and a month back he collapsed in his office. He has now become so weak that he could not even lift his head. Along with that he had severe pain in his neck due to spondilosis. For all these reasons he could not attend office for a month. In the company the system was 'no work, no pay' so he could not earn anything for a month but spent a lot on expensive doctors. At the moment he was right up to his neck in debt. Impatient Bina has started going out into the streets again. Amiya-babu had asked for fifteen days time from Bina. He had requested her 'I looked after you for ten years, give me fifteen days' time. I will get well and start going to office.' Bina had no savings and neither did she have any patience to listen to her man. All these days she had spent lavishly. Now the moneylenders are pestering Bina everyday for repayment. Bina could not bear it and drove away the old man the same day without waiting any longer. The old man too, left without protest."

Even before Amiya-da had fought and left home a few times. This time too, he tried to stay with his sister. But the difference was that earlier he was employed and lived like a king. Now he had no money. Hearing the whole story his sister did not allow him entry into her house. So the poor old man spent two nights in Hazra Park and came back to Bina burning with fever. This created problem for Bina as she could not bring home customers. So she lost her temper and beat up the old man on top of his fever. Bhombol was not at home. He came back from his coaching class and saw his mother beating his sick father with a broom. He was already annoyed with his mother for driving away Amiya-babu. He felt if mother had a little saving habit, she need not have had to start this work again after being a housewife for eighteen years. Seeing his father's pathetic condition, he created that scene.

Srikarna continues:

This is like that story of mythology. An eagle was attacking a pigeon due to hunger. He was so hungry that he would die without food. Similarly the pigeon too, for fear of life came to the prince and hid in his arms. Now the Prince has to judge what to do. For both it was a question of life. In this case, my position was similar. Who was at fault, what to do now? I got confused and my head went numb. Whether I did the right thing beating Bhombol? I spent half the night without sleep thinking about all this.<sup>121</sup>

In this context Srikarna narrates another case,

In the afternoon, the oldest tenant of our house called Baroma, Mokshadabala Dasi aged at least seventy finishes all her household chores including her 'turn' of cleaning the house and takes bath. She has lost everything and works as servant in younger girls' rooms. She even finishes her 'turn' everyday. Here the word 'turn' or *pala* is used to mean cleaning of the rooms, which is done by the girls by turns clockwise. Like other days, today too, Baroma finished all her work and sat down to powder the lumps of incense to create a firepot and spread incense-smoke from room to room. (For repelling insects). On this side towards the East of our room, Madhu's uncle spread the mat on the floor to sit down and tutor Madhu. Madhu was seven years old. He studied in class one. Madhu's mother Seema-di was getting ready behind the curtain, dressing up to go out. In between she lit a

<sup>121</sup> Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.52-56

kerosene lamp and gave it to Madhu's uncle. He put down the burning lamp on a piece of wood and sat-down to teach Madhu. Madhu's uncle Pancha-da alias Panchanan Sardar is Seema-di's babu for the last 3-4 years. He works in a private firm in the Dalhousie area. I do not know how far he has studied, but the way he scolded his pupil reminded me of the old-time village schoolteachers. If a small child made mistakes in his studies, the right thing would be to correct him. But for small mistakes in pronunciation or spelling he would not even stop with slaps or caning, he would make the child do sit-ups and undergo many other severe physical punishments. There were methods like putting a pencil between fingers and press the fingers together, holding the ears and making him remain in a sitting posture without a chair etc. Seeing these day after day I used to get shivers. Madhu's mother's silence surprised me. Madhu's tortures increased in intensity when Madhu failed to do his job as a detective. Whether his mother received any customer in the afternoon – was his common query, which Madhu had to reply correctly. Pancha-da also needed to know whether Madhu's father had visited him or met his mother.<sup>122</sup>

In the 'red light area', any child born during the tenure of a babu is known to be the offspring of the babu.

So naturally, the same mother can have two children from two different fathers. Suppose the father leaves for some reason, the next person who stays as babu becomes the child's uncle. Even if he happens to be an old man, he would be only an uncle.



**Babu, bibi and Child**

(Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke)

Even now in India there is a custom among some communities – if the husband dies, the brother-in-law marries the widow. May be following this practice the babu at the time of birth becomes the father and the babu who comes subsequently is called 'uncle' as taught by the child's mother.

It can be questioned why anyone wants to be sure of only one person, identified as their father. The reason is, the child still needs a father's name. Even though according to the latest Supreme Court's verdict a child mother's name as guardian is valid and 'father's name is not mandatory, 'father's name' carries its importance. Any courageous, mother admitting a child in school under only her own name raises many eyebrows. So a readymade 'father's name' is preferred out of social conditioning. In this way a child gets a 'father' and maintains an identity or lineage.<sup>123</sup>

### **The Inter-relationship between children and their father-uncle (*Baba – Kaka*):**

Either being responsible for birth or for being called 'Baba' (father/daddy) by a child, usually these men love their children like all ordinary fathers. The children too are not deprived of a father's love. Sometimes these fathers plan for the child's future. It is also observed that even after the 'father' is separated from the mother of the child, he comes back to see the child. In most cases they are shunted out by the mother with abuses. Whatsoever, these fathers do not get to do much for their offspring's future. In 'red light area', the fathers and children usually fall apart as it is sparsely possible for the fathers to save anything or do anything constructive for their child's future. Their material conditions are such that they are hardly left with any savings. Those who can, usually invest their savings in their native places. Unmarried mothers are not accepted in their native society and hence the children are also rejected by their other family members in the native villages.<sup>124</sup>

In the dark lives of these children, the father's existence is a ray of light. But those hapless kids are the worst sufferers who get into the custody of 'uncles' instead of 'fathers'. These children do not get any affection from their uncles. Moreover are made to work and are disciplined ruthlessly for small mistakes.

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. p.57-59

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p.59; The fixed clients have varying levels of commitments to the women they visit. If the woman becomes pregnant, most clients stop visiting, although sometimes if a man thinks that the child is his, he becomes even more involved in the woman's life. There are several fixed clients who stop their visits temporarily during the pregnancy but still sends money, resuming their visit again after the birth. Sanlaap has been surprised at how many fixed clients do want to be involved in the lives of the children whom they believe they have fathered. We know one woman who sent her child with her relatives in a village. Her babu sends money to the village regularly for the child's upkeep, even though he never sees the child. In another area, a fixed client took his child away from the mother as she was born and gave her to friend of his to raise, not telling anyone that the child was his. The mother never sees her child and yet agrees what her babu did was for the best. They both think that the red-light area is not a suitable place to raise children. Geeta has a regular client who has his own family living in a near by lane. He never spends the night with her, although he gives her a regular amount of money for her maintenance. She has a child, whom they both believe as his. He helps to support the child and look after her. His family knows about the situation and has had to accept it. He wants her to stop taking other clients, and they fight about this regularly. She refuses to do so as she needs the extra money. - Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Street, Kolkata*, 2002. p.116-117



‘হুঘ’—কাকুদের সন্তুষ্ট রাখার একটা উপায়।

**Bribe – it is a way to keep the uncles happy**

(Source: Shrikarna, Babuder Andarmahal Theke)

If we ask for the reason behind this cruel mentality of these uncles', we will see that they do not accept these girls or boys as their own children. Rather they are treated as stepchildren. Exceptions in this context are one in a hundred. If the child's mother protests, she is rebuked with words like 'you yourself is ignorant, now spoil your child too!' In the hope of teaching the child and also in fear of losing the babu, the illiterate mother keeps quiet. Srikarna cites an instance in this context: - *"I remember, the 'uncle' of a boy named Jaga; in the name of disciplining him, his uncle used to beat him up ruthlessly with a stick similar to a policeman's baton."*

Then the question arises whether the babus have love for their children or not? They do, but only in their own interest. They use the boys as detectives or informers to obtain information regarding the mothers. How many men visited her during the day? How long did they spend in the room? etc. In the fear of being beaten up or in the hope of winning the uncle's affection the kids would do as told. The child may not be too willing to report against the mother who might take her turn to beat up the child if she ever came to know about it.

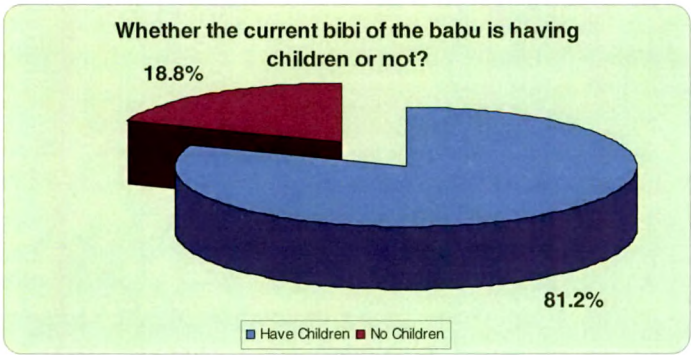
The children of the red-light areas grow up battered from all sides and turn out to be obstinate, headstrong youths. They mix with similar kids of the locality and lose the sense of fear. Gradually they become adamant and start to protest openly against the Kakus ('uncles'). The uncles realize that they have lost strength to and keep away. Sometimes they try to adjust with them. Those who still try to take the upper hand get severe resistance and at times the baton changes hands.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. p.59-61

In this section entitled 'Interconnection between the Children and Babus' vivid picture of few aspects of the 'red light areas' has been explored. The helplessness of these children starting growing under constant fear and insecurity gradually changes them into fearless adolescents. We also get various relationships between children and the 'babus' and 'kakus'. Along with the affection of the Babu or 'father', the cruelty of the 'uncles' or the step-fathers give a comparative view of human relationship. Children's helplessness is compounded by the helplessness of their sex-worker mother. To provide an identity of these semi-orphan kids the mothers pathetically try to patch up with cruel partners. A woman who has borne the child in her womb cannot be the sole guardian of the child in fear of social shame and ostracism. The patriarchal society reduces the woman's identity to a subhuman existence. Somehow or other she has to depend on a man. It is the ultimate male effort to dominate and maintain supremacy over the woman. In a society like this, the torture of women and the abuse of children by their stepfathers are nothing new or unnatural. Money and sex are at the basis of the relationship of these 'babus' or 'Kakus' with the sex-workers. So to compete with other clients most babus become penniless in their old age. In place of a life of luxury they get back to extreme penury. They lose their importance. The anecdote about Amiya-babu and Bina is a vivid instance of this. The constant need of money and the worries about future make these sex-workers tough and emotionless. They turn into stones; not allowing themselves the luxury of 'feelings'. They know from the first day in the profession that they belong to nobody. Men compete among themselves and blow up their money. Along with expenditure, they claim the ultimate right over a woman's body. It is a man's final victory – to keep the final control over his woman proves a man's worth and feeds his male ego.

Table: 3.9.A

Whether the current bibi of the babu is having children or not?		
Statement	Number	%
Have Children	406	81.2%
No	94	18.8%
Total	500	100%



Source: Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, p.61



Table: 3.9.B

Number of Babus Who have introduced themselves as fathers of their bibis' children		
Statement	Number	%
Introduced	345	69.0%
Not Introduced	61	12.2%
Total	406	81.2%

Table: 3.9.C

Various ways in which the babus have fulfilled their responsibilities towards the children of their bibis (Total number of such babus is 345)		
Statement	Number	%
1. Have provided the children to call him as father	212	42.4%
2. Have admitted in the school by providing father's identity	158	31.6%
3. Teach the child	87	17.4%
4. Have taken them to their native place or residence introducing as his child	95	19.0%
5. Have donated some property in their (children's) name	40	8.0%
6. Have made savings for the children	57	11.4%

- 2.8% of the babus have fulfilled all the responsibilities mentioned above.
- 0.4% of the babus have fulfilled the responsibilities from serial number 1 to 5.
- 1.2% of the babus have fulfilled all the responsibilities except serial number 5.

Source: Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, p.62

3.10. Regulation of Prostitutes and Clientele: Role of other elements

Pimps, hoodlums and *bariwallis* always play an important role to regulate the inter-relationship between prostitutes and clients. The elaborate accounts of the roles played by these elements have already been discussed under the section 'Dynamics of Operation System' in Chapter 2, entitled 'Empirical Reality'.

3.11. Saathi Sangathan:

With the rise of Durbar, a dramatic transformation has occurred in the lives of sex-workers since 1995. In various ways Durbar is playing a significant role in the empowerment of sex-workers. It has been gradually realised that the unity among them is very much essential to expedite empowerment agenda. Numerous elements play important roles to regulate the lives of the sex-workers, Durbar took the initiative to bring them together. Formation of *Saathi Sangathan* was one of such initiatives taken by Durbar Mahila Samannay Committee (DMSC). It may be seen as an attempt to eradicate one thorn with the help of another. The babus who cause the sufferings of sex-workers, once they are incorporated into the movement for removing violence, coercion, exploitation from the lives of



the sex-workers becomes vehicles of change towards their bibis. Thus it can improve the babu-bibi relationship providing the latter with certain relief from violence meted out to them in such relationships.

The fixed clients or the babus of the sex-workers tend to become integral part of the families of the sex-workers and their communities. Therefore, it was gradually realized by Durbar Mahila Samannay Committee (DMSC) that to strengthen the process of empowering sex-workers as well as their communities these fixed clients or the 'non-paying partners' indeed have a pivotal role to play 'in their empowerment process'. It led to the formation of *Saathi Sangathan* (Companions' Collective) which is a 'collective for the Babus'. The objective of the *Saathi Sangathan* is to support the Durbar Mahila Samannay Committee (DMSC) in their struggle against all kinds of violence, exploitations and coercion exercised over sex-workers, their children and peers.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Durbar: A Brief Profile (Celebrating an era of Sonagachhi: 1992- 2004), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata. p.25