

Chapter 2



Chapter II

Empirical Reality**2.1. Topography of Calcutta Red-light Areas:**

As in all the countries of the world, western or oriental, the brothels are situated normally in the cities. Though of course the 'raw materials' for this trade, that is, the 'women' are supplied mainly from the villages. All the capital cities of the states gradually become the heart of this trade as the cities are the business centers and the hub of all economic transactions and the centre of activities of the affluent business classes. The floating population of traders of all kinds indirectly causes the flesh trade to thrive in cities. In West Bengal, the city of Calcutta is the centre of the practice of prostitution. Usually, the brothels are located in isolated areas and localities where residential houses of gentle-folk are not in the vicinity. Of course, we also find whore-houses mushrooming around and on the way to 'public places' like temples, hospitals, railway stations, universities or colleges. The brothels of today were not there during or before the inception of the city of Calcutta. But old records tell us about the presence of some dens of *Bajjis* or Nauch girls in the lanes off Chitpur Main Road or the Harkata Lane in the central part of Calcutta. It can be guessed that from the birth of the Calcutta port way back in 1690, local *Zamindars* (feudal lords) started getting singing girls or *Bajjis* from Lucknow, Benares, Patna and Murshidabad to Calcutta with the primary intention of pleasing the British settlers. And after that, areas like Rambagan, Sethbagan, Sonagachhi and others gradually turned into 'prohibited areas' and by the 19th century they developed into full fledged pros-quarters, mainly patronised by foreigners and the *Babu* or aristocrat class.¹

These areas acquired tremendous popularity in course of time. These brothels primarily of flourished under the patronage of native traders whose prime motive was pleasing the British Lords and making their (natives) own 'fortune' with the help of the British.²

It appears from the description of H. Anderson (in nineteenth century) that "the headquarters of European immortality was centrally situated in district called *Callinga Bazar* not far from Municipal Headquarters.... On Saturday and Sunday nights, there was shameless disregard of public morals. Its women, European, Anglo-Indian and Indian were bold, its pimps were aggressive."³

¹ Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995, 1401 *Maagh*, p.52

² B. Joardar, *Prostitution in Historical and Modern Perspectives*, Inter-India Publication, New Delhi, 1984. p.4

³ S. N. Mukherjee, *Prostitution in India*, DasGupta & Co, Calcutta, 1936. p.467

H. Anderson further offers his contemporary comments on the first quarter of the nineteenth century when he says that "the immoral home of Calcutta, Indian prostitution was in the north of the city, in the district of Chitpore, on the main thoroughfare and its adjacent Streets and lands, where some hundreds of Magdalenes reside. It had dug itself in so deeply in 200 years it had been allowed to exist there, its vested interests were so great, and its clientele so influential, that until the passing of the present act, it has laughed at legal enactments and gone its own way. Women looked from windows and verandas. Boys solicited for the customers at the doors or in the Street nearby. But, early this century, Municipal action in parts of the area near Beadon square had made even this garrison of lust to tremble."⁴

Jewish prostitutes inhabited Bowbazar area. These prostitutes never solicited openly. Chinese, Japanese and European prostitutes commonly lived in the Park Circus and Fort areas. The first or second floor of the houses situated on public Streets was mainly inhabited by the local prostitutes. This class of prostitutes used to solicit openly, standing on the veranda or at the door on the Street for securing clients. Some of them were quite proficient in music and dancing and could entertain men with that sort of tastes. These prostitutes mainly inhabited the Upper Chitpur Road and Harkata Lane.⁵ In Calcutta, there were several colonies of prostitutes; in the central, northern and southern parts of the city. Sonagachi of Northern and Harkata Lane of Central Calcutta were the largest and notorious of these Red light areas. The notoriety of these parts continues till day.⁶

From S.N.Mukherjee's work we find the picture of the red-light areas of old Calcutta.

Red Light Areas of Old Calcutta:

Red-light Areas of Central Calcutta:

Harkata Area:

This district had been named from Harkata Lane, off Bowbazar Street. The major population of almost whole of this lane (with the exception of a house near the Bowbazar end), Radhamohan Pal Lane and Premchand Boral Street (The portion area between Banerji Lane and Harkata Lane) consisted of public women. Most of the women of these areas might have solicited standing at the doors of their room or sitting in the windows in the hops of securing customers. These brothels were situated in the neighbouring areas of reputed schools and colleges of Calcutta. Many students residing in the neighbouring hostels were found among regular customers of prostitutes.

⁴ As cited in S. N. Mukherjee, *Prostitution in India*, Das Gupta & Co, Calcutta, 1936. p. 468

⁵ B. Joardar, *Prostitution in Nineteenth and early twentieth century Calcutta*, Inter-India Publication, New Delhi, 1985. p.8

⁶ S. N. Mukherjee, *Prostitution in India*. p. 235

It would be interesting to note here that a few students of Hindu college also were found to be the visitors of /in brothel areas.

Kerani bagan area:

This area mainly included Kernibagan Lane of Bowbazar Street. This area was inhabited mostly by low class women / women hailed from low class of the society.

Bowbazar Area:

The high class courtesans used to live in the rooms our some of the shops in Bowbazar Street near the Bowbazar market. The customers of these women were secured mainly by their friends and touts. But sometimes they used verandah to secure their customers. Some of these women belonged to the Vaiji class and were proficient in music and dances. Any regular colony of these women was absent in this area.

Mechuabazar Area:

There was at one time a colony of low class prostitutes along Chitpur Road near its junction with Mechuabazar Street. During 1930s there were several brothels in this routine of Chitpur Road especially near the crossing of Muktaram Babu's Street also in Paein Dhopam's Lane. The mainly up-country women who mostly entertaining (all to) the tastes of the up-country men lived in Burrabazar Heramba Das Lane off Mechuabazar Street and the portion of Bechu Chatterjee Street near Cornwallis Street, contained few *bustees* full of low class harlots.

Red-light Areas of Northern Calcutta:

Simla area:

There was a colony of Public women near Manicktola Street. Chandra sur lane and a narrow lane after Mohendra Gossain Lane were extremely notorious. This area was also known as dampara though by 1930's no doms (a low caste) lived in this area.

Rambagan Area:

There was another large colony of prostitutes at Rambagan. Beadom Street once upon a time used to be the centre of amusement and this area contained three leading Bengali theatres. In those theatres female roles were played by prostitutes. These theatres flourished mainly under the patronage of (those men) among patrons were drunkards and sexually immoral person. Most of the dancing girls used to have meager earning in their profession; therefore, they would have become

dependent on the patronage of the theatre going young men. The role of Pimp was played mainly by the ticket collectors and servants of the theaters. Most of the girls resided in neighbouring areas. In this way Rambazar grew in importance as an important centre of prostitution. By 1930's only one theater was left in this area. Raja Gurudas Street, which ran alongside Minerva Theatre, and also the portion of Maniktola Street from Beadon square to the houses of the Dutt family of Rambagan area were dominated / inhabited by the houses of ill fame.

Jorasanko Area:

There were several brothels at Jorasanko in the portion of upper Chitpur Road near Haniktola spur crooning. Sethbagan Lane (off Ratan Sirkar Garden Street), Pathuriaghata Lane and Brajadulal Street contained many brothels. These areas were mainly inhabited by low class up-country women.

Darmahatta area:

There were low class brothels behind the Mint and in the portion of Darmahatta Street from Meerbahar Ghat Street to Posta Bazar. Coolies, sailors and bazar Sircars of the shops and go downs in the neighbouring areas formed the main clientele of the prostitute of these areas.

Ahiritola Area:

There were low class brothels situated near the Ahiritola Bazar, Nather Bazar Lane, Kasi Dutt Lane and Sen Lane contained many but inhabited by ugly looking women who usually entertained low class clients came from the class of labourers and boatmen. Ananda Khan Lane off Beniatola Street and Ramdhan Khan Lane off Shovabar Street were also notorious. Sashi Sur Lane off Sovabazar Street was full of brothels but the women of this area were 'a little better than the women of bustee class'.

Chitpur Area:

Most of the houses over shops on both side of northern portion of upper Chitpore Road from junction of Durga Charan Mitra Street were inhabited by prostitutes. The portion of Chitpur Road near Oriental seminary had been cleared by early 20th century and there were no brothels near the Beadon Street junction of Chitpur. This cleaning operation was done between 1915 and 1920. Around 1930, there were only a few brothels in Garanhatta Street.

Sonagachi Area:

The Sonagachi area was one of the largest colonies of prostitutes and dominated by high class prostitutes. The Chitpur ends of Durga Charan Mitha Street and Imanbuksh Lane Sonagachi Lane and Monimuddin Lane all of which branch from it and Joy Mitra's Lane contained a large number of these prostitutes. Women of these areas mostly did not solicit standing at the door or verandah to

draw customers and remained dependent on touts in this regard. Many of these women were the Mistresses kept by rich men. In Gurrey Street, especially the portion between the Central Avenue and Chitpur Road many brothels were situated.

Bagbazar Area:

There was a colony inhabited by low class prostitutes near the Chitpur end of Bagbazar Street, Haralal Mitra Street and Nandalal Bose's lane. Most of the prostitutes of this area lived in huts and did not have ever got accomplished. They used to live a life of poverty.

Red-light Areas of Southern Calcutta:

The Southern portion of Calcutta was not that much thickly populated and that much famous colonies of prostitutes were absent in this area.

Kalighat Area:

Kalighat being a place of pilgrimage attracts a large number of visitors from various parts of India. There were no brothels near the temple; but there was a small colony of low class women in Kalighat Road near the Kalighat market. The young men from the villages who used to visit Kali temple of Kalighat were the customers of prostitutes of this area.

Bhowanipur Area:

There was a small colony at Harish Chatterjee Street near Hazra Road end. There was a narrow lane connecting this Street with Kalighat Road which was populated by low class prostitutes. There were also several brothels on the western side of Hazra Park and in Mahesh Chaudhary Lane.

Kareya Area:

There was a colony of European and Anglo-Indian prostitutes at Kareya. The brothels of Ahirupukur Road were mostly frequented by Europeans, Anglo-Indians, Muhammedans and sometimes also by Hindus in European dress. Some prostitutes of this area used to solicit standing at the doors or on the roadside in a hope of securing customers. Other section of prostitutes was dependent upon touts and drivers in this regard because latter acted as their pimp. Empty phaetons might be seen standing on the roadside in European quarters and the drivers used to oblige any one by taking him to prostitutes.

Watgunge Area:

The Japanese prostitutes were seen in Watgunge Street near the Kinderpur Park. During early thirties of 20th century the number of Japanese prostitutes in these areas was nearly 20 to 40. Nice decoration was done in the Japanese brothel with beautiful paper lanterns hanging on the verandah. The prostitutes of this area used to be in their traditional dress and looked very beautiful. Their main patrons were Europeans and Indians.⁷

Except these areas, there were other parts of the city inhabited by the European, Anglo-Indian and Indian prostitutes.

The European prostitutes, up to the year 1911, were situated principally in a single part of the city, of which *Collinga-Bazar* was the center, and between 70 and 80 foreign women living in between 20 and 30 houses were engaged in it. In a careful investigation made in 1908, particular of nationality and religion showed that 54 out of 78 were European Jewesses who had come from Russia, Romania, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Poland, France and Italy. By the transference of the tolerated area from the heart of the city to the suburbs, the number was somewhat reduced. Upon the outbreak of the war, the police took steps to repatriate German and Austrian women, Jewesses included, and so the number was till further reduced. During 1916 the number of foreign Jewesses was reduced from 54 (in 1908) to about 30.⁸

A detailed description of the localities inhabited by these foreign prostitutes is found from the British official records:

Formerly the European Jewesses prostitution existed in Collinga Bazar Street and its neighborhood, a position practically in the heart of the city, bounded by Chowringh Road, Corporation – Street, Wellesley Street and Royd Street. As a result of a protest against permitting so glaring a disgrace to be so centrally situated, most of the houses in that area were closed by the order of the Government of Bengal in 1911; but the inmates were permitted to take up their residence in an area, the chief Street of which is called *Karaya Bazar Road* running in a sub-urban area from the Scottish Christian Cemetery to the *Ballygunge Circular Road*. Most of the houses were in the neighbourhood of the *Ballygunge Police Thana*. There are still between 20 and 30 of foreign prostitutes scattered along about a mile of road, the majority of them being as stated at the further end, near *Police Thana* ... The Asiatic Jewish Community is found on both sides of *Bowbazar Street* and lower classes connected with it are scattered over the area north of *Bowbazar*.⁹

⁷ S. N. Mukherjee, *Prostitution in India*. Das Gupta & Co., Calcutta, 1936. P. 236-242.

⁸ *Protection of Jewish Girls and Women from Evil Influence*; file P.10P-1 (4-10) Progs 1-7. September 1916 [Political Department: Police Branch], PV- page-3.

⁹ Ibid. PV- Pg- 4. Mentioned in the report desired to be submitted by the Calcutta vigilance Committee in response to the questions submitted in the letter no. 937C, dated Delhi, the 15th March 1916, from the Government of India to the Government of Bengal and forwarded by the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal in his no. 5296P, dated The 6th April 1916, to the Secretary of Calcutta Vigilance Committee.

The Turnbull's Lane was also allocated by foreign prostitutes. The eviction of the brothels in this area under section 43 of the Police Act had given a severe blow to foreign prostitution in Calcutta and to the profits derived from it.¹⁰

The British Official records informs that foreign prostitutes were not only allocated in the Turnbull's lane but also they spread over "off Free School Street about east of Indian Museum. This had great advantages from the point of view of Police supervision watching soldiers, etc., as there were no respectable neighbours, the women forming self-contained colony, there were few or no complaints. ... The quarter was right in the middle of a number of Educational Institutions."¹¹

In 1922 few Streets where numerous brothels were flourished had been declared by the Corporation to be "Main Thoroughfares" under section 2 of the Calcutta and Sub-urban Police Amendment Act III (B.C.) of 1907. These Streets were:

- I. College Street: Four or five brothels in 110, upper flat.
- II. Collinga Bazar Street (Now Collin Street.): Brothels in 16, 93, 96/2.
- III. Cornawallis Street: No. 81, upper flat.
- IV. Lower Circular Road: No. 11.
- V. Nimtollah Ghat Street: The houses behind No. 67, 70 and 70A upper flat, and No. 32 opposite No. 70.
- VI. Sovabazar Street: 112, 114 and 122 with an adjacent building; also a blind alloy nearby the Hatkhola Post Office in which there are many brothels whose residence solicit on Sovabazar Street.¹²

There were several houses left to be evicted and so were still occupied by the prostitutes. These houses were as follows:

Table: 2.1.A

House Numbers	Street Name
84	Sovabazar Street
91	Do
95	Do
97	Do
116	Do

Further investigation was asked to be carried out in this regard as those prostitutes were not permitted to ply their trade in the houses from which they were ordered to be removed by the

¹⁰ *Legislation to Suppress the Importation of Foreign women for Prostitution and to punish the importers and other profiting there-by*, file P. 2-A/22 of 1912, serial nos. 3-16, progs. Nos. 18-31, February, 1913, [Political Department: Police Branch] – last to last page.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Solicitation by public women on the Calcutta Maidan and in other public places and the suggestion of remedial measure*. File No. P.10P/1/22, [Political Department: Police Branch], 1922.

Commissioner of Police. Apart from the business houses, there was large school in the Street. The residents of the locality had applied to the Commissioner of Police under the Calcutta Police Act for the removal of the disorderly houses.¹³

Except these above mentioned Streets a number of roads, areas had been declared public or main thoroughfare for the purposes of the Calcutta Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act of 1933. These were *Harisava Lane, Belighata Road, Maharani Hemantakumari Street, Manmatha Bhattacharji Street*, Elliot Road, Royd Street and Park Street, Ripon Lane, Park Lane, Meleod Street(?), Beniapukur Lane, Mohinimohan Road, New Bowbazar Lane, Garden Reach Road, Bedford Lane, Golam Sovan Lane, Shoshibhusan Dey Street, Nebutola Row, and Sankaritola Lane, Free School Street, Wellesly Street, Theatre Road, Bechu Chatterjee Street, the Upper Circular Road from Gas Street to Shyambazar Street, Jakaria Street*.¹⁴

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Declaration of Harisava Lane and Belighata Road in Calcutta, to be main thorough fares for the purposes of the Calcutta Suppression of the Immoral Traffic.: File P-2A-21, progs. B 19-21 (12 years), September 1932. (Destroyed – 1945), [Police Department]; Declaring of the Maharani Hemantakumari Street and Manmatha Bhattacharji Street as public thorough fares for the purposes of the Calcutta Suppression of the Immoral Traffic": File P.2A-5, progs. B-561-62 (12 years), March 1933. (Destroyed – 1946), [Police Department]; Declaration of Elliot Road, Royd Street and Park Street as Public thoroughfares for the purposes of the Calcutta Suppression of the Immoral Traffic. File- P 2A-14, progs. B 158-159 (20 years), June 1933. (Destroyed – 1954), [Police Department]; Declaration of Elliot Lane, Ripon Lane, Park Lane, Meleod Street and Beniapukur Lane as public thoroughfares for the purposes of the Calcutta Suppression of the Immoral Traffic Act. – File P-2A-28, progs. B-89-90 (20 years), November 1933. (Destroyed – 1954), [Police Department]; Petition of babu J.N. Basu and others of Calcutta for the removal of and disorderly houses situated in and around Maharani Hemantakumari Street and Manmatha Bhattacharji Street. – File P-2A-5, progs. B-196-97 (12 years), May 1933. (Destroyed – 1946), [Police Department]; Declaration of Mohinimohan Road as public thoroughfare for the purpose of the Calcutta Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act: File P-2A-15. prog. B 437-38 (20 years), March 1934. (Destroyed – 1955), [Police Department]; Declaration of Wellesly Street, Free School Street and Theatre Road in Calcutta as public thoroughfare for the purposes of the Calcutta Suppression of the Immoral Traffic Act: File P.2A-8, progs. B-126-27 (20 years), February 1934. (Destroyed – 1955), [Police Department]; Declaration of New Bowbazar Lane as main thoroughfares for the purposes of the Calcutta Suppression of the Immoral Traffic: File P.2A-16, progs. B 42-43(12 years), April 1934. (Destroyed – 1947), [Police Department]; Declaration of Garden Reach Road as main thoroughfare for the purposes of the Bengal Suppression of the Immoral Traffic Act: File P.2A-40, progs. B-125-126 (12 years), October 1934. (Destroyed – 1947), [Police Department]; Declaration of Bedford Lane and Golam Sovan Lane in Calcutta as public thoroughfares for the purposes of the Calcutta Suppression of the Immoral Traffic 1933: File P-2A-37, progs. B 290-91(12 years), September 1934. (Destroyed – 1947), [Police Department]; Declaration of Shashibhusan Dey Street, Nebutala Row and Shankaritala Lane in Calcutta as public thoroughfares for the purposes of the Calcutta Suppression of the Immoral Traffic 1933: File P-2A-39, progs. B 234-36(12 years), September 1934. (Destroyed – 1947), [Police Department]; Declaration of Bechu Chatterjee Street, Calcutta, to be a main thoroughfare for the purposes of the Calcutta Suppression of the Immoral Traffic Act: File P-2A-1, progs. B 229-30 (20 years), January 1936 (Destroyed – 1957), [Police Department]; Declaration of Upper Circular Road from Gas Street to Shyambazar Street, Calcutta, to be main thoroughfares for the purposes of the Calcutta Suppression of the Immoral Traffic Act 1933: File P-2A-9, progs. B 353-54 (20 years), March 1936. (Destroyed – 1957), [Police Department]; Declaration of the Jakaria Street in Calcutta, to be main thoroughfare for the purposes of the Calcutta Suppression of the Immoral Traffic Act 1933: File P-2A-19, progs. B 11-12 (12 years), May 1940. (Destroyed – 1956), [Home Dept: Police Branch]; Declaration of certain streets in Calcutta to be main thoroughfares under the Calcutta Suppression of the Immoral Traffic Act 1933. File P-2A-3, proce – 154 & 155. Last order 12th February – 1936 (12 years). (Destroyed – 1949), [Police Department]. The local self government department of British Government forwarded a copy of notification declaring Collin Street, Dhakuria Bagan Lane, Umadas Lane, Karimbux Lane and Market Street to be main thoroughfares for the purposes of the Calcutta Suppression of the Immoral Traffic Act 1933: A copy of the communication was forwarded to the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, for information. * Babu J.N.Basu and others of Calcutta were informed that their petition praying for the removal of

We find another information about the influx of prostitutes in Barrabazar area during early twentieth century Calcutta. There was huge complain lodged by the All India Sanatan Dharmawalambiya Marwari Yubak Sammelan to the Secretary of Bengal Government against these influx of prostitutes into Barrabazar area in the following manner:

I have been directed by my Sammelan to address you as follows in connection with the increasing nuisance in the Barrabazar Circle, Calcutta on account of the prostitutes having recently taken up quarters to carry on their immoral and indecent profession in the heart of Barrabazar area, in the localities inhabited by respectable families, which quarters were previously absolutely immune from these sort of trafficking.

It is needless here to enumerate the various baneful effects of such immoral practice on the society and the lives of respectable persons and persons of comparatively immature understanding, inhabiting such localities. This Sammelan therefore thinks that in order to preserve a healthy standard of social life, it is absolutely necessary to put a check on the prostitutes taking up habitation amidst the places inhabited by respectable persons and oust them of the places already occupied by them in such localities.

I have therefore to request you on behalf of the Sammelan that the authorities should take up this matter in hand and make necessary arrangements to oust the prostitutes from these quarters and if necessary to seclude them in some remote corner of the town, so that the society may be saved from being a prey to these licentious sluts.

This Sammelan will be highly obliged if you will please intimate the stated proposed to be taken in this connection.¹⁵

Despite being declared as public thoroughfare earlier, some portions of Karaya Road were occupied by the prostitutes. A complaint was lodged to Khan Bahadur Bazlul Karim, Secretary Coal Mines, Stowing Board by the Hon'ble Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin against these inhabitations of prostitutes in Karaya Road in 1944.¹⁶

There were another two localities called Umadas Lane and Dhakuria Bagan Lane were inhabited by several prostitutes even after the declaration of these Streets public thoroughfare for the fulfillment of the purposes of the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act 1933. Public of these place had appealed to the Government of Bengal for the eviction of prostitutes from these areas in 1947. This letter stands very much informative about the nature of the prostitution and its organizational network carried out in those areas:

The prostitutes residing in these localities were evicted by the 2nd of February 1945. Soon after their eviction some of the houses were let-out to the public but most of them were retained by the Bariwalis and Gundas with their deliberate ill-intention to prosecute secret and mobile prostitution therein. Just after two or three months of these most of the

Brothels and disorderly huts situated in and around Maharani Hemantakumari Street and Manmatha Bhattacharji Street had been forwarded to the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta for disposal.

¹⁵ Complaint of the All India Sanatan Dharmawalambiya Marwari Yubak Sammelan against the influx of prostitutes in Barrabazar. - File- P-10C-1/35, proce B-264-65, January 1935, [Police Department]

¹⁶ Removal of brothels from Karaya Road, Calcutta: File No. P-10P-2/44 (1 – 2), proce.B-16-17, July 1944, [Home Dept. Police Branch].

prostitutes thus sheltered came out with their old ugly affairs and began regular prostitution. ...There has been a considerable influx of prostitutes in these two lanes for sometimes past and everyday there has been the opening ceremony of new brothels made by these Gundas and Bariwallis quite un-hampered. Bariwalis like Ramchandi and Durby have sheltered many prostitutes at 24, Umadas Lane (1st and 2nd floor) and 3 and 8, Dhakuria Bagan Lane, who come down in open Street and carry on prostitution day and night.¹⁷

Table: 2.1.B

FIGURE Or DATA			
SL #	House or Premises Number	No.	Under Who's Control
I	1 No. Dhukuria Bagan Lane	6	3 Gundahs
II	3 No. Dhukuria Bagan Lane	15	Ibrahim Gundah & Derby Bariwalli
III	Oppt. 3, Hole West Block	15	3, Bariwallis
IV	4/1, Dhukuria Bagan Lane	3	Self
V	5, Dhukuria Bagan Lane	2	2 Gundahs
VI	Lane-siding 7, Dhukuria Bagan Lane	5	Self
VII	7/3, Umadas Lane	4	Selim Biriwalla
VIII	8, Umadas Lane	1	Self
IX	24, Umadas Lane(1st and 2nd Floor)	20	Ramchandi, Yeasin
X	26, Umadas Lane (Ground Floor)	3	Gundahs
XI	22, Umadas Lane (2nd Floor)	3	2 Gundahs
XII	Oppst 22, Umadas Lane (hut), 14 & 14/1	7	Gundahs and Bariwallah
XIII	2/1, Ramhari Mistri Lane	5	Bariwallah, the tailor, Sitaram Gundah
XIV	29, Umadas Lane	2	Tea Shop owner
		Total 91	
XV	East Lane between 7 & 6 Dhukuria Bagan Lane	15	
		Total 106	

Source: Prayer from the public for the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act Dhakuria Bagan Lane and Umadas Lane – File No. P-14B-3/46 proce. B-418, January 1947, [Political Dept: Police Branch]

Another description of red-light areas of early twentieth century Calcutta is also found in Meghnad Gupta's work Rater Kolkata:

Sonagachhi, Rupogachhi, Joy Mitrer goli, Upper Chitpur Road, Bowbazar, Karaya, Harkata Gali, Haripadminir goli, Sethbagan, Natun Bazar, Mahendra Goswamir Lane, Shimla, Phool bagan, Kerani Bagan, Shashibhushan Surer Goli, Benetola, Goran Hata, Dhakapotti, Jorabagan o Malapara Goli etc are the main flesh trade area of Calcutta. Apart from these all, in all other places of Calcutta, we find prostitutes in some way or the other. ... In Calcutta, wee see different classes of prostitutes. Those who solicit standing on the road side or on the lane are the lowest of the lot. In most of the cases, they live in the dark, filthy one-storeyed house with roof made of indigenous tiles. Their clients consist of potters and poor *chotoloak* (men of lowest social and economic status). The next higher category of the prostitutes live in the two-storeyed *mathkota* or mud built house. These prostitutes can be seen in the *Malapara lane*, *Dacca Patti* and *Jorabagan*. Generally, *gadiwalla* (businessmen), shopkeeper and the lower grade staff of the rich come here in search of pleasure and sex. In gradation domicile, next come the prostitutes who live in the one-storeyed brick-built or *pukka* building. They are better in appearance, behaviour and more charming than the other two groups already mentioned before. The better off among them lived in *Chitpur Road*, *Harkata Gali* (Gali stands for lane) and *Haripadmini Gali*. These prostitutes live in the first and second floor of *Pukka* building. Generally, clerks and the like are their clients.

¹⁷ Prayer from the public for the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act Dhakuria Bagan Lane and Umadas Lane – File No. P-14B-3/46 proce. B-418, January 1947, [Political Dept: Police Branch].

Then there is a class of sophisticated prostitutes considered as the highest of the lot. In this category, we find two types of prostitutes, one of them is *Bandha* (permanent) while the other is known as *Chooto* (occasional). The prostitutes who have regular visitors or clients are known as *Bandha* while those who have only the occasional or *chooto* clients are known as *chooto*. The *Bandha* are regarded as aristocrat among the prostitutes. Some of them get honorarium ranging from rupees one hundred and fifty to three or four hundred per month. In some cases, the honorarium is five hundred, seven hundred – and sometimes even as high as rupees one thousand per month.

The charge of the *Chooto* ranges from rupees eight to twenty five. Those who are proficient in singing and dancing earn more – in some cases rupees one hundred or one hundred fifty per sitting.

In this category, there are some who are *bandha* as well as *chooto*. The *bandha babu* or *lok* or client of such a prostitute visits on particular days of a week and that too in fixed time, and in the remaining days of the week and time, she (prostitute) is free to entertain *chooto* clients. In some other cases, *bandha babu* or *lok* come every day a particular time; and excluding that time, she can invite any client of her choice. The *babu* visiting prostitutes on specific dates and times are known as *timer babu* i.e. clients who maintain time.

These highest category prostitutes can be seen mainly in *Sonagachhi* and *Rupagachhi*. Often they are very much proficient in the art of dancing and singing. Some of them are even moderately educated and devout reader of Tagore literature.¹⁸

Meghnad Gupta explains that the Kareya and Wattgunj area was inhabited by the prostitutes hailed from all over the world. However, unlike others, this part was not visible on the road side. The customers were normally the foreigners, the sailors, and the soldiers of the fort, the Chinese, the Japanese or the low class Muslims. Especially during the night, the sight was different in the anglo areas of Calcutta. They used ply their trade in the areas like Chauranghi, Karjon Park, Eden Garden, Garer Math and in the race course area. Their sight was possible if someone could wait in a corner of the *Garer Math* "*Klarjon Park*" for sometime. Eden Garden was also treated as one of the biggest place where they used to gather. During the dark and low lights of nights, it was very easy to find these foreign prostitutes in awkward position with men in the bushes. According to him, Calcutta's various streets had the temples of Kali and other god-goddess, there were devotees in these temples during the evening prayer, but another group of male and female was also part of these devotees. They were mostly all men, characterless women from sophisticated family and prostitutes. Out of that, few were sophisticated women from good families who were guardian-less. But these sophisticated women were not able sell themselves in public. Thus they generally used to come in such temple in order to get their kind of customers. One class of those characterless men looking for girls to meet their sexual lust used to prefer these characterless women from the sophisticated families compared to the regular prostitutes. This truth was also known to the prostitutes very well.

¹⁸ Meghnad Gupta, *Rater Kolkata*, Pratik, Kolkata, 1991 (1st Publication 1923), p.28-29. In this regard translation has been taken from B.Joardar, *Prostitution in nineteenth and twentieth Century Calcutta*. p.23

So, in order to cheat these men, they used to dress up like sophisticated women and tried to attract them.¹⁹

In the same context Manada Says:

After late evening, we used to get dressed up and go to the nearby *thanthania Kali temple* in the pretext of watching the evening prayers and worship of the idol. After standing there for some time, when we noticed that we have attracted attention of some well-dressed guy, we would start walking towards home. The dandy would also follow us. Our landlady ('*bariwali*') had taught us this method of catching a client.²⁰

From the above sources it has been clear that though specific colonies inhabited by prostitutes where they ply their trade or profession – prostitution or sex-work is called *nishidhyapalli* or *red-light area*; but in reality prostitutes were not always confined to a certain limited areas. It had always been spread over the various localities outside the red-light areas in its one form or another.

In the later days, the composition of the red-light areas has undergone a dramatic transformation. On one hand, many prostitutes' colonies have now been ceased to exist. On the other hand, some new colonies grew up by the passage of time. The expansion of the area of prostitutes' colonies has been reduced but the density of the population in these Red-light areas has now increased to a larger extent.²¹

According to the 1993 survey report conducted by the department of Epidemiology of All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, the recent compositions of Red-light areas of Calcutta are as follows:

Red-light Areas of Present Calcutta:

Northern Calcutta:

- Sonagachi
- Rambagan
- Sethbagan
- Jorabagan
- Rabindra Sarani
- Baruipara (Barahanagar)

¹⁹ Ibid. p.15-19; Meghnad Gupta again informs how some unconventional places were used by their prostitutes for plying their trades. He narrated another interesting information; in the banks of Ganga, females from good families used to come in order to have bath before the dawn. But these all females were not honest and they wanted to use this opportunity and Men used to come with their faces covered, after getting their hunts, they used to take them to empty houses. Ibid. p.15

²⁰ Manada, Devi, *Sikshita Patitar Atmcharit*, (autobiography of an educated prostitute), Chirayat Prakashan, Kolkata, Janury 2004, *Poush* 1410, p.52-53

²¹ Debashish Basu, *Kolkatar Jaunapalli* (Red Light Areas of Calcutta) in *Jaunata O Samaskriti* (A collection of essays on Sexuality and Culture by eminent writers and intellectuals) edited by Sudhir Chakraborty, Pustak Bipani, Kolkata, 2002, p.314-15

Central Calcutta:

- Bowbazar
- Teriti Bazar
- ParkStreet

Southern Calcutta:

- Kalighat
- Chetla
- Watgunge
- Metiaburuz
- Bangsola
- Bhukeilasgad (Babu bazar)
- Lakharmath
- Garia
- Ballygunj
- Tollygunj²²

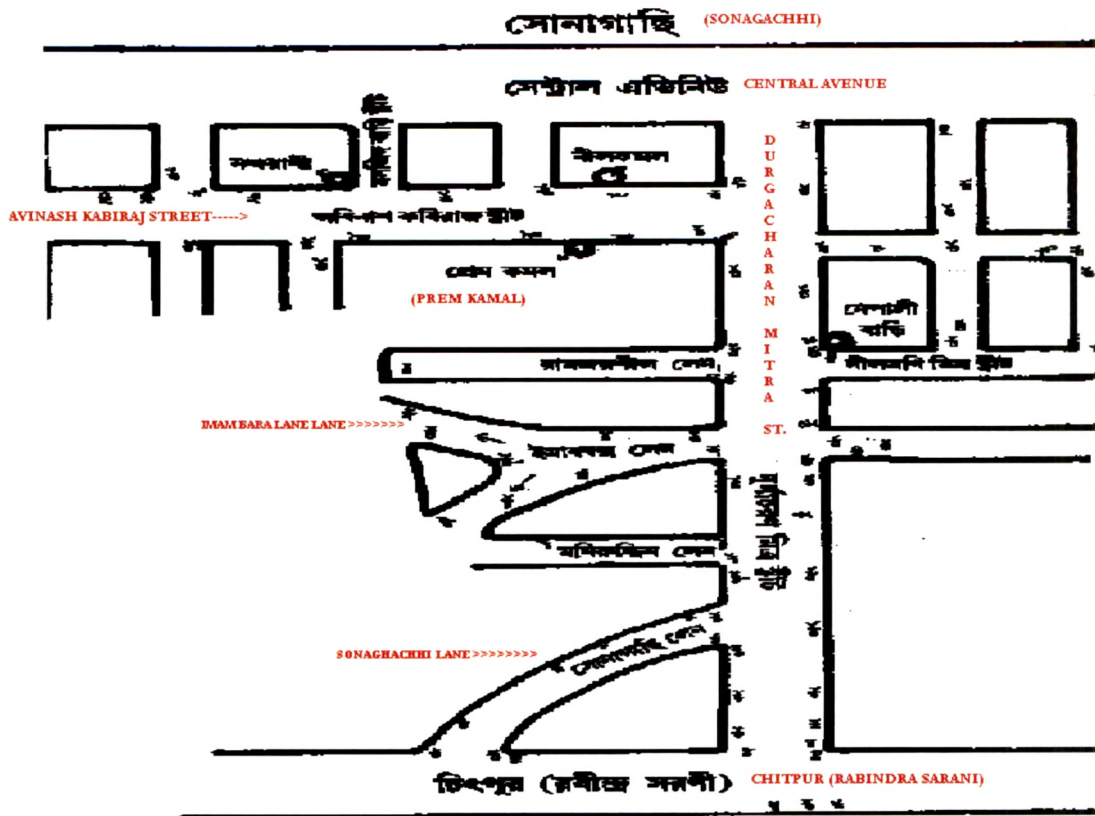
From the work based on survey by *Durbar Mahila Samannaya Committee (DMSC)* a detailed picture of some of these dominant red-light areas of Calcutta is found.

Northern Calcutta:

- **Sonagachi:**

Sonagachhi is world famous as a red light area. It is situated in between Rabindra Sarani and Chittaranjan Avenue in the north and on the other side from Beadon Street to Aravinda Sarani. Within this area there are Streets like Maniruddin Lane, Sonagachhi Lane, Joy Mitra Lane, Durgacharan Mitra Street, Nilmani Mitra Street, Gourisankar Lane, Avinash Kabiraj Lane, Imam Baksh Lane, Ramjoy Sil Lane, Madhubala Lane etc. It is under ward number 18 of Kolkata Municipality and Baratala police station. Sonagachhi can be reached from all parts of kolkata. One can cross the river Ganga in a launch from Howrah in the west and then from Shovabazar Ghat take an auto. From the South one can take a bus or metro and reach Shovabazar metro station. And from the north one has to get down at Bidhannagar rail station and take either a bus or an auto from there.

²² Ibid. p.312



(Source: Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, p.54.)

Avinash Kabiraj Street

Avinash Kabiraj Street is one of the main lanes of Sonagachhi. This Street is under ward number 18 of Kolkata Municipality and Baratala police station. It can be reached from all the places of Kolkata. This is the most aristocratic red light area in every way. All the houses are multistoried and brick-built. It is also more luxurious than other areas. There are about 20 houses in this Street. Among them 18 are multistoried. Every house has a municipal water connection, clean toilet, attached bath etc. The most famous house among them is Nilkamal. A lot of the sex workers have AC in their rooms in these houses. There are two markets in this locality. One is in Sonagachhi and the other in Durgacharan Mitra Street. There are some small industries including sattu industry in and around this area.

The name of this Street was Deonpara Lane before the foundation of this red light area was laid. There were a lot of aristocratic families who used to live in this area then. There were the houses of Seths, Basaks and Bhars. So many houses were not there in this area that time. There used to be a big ground where the children used to play. The house number 7 was the first among the *linebaris* (a house where one keeps his girl/*rakshita*). A prominent owner of Seth's Lily Biscuit Company bought that house for a girl named Madhu. This Madhu laid foundation of the first *linebari* in this area. The girls that time used to stay as permanent girl or *rakshita*. Those fixed babus used to come with their

friends to celebrate. There used to be a lot of fun and merriment unlike a general household. Gradually the nature of the locality started changing. And therefore the houses one after another started getting sold. Independent sex workers also started staying here except the fixed girls or *rakshitas* (kept). These independent sex workers also started taking more than one mate. The Street got a new name after it became a red light zone. That time a very famous kabiraj was Avinash. The government named the Street after him. Nobody knows that there is a Street named Deonpara Lane now days. But Avinash Kabiraj Street is in the top among the elite areas of Sonagachhi, though it is not as ancient as other areas of Sonagachhi. In comparison Avinash kabiraj Street came into being much later, only in the last century.²³

Gourisankar lane

This place is about two hundred fifty years old and it is popularly known as Sonagachhi. This profession is not a modern one. This profession started long ago due to people's need and necessity just like any other profession. They always had a separate place and priority is it the reign of the Hindu king or the Muslim. There were topmost beautiful girls in the Harem of Muslim kings. Hindu kings had their dancers. Some of them even became dearest of the kings. If one turns the pages of history, comes to know that not only these sex workers had an intimate relationship with the kings but sometimes they became very close to the queens also. They shared a relationship of co existence with the queens. The kings and the Zamindars used to go to the houses of the *bajjis*. Most of the *bajjis* were only singers and dancers back in those times. Only later when their market began to fall, they became sex workers.

Whatever, Sonagachhi is one of the biggest places of prostitution. Now a lot of countrymen as well as foreigners know its name. Sonagachhi has a history of its name and activities. It is heard from the people that the name of this place was originally Sonagaji. There was a Muslim man named Sonaula who used to live here. He used to earn his living through fighting, robbing and rioting. He had no one else but his old mother in his house. One day this Sonaula got ill and died. He came to his mother in her dream and said he killed a lot of people while he was alive, but now after his death he wants to do something good for the people. And that is how he wants to do his expiation. He also told his mother that after his death he had become a Gaji. He said to his mother in her dream that if the soil of the place of his graveyard is given to that person who is ill and comes to ask for her help and if that person burns and eats that soil, then he or she will be cured. And that was how a lot of people were cured. From then onwards the name of Sonagaji spread everywhere. After few months his mother built a beautiful mosque. This mosque became famous as the mosque of

²³ *Jaunapallir Chalchitra* (A Pen Picture of Brothels/Red-light areas), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2001.p.78-83

Sonagaji.

Long time back this place was not as popular as it is today for its prostitution. Families used to live here that time. The girls of the families used to do this secretly. Gradually the prostitution and the geographical area of Sonagachhi started expanding. One area of this Sonagachhi is Gourisankar lane and Nilmani Mitra Street. This road is under ward number 18 and Baratala police station. Now let's come to the inside stories of this particular area of Sonagachhi. There are 22 houses of Gourisankar and Nilmani Mitra Street where prostitution takes place. Most of the houses in this area are brick-built. The roofs are brick-built and made of joists. Most of the floors are cemented, some are mosaic. The girls here do not have to go anywhere else to get the drinking water. They can live with the supply of municipal water and tubewell. Toilets are also mostly brick-built and covered. But the bathing places are not covered in most of the houses. Most of the houses have toilet in each floor. In some houses there is only one toilet. In those houses they do the bathing and washing faces etc in the corner of thier rooms.

Turning the pages of history one can find that Gourisankar and Nilmani Mitra Street were established more than 150 years ago. The place was built due to the patronization of Zamindars and feudal lords like Radhakantadev etc in the time of British occupation. That time this area was spread upto Madanmohantala, Hatibagan and Garanhata. The area gradually got shorter with the fall of those bureaucratic feudal lords. The place got its present size near about 50 years ago. The place was named after Gourisankar Dey. He was a renowned Mathematician and a resident of this place. A part of the area was named after him almost 100 years ago. Nilmani Mitra was the first Indian engineer. He was also a resident of this place. This area was named after him 50-60 years ago. One can not find any significant incident of this area turning the pages of memory. Nobody actively took part in India's struggle for independence from this area. But a lot of freedom fighters used to stay here, hiding.²⁴

Masjid Bari Lane

One of the areas of Sonagachhi is Masjid Bari Lane. It is under Baratala Police station. This area was built approximately 60 years ago. One can guess from the name that this was a place infested by the Muslims. The houses that can be seen here presently are the houses where the Muslims used to live. This area was named Masjid Bari Lane because there was a mosque here. But during

²⁴ Ibid. p.86-88; Government is the owner of this road like other roads. And the owner of the land is the person who bought it. And the owner of the house is the person who buys or builds it, that means the landlord or landlady. The ownership of the room goes to the person who either takes the room from the landlord on a rent or on a condition from the tenant of the room. The place is far away from industries. But there are markets near by. The biggest market near is Hatibagan. Besides there are smaller markets of vegetables and fish which satisfy the daily requirement and were built precisely for that. Ibid.

the riot of 1971 the Hindus drove away the Muslims and occupied these houses. There are 19 houses in Masjid Bari Street. The houses are brick-built and three storied to six storied. There are 20 to 45 rooms in each house. There is proper drinking water and toilet. The rents of these houses vary from 200 to 10000. The girls can not take customers without the agents.²⁵

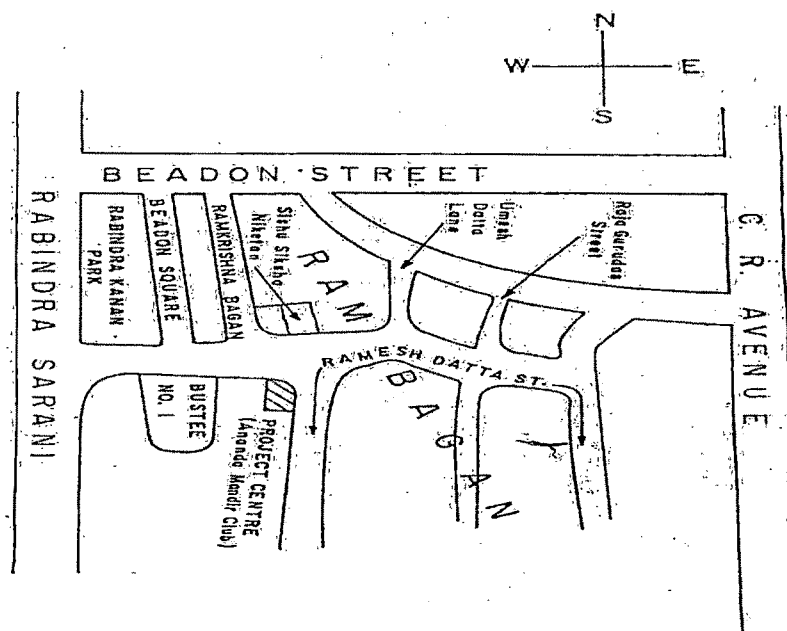
Rambagan:

About two hundred years back from now, when the city of Kolkata did not fully develop, at that time, at the northern region of the city in this place, which is known as Rambagan these days, there were huge ponds and lakes, and surroundings them were rows of mango trees, thus the name of the place was 'Aam Bagan' (meaning, a collection of Mango trees in Bengali). This later in its distorted form became to be known as 'Ram Bagan'. The elite business society of the then contemporary Kolkata cleared up the jungles in the areas nearby the Ganges and brought up places for their entertainment. These are generally brick and wood houses. Most of them are three or four storeyed. Though previously the owners of these buildings were the people of this moneyed class, but later on those were subscribed to attractive prostitutes of the owner's choice. Ample evidences of this are spread over the whole region of Rambagan. In these days the brothel included a vast area, which not only covered present day Rambagan, but also stretched towards the two sides of Central Avenue, thus taking in goramhata and the area adjacent Minerva Theatre. But the stretch of the brothel gradually reduced in size, mainly because of two reasons. Firstly because of the lathergy among the prostitutes of this area in maintaining the marks of traditions and secondly because of the increase in fluting of the city like image of the city. Now this area is under Kolkata's ward number 26. This area is under the control of Battala, Jorshanko and Jorabagan Police Station. The route to this place is a simple one. While traveling by bus one has to get down at the bus stop for liberty cinema hall. More over the place is vary near to Girish Park Metro station.²⁶

²⁵ Ibid. p.91

²⁶ Ibid. p.75. One of the most special features of Rambagan is that, once this place has been home to many talented people. Many famous musicians, like sehnai and harmonium players, singers, etc. were here. Still today the believing holds the evidences of the popularity of the 'Mujras' (dance recitals by the women of this place in a gorgeous gathering of men, money and other intoxicants) that were used to be held here. The greatest proof of the fact that this area was a gathering ground for talents is the association of the great singer Indubala with this place. Indubala was born on 6th of November 1898. She was the only daughter of Motilal Basu, and Rajbala Basu. Motilal was the middle son of the Swadeshi (an Indian nationalist movement, favouring home industries and boycott of forcing goods) poet Monmohan Basu. When her father went away leaving her mother, at that time Rajbala with her young daughter took refuge in a building of Rambagan. Rajbala was an expert singer. They started earning by performing in 'Mujras' and acting in theatre and with that brought up here loving Indu. It was during this period when Indubala started taking music lesson from her mother. Indubala received music training from the then famous Ustad Gauri Shankar Mishra and the Queen of music honourable Gaharjaan. She even learnt to read and write, upto a certain extent, besides her music education. Indubala's performance has been recorded even in languages other than Bangla. In theatres she has acted with masters like Davi Ghosh, Sisir Bhaduri, Athindra Chaudhury, Nirmalendu Chaudhury. She has even worked in Bengali and Hindi films. Many of her performances of poet Kaji Nazrul Islam's songs hared been recorded by H.M.V. Company. Apart from these she also took part in the sex worker' movement and shouldered a responsibility of leadership to organise these women. These sort of activities were done by her mother Rajbala, even before Indubala. During the flood of 1922, that disturbed North Bengal she even got involved into collection of funds

RAMBAGAN RED LIGHT AREA.



Source: 'A Study on Children in Prostitution in Kolkata' – conducted by ATSEC, West.Bengal, commissioned by CINIASHA (Urban Unit of Child in Need Institution), April 2005.

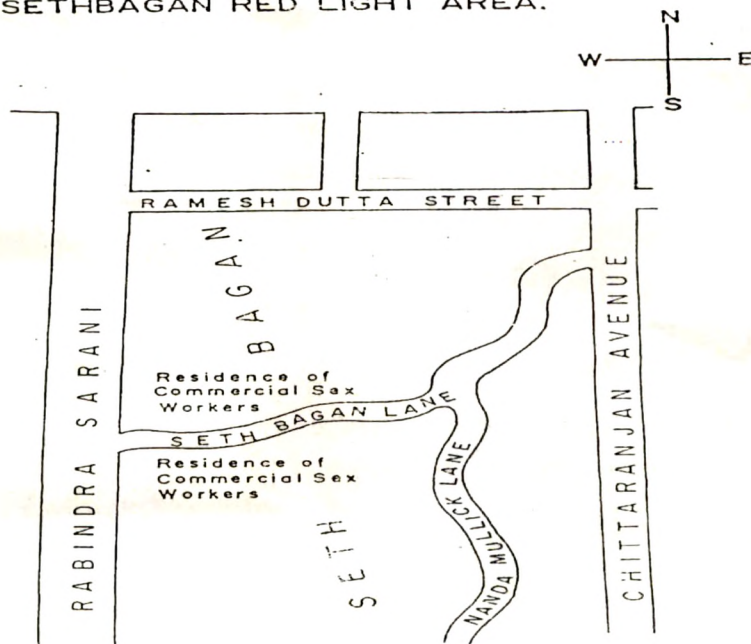
Shethbagan:

Shethbagan is a very old name in the brothel-history of Kolkata. At present the size of Shethbagan has much deteriorated than it was before. During the British era and also after that, during the time of the Zamindaars, this was a place of entertainment for them. The British rule and the Zamindari system gradually diminished and disappeared and along with it the brothel of Shethbagan lost its brightness. In the past the rooms which were a part of the brothels, have now been a part of the houses where *grihasthas* (socially respectable families) live. In the brothel of Sethbagan which is a part of the Jorasanko Police station of central kolkata, there area altogether 17 pucca houses. The houses are from single storeyed to four storeyed. Number of rooms in these houses varies from four

along with other women of Rambagan, which they handed over to Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy. Indubala was very popular among the women of Rambagan. She died on 30th November, in the year 1984. Remembrance of Indubala's foot steps made the girls of Rambagan realise that in order to resist any sort of torture on them, they need to be united at first. And this realization led them to develop Drubar Women's Joint Committee in the year 1995. Another important feature of Rambagan is that beside the brothel, the place is home to another community of people who are known as the 'Sudras' or the 'Dom' (lower of the society). Their similarity with the sex workers is that, both the communities are extremely neglected by the society. Many years back the people of this community were exploited by the Moneyed Zamindar class for their own safety sake. Among these people there were many famous Lathials' (the man with the sticks). There was no practice of education in this community. In the year 1952 Lokeshwarananda Swami of Ramkrishna Mission initiated custom of education among these. The Mission has arranged for their training on bamboo and cave works and even took good care so that their products get a demanding market. Jiban Krishna Ghosh was established and the trainee, the artists were trained here. Now they are trying to maintain a pace of living which is at par with the society outside. And with that they have also came up with their notions of self esteem. Still today they live near by the brothel area. Different festivals are celebrated as a result of joint participation of these two communities. Ibid. 75-77.

to sixteen. Rent of the rooms per day are from Rs.15/- to 20/-. There are arrangements of pure drinking water and toilets.²⁷

SETHBAGAN RED LIGHT AREA.



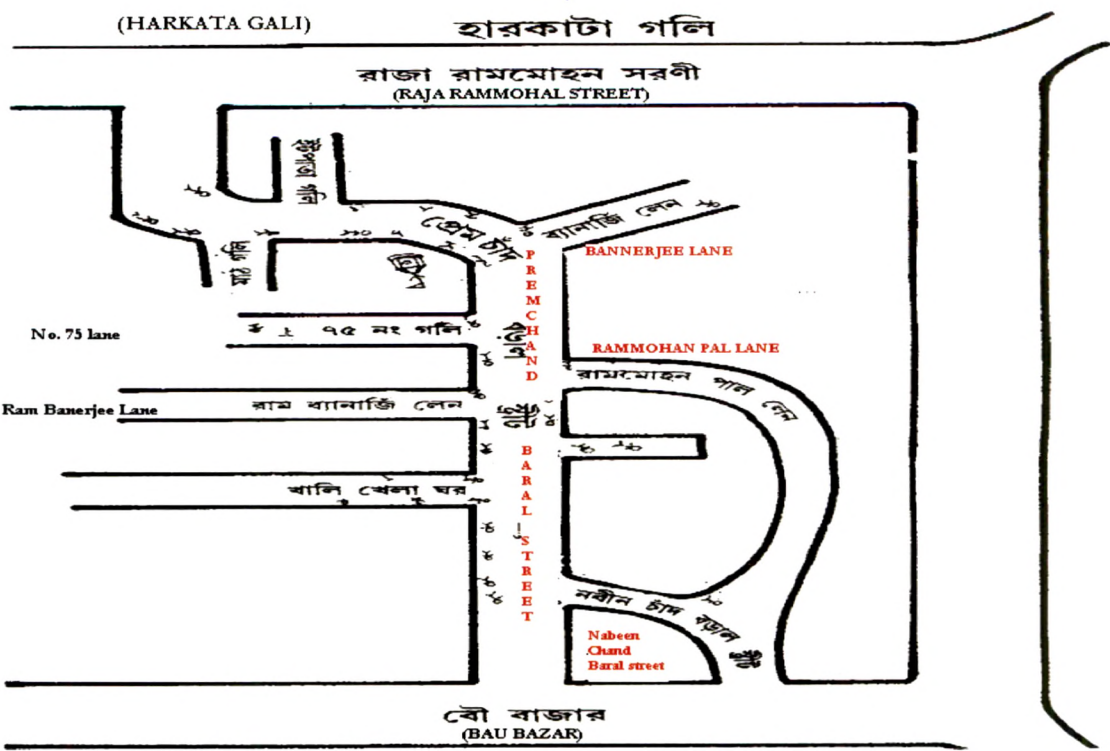
Source: 'A Study on Children in Prostitution in Kolkata' – conducted by ATSEC, West.Bengal, commissioned by CINIASHA (Urban Unit of Child in Need Institution), April 2005

Central Calcutta:

Bowbazar:

Almost two hundred years back the vast city of Kolkata was very small town. Though consider other towns it was huge in respect to size, shape and facilities. During the British rule the Zamindars hold a high status. Zamindars and other well-to-do people of the society, in those days were found of music and so they of ten arranged Mujraas in their Farm – Houses. This group of people in those days was prodigals who spent unlimited money and were known as the 'Babus'. The Tawaaifs were brought from outside. There existed an undeclared competition among the babus in bringing in the most beautiful Tawaaifs. In addition to their own Farm Houses these Babus were accustomed to visit the Tawaaifs place too. Due to this Babu culture, the Tawaaifs at that time become fortunate enough. The good looking Tawaaifs were sent as gifts by the Zamindars to their British masters. Prostitution was a good business at that time. Innumerable British soldiers were regular customers of some Indian where they often selected and sent some of them to entertain their masters.

²⁷ Ibid. p.93.



(Source: Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, p.59)

In those days Prince Dwarknath Thakur was a leading personality among the 'Babus'. Realising the situation, he bought two building at Bowbazar Street Nos 235 and 236 and lent them for the purpose of women trade. He earned Rs. 140/- a handsome amount in those days from these two houses. Harkata Lane, Radhamohan Paul Lane, Premachand Baral Street and Bowbazar area some of the places in Central Kolkata where on the top or the first floors of the shop the Tawaaifs or the prostitutes of higher status used to live people belonging to different class & status used to visit these places. Those who would not afford to visit the Tawaaif arrangements for their entertainment also prevailed in the society. There has always been an arrangement to fulfill desires within ones limit; at that time also it existed. There is hear-say that the main proprietors of the banned alleys of Bowbazar are the Zamindars and the wealthy people of the society. In those days Baral Family was an aristocratic family. They were the residents of Bowbazar since 150 years. But how the entire locality came to be know as Bowbazar is still not clear Nabeen Chand Baral Street, Premchand Baral Street Natabar Dutt Lane and 'Chana Pao' and 'Math Gali are famous. The Barals here were an elite class of people. The most influential person of this family was Premchand Baral. His sons were Nabeen Chand Baral and Gokul Chand Baral. Nabeen Chand's eldest son was Lalchand Baral whose pet name was Gongababu his second son Bisen Chand Baral who was popular as Jolubabu his third son was Rai chand Baral. At present both Gongu and Jolubabu stay in this area.

Bisenchand Baral was the editor of the Tawaaif association. At present the entire long lane is known as 'Harkata Lane'.

It is said that people here used to make combs and buttons from the bones of the buffaloes and hence the lane was known as harkata lane. Some also say that Golden chains were cut and made and so it was known as har (Chains) Kata Lane. Probably in this area one could find a wife, golden chains were made the buttons and combs were made from the bone – necks of human beings were also broken so this area was known as Harkata Lane. There is also a different concept that why such red-light areas developed over here. There were two most important roads in ancient Kolkata. The first one is the road leading to the pilgrimage. Starting from Chitpur Road, via Bentick Street and the forests of Chowrangee the road ultimately led to the temple of Kalighat. The second one was the road of trade. Starting from the bank of Ganges via Kaliaghata Street, northern bank of the Red Lake then through Lalbazar Street, and Bowbazar Street, reaches *Baithak khana* which is the Central part of present Sealdah station and Sealdah Court. These were the two most important roads used by people, trade also flourished through these Streets. These are the reasons why the prostitutes started residing in Harkata Lane, Kerani bagan Lane and Bowbazar.

At present it is possible to avail Bus or Train from Sealdah to Bowbazar. Even Taxis are available. Previously a massive portion was the trade area. At present Women trade exist mainly in Prem Chand Baral Street, and a portion of Nabeen Chandra Baral Street comprising of few houses and a few houses in the adjacent alleys and fields. Altogether it is limited within seventy buildings. The buildings are well-built with concrete tiles tins and cemented floors. Out of these houses six are three storeyed, double storeyed houses are more in number, some houses are single storeyed. These houses have Municipality water supply facilities. Each of the houses has their own toilets. But often taps and toilets are insufficient in comparison to the dwelling members. So their often arose quarrel among them. The owners of these buildings often kept young girls. Those who are very old tenant the pay an amount of Rs. 100/- to 250/- per month. The new tenant at present would have to pay an advance of Rs. 20 to 40 thousand and Rs.60/- to 70/- per day as rent for a single room.²⁸

²⁸ Ibid. p.58-60. In the year 1956, in Nabeen Chandra Baral Street Augurbala's daughter Indubala established an association with these fallen women. On 22nd December, 1956 this association established by Indubala hold up their first seminar. Prafulla Chandra Sen, the food minister of that time graced the occasion as the chief Guest of the day. Then there was another meeting on 28th July, 1958 and the Chief Guest was Dr. Pratap Chandra Chandra. On that day Indubala very boldly announced on the stage "When there are no place us in this society we shall create our own society". The girls at Bowbazar are no more backward. They have made their own committed to unit themselves and are fighting against torture and misdeeds of all kinds. In this area the myras and the dancing girls – the Tawaaifs have almost disappeared. The decorative lanterns illuminating all around are no more found. There no more prevail that fear and guilty consciousness. The girls are no more ashamed to call themselves, on whose with a smiling face they would utter 'I am a Sex worker, that is my identity'. Ibid. p.62

Fre-School Street-Park-Street-Teriti Bazar:

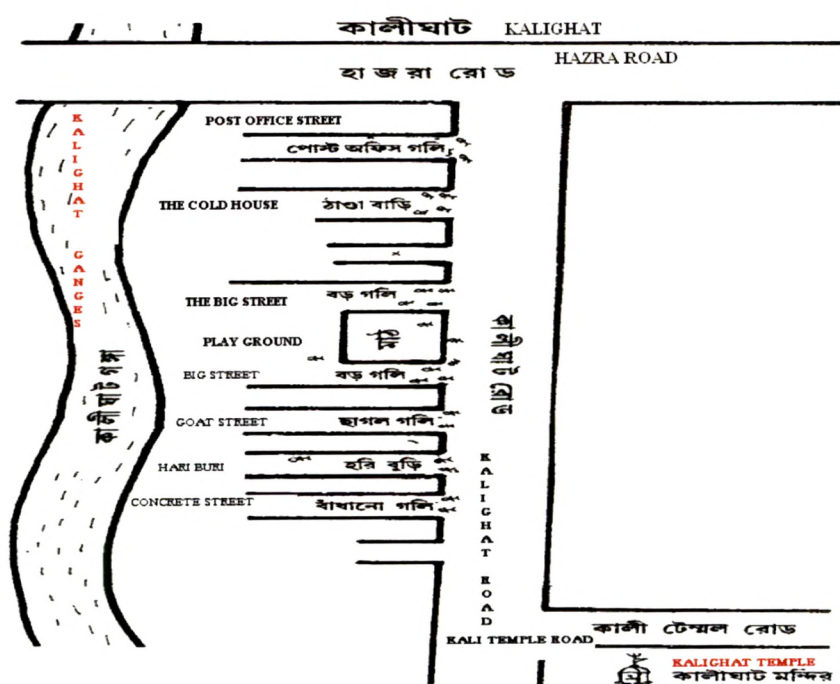
Other prostitutes' quarters discussed so far are all hutments or colonies where many sex-workers live together in the same locality. The above-mentioned area is an exception. Many roads centered round Park Street-- like Kyd Street, Marquis Street, Royd Street, Eliot Road, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road, A.P.C.Road have buildings or hotels where permanently reside. These buildings are private properties and the women are independent and have nothing to do with each other. Many women come and go and business goes on in a big scale. Bengali women are negligible in number. Most of the girls are Nepalese, Khasia or Anglo-Indians. Here each house or hotel has its own middleman or pimp. The need for goons or bouncers is comparatively less. The rooms are rented out on a daily basis. 'Adiya' system may exist here, though 'Noth Khola' or 'Chhukrikata' are totally absent. There is no fixed rate for these girls. Some empty rooms are there, where women come with their companions, and leave after paying the rent. The permanent pros' that stay on get their clients through pimps. It is widely known that here *rikshawallas* work as pimps. The practice of prostitution goes on here hidden from the public view. Many clandestine private practices go on and quite a good number of girls come and go. So it would be logical to say that these places are not exactly prostitutes' colonies; rather that many whore-houses are present there. Other than all the prostitutes' colonies mentioned earlier, on various other areas some of these call-girls reside. But they do not have such flourishing business. Such places are Jogen Dutta Lane adjacent to Central Avenue, Dayal Mitra Street, Sheth Gali off Upper Chitpur Road, Tiretti Bazar and Garia in South Calcutta. In Tiretti Bazar some Chinese girls are available. But in Garia, Bengali girls are more in number.²⁹

Southern Calcutta:**Kalighat:**

The temple of Kalighat is a famous center for pilgrimage in Kolkata. Having a glance of this place is considered almost compulsory/mandatory by new Hindus from all the centers of India, then visit to Kolkata Kalighat is considered among the famous fifty one 'Piths' (holy places for Hindus) Kolkata's aristocratic Zaminder family of Sabarna Roy Chowdhury established this temple on the bank of the Old Ganges of South Kolkata. The three village of Govindapur, Kolkata and Sutanati, from which the city of Kolkata developed, were purchased by the Englishmen from this Zaminder only. The increase in trade and other activities with the advent of British people started pulling crowd to this port centric city. In that sense this is almost an ancient region. The place almost has a history of three hundred years. Thus people from different work of life started settling on centering the newly temple of Kalighat. Is like all the other centers of pilgrimage this place also housed many prostitutes favour the

²⁹ Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati* ., Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995. p.65

very beginning and it still continues doing so. Starting from goddess worship to buying and selling of various items these had always been a fan like atmosphere, which still remains unchanged. The fame of the clay idols and the constructors of Kalighat are no less. It is so said that earlier just next to the residential area of the idol maker were the area of the prostitutes. Presently this area almost runs parallel to the Kalighat road. Starting from Hajra Road in the North to Kali Temple Road, different lanes and bye-lanes of this whole stretch plays residence to the sex workers of the present day.



(Source: Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, p.62)

The number of properly constructed houses is very less in this area mostly is tin-roofed structures. But these are not really and house the walls and the floors are cemented. These are around thirty such houses and about three hundred rooms in them. The owners of these lands area actually some of the Zamindars of North Kolkata some of the local people took up the ownership of these plots on lease and became the landlord on land slides of the area 25-30 years back when the rooms were even gibber in size the number of sex workers in one hundred and fifty rooms were around 200-250. The monthly rent of these rooms was also very less than rent varied between twenty five to thirty rupees a month. But with increase in population those 150 rooms had been divided to made 300 and now they house about 500 sex workers who reside and carry on with their professions there. There are cemented road and electricity in this locality. There are well constructed toilet and water supply from municipality. Since the old Ganges is flowing the west of the locality so the backyard is somewhat airy. This is the space where the age old Shiv Temple established by the

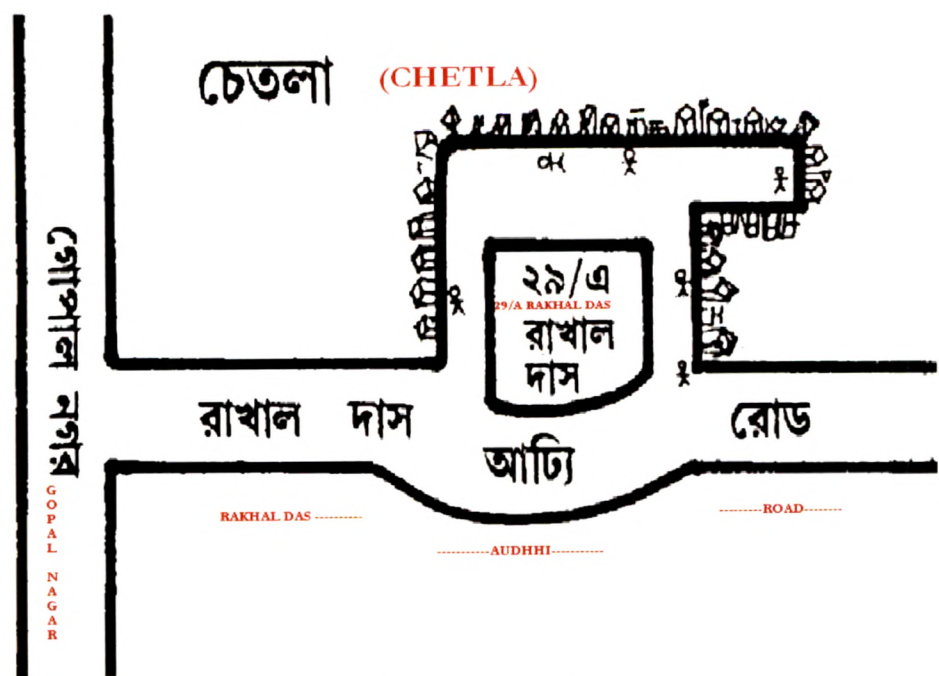
Zamindars and the health clinic started by a social welfare organization are situated. Presently small schools for children as well as adult education have been set up in this place. In the monsoons when the river brims, the rooms of the sex workers of the locality get flooded and this becomes a time of hurdles for them.³⁰

Chetla:

About 110-112 years back, the red light area comprised of only three buildings of Soro, Sorona and Satischandras' ownership. The name of the place is Chetla. A distributary of Ganges named. To many this is also popular as old Ganges (Adi Ganga). At that time many merchant took this water route for their trade. On their way for some relaxation and entertainment, the merchants used to visit the sex workers of this area. At that time the rate per client was twenty five paisa. This area falls within the limits of Alipore Police Station and under 82 number wards. The name of the Street is Rakhal Das Adduy Road. To reach this area by bus, one has to get down at Gopal Nagar bus stop and if taken the water way one has to cross the Chetla 'Kheya Ghat' which is very close to the Jatin Das Park Metro Station. While traveling towards Gopal Nagar if one times to the B.G. Press, one can see the Prostitution area. All the houses of this region are single storied. While some of them have 'Pucca' walls, the others have 'Kuchcha'. In and tiles are the materials used for the construction of the roofs. The total member of houses in these areas is twenty seven. The owner of the plots of land of this area is a Zamindar named Bhu-Kailash. The daily rent charged by the house owners of this area are rupees thirty and above.³¹

³⁰ *Jaunapallir Chalchitra*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2001. p.63-64; "The incident took place just a few days back. To escape the exploits of her mistress Shyama Gurung wanted to come out 104 Rabindra Sarani along with her six years old son. But the mistress forcefully kept back her six years old son. Shyama then shifted to Kalighat and complained about it to the leader of the local organization who in turn took it to the police station. And with the joint effort of the Baratala Police Station and the Sex workers of Sonagachi area the leader succeeded in saving her son Jiban Gurung. "The Sex Workers" of this area are now quite aware of their rights. Just like all other red light areas Kalighat has also faced the extremes of notoriety of the anti-socials. Later on, organized protests were also voiced by the sex workers. At first camp up 'Women Welfare Association' by the sex workers themselves and later on 'Neglected women and child welfare Association' was also built up. The role of Minister Rathin Talukdar and Social worker Bela Roy ever remarkable in this regard. Finally 'Durbar Women committed' was built up in Kalighat. Mrinal Kanti Dutta (Bacchu Dutta) the son of a sex worker of the Kalighat area has made history. He has become the head of a Sonagachi Project. Defeating all the chiche beliefs, Bacchu is successfully carrying on the project consisting of 452 workers. Moreover he is also striving and struggling for various rights and privileges of the sex workers and their children. Still today Bacchu Stays with his mother in their old Kalighat house with a dream to fulfill his mother's dream. He believes that the sex workers and their children are capable of doing everything, but are just waiting for the right scope. So himself being brought up with the identity of a sex-workers' child he wants to carry on struggling hard for the betterment of the sex workers and their children all his life with the same identity". Ibid. p.65-66

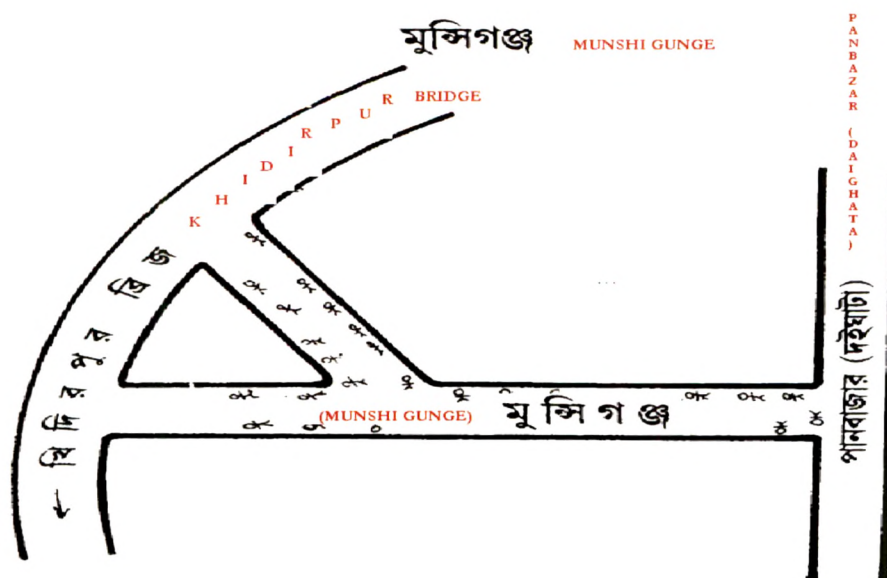
³¹ Ibid. p.69



(Source: Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, p.64)

Doighat in Khidirpur:

With the growth of the city of Kolkata about 200 to 250 years back, the port also got expanded and started getting busier. During this period developed the prostitution area of Khidirpur to provide entertainment and relaxation to the English Sailors, this area falls under the 75th no ward of Kolkata Municipality. Doighata bus stop is very close to the Princepghat Railway station. Pan bazaar Babu Bazar, Watgaunge, Munsiganng and Nitya Ghosh Street are at a walking distance of ten minutes from the bank of Ganges.



(Source: Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, p.61)

According to the documents of historian Radharaman Mitra, Khidirpur enlisted on its name even during the era of Govindapur and Sutanati. Where as Pan Bazaar got its name mainly because of the popular 'Pan' market there. After the ships reached the docks the sailors used to come to this place. They used to spend time with the women and entertained themselves; these sailors were referred to as 'Sahibs' or 'Babus' from which the place gained its identity as 'Babu Bazaar'. In the year 1858 a military engineer of the East India Company named Colonel Watson built up a dock to make sailing a bit more easily. Accordingly, the place got its name after him and came to be known as 'Watgaunge'. Nitya Ghosh Street had been residence for many milkmen who used to distribute milk and curd to Kalighat and many areas of North Kolkata on boat from Doighat. Thus the place came to be known as Doighat. No. 7 building of Nitya Ghosh Street had an age old 'Bar' in it, so it had been a hangout spot for all the foreign sailors. The owner of a major chunk of this area was Zamindar named Munsiram Narayan Basu Sarbadhikari. Due to his been interest a road was built, connecting the goat market to the dock. For the convenience of the people this place and the road was named after him as Munsigunge.³²

Lakhar Math:

This is a small area for the sex workers in South Kolkata. One can reach the area both from Sarat Bose Road and from Dr. Shyama Prasad Street. Common people are not so aware of the identity of this area. This region is very small in comparison to other brothels and the sex workers have are

³² Ibid. p.67.

never found to be waiting on the main road. This zone is a sort of slum. Leaving the main road when one enters the narrow Street then only in the evenings the girls one found. In the broad day light these girls are hardly visible in front of their houses. For this reason the place is not so recognizable to the commoners.

Around thirty to forty years back this zone was much larger in size. At that time there were fifteen to sixteen houses some of them were well built and some were made of tiles and tins. Nearly four hundred sex workers lived in these houses. After the partition of the country the population went on increasing. The owners of these well built houses with a hope to earn more through high rents and donations, offered the sex workers a lump sum amount and forced them to leave the area. At present in these houses families dwell. Around one hundred sex workers inhabit there at present in seven houses made of tins and tiles. Number of rooms altogether is seventy to eighty. Most of the sex workers pay monthly rents. Those who are staying from a very long time pay an amount of 50/- to 60/- rupees whereas the newer ones have pay 250/- to 300/- rupees. Though the roofs are made of tins and tiles the walls are cemented. Though there are toilets inside these houses lent for drinking water and for water other purpose they use the municipality taps and tube-wells within the locality. The owners of these buildings belong to the well to do class. These well off group of people had directly let the houses to the sex workers. Those who had initially taken the houses have now become aged. All of them have now partitioned the rooms, in one half them themselves stay and the other half is given out to the young sex workers who have come later on. Through this process they earn even 1000/- to 1500/- per month. Brokers did never exist in these areas, to day even they are not found here. The entire zone is surrounded by family set ups, totally tidy and peaceful area.

The history of this area does not go too far as other sex workers regions of Kolkata one. In the early twentieth century under the proprietorship of some of the middle class 'Babu's' of South Kolkata – such as Kalighat and region – this region came into existence. Some of the men of this class made arrangements for their 'kept' in this region. These kepts did not accept flying customers as they had a fixed customer or 'babu' to fulfill all sorts of requirements. If this class of 'babu' is decreasing in number, the dimension of this place is gradually diminishing. All the well built houses have also gone back into the grip of the owners.³³

³³ Ibid. p.73-74

Tollygunje:

The Tollygunge area, under the control of Reagent Park Police Station, developed as the place for the luxurious exploits of the Zamindars. At that time the Zamindars and their male companions would ride on horses and elephants, and the stable at Anwar Shah was the place for the rest of their animals. Though at that time, Tollygunge wasn't so crowded, as it is these days. Presently, the number of houses in the Tollygunge brothel is sixteen. These are 'pucca' houses with tiles and tin shades as roof.³⁴

Rani Rashmoni's Jaanbazar: (Central Calcutta)

The name 'Jaanbazar' is mere than a hundred year old according to historical documentation. It is so said that in those day the 'Lethels'(the men with sticks) in inebriated state used to rob the people on Street and even tried to take their lives. Thus to come back with 'Jaan' (life) from that area was matter of sheer luck and to the place came to be known as 'Jaanbazar'. To reach Jaanbazar one has to travel towards east through S.N. Banerjee Road from Esplanade from Moulali. Jaanbazar falls in the area under Taltala Police station. There is also a police camp here. Many mentionable institutions have come up surrounding this area. Among them, there are Kolkata Corporation, Technical College, Central Telephone Exchange, New Market, Maulana Azad College, Church, Taltala High school etc. This are is very close to Dharmatala.

While discussing Jaanbazar, the first two names that come to one's mind are Rani Rashmoni and Sri Ramkrishna Paramahansadev. Pritiram Das was a great Zamindar of Jaanbazar, he was the owner of limitless amount of money and other properties. Rasmoni's original house (i.e. her father's

³⁴ Ibid. p.71 The Red-Light areas of Calcutta can be divided into three classes :-i) Red-light areas of Central Calcutta:- Boubazar Area: Bowbazar Street, Keranibagan Lane, Harkata Lane, Premchand Boral Street, Nabinchand Boral Street (still present); Mechhuabazar Area: Muktarambabu Street, Panji Dolani Lane, Herombo Das Lane, Bechu Chatterjee Street (presently non-existent). These areas of central Calcutta were created as an outcome of *Babu*-culture. Only in some parts do we notice the influence of foreigners. ii) Red-light areas of North Calcutta:- Manicktala Street Area: A part of Manicktala, Chandrapur Lane (non-existent now); Rambagan Area: Rambagan, Raja Gurudas Street, a part of Manicktala Street (non-existent); Jorasanko Area: Upper Chitpur Road, Manicktala crossing, Sethbagan or Seth Lane (still present), Pathuriaghata Lane, Brajadulal Street (non-existent at present); Ahiritola Area: Ahiritola bazar, Nather bagan Lane, Kali Dutto Lane, Beniatola Street, Kashipur Lane off Shovabazar Street (Now not existing); Chitpur Area: Upper Chitpur Road and the locality adjacent to Oriental Seminary (Present now); Darmahata Area: Darmahata Street, Posto bazar, Meer bahar Ghat Street (now non-existent); Sonagachhi Area: Durgacharan Mitra Street, Imam Buksh Lane, Sonagachhi Lane, Moniruddin Lane, Joy Mitra Lane(Present), Musjidbari Street, Abinash Kabiraj Street, Nilmoni Mitra Street (present); Bagbazar Area: Bagbazar Street, Haralal Mitra Street, Nandalal Bose Lane (now non-existent). This extensive area inhabited by the courtesans in the northern part of Calcutta was mainly patronised by the contemporary *Babus* or *zamindars*. iii) Red-light areas of South Calcutta: Kalighat: Kalighat Main Road (existing now); Bhowanipore Area: Harish Chatterjee Street, Hazra Park, Mahesh Chowdhury Lane (non-existent); Karaya Area: (non-existent); Watgunge Area: Daighata, Panbazar (non-existent), Munshigunge, Watgunge Street, Banshgola, Babubazar(existing now). These brothels of south Calcutta were mainly visited by common men, sailors and pilgrims who visited the temple of Kalighat. Other than these, in parts of Free school Street, Park Street, Eliot Road, Ripon Street etc many quarters came up under the patronization of the British. Some of them are still functioning. Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995. . p. 53

house) was in Halishahar. In the year 1803 Rashmoni was married to Ramchandra Das, the son of Zamindar Pritram Das. After the battle of *Plassey* in 1757 a huge change took place as far as history is concerned. With the advent of East India Company and British rule the characteristics of the city of Kolkata went through a rapid change at pace with the period and its society. With the spread of the rule of East India Company, under their leadership, business started to flourish rapidly. Many people became associated with the recently developed business of the company. Gradually many people started to gather in Kolkata, looking for job and they engaged themselves in various fields of work to earn their livings. At that time mostly the Muslims and the Hindustanis were engaged to work as security guards servants, bodyguards and coachmen for the Zamindars. Apart from these they also got engaged in different sorts of business, brokerage user's business and even looking after different officers of Zamindars. It is so said that during the golden days of the Zamindars of Jaanbazar number of palaces were built at various places. Apart from this to keep up with their aristocratic attitudes they even tried their hands in different sort of things for the betterment of the society. So the people appointed to do these works used to stay in the nearby areas. The Muslims and the Hindustanis performed these jobs with efficiency. The Mulsims were quite efficient and perfect in works related to mosaic, marbles and decoration of the walls. Even today those edifices carry the evidences of their perfect ness. The ancestors of today masons started their lives here centering these works and following the foot steps of the ancestors the later generations started residing in this area.

In comparison to the small houses the number of huge houses is more here. Presently this area is a locality for offices and a central area for business houses. The immigrant labourers of this area themselves have formed different communities. Apart from this the old tenants of this area share a room among fifteen to twenty members. Turn by turn one cook for all the rest. More over many hotels have grown up centering this place; where these immigrant labourers are among the chief customers. Visit to the market starts from around 7.30 A.M. in the morning. The period between 8.30 and 9.00 A.M. is the time when the market is most lively. Though they have their own fixed jobs still they visit to the market for a while to meet and have a chat with the friend and even discuss the pros and cons of their profession. They visit their original homes and amities during the religious festivities. Through the year the keep waiting for these days to come.

At the very beginning no women were allowed to work as helping hands in the works of masons. It's said that around thirty to thirty-five years back some women gradually started joining. At the beginning girls from *Bilaspur* started working for making roof. They used to come to work carrying their children along. The mothers used to feed their children and made them go to sleep, when they

worked. It is so said that their daily wage was Rs. 1.25. After the war in Bangladesh many people migrated to West Bengal with their families. After coming to this side of the many men and women started to work as labourers in order to seek a way to earn their living, the reason behind their choosing this profession remains that they did not get a chance to join elsewhere and did not have the capital to start any sort of business. These men were forced to bring their wives to work in order to earn the living for the whole of the family. On the other hand these women only started bringing other women of their villages to *Janbazar*. In this way everyday new women started coming to the market. Even men from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Bangladesh could be seen coming to the place.

Presently the number of labourers in the area is around 2500 and the number of women is about three hundred. At times they are found changing their market areas. The women stand near the Lotus cinema whereas the men stand in the area which stretches from *Janbazar* to *Dharmatala's* Metro cinema hall. Approximately the average age of men here is between 18 and 60; and the age of women is in between 20 and 50. Most part of the lives of these labourers are spent in seclusion from their homes. By the time they return to their homes they have already reached old age. They visit their own lands only at the times of festival, so they are always deprived of a life led in love and care of the family members. It is said that at the time of the Zamindars, tawaifs were brought to *Jaانبazar* for the entertainments of the Zamindars and the English Sahibs. Later with the fading away of the Zamindari traditions the tawaifs also left the place. After the tawaifs left there grew up a brothel in this place, with approximately 50 women. The name of the alley was Dhukuriya Lane. With help from police, later, the local residents closed this Brothel. Though the sex workers are no longer staying here, but the buildings still carry the memories of the by gone days. The number of labourers in this area is too high and they are almost disconnected from their families to in order to meet with their physical needs they could also be seen visiting these banned alleys. Thus both the sides were inter-dependant on each other, for one the need is physical whereas for the other it is a question of a meager earning. Safe sex is almost impossible for them due to poverty and lack of enough education. So AIDS and other Sexual disease have a high tendency to spread among them, as a result of unprotected sex.

An extreme guilt feeling works among the women of this area and so they are even reluctant about taking medical help for their diseases and illness. Moreover behind this step there are obviously many financial, social and familial problems at work the women of this area very frequently, had to face physical and mental futures. At the time of the Zamindars Durga Puja was the main festival of the area. The Pujas were held in the houses of the Zamindars, with the decadence of the Zamindar system Durga puja began to be celebrated as a public festival. Presently the number of Kali pujas

held in this area and their grandeur are comparatively more. The local people have to suffer threat full times when they were forced for monetary contribution, for various pujas and festivals by the young guys of the area. Those girls who were incapable to contribute they were restrained from carrying on with their profession, by the local youths. At times these women had to forcefully go into physical relation with these youths, dispute of their unwillingness. Then they were deprived of their payments. But they were afraid of being restricted to carry on with their profession, which would land them without earrings, so they never protested. Thus to resist these misdeeds and injustice, together, the Durbar Women's Joint Committee have started their work here almost two years back. Previously with the help of Jaanbazar's 'Mannagali Friends' Association and later with that of 'Tarun Pragati Sangha' this project is being carried on successfully. Besides the rise of health consciousness, self respect is also growing among the women of the area. Along with the power of self-control the will to protest against opponent forces have united the women of Jaanbazar area.³⁵

Flying Sex-workers

Ultadanga:

Most probably the girls come to this city singing this song from villages and suburbs and spread in every corner of Kolkata. A lot of girls from villages come to Ultadanga, Dumdum and Sealdah station by train to feed themselves as well as their families. Then they begin the search for work. They live their lives by working as helpers or doing housework for their masters, some of them do the business of vegetables, some work as suppliers of the masons. There are a lot of other stories in their lives behind these works. That story ends in jobless girls turning into sex workers. Now let's hear the story of the girls turning into sex workers.

Ultadanga is the centre for jobless girls to search and find work. Many men and women gather here from various places to find work. Approximately 2000 women and 5000 men find their work here everyday. There are 500-700 women and 900-1000 men who come here everyday. The men here work as labors and the women work as suppliers. Women come from different villages of Nadia and *North 24 Parganas*. Most of them are illiterate, abandoned by their husbands, husbands married again etc. They have 2-3 children. There is extreme poverty in their houses. These girls work as helpers to the masons in the construction projects. This is their profession. But these male workers get attracted to them. They use these girls to fulfill their physical desires. They stop giving the girl any work if she refuses, they do not even pay for her previous work. In this way the girls are forced to have sex with them in order to survive, unwillingly. The girls are not given any extra money for this. Sex work is seen as a part of the work of a supplier. In some cases the workers give them food

³⁵ Ibid. p.95-97

or buy them something. In this way the girls get associated with sex work. A girl has to become a sex worker though she went to work as a supplier. Some girls are seen to have turned against this. According to them they have to work from 9am to 5pm as a supplier. In between they have to work as a sex worker once or twice every day. They get 60 rupees in exchange of all these per day. Rather than this if they do only sex work with the customers, in that case it is possible for them to earn 150-200 rupees. They can earn more money in less time that way. There they can also express their opinion. They can tell their customers to wear condom before sex.³⁶

Dumdum:

The gentleman could identify the voice of the girl on the other side of the phone after saying "hello". The girl is standing in the Streets of Dumdum. The customer did give her the phone number of his residence during a passionate moment. After waiting for a long time she has not got any customer today. That's why the girl is talking over the telephone, "will you come today, in the afternoon." The women of Dumdum also work in building construction like the girls of Ultadanga. The number of girls here is about 350 to 400. 100 to 150 of them do sex work. The rest go to the work of suppliers and mix with others. They mainly come from North 24 parganas and other zillas near by.³⁷

Rajabazar:

Rajabazar is situated very near to Sealdah. The girls in Rajabazar are also associated with construction works like the girls of Ultadanga and Dumdum. There are about 300 to 400 girls here. The number of men is around 800 to 900. The girls here mostly come from the slums beside the canal and from North and South 24 Parganas. Men and Women here are mostly Muslims. The ex workers who made roads their lives and professions can not ignore the nature. People come less in this field, if there is a natural disaster or if train service has been disrupted.

After getting down at Ultadanga station the girls wait for the customers. The customers and girls identify each other through eye contact. Then they settle the price. And then they go to the brothel or cinema hall or in some hotel. The girls go back to the brothel if they do not find any customer after waiting for a long time. They get some customers in the brothel. Atleast they get something to buy and feed themselves with salt and rice. In the afternoon 150 to 200 girls come here to do sex work. There are girls who stand there to get some work of supply; if they do not get it then they stand for the customers. After doing the sex work with the customer they go back to their houses. There are 300 to 400 girls like that. There is another type of girls who only work as suppliers. They do not stand for customers separately. They are mainly scared of the fact that if someone sees it, they will

³⁶ Ibid. p.98-99

³⁷ Ibid. p.99

be abandoned by the society. They think that they do sex work with the labors because they are forced to do it and that's why it's not bad. If they do sex work outside, that would be bad. There are 300 to 400 girls like this.

When puja or something like that goes on in the village, the girls become busy and they do not go out. The number of girls to stand on the roads goes down that time. These girls do not like to leave the life of a family and stand in the line this way, that's why they do not generally admit their work in the line. After mixing with someone for long when their faith increase, when they feel attached only then do they talk truly, talk their heart out. They even hesitate to buy condoms fearing that someone might see them. Because if someone comes to know about this, the news will spread that this girl is doing an ugly job. Therefore naturally she will be driven out from the village as well as from the society.³⁸

In this regard, various contemporary News reports provide informations about flying sex-workers, floating zones and the areas outside the red-light areas where prostitution is dominant:³⁹

In Salt-Lake, following the main areas where prostitution is carried out:

- AA Block
- CD Block
- KB-KC Block
- AL Block
- BL Block
- CG Block
- Baisakhi Abason
- DD Block

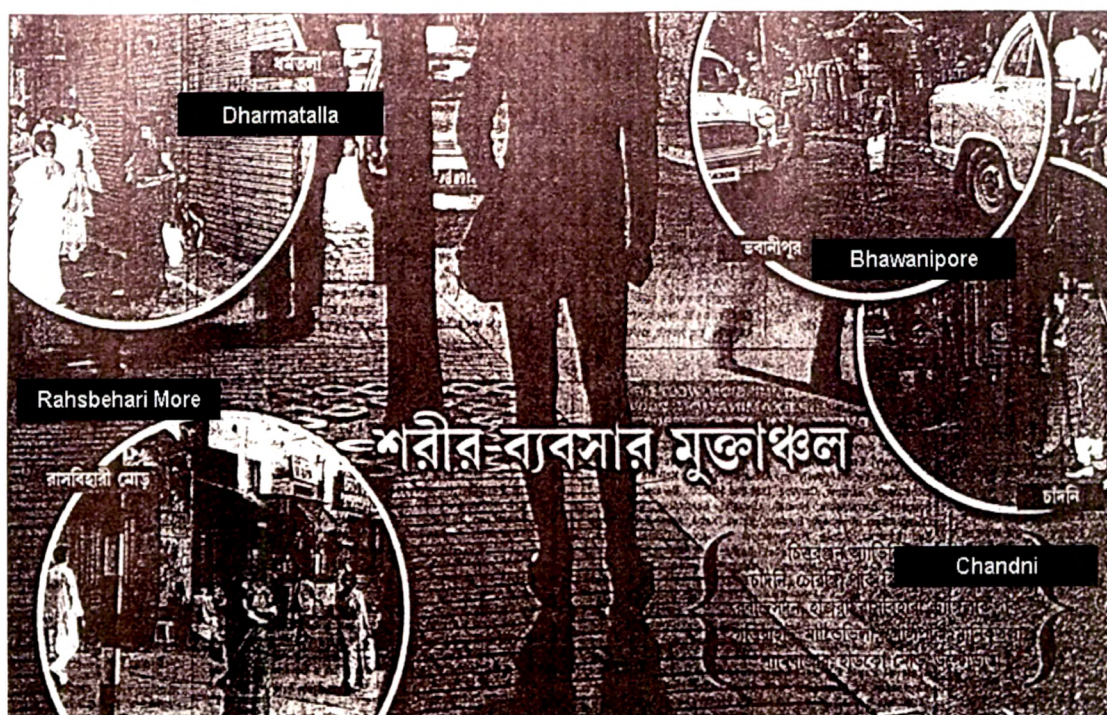
Outside the marked red-light areas there are also other areas where the prostitution is being carried out, which are as follows:

- Beauti-parlour
- Bar-cum-Restaurant
- Cheap hotel (Sastar aabaasik hotel)
- Karnani mansion
- Salt-Lake
- New Alipore
- Tollygunje
- Javadpore
- Laketown and
- Sub-urban resorts⁴⁰

³⁸ Ibid. p.99-100

³⁹ Sanbad Sen, *Patita Nagari Kolkata: 300 Bachharer Kolkata Ekhon Baarbonita'der Muktaanchal, Jor Khabor* (Journal in Bengali), 1st – 15th June, 1994.

⁴⁰ Shuhbhajit Adhikari, *Madhuchkra Theke Ekhon Madhuchakranter Ishara, Anando Bazar Patrika* (n.d), 2004; Please see – Staff Reporter, *The Flesh Trade Racket Goes Unchecked, The Telegraph*, 10th May, 1995.

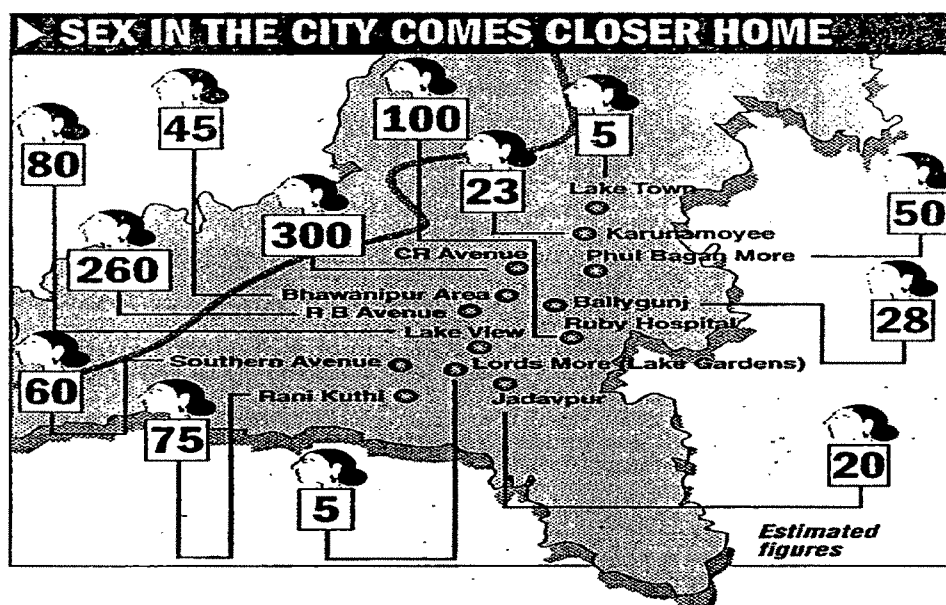


Raj Pathe Deher Pashra Sahar Jure
(Source: Ananda Bazar Patrika, 3rd June 2004)

From the news-reports, some places of Calcutta are explored where street sex workers or floating sex workers are dominant:

- (i). Chittaranjan Avenue,
- (ii). Dharmotola
- (iii). Chandni
- (iv). Chauranghi
- (v). Park-Street
- (vi). Theatre Road
- (vii). Rabindra Sadan
- (viii). Hajra
- (ix). Rasbihari
- (x). Bhawanipur
- (xi). Triangular park
- (xii). Gariahat
- (xiii). Mandevilla
- (xiv). Golpark
- (xv). Manicktall
- (xvi). Shyambazar
- (xvii). HUDKO more
- (xviii). Ultodanga
- (xix). Madhyamgram
- (xx). Barasat
- (xxi). Barackpore.⁴¹

⁴¹ Soma Mukhopadhyay, Rajpathe Deher Pasra Sahar Jure: Sharir Byabsar Muktanchal, Anondo Bazar Patrika, 3rd June, 2004. Why this system is growing so rapidly? While discussing the same point, former head of the department



Source: AIDS Threat Looms Large as Sex-trade creeps into 'Safe' neighbourhood, Times of India, 1.10.2004.

Another report gives us similar information about the places dominated by flying sex-workers or street sex-workers or floating sex-workers. These places are as follows:

- (i). The pavement in front of Basanti Devi College in Gariahat
- (ii). Crowded places like the area around Rubi Hospital off EM Bye-pass in South Kolkata
- (iii). Keshab Sen Street (North Calcutta)
- (iv). Kailash Bose Street (North Calcutta)
- (v). BD Market (Salt-Lake)
- (vi). Baisakhi (In Salt-Lake in the Eastern Fringes)
- (vii). Karunamoyee
- (viii). Rashbehari Avenue.
- (ix). C.R.Avenue
- (x). Moore Avenue
- (xi). Ballygunj
- (xii). Phoolbagan
- (xiii). Jadavpur
- (xiv). Ranikuthi
- (xv). Lake View
- (xvi). Southern Avenue

of Social Science, Presidency College, Proshanto Roy, said, "This is the result of the modern socio-economic system. One after another mills are shutting down; there is no end to poverty in the family of farmers. Another change has taken place, the value system has changed. Mostly, after suffering from dire poverty, people are making business out of their body. In whole, the feeling of committing sin has now reduced to a great extent. Not only for bread and butter, some have chosen this path for the sake of luxury. But they usually do not come to the roads, for this only the poor females are compelled." Mr. Proshanto adds, "This trend is not new. These kinds of girls were there in the Dharmotalla area 50 years back too. But now they are spread across Madhyamgram, Barasat and in Barackpore too. Earlier they were known as 'prantobasini' but later on along with the growth of the urban areas, they began to come to the cities. And that has now crossed all limits and reaching to every corner of the society. They mainly avoid soliciting standing on some special roads or streets or areas due to the fear of being noticed and therefore, they prefer to solicit standing by the normal roads. Ibid. Also see - Sanbad Sen, Patita Nagari Kolkata: 300 Bachharer Kolkata Ekhon Baarbonita'der Muktanchal, Jor Khabor (Journal in Bengali), 1st - 15th June, 1994.

- (xiv). Ranikuthi
- (xv). Lake View
- (xvi). Southern Avenue
- (xvii). Bhawanipur
- (xviii). Bidon Street – Hedua Crossing
- (xix). Park Circus
- (xx). Lake Town (around Jaya cinema)
- (xxi). Sealdah Railway Station
- (xxii). Ultodanga Railway Station
- (xxiii). Ballygunj Railway Station
- (xxiv). Park-Circus Railway Station
- (xxv). Truck terminals port
- (xxvi). Major cross-section within the city.⁴²

In this regard, there are some other important spots are as follows:

- (i). Babughat
- (ii). Victoria Memorial
- (iii). Road opposite to Eden Garden or Garer Math
- (iv). Kashipore
- (v). The surrounding area of Puravi Cinema Hall of Sealdah
- (vi). The surrounding area of Chhabighar of Sealdah
- (vii). The surrounding area of Aruna Cinema hall of Sealdah
- (viii). Shradhhananda Park.
- (ix). Jamuna Cinema Hall

According to a contemporary English News report, the number of red-light areas in Calcutta was 27 and 71 in West Bengal in 2004.⁴³

⁴² Staff Reporter, *AIDS Threat Looms Large as Sex-trade Creeps into 'Safe' neighbourhood*, Times of India, 1.10.2004.

⁴³ Rakeeb, Hossain. *A Ray of hope for Teens in Flesh Trade*, www.hindustantimes.com, Saturday, September 25, 2004

2.2. Demography of Calcutta Red-light Areas:

A considerable amount of statistical information is procurable from the census from early 20th century. In the census volume of 1901, the following figures for Calcutta town and suburbs are given:⁴⁴

Table: 2.2.A

Census:- 1901	
Total Number of prostitutes	18,352
Hindus	16,185
Muhammadans	2,027
Christians	55
Others	85

A report of Police Branch: Judicial Dept, 1903 states that during this year there were about 14,000 prostitutes in the town of Calcutta⁴⁵.

Table: 2.2.B

Europeans (no Eng-women)	56
Asiatic Jewesses	30 to 40
Japanese	40
Natives	Rest Are
Judicial Dept: Police 1903	

The Census of India, 1911 gives a detailed demographical picture of the prostitutes.

⁴⁴ *Prostitution(s) Among Indian in Calcutta: condition of brothel in Bengal*, File P.14B-3 of 1917, progs. 14-19, July 1918, [Political Dept: Police Branch]. IV, p.67; "According to the census of 1901, the population of proper Calcutta was 8,47,796; of which male population was 5,62,596 and female population was 2,85,200. Out of the total number of females, if we deduct 86,128 or the number of girls below ten years, we get the number of women above ten, 1,99,072. As mentioned in the census report 14,370 of these 1,99,072 had pronounced themselves as prostitutes. Other than these openly declared prostitutes, how many more the city of Kolkata must have had is anybody's guess. It is a known fact that of a large number of maidservants, cooks, hawkers selling betel-leaves and construction workers-- many were loose women. Even if we do not count these hidden ones, we can safely say that out of every 14 women of more than ten years of age, 1 was a declared whore. As we see in the census report, in Ward no 5, one in every four women was a whore. Again in Ward no 1, one out of five women practiced prostitution. In each of 25 Wards of Calcutta, on an average, 575 prostitutes lived. Other than that there were numerous undeclared ones of which there is no record. Leaving aside the other smaller streets and lanes, the main thoroughfares like Chitpur Road, Cornwallis Street, Corporation Street etc had numerous prostitutes who stood on either side dressed up and eager to seduce the passers by. he landlords of Calcutta used to get higher rent from tenants who were whores by profession. Many of the rich and aristocrat families rented out their properties to earn more money. If we could get a list of names of these landlords, it would have proved what I am trying to say. If people had stopped renting out their houses to *Baijis* and prostitutes, and checked the sinful and scandalous practices, the proliferation of prostitutes in the city would not have grown so rampant. In this city and its outskirts, there are touts to collect small girls. They look out for young, ignorant girls and seduce them under some pretext or the other to bring them to the whorehouses and sell them. This practice of human trafficking is prohibited by law, but the stringency which is required by the government to implement the law is not seen; then this immoral practice would not have grown to such an extent." Kolkatai Barbonitar Pradurbhab (20 Jaishtha, 1311) in Kanailal Chattopadhyay (ed.), *Sanjeebani: Samayik Patre Samaj Chitra*, Dey's Publishing, Calcutta, 1989, p.336

⁴⁵ *Strengthening the Law of Checking*, File No. P2A-10(1-2), proce.-1-3, August 1903 [Judicial Dept: Police Branch]

Those returned as beggars, vagrants and prostitutes was noticeably large, viz. 24,155, of whom 4,044 were dependents. In this category there were five females to every male. This sexual disparity caused the growth of prostitutes. During this period the number of prostitutes in Calcutta was 14,271, viz. 12,848 and 1,423 in suburbs. ['Large as this number is, it is 4099 less than was returned in 1901'.]

The prostitutes of Calcutta represented 4½ percent of the total female population, 21 percent of the women 'who returned themselves as engaged in any occupation were working class. The percentage calculated on the total female population, however, didn't give a perfect picture but a 'misleading idea' of the proportion of prostitutes as it included girls under 10 years of age, who were not old enough for the profession of prostitution. Excluding them, the 6 percent of the females of Calcutta were professional prostitutes. The actual number was probably higher because large section of women did not proclaim themselves as prostitutes directly but many of them described themselves as maid- servants. The proportion was even higher among women 0-aged 20 to 40. In this age group 1 in every 12 was a prostitute. It further revealed that 997 girls in Calcutta and 99 girls in the suburbs dependants on prostitutes. Afterwards, they were surely engaged in the profession of prostitution by their mother or guardian ('foster mother').⁴⁶

Table: 2.2.C
Position of Women in Calcutta and Suburbs ⁴⁷

Prostitutes	14,271
Domestic Service	22,409
Industries	11,929
Trade	8,449

Caste-Race wise Domination:

Special statistics of the castes and nationalities of the 14,271 prostitutes in Calcutta and the suburbs showed that 9/10^{ths} were Hindus, 2,962 or more than one-fifths were Kaibarts. 1,770 were the Baishnabs, the Kayasths were 1,408, 844 were Sadgopes and the Musalman sheikhs were 803. One out of every five Baishnab females returned herself as a professional prostitute. Only 32 were Europeans or 'member of allied races'. Number of Jewesses prostitutes were 49 and Japanese prostitutes 55.

⁴⁶ *Prostitution(s) Among Indians in the Calcutta: Condition of Brothel in Bengal*, File 14B-3 of 1917, progs. 14 – 19, July 1918. (Political Dept: Police Branch). p. 67

⁴⁷ B. Joardar, *Prostitution in Nineteenth and early twentieth century Calcutta*, Inter-India Publications, New Delhi 1985. p. 21

Areas from where Prostitutes Hailed:

The Census of 1911 further revealed the original places from where prostitutes of Calcutta mainly hailed; from 24 Parganas, Midnpore, Howrah and Hoogly and Burdwan or were born in Calcutta and the neighbouring districts of 24 Parganas. Only 322 prostitutes hailed from Eastern Bengal. 744 came from Bihar and Orissa, 409 prostitutes hailed from the united provinces. Of countries outside India the number of Japanese prostitutes were more dominant – 55, Russian prostitutes were 30.⁴⁸

Radhakamal Mukherjee's work shows that women hailed from Midnapore and settled in the Jute mill areas of Bengal, 'Out of 300 workers one in the three admitted being a prostitute and among the people from Hoogly one third of the families worked in the mills and in every four had a prostitute.' It has been further appeared in his work that the Bilaspuri working women were notorious in their character for their 'immorality and prostitution'. In the jute mill village of Birlapur, the prostitutes' colony was very much near by the coolie line. The number of prostitutes inhabited the area was 200.

From the work of J.N.Ghosh it is further appeared that women workers in the jute mills area used to ply sex-trade at night and usually deny that they earn by selling sex or prostitution.⁴⁹

Table: 2.2.D/E/F
Distribution of Prostitution in Town and Suburbs.⁵⁰

Distribution of Prostitutes In Town								
Name of the Police Station	Section	European	Jewish	Japanese	Hindu	Muhammedans	Eurasian	Total
Shampooer	A	---	---	---	600	50	---	650
Coomertuly	B	---	---	---	1800	1	---	1801
Bartollah	C	---	---	---	2000	25	---	2025
Sukea's Street	D	---	---	---	217	---	---	217
Jorabagan	E	---	---	---	1623	---	---	1623
Jorasanko	F	---	---	---	1530	101	---	1631
Burra Bazar	G	---	2	---	4	15	---	21
Colootollah	H	---	15	---	30	130	---	175
Muchipara	I	---	---	---	505	5	---	510
Bowbazar	J	---	3	---	50	11	---	64
Paddapukur	K	---	---	---	332	5	---	337
Waterloo Street	L	---	---	---	---	---	---	0
Fenwick Bazar	M	---	8	---	488	105	---	601
Taltollah	N	---	---	---	60	20	5	85
Elliot Road	O	---	---	---	21	28	---	49
Park Street	P	---	---	---	---	---	---	0
Victoria Terrace	Q	---	---	---	---	---	---	0
Hastings ...	R	---	---	---	---	---	---	0
TOTAL		0	28	0	9,260	496	5	9,789

⁴⁸ Prostitution(s) Among Indians in the Calcutta: Condition of Brothel in Bengal, File 14B-3 of 1917, progs. 14 – 19, July 1918. (Political Dept: Police Branch). p. 67

⁴⁹ B. Joardar, Prostitution In Historical and Modern Perspectives; Inter-India Publication, New Delhi, 1984. p.74

⁵⁰ Prostitution(s) Among Indians in the Calcutta: Condition of Brothel in Bengal, File 14B-3 of 1917, progs. 14 – 19, July 1918. (Political Dept: Police Branch). p. 68

Distribution of Prostitutes in Suburbs								
Name of the Police Station	Section	European	Jewish	Japanese	Hindu	Muhammedans	Eurasian	Total
Casipore	A	---	---	---	213	10	---	225*
Chitpore	B	---	---	---	234	5	---	239
Ultadanga	C	---	---	---	129	1	---	130
Manicktolla	D	---	---	---	105	---	---	105
Beliaghatta	E	---	---	---	279	61	---	340
Entally	F	---	---	---	300	20	---	320
Beniapukur	G	---	---	---	3	20	---	23
Ballyganj	H	63	---	5	6	13	1	88
Bhowanipur	I	---	---	---	1000	15	---	1015
Tollyganj	J	---	---	---	99	10	---	109
Alipore	K	---	---	---	75	10	---	85
Ekbalpore	L	---	---	---	13	12	---	25
Watgunge	M	---	---	75	87	65	---	227
Garden Reach	N	---	---	---	16	1	---	17
TOTAL		63	0	80	2,559	243	1	2,723

Total in Suburbs		63	0	80	2,559	243	1	2,723
Total in Town		0	28	0	9260	496	5	9789
GRAND TOTAL		63	28	80	11,819	739	6	12,512

*Two Native Christians.

Table: 2.2.G
District wise Distribution of the Prostitutes of Bengal Origin in the City and Suburbs⁵¹

Districts	Calcutta with Suburbs	Calcutta	Suburbs
	No. Of Prostitutes	No. Of Prostitutes	No. Of Prostitutes
Bardwan Division			
(a) Burdwan	1,191	1,125	66
(b) Birbhum	55	55	---
(c) Bankura	369	361	8
(d) Midnapore	2,265	2,092	173
(e) Hoogly	1,567	1,517	50
(f) Howrah	502	431	71
Presidency Division			
(a) 24 Parganas	1,525	1,230	295
(b) Calcutta	2,061	1,660	401
(c) Nadia	491	458	33
(d) Murshidabad	243	238	5
(e) Jessore	163	121	42
(f) Khulna	53	35	18
Rajshahi Division			
(a) Rajshahi	11	11	---
(b) Dinajpore	2	1	1
(c) Darjeeling	10	10	---
(d) Rangpur	1	1	---
(e) Pabna	28	28	---
(f) Malda	3	3	---
Dacca Division			
(a) Dacca	96	72	24
(b) Mymensingh	81	9	72
(c) Faridpur	40	34	6
(d) Backerganje	45	29	16
Dacca Division			
(a) Tuppera	5	5	---
(b) Noakhali	0	---	---
(c) Chittagong	0	---	---
(Census of India 1911 (1913) Volume - VI City of Calcutta, Part I - Report:75			

In an archival document of 1913 it was mentioned that:

Calcutta is the only place in the Bengal Presidency where the evil of European prostitution exists. There are at present under 50 European foreign prostitutes and no European male procurers in the city except perhaps some Japanese. With a large foreign and floating population such as exists in Calcutta, there will always be demand for prostitution, and it is therefore hardly surprising that foreign women should be imported into the city in conformity with the law of supply and demand. It is generally admitted, however, that the women who come out to India are rarely young girls who have been decoyed or kidnapped fresh from

⁵¹ Census of India, 1911 (1913), Vol VI, City of Calcutta, Part I, Report: 75 Cited in B. Joardar, *Prostitution In Historical and Modern Perspectives*, Inter-India Publication, New Delhi, 1984. p.75

their homes, but experienced prostitutes from South-Eastern Europe, mainly it is believed, from South Russia and Romania and are under no delusion as to their occupation.⁵²

It can be said according to the information availed from the British archival documents that, prostitution in Calcutta was very wide spread. It affected three communities – the European, Anglo – Indian and Indian. Up to the year 1911 the European prostitutes were mainly situated/inhabited in a single part of the city. Collinga-Bazar was the centre of/ to that area and between 70 and 80 foreign women living in between 20 to 30 houses was engaged in the profession of prostitution. According to a sincere and detail investigation report made in 1908 the information about nationality and religion of prostitutes showed that (there were) 54 prostitutes were European Jewesses out of 78 prostitutes. These prostitutes mainly had hailed from Russia, Romania, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Poland and Italy. The transference of the tolerated area from the heart of the city to the suburbs led to the reduction of the number of these foreign prostitutes to some extent. The action of colonial police to 'repatriate' German, Austrian and Jewesses prostitutes with the outbreak of the war further caused the reduction in the number of European Jewesses prostitutes. The number of foreign Jewesses in 1908 that stood at 54 had been reduced to about 30 in 1916. There was also another reason: action was taken in 1911 to demolish the European prostitutes' colonies.⁵³

According to the census of 1911, the total number of the Jewish Community was 1,919. 1,136 out of them lived in the city of Calcutta and 783 in the suburbs. The community was very mixed one and composed of very rich and poor members. The numbers of rich were few and the larger section was extremely poor.

The social conditions under which the poorer classes lived necessitate overcrowding and the conditions were such as result in a low moral standard. There were no statistics available to the public as to the number of Asiatic Jewesses engaged in prostitution. The police register and census statistics, after deducting the foreign European Jewish prostitutes, only showed between 30 to 40. But the number of Jewish dancing girls and those who were either willingly or unwillingly connected with a life of shame must be larger than these figures would suggest.⁵⁴

In the census report of 1921 the number of Goanese prostitutes was 510 out of 2,995 public women. In 1936 also the Goanese prostitutes formed a dominant part of the public women in Bombay. Among the European prostitutes, the dominant were English women, French women, Russians,

⁵² *Legislation to Suppress the importation of foreign women for prostitution and to punish the importers and other profiting thereby*, File 2-A/22 of 1912, progs. Nos. 18-31, Serial Nos. 3-16, Feb 1913 [Political Dept: Police Branch]. p.27,30

⁵³ *Protection of Jewish Girls and Women From Evil Influence*, File P. 10P – 1 (4-10). progs. 1-7, September 1916 [Political Dept: Police Branch]. p.3-4

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p.4

Italians, Greeks and Austrians. The numbers of European prostitutes were found in the brothel were as follows:

Table: 2.2.H

Number of European Prostitutes in Brothels of Calcutta	
Total in Calcutta	41
French	25
Russians	10
Italians	1
Greeks	1
Austrians	1
Other nationality	3

Most of the European prostitutes were French women and Russians. In Calcutta the number of European prostitutes was larger than that given in the census. The number of women living in the known brothel was only 45. But there were numerous European women, mainly French – ex-prostitutes used to live as mistress of European Indian ‘nobles’. The number of European prostitutes used to get increased in every year during the season when ‘touring theatrical and opera parties’ from Europe and America used to visit the city – Calcutta. The dancing girls and artistes associated with these parties used to get engaged in/with the sex selling trade during their short time visit.⁵⁵

Jewish Prostitutes:

Jewish girls with their beauty of Eastern type were in high demand of Indians who could pay for their associates. In Calcutta the census report showed only one Jewish from Iraq was living in a brothel. But actually the number of clandestine prostitutes and mistresses among these Jewesses was extensively dominant. There were a large number of Jewish prostitutes at Bowbazar.

Persian Prostitutes:

There were some Persian prostitutes in Bombay and two were in Karachi and Calcutta. Some of these prostitutes were good dancers and therefore, were in high demand.

Arab Prostitutes:

There were two Arab prostitutes in Calcutta. But at the same time in Karachi the numbers of Arab prostitutes were half-a-dozen.

⁵⁵ S N Mukherjee, *Prostitution in India*, Calcutta, 1936, p. 279-80

Egyptian Prostitutes:

In Calcutta there was one Egyptian prostitute whose living style was European.

Japanese Prostitutes:

Though the colony of Japanese was small in the city but the number of Japanese prostitutes was quite large in Calcutta. There were about 34 Japanese prostitutes at Watgunge area whose age was between 20 to 40. The 'geishas or entertainers' were absent there. During 1933/36 (the time period of S.N. Mukherjee has to be found out)

Chinese Prostitutes:

The Chinese brothel was totally absent in Calcutta. But there were number of Chinese women who used to practice clandestine prostitution with Chinese men. A large number of them used to live as mistresses.

Anglo-Indian Prostitutes:

The number of Anglo-Indian prostitutes was quite large in Indian cities. They were 'half-castes and were the off springs of European residents and their Indian maid-servants. Mostly low class Mohammedans and Christians, as Hindu women never worked in European families. There were 86 Anglo-Indian prostitutes who lived in the brothels in Kareya and Bowbazar red-light areas. The actual number of these prostitutes was not this. Because a large section of the Anglo-Indian women used to practice clandestine prostitution with the help of the Mohammedan pimps. Many of them worked in offices as shop girls or typists but their low wage used to get make up by taking up prostitution.

(Calcutta and Bombay was cosmopolitan towns where the number of foreign colonies was large. Therefore, naturally the existence of foreign prostitutes here with its diversified nature was common characteristics of these towns).⁵⁶

The census of India, 1921 (published in 1923) reveals that there were 52,660 female workers lived in the city Calcutta, 15,043 in the suburbs in the 24 Parganas and 12,214 in Howrah. 'The 81,091 is but 18.3 percent of the female population' (Census of India, volume XI, Part I, Report, Calcutta 1921:109). There were various occupations with which the women were engaged like domestic service, prostitution, begging, textile workers, labourers, sweepers, mid-wives etc. the following table would give us clear understanding about the number of working women engaged in various different occupations:

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 278-83.

Table: 2.2.I
Numerical Distribution of Women Engaged in Various Different Occupations:⁵⁷

Sl. No.	Nature of Occupation	Number of Women engaged
1	Domestic Service	20,999
2	Prostitution	10,814
3	Begging	6,691
4	Textiles	6,633
5	Labourers (Unspecified)	3,593
6	Sweepers	2,254
7	Midwives etc.	1,223
8	Rice pounding and husking	1,238
9	Trade in fuel	1,092

From census of 1921 it is appeared that there were total 10,814 prostitutes. 8,877 of 10,814 hailed from Calcutta. There were 641 prostitutes in the suburbs area of 24 Parganas. (Census of India, 1921, published in 1923:122). 'Out of every 1000 female workers who immigrated to the city for/in search of livelihood; 70 from Midnapore, 38 from Hoogly and 10 from Dacca were prostitutes. (Census of India, 1921:26).⁵⁸

From census of 1931 (published in 1933) it has been appeared that there were 7,970 prostitutes in Calcutta. 7,440 out of this 7,970 women's main occupation was prostitution.⁵⁹

But here S.K.Sinha, President of All Bengal Women's Union on her deputation to the Governor of Bengal in August 13th, 1932 claimed that the estimation made by police for the number of 'Magdalness' in all the area of Calcutta was 20,000. She said, "Although the figure of the census held in March of that year fixed them at less than half that number;". Mrs. Sinha on behalf of the Women's Union demanded the abolition of brothels in any guise not only from Calcutta but also from entire Bengal.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ B. Joardar, *Prostitution in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Calcutta*, Inter-India Publications, New Delhi 1985. p.22

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ S. N. Mukherjee, *Prostitution in India*, DasGupta & Co, Calcutta, 1936. p.469

Division of prostitutes according to the religion clearly appeared from the census of 1931 ⁶¹

Table: 2.2.J
Division of Prostitutes According to Religion:

Sl. No.	Name of the Religion	Number of Prostitutes according to the religion	Population
1	Hindu	6,995	822,293
2	Mohammeden	302	311,155
3	Christian	86	17,484
4	Buddhists	27	3,021
5	Other (Jain, Parsee, Sikh, Jew, indefinite beliefs etc.)	30	12,781
6	Total	7,440	1,196,734

From an archival record it is known that the total number of prostitute in 1941 was about 43,510 in Bengal. Among them 31,214 were Hindus and 11,936 were Mohammedans.⁶²

In the first half of the 20th century, All Bengal Census Board raised many a concerns about the accuracy of the Census Board. The errors are prominent in this Census Report due to the wrong dealings with the religion and caste issues. One of the issues which is of most concern is that, whether the correct number of prostitutes can ever be based on the Census Report or not?

In 1941 (Bengali – *Baisakh 1348*), an article entitled *Bartoman Lokganana O Patita Samaj* (Current Census and the Prostitutes) was published in the *Ramananda Chattopadhyay* edited 'Prabasi' journal by the editor of All Bengal Census Board, *Jatindramohan Dutta*. In that the writer says,

In this year's Census (1941) Bengal Government alias the ruling party ordered that during the census no one should ask about the castes from the Muslims but in the cases of Hindus they should be asked about their castes and sub-castes. In the 1901 census report we came to know that in the Muslims of Bengal there are about 55 sub-castes. In the first phase of census of this year, it has suppressed that existence. In this context, there is no point why their castes should not be asked. Castes were asked only in the case of the Hindus – this order is illogical.

The All Bengal Census Board has requested all the Hindus to put 'Hindu' as the answer for the third question of Caste part. Due to this, in the villages and corporation areas where a Hindu claimed of being Hindu, they had to face government blockade and torture. This seems as if being a Hindu is a big sin. In many schools, the census authority, especially the Muslim authorities are forcing the citizen to know their castes and these officials are even threatening by telling that they will not include them in the census or even of forgery actions can be taken against them. As per the information provided by the citizen, in whichever places the officials have listed the Hindus, the Muslim census officials, Muslim school inspectors the deputies have mentioned the castes with their own choice and in some places they compelled the citizens with regard to this matter. A strong political motive behind this filling-up of castes. According to All Bengal Census Board, the one who has

⁶¹ Ibid. p.132

⁶² *Suggestion for licensing the prostitution*, File: P10P – 1/32, proce – 187-B, April, 1932, [Police Department].

been included as Scheduled Tribes in the 1935 census under the Indian Administrative Law, they are introducing themselves as Hindu and they felt proud of doing so. Many Barna Hindu, Kayesth etc have introduced themselves as Hindus; but by looking at their surname, they have been forcefully counted as Brahman, Kayesth etc – what a wonderful way to collect data! At many occasions one cannot decide the caste by merely looking at the title if a Schedule Tribe introduce himself by Hindu, for this these officials have forcefully written their castes according to their will. In North Bengal – Rajbanshi, in Central Bengal – Namahshudra, in South Bengal – Pod etc. in Medinipur many Hindus have been forcefully counted as Mahishya.

There is no position for the prostitutes in Hindu Soceity – they do not have caste. Those who are prostitutes, they had a caste in the past but nothing now. If you force them for their castes, they will tell you about their cast identified in the past. But those who are yet to be born, what caste they will have? Can Bengal government answer this question? If they call them Hindu, what is wrong in that? Moreover, they have been tortured; they have not got relief for being women.

The way of in deriving the Religion of the prostitute is even worse. Despite of their statement of being Hindu, in many places they have been counted as Muslims.⁶³

The prostitutes raised protest against this to the All Bengal Census Board. Some excerpts of their reaction is mentioned below:

The prostitutes who were getting monthly remuneration from their Muslim *babus*, and who's nick names are like Meher, Ananr, Saara, Shera, Aangur, Daalim, Saaki, Dula, Ayesa, Pokhraj etc. even if they are Hindus by birth, the officials have counted them as Muslims. Though these prostitutes accept money from their Muslim *babus* in sheer greed, but they still feel shy because of their attachment with Muslim *babus*.⁶⁴

From the above excerpts one thing can be inferred, that depth and the reach of the call of Hindu Mahasava is largely extensive. For those who want to do good by maintaining the social welfare and social balance, they should be made aware of the number of prostitutes in Bengal. But for these officials it is very tough or may be impossible to estimate prostitutes and their dependent's correct number.

The difficulties in estimating the correct number of the prostitutes are mainly the distinct organizational structure prevailed in the brothel world. In this regard, a letter sent by few Hindu prostitutes residents of one of the ward of Calcutta, to the All Bengal Census Board:

Sir, we are from the red-light area, and hence do not need to introduce ourselves. But we feel proud to introduce ourselves as Hindu. We have not yet been able to be united in our society this is the reason why we do not dare to introduce us as Hindu. During the time of census, for many reason we have to shy-away. But this time the census has made us surprise. We have observed that as soon as the Muslims officials are coming here, they themselves are taking initiatives to register the name but they could do nothing much in our locality. We wanted to put forth our charges to Superintendent over phone, but we could not contact him. We feel that not even one-third of our actual numbers have been counted.

⁶³ Sri Jatindra Mohan Dutta (Editor – All Bengal Census Board), Ramananda Chattopadhyay (ed.) *Bartaman Lokganana O Patita Samaj* in 'Probasi' Journal, 1941, (Bengali Era - Baisakh 1348), p.86

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.87

We are providing some of the reasons behind that below. We think that it is better not to reflect the actual number of the women of our status.... (1). In brothels, we cannot mention about our daughters as it is against law to keep unmarried girls. We do not want to project our sons as bustard. And a prostitute having child is not respected. (2).The men, who reside permanently in the brothels, we cannot disclose their names and details. But they all are Hindus. (3).The actual numbers of people have not been taken from most of the brothel houses in Calcutta. (I)In some of the cases, the landlady has not provided the correct number of tenants. (II) Some of the prostitutes were not ready to give details about their names, age and other details. (III) The servants, feeling that it is danger, they were either shy or were not so sporty in giving the details. (III) In most of the brothels, the details about the dasas and dasis are not taken. We feel it is our duty to inform you about these things and expect your investigation for the same.⁶⁵

With regard to the above letter, the Editor of the All Bengal Census Board, Mr. Jatindra Mohan Dutta replied in the following manner,

Because of the late arrival of this letter and due to shortage of capable manpower, All Bengal Census Board has not been able to take any action in this regard. But the reasons which have been mentioned in the letter, the Board finds them as possible and logical.

Here are some of the information received from the Census report of 1921 and 1931:

Table: 2.2.K/L

Number of Prostitutes 1921		
Place	Prefession - Prostitution	Occupants (<i>Poshya</i>)
Burdwan	5,126	1,372
Presidency	16,388	2,732
(Calcutta)	8,877	1,330
Rajsahi	5,691	1,186
Dhaka	6,895	1,857
Chattogram	1,594	224
Bengal	35,921	7,404

Number of Prostitutes 1931	
Place	Prefession - Prostitution
Burdwan	3,041
Presidency	11,996
(Calcutta)	7,440
Rajsahi	3,983
Dhaka	4,372
Chattogram	437
Bengal	24,037

In 1901, the total number of prostitutes and their dependants was 59,811 in all across Bengal. In the Census report of 1911, the total number of prostitutes and their dependants was not available. In

⁶⁵ Ibid. p.87

1921, the Superintendent of Bengal Census, Sir Tomson commented that (Census Report of 1921, p.397):

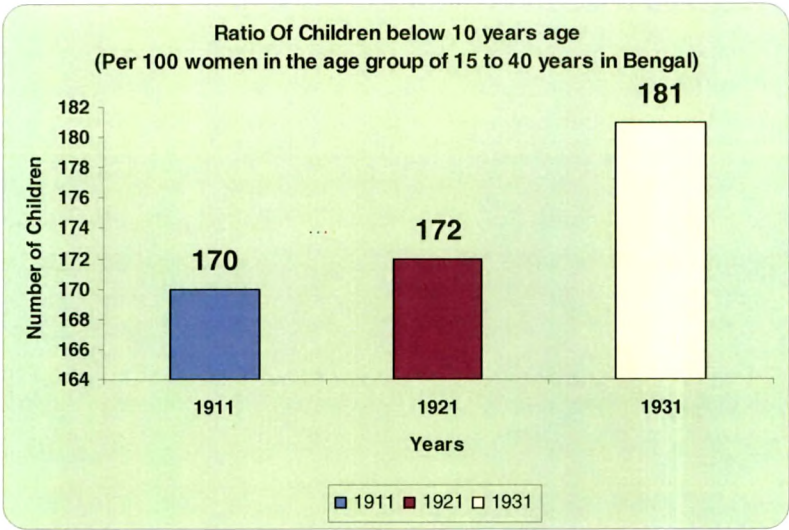
The number of dependent on prostitution has fallen from 59,811 in 1901 to 43,333 in 1921 but it is still remarkably high. The actual number is almost certainly understated for there are in every country many more loose women than will admit to following the profession of prostitutes. Because there is some uncertainty in the return of those loose women who do not publicly advertise their profession, for example by living in the recognized prostitutes' quarters in the town, it would perhaps be unwise to make too much of the decrease in the number of the prostitutes in the country shown by the statistics of 1901 and of 1921, but the decrease has been so marked that it seems almost certain that there must have been a large reduction.

In 1931, though according to Census Superintendent Sir Porter, the number of prostitutes decreased from 35,921 to 24,037 but he has not commented in this matter. May be sensing about the error in the census, he has not dared to comment on the subject.⁶⁶

According to the Census report of 1921, it came in to the light that the total number of prostitutes was 35,921 in which the number of dependants was 7,404 (20 percent). But across Bengal during this time the number of dependants was 185 percent more than that of the 'workers' in all class. The primary reason for the lower ratio of dependants in comparison to the prostitutes was probably because of not registration of their son's and daughter's name. There was certainly one obligation in this and may be because of the lower number of children, the number of dependants were low. This reason is not impossible too. But in this case, if we assume the age group of the prostitutes in between 15 to 40 years, then the number of children or dependant below 10 years in this age group of prostitutes was much lower than that of the combined total of children in the 'general women' group. In general group, there is a statistics available in the Census report of 1911, 1921 and 1931 about the ratio of children below 10 years of age per 100 women of the age group of 15 to 40 years. It can be bet on this that most of the children of the prostitutes were not included in the Census report.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p.87

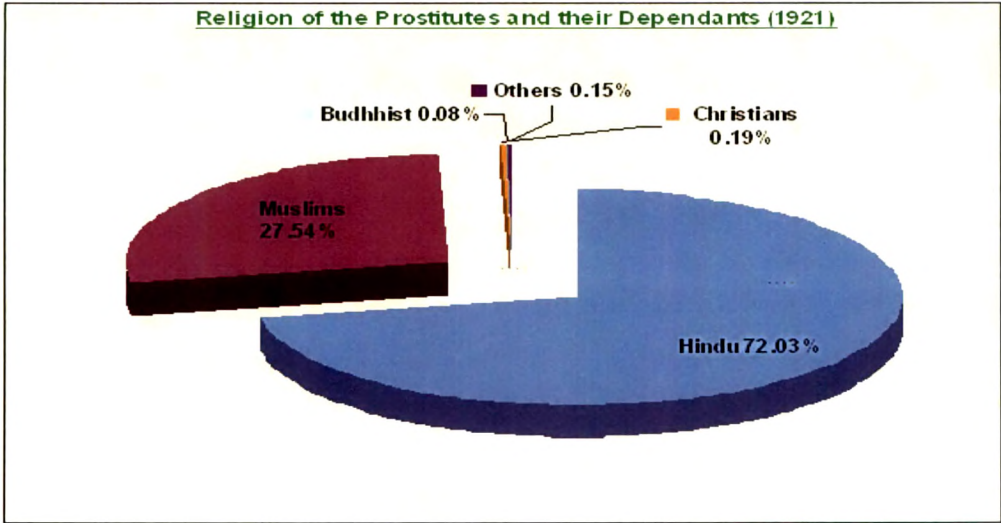
Table: 2.2.M



As per the number of prostitute, their ratio in total population was 0.15 percent. But the ratio of prostitute among the women prisoners was 8.7 percent. From this percentage/ratio, one can conclude that the tendency of crime in the prostitutes was much more than the normal population.⁶⁷

In 1921, a list was published about the religion of the prostitutes. Such kind of list was not published in 1931. The graphical presentation of the list is given below.⁶⁸

Table: 2.2.N

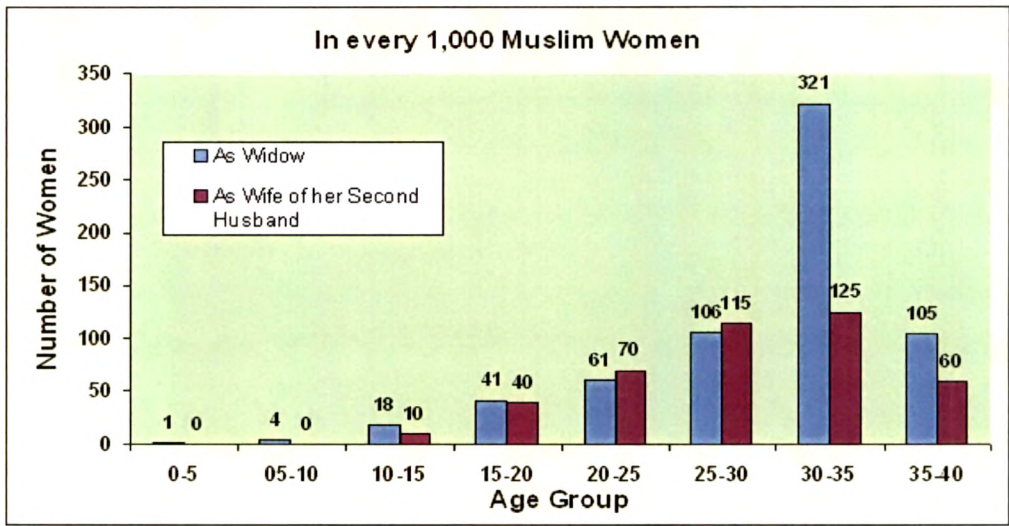


The number of prostitutes in the Hindu society was more than in the Muslim society. While explaining the reason behind this, Mr Jatindra Mohan Dutta (Editor of the All Bengal Census Board) said:

⁶⁷ Ibid. p.88
⁶⁸ Ibid.

The number of Hindus in 1921 was 43.7 percent of the total population. Relatively, the number of prostitutes in Hindu is 3.1 times more than of Muslims. This is not at all a matter of proud for the Hindus. The primary reason for this is non-existence of widow-marriage. In 1921, the number of widow in the age group of 15 to 40 years was 1,008,000 and the same for Muslims was 621,000. This means the number of marriageable widow in this age group is 1.6 higher in the Hindus. Moreover, the ratio of prostitutes in Hindu is not 1.6 but 3.1 times more. The main reason for this is, the Muslim widow in this age group has possibility of re-marriage and most of them do get married again. In this regard, following details from page number 163 of the 1st Volume of the Census Report of India, 1921 is represented in graphical form:

Table: 2.2.0



If we assume the age group 15 to 30 years, which is more prone to choose prostitution as profession, we will not be very wrong. In that age group the number of widow is 208 and the number of women who have got married for the second in the same age group are 225. This means that out of 433 widows, the total number of widow who got re-married is 225. Meaning, that the total number of widow is 2.1 times more than the widow in this age group.⁶⁹

Multiplying the above factor 2.1 with the former, 1.6 provides us the number of Hindu prostitutes against Muslim prostitutes, which was 3.4 times more. This was primarily because of the absence of widow re-marriage in Hindu caste. In reality, it was 3.1 times more than that of the Muslims. Another reason, which was prevailing in the Hindu society, was that if a woman was raped or kidnapped she was not accepted in the society. Such kinds of women choose prostitution as a livelihood.

From the above discussion, it was evident that in the census report the number of prostitutes in Bengal was not accounted correctly and there were few bottlenecks in getting the accurate data. The number of dependants and children of prostitutes were also very less and there were sufficient reasons behind it. Regardless of all these reasons, the ratio of Hindu prostitutes was very high. It

⁶⁹ Ibid. p.88

was also true that absence of widow re-marriage was one of the rational behind this augmentation of Hindu prostitutes. Despite their low position in the Hindu society, their inner feeling of being Hindu was very much alive. This aspect of them should have been thought about.⁷⁰

The information about the number of prostitutes living in the Dhukuria Bagan Lane and Umadas Lane in 1947 is found (Though the areas were declared public thoroughfares for the purpose of the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act. 1933, and all prostitutes living in these areas were evicted by the 2nd of February 1945) from a British official record.⁷¹ Please refer to **Table: 2.1.B**

Amrita Bazar Patrika – Saturday, May 21, 1949 further informs that there were about 40000 prostitutes of different ages and number of houses inhabited by the prostitutes was 8000. It states:

Despite the effort made during the days of British autonomy when 1946 the then Governor of individual Bengal Mr. R.G.Casey enacted an ordinance closing down all brothels in the city, the Metropolitan city of Calcutta faces the problem of having a large number of prostitutes affecting the moral and health of the society. The ordinance expired and it was neither renewed nor any legislation passed by the Assembly since then.

In the city of Calcutta alone, as it stated, there are about 40,000 prostitutes of various ages and about 8000 houses accommodating these ill fated and ill-famed women...⁷²

In 1961, total citizen of Calcutta was 29,27,289. Out of this 1,17,080 were infected by deceases and 6,049 were prostitutes.

In 1971, the number of prostitutes got reduced to 5,000 out of 31,48,746 total population, of which 2,20,360 were infected by diseases.⁷³

The work entitled "*Jaunapallir Chalchitra*" (A Pen Picture of Brothels) based upon a survey done by Durbar gives a detail picture of some of the 'Red-light areas' of Bengal.

Red-light areas of Present Calcutta:

Northern Calcutta:

Sonagachi:

There are three types of sex workers in this area. The first class sex workers generally live in the famous and luxurious houses of Avinash Kabiraj Street. They also live in some houses of Masjid Bari Street. They are basically less aged than sex workers of other classes. These first class sex

⁷⁰ Ibid. p.88-89

⁷¹ *Prayer from the Public for the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act Dhukuria Bagan Lane and Umadas Lane*. File P14B – 3/46, proce. B-418, January 1947 [Home Dept: Police Branch]

⁷² *Calcutta Prostitutes: 8000 Houses Accommodating 40,000 ill-fated Women* – *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Saturday, May 21, 1949. p.4

⁷³ Kamal Chaudhury, *Patita [Fallen Women]*, In Indrani Sinha & Nabarun Bhattacharya (ed), *ABARBONITA – A Quarterly Journal Against the Sex-trade*, Annual Publication, 2000. p.23

workers now come mainly from other states of India. Sex workers of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi and South India and also those in high demand of other states live here. The customers of these sex workers are more or less rich; they are either businessmen or wealthy people from other professions. What we understand as *Baiji* is almost non-existent in Sonagachhi now a days. Those who still exist in some houses please their customers with songs and dances of Hindi films. It is heard that in some houses they present nude dance in exchange of more money. The sex workers of second class generally live in the houses of *Durgacharan Mitra Street*, *Neilmani Mitra Street*, *Joy Mitra Lane* and *Gourisankar Lane*. There are *Bengalees* and lots of Nepalese as well as girls from other parts of India. Most of the third class sex workers live in the houses of *Imam Baksh lane*, *Maniruddin Lane* and *Sonagachhi Lane*, these houses are located in old and narrow lanes - rooms are dark and airless. They are also very small and suffocating. A lot of sex workers supply customers to the *mashi* in *adhiya* custom. Some old and ex sex workers keep the girls in their rooms in this custom. In this custom the sex worker has to give half of her money that she gets from the customer to the landlord. A lot of the old sex workers are earning their livelihood this way. *Chhukri* custom is also in use here. A particular class of girl traffickers supplies these girls from poor families to Sonagachhi by enticing them with money or allurements of work. A lot of young girls from Bangladesh and Nepal off late are brought to Sonagachhi this way. In this custom the girls give all the money that they earn to the landlord/*malkin/masi*. Those girls get nothing for themselves except food, lodging and something to wear. These girls are bought either with one time paid money or some amount of money is sent to their families' occasionally. Some sex workers belonging to third and fourth class are staying there by giving rent. But they have *chhukri* and *adhiya* customs also. A lot of girls come from the suburbs in the name of work; they do their customers in Sonagachhi in the day time and get back home before night. They have to give a share of their income per customer to the landlords. This class of sex workers has supply of water in their houses but they do not have separate toilets. There is a common courtyard or *chatal* inside the houses where they have to do all their work associated with water. The girls have to serve their customers while keeping a bucket of water inside their rooms. There is an increase in the number of customers with the growth of population. And according to the demand, the number of sex workers has also increased. But the size of the area and the number of houses did not increase. Therefore the size of the rooms of the sex workers has only got smaller than before. The number of rooms is doubled with partition, a house which had 20 rooms before, there are 40 rooms now. Landlords also have the advantage of taking *selami* (advance) and rent in new rate from these extra rooms. The sex workers of this area are very conscious of aids and

sexually transmitted diseases now. They regularly go to the clinic for their check up as well as their customers. Most of the sex workers except few first and second class sex workers are very poor.⁷⁴

Abinash Kabiraj Street:

Presently there are 409 sex workers only in Avinash Kabiraj Street. This number keeps on getting up and down. Most of the girls come from *Basirhat, Bongaon, Murshidabad, Birbhum and Bangladesh*. Many girls used to come here in evil ways before. Presently that has gone down. A lot of girls came here without knowing. They were cheated by their boyfriends. Many of them come here due to the oppression in their in laws' house. Some come here due to poverty being a victim of socio-political situation. Song and dance of *baiji* have become almost extinct. A particular class of girls used to roam and sing from locality to locality. They were called *Banjaran*. They started coming to this profession once the *linebari* as well as records and cassettes came into existence. Because, no body listened to their songs afterwards. Mainly they came from *Uttar Pradesh* and they were gypsies.⁷⁵

Gaurishankar Lane:

With the change in the social and economical infrastructures, there is an increase in the number of 'flying' sex workers in the brothels. There is also an increase in the number of girls who are coming in these brothels but the number of flying sex workers have increased much more than that. Generally these girls come from *Bongaon* and *Murshidabad* but the number of girls who come from Bangladesh and Nepal is not much less either. The girls come in these professions for various reasons. Previously they were sold and forced to do this profession but that has lessened a lot. Most of the girls are coming to this profession knowingly. Though there are exceptions also. A lot of the girls are enticed by the offer of work by the agents and brought to this profession. Some of them come to this profession because of poverty. Examples of a girl leaving her house due to the familial

⁷⁴ *Jaunapallir Chalchitra* (A Pen Picture of Brothels/Red-light areas), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2001.p.78-81; The first class sex workers mostly live in exchange of either monthly or daily rent from their landlord or *malkin* (owner). The monthly rent varies from 500 to 5000 rupees. Daily rent can be between 20 to 100-150 rupees. Basically they are in this profession independently. They have proper system of toilet and supply of water in their houses. Sex workers of the second class take rooms by giving money to their landlord or *malkin*. They give monthly rent of 200 to 500 rupees. Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p.82-84; The owners of the houses in this red-light area bring the sex workers themselves and run their business in their own guardianship. There are cases of some businessmen taking the rooms on rent from the owners and decorating them according to their wishes and then running their business by renting them to the girls or on some other conditions. The appointed persons of the landlords collect the money. Plenty of money is taken as advance from the new tenants in these houses. The rent is also much higher here than other places. The monthly rent at present varies from Rs 3000 to 12000. Ibid.

unrest and joining this work is very rare.⁷⁶

Masjidbari Street:

Those who are known as *Agrawali* in this red-light area came from the various places of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. They used to roam and sing like gypsies. But after the records came into existence, their income as well as their popularity began to fall down. They started coming to prostitution for income and became known as *Agrawali*. Besides, the girls who come from *Bongaon* and *Murshidabad* hoping to get a job due to familial unrest or for poverty or the girls who come in this profession willingly.⁷⁷

Rambagan:

Remembrance of Indubala's foot steps made the girls of Rambagan realise that in order to resist any sort of torture on them, they need to be united at first. And this realization led them to develop Drubar Women's Joint Committee in the year 1995. Another important feature of Rambagan is that beside the brothel, the place is home to another community of people who are known as the 'Sudras' or the 'Dom' (lower of the society). Their similarity with the sex workers is that, both the communities are extremely neglected by the society. Many years back the people of this community were exploited by the Moneyed Zamindar class for their own safety sake. Among these people there were many famous Lathials' (the man with the sticks). There was no practice of education in this community. In the year 1952 Lokeshwarananda Swami of Ramkrishna Mission initiated custom of education among these. The Mission has arranged for their training on bamboo and cane works and even took good care so that their products get a demanding market. Jiban Krishna Ghosh was established and the trainee, the artists were trained here. Now they are trying to maintain a pace of living which is at par with the society outside. And with that they have also come up with their notions of self esteem. Still today they live near by the brothel area. Different festivals are celebrated as a result of joint participation of these two communities.⁷⁸

Sethbagan:

Among all the brothels of Kolkata, the brothel of Sethbagan has been able to maintain its liberal existence. The girls of these areas are mostly from the villages of *Bardhaman*, *Murshidabad* and

⁷⁶ Ibid. p.87-89; The cost of the room in this area depends on the size of the room. Depending on that the monthly rent varies from 500 to 4000 rupees. Landlord has his own person who pressurizes the tenants to collect the rent on time. Agents have no role to play here. Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p.91.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p.76-77.

Bashirhat. Being the victims of poverty, misguidance and family quarrels, the girls who have come here to earn are mostly illiterate.⁷⁹

Central Calcutta:

Bowbazar:

In *Nabeen Chandra Baral Street* there are no women working as a *adhiya* or *chhukri*. The sex-workers here directly take rooms from the owners. The business girls here have to abide by some rules. The sex-workers here are not allowed to stand at the door wearing *Salwar Kurtas* on with petticoats tied over their breast. The customers here are from well-to-do backgrounds. In these houses at *Nabeen Chandra Baral Street*, customers start visiting 11.00 A.M. onwards. There are not disturbances by the police, in this road. But in *Prem Chand Baral Street* police go on disturbing. Now-a-days there is an increase in the number of the sex-workers. Including the flying traders, approximately three thousand five hundred girls are engaged in his trade here. Some of the sex-workers stay in the places which they have rented but some arrive around 10 to 11 am and leave the place by 5 to 6 p.m. These girls mostly come from *Nadia* or *24 Parganas*. They come earn and go away. They are known as flying sex workers. Those who stay here permanently are mostly from *Murshidabad*, *Midnapore*, *North & South 24 Parganas* and also from Bangladesh and Nepal. The girls at Bowbazar are no more backward. They have made their own committee to unit themselves and are fighting against torture and misdeeds of all kinds. In this area the *mujras* and the dancing girls – the *Tawaaifs* have almost disappeared. The decorative lanterns illuminating all around are no more found.⁸⁰

Free-School Street , Park-Street and Teriti Bazar:

The women are independent and have nothing to do with each other. Many women come and go and business goes on in a big scale. Bengali women are negligible in number. Most of the girls are Nepalese, *Khasia* or Anglo-Indians. Here each house or hotel has its own middleman or pimp. The need for goons or bouncers is comparatively less. The rooms are rented out on a daily basis. '*Adiya*' system may exist here, though '*Noth Khola*' or '*Chhukrikata*' are totally absent.

The practice of prostitution goes on here hidden from the public view. Many clandestine private practices go on and quite a good number of girls come and go. So it would be logical to say that

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.93-94.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.60-62; The women residing in these areas were very unfortunate. Different situations arose which forced them to spend sleepless nights. Such a problem arose when *Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy* was the Chief Minister of West Bengal. Some influential people, some building owners and some ruffians together planned that prostitutes should no more be allowed to stay in that area. The helpless group of women finding no other way pleaded to the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister, *Mr. Roy* assured them that they would not be expelled.... The customers here are cart pullers, porters, masons and small traders. A few customers are there with a better earning. Ibid.

these places are not exactly prostitutes' colonies; rather that many whore-houses are present there.⁸¹

Southern Calcutta:

Kalighat:

When the zamindars started settling here, women from middle class families were brought here tactfully. In the name of saving the young widows, by titillating married women, by tricking unmarried girls in the name of marriage – this way the girls were brought to this place. Most of them had fixed clients and many of them led their lives as the kept of these clients whom they called '*babus*'. Apart from this the customers were generally from middle class or in the bankrupt elites section of the society. At that time the sex-workers did not use the method of displaying themselves on road in order to attract customers. At that time things were not so open. The sex-workers had an invisible covering around them which have gradually faded away in the last 25-30 years. At that time the women of this locality were mostly Hindus but after the partition the scenario started changing. These days there are Hindus, Muslim, Nepalese, *Bihari* and some South Indian sex workers residing in this locality. Most of the women come here from the districts, Bangladesh and Nepal. The women of this place are financially not very affluent.⁸²

Chetla:

The women residing here mainly come from Bangladesh, *Murshidabad* and different districts of West Bengal. Most of the women have come here to escape from poverty, and some has arrived here as a result of wrong guidance. Whatever may the reason be, the fact remains that now all of them has got well mingled with the practices of the area. With their own effort they have developed a culture of their own they support each other at the times of crises and have organized themselves well. Together they have learnt to resist the disturbances created a 'Durbar Women's Committee' for themselves. Now they dream of a new world for themselves.⁸³

Doighat in Khidirpur:

In this red light area mostly there are women from Madhya Pradesh, *Murshidabad*, Nepal and Bangladesh. Due to the decrease in the number of ships coming to the *Khidipur* dock, the number of prostitutes residing here has also gone down. Extremely intolerable poverty has been the main reason that drove the women to this place. Most of the houses here are one storeyed '*pucca*'

⁸¹ Debrani Kar, *Kolkata Nagarnati*, Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995. .p.65; There is no fixed rate for these girls. Some empty rooms are there, where women come with their companions, and leave after paying the rent. The permanent prostitutes that stay on get their clients through pimps. It is widely known that here *rikshawallas* work as pimps. Ibid.

⁸² *Jaunapallir Chalchitra* (A Pen Picture of Brothels/Red-light areas), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2001.p.64

⁸³ Ibid. p.70

houses. 'Chhukri' tradition is also very popular here. An important feature of this area is that Hindus, Muslims and people from other religions back grounds reside together in the same area.⁸⁴

Lakhar Math:

Most of the girls of this region are illiterate. They originally belong either to villages or suburbs. The background of almost all the girls goes to the poor peasant families who have come here out of poverty. Earlier there were mainly Bengali girls. But now many Bangladeshi, Nepali and Hindi speaking girls have joined due to their Socio-economic problem and tortures and crisis at home have led them to take this decision. As such they are never disturbed by the ruffians. They have got a healthy relation with the families, which surround their locality.⁸⁵

Tollygunge:

The women of this locality are mainly from different regions of Nepal, Bangladesh, *24-Parganas* and *Murshidabad*. In most of the cases misguidance and poverty are the reasons for their being here. Durbar Women Joint Committee has been formed here.⁸⁶

Rani Rashmoni's Janbazar: (Central Calcutta)

Information in detail about Rani Rashmoni's Janbazar red-light area has already been discussed in previous section (Topography of Calcutta Red-light Areas) of the present chapter.

Flying Sex-Workers:

- **Ultadanga:**
- **Dumdum:**
- **Rajabazar:**

Informations in detail about Ultadanga, Dumdum and Rajabazar floating zones have already been discussed in previous section (Topography of Calcutta Red-light Areas) of the present chapter.

According to All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health's survey carried out by the department of Epidemiology during 1992, it came into light that the number of prostitutes living permanently in the Sonagachi area was about 12000. During the survey, a large number of teenaged girls hide their actual age and stated that they were 18 years or more than that. The fear of police intervention was the major reason of this hiding. And the child prostitutes could manage to make their age in the 14-15 years range. According to the survey the number of girls who were less than 15 and in the 15

⁸⁴ Ibid. p.68; All these days the sex workers of this locality had been leading a life in darkness, but now as a result of their hard work a 'Durbar women joint Committee' has grown up in the area. Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p.74

⁸⁶ Ibid. p.71-72

– 19 years, the sum of such girls were 3000. In this sum the number of child prostitutes was at least 1200. Child prostitutes are those who are less than 12 years or yet to reach the puberty. Though they are the youngest but they have to face all kinds of sexual harassment to the core.⁸⁷

In 1994, from a journal in Bengali, "Jor Khabor", it was known that based on the survey of that year the number of prostitutes practiced prostitution in more than 5000 houses of Calcutta's known red-light areas was 50,000. This large number of prostitutes included girls belong to various provinces with different cultures and languages. Even 12 years old girls are also forced into this profession because child prostitution has always been an integral part of the sex industry in Calcutta. Apart from the prostitutes from brothel house, the women from well to do families are also coming to Kolkata for a part-time job in terms of prostitution. Apart from urban city of Kolkata, they are also from sub-urban cities. Their daily routine is almost like office goers. Daily they start from their house during the office time. Their neighbours think that they work in some organization or office. The office goers identify them in bus and trains. These call-girls do have some temporary places like hotel, restaurant, boats, and tomtom and when they have got nothing, and then park or Maidaan are the places where they can quietly carry out their business. And the flying sex-workers or the call girls hailed from middle and upper middle class constitute a major part of the composition of prostitution in Calcutta.⁸⁸

Another contemporary English newspaper states there were 17,000 sex-workers in 1995 in different red-light areas of Calcutta and Howrah.⁸⁹

The entire prostitution of Calcutta is not at all a homogeneous group. It is composed of large number of girls hailing from different places with different castes, religion, class and ethnic culture. Among these non-Bengali prostitutes, the number of Nepalese girls has been dominant and gradually increasing.⁹⁰ From an English newspaper of 1996 it is known that there were over 5,000 sex-workers residing in Sonagachi in this year.⁹¹

The discussion about the flying sex-workers is already made earlier. Due to the dearth or at times the greed of extra earnings, one class of woman does not hesitate to take the profession of prostitution as a part-time occupation. One such incident was available in one of the Bengali news

⁸⁷ Staff Reporter, *Kishorider Paowa Jabe, Anando Bazar Patrika*, 21st September, 1995.

⁸⁸ Sanbad Sen, *Patita Nagari Kolkata: 300 Bachharer Kolkata Ekhon Baarbonita'der Muktaanchal, Jor Khabor* (Journal in Bengali), 1st – 15th June, 1994; Also see - Staff Reporter, *Eve-teaser, Call-girl dhrita*, Sandhya Aajkal, 7th June, 1995.

⁸⁹ Staff Reporter, *Sex-workers Want Legal Sanction*, The Times of India, 3rd August, 1995.

⁹⁰ Diptosh Majumdar, *Nepal girl-runners turn to City*, the Times of India, 3rd November, 1995.

⁹¹ Staff Reporter, *Red-Alert: Minister in Sonagachi: Partha De visits brothels to monitor progress of AIDS project*, 11th October, 1996.

paper *Sandhya Aajkal* in 1995. These girls used to work as 'maid-servants' in Salt Lake housing society during morning and in the afternoon as 'a prostitute' in Sonagachi. The teenaged girls were also involved in this.⁹²

The open practice of prostitution has been gradually increasing, and it has become a serious concern both socially and administratively. Police has absolutely no clue on how to have a stop on this menace. Failure of their action plans combined with the acts of corrupt policemen, who themselves take bribes from these prostitutes are indeed helping this menace to grow further. For the sake of law and order, few of the prostitutes have to spend a day or night behind the bars but that not helping anyone. The sex-workers are soliciting in the places like Rabindrasadan Metro Railway Station, Nehru Children's Museum etc. The soliciting of the sex-workers not only is awkward for the general mass but it is also putting the daily commuters in to trouble as most of the taxi drivers in this area do not entertain the daily commuters after 9:30pm as most of the sex-workers bring customer along with them which provides the taxi drivers an avenue for extra income. According to Calcutta Police, these sex-workers basically hail from the nearby districts, child prostitutes are also often found in this group. Apart from that house-wives are also part of this. Police also feels that if this problem continues that will lead to an additional problem of criminal activities including loot, murder, etc. The incidents of loot, murders are very common these days, recently, near the tent of Bhowanipore club in *Chauringhee*, a sex-worker was murdered. Not only this, many customers have complained that their every thing was looted by getting into this sex-worker's trap. The scene of the intervention made by Calcutta mobile police to handle the situation while the sex-worker and the customer get into confrontation regarding their dealings to each other is also not absent.⁹³

In 1998 the total number of sex-workers in the country was 15 lakhs. In Karnataka, it was about 2 lakhs and in West Bengal it was more than 1 lakh.⁹⁴ Only in 1997 the total number of child prostitutes in Calcutta was 12,000. Few years back from 1997, the percentage of teenaged sex-workers was 15 to 20 of the total population of sex-workers. The proportion increased to 25 to 40 percent in 1997. In this year, according to the statistics of State Women Commission's president *Dr. Bela Gupta*, earlier the age group of the child prostitutes was 15 to 17 years but now it has been reduced to 4 to 7 years. She expressed her concerns for this rapid increase in the child prostitutes and also expressed her worry about the future in this regard, if things continue in this same direction. These girl children are brought mainly from the border areas of *North 24 Parganas, South*

⁹² Staff Reporter, *Din-e Salt Lake Poricharika, Dupure Jaunakarmi*, Sandya Aajkaal, 17th June, 1995.

⁹³ Ashish Mitra, *Kolkatar Prankendre Jankiye Bosechhe Dehobyabsar Haat*, *Sandhya Aajkal*. 15th November, 1996.

⁹⁴ Dr. Banipada Saha, *Mukto o Sadhin Patitabruti*, Bartomaan, 3rd January, 1998.

24 Parganas, Birbhum and from entire Murshidabad. Girls (*nabalika*) from the Murshidabad area are brought in to the city by the dalals and then are trafficked straight to the 'Premchand Baral Street' or to the famous 'Harkata' Lane. The number of girls trafficked in from Bangladesh and Nepal is also on rise to a larger scale. A big racket works behind this trafficking and based on the condition of health and beauty of a girl, they can be quoted from Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 50,000. The trafficking business has gradually taken the shape of an industry in which all kinds of people hailing from different strata (higher-middle-lower) of the society are involved. Benapole border is used as a main route through which girls from Bangladesh are trafficked in. Another crucial route is Satkhira Bhowra. The dalals (*aarkathis*) secretly meet all the poor families of West Bengal and Bangladesh. In this regard, the work is mainly done by women pimps (*mahila aarkathi*). They promise to provide their daughters with jobs or commit that this will give their daughters better lives. Thus, these lady pimps convince these poor old parents and after handing over some money to them, they bring their daughters along with them to the city. The poor parents do not even hesitate to hand over their children to an unknown custody, in this belief that their daughters will be happy. But in reality the picture is totally opposite, they lose their daughters forever. During 1997, in *All India Summit of Prostitutes*, organized at the Yuvabharati Kriragan, a 14 year old teenaged prostitute, named Protima Sapui from Murshidabad, narrated how she was brought into this city by one of her so called aunt, who promised her parents to offer her a job of a maid-servant in a good family and finally she found a place in one of the red-light area near Kalighat. This kind of story is not only with one Protima, there are many teenaged girls, children who have already become victim to the business of trafficking and lost their every thing before coming out of their childhood or teenage. The girls who are trafficked and brought into the red-light areas from the interior villages are getting the recognition as 'sex-workers' in later life.⁹⁵

The class of flying sex-workers neither has a fixed place nor do they have a union, this is why this class suffers from insecurity. They ply their trade at the road-side. In 1999 their population was about 12,000 under the jurisdiction of 22 police stations of Calcutta. Since it is tough to get hold of such flying sex-workers and they are out side the normal thought process with less concern, the probability of spreading AIDS through them is always high. In 1999, according to the initial estimates of an organization named, *STD/HIV INTERVENTION PROJECT*, that made a survey on the flying sex-workers of Calcutta for the first time, the total number of flying sex-workers in that year in Calcutta was about 12,000. Their lives are miserable than the women residing in the red-light areas. Since they have no union of their own, there is no way by which they can get rid of the tortures they face from the police and the *babus* but to suffer all this quietly. They also even do not

⁹⁵ Staff Reporter, *Kolkatai Shishu Jaunakarmir Sankhya Barche*, Sandhya Protidin, 9th December, 1997.

have awareness of their health matters. In all, they lead lives with full of risks. According to this survey of 1999, only 3 percent of these flying sex-workers used to use condoms and 75 percent of them had a feeling of being infected by some Sexual Transmitted Diseases (STD). Everyday in average they used to work for 7 hours and their weekly earning ranged from Rs. 100 to Rs. 3000. This survey also revealed that they mainly hailed from maffusal/suburbs. They all started to work as physical labourers but either the chief mason, or the contractor, owner of the factory used to threaten them of terminating from the job and started exercising sexual exploitation over them. Resultantly, in course of time it turned them into part-time or full-time sex-workers. Due to this reason they conceal/hide the actual nature of their work at home and everyday come out to the city, stating the family member that they are going out for the job purpose. They are the daily passengers in the local trains. But in fear of getting the real identity revealed to public, at times they have no other choice but to bear-up the tortures at the hands of *mastans* (hoodlums) and police. Though these kind of 'flying sex-workers' have no union but they have group divisions among themselves and according to the group, they have their area divided. According to this survey, in Calcutta alone there were about 56 such groups. With regard to the large scale growth in the number of 'flying sex-workers', Sociologist, *Nandini Bandyopadhyay* stated: "the number of floating sex-workers is increasing on a daily basis. The reason behind this is that the rates of houses at the red-light areas are very high, and those houses are nowadays getting sold as shops."

On behalf of this project Sanjay Bhattacharya put his own expressions in this regard. According to him, in order to reduce the risk of AIDS and other Sexual Transmitted Diseases, it is very much important to alert such 'flying sex-workers' and their customers. A larger section of their customers comprise of lorry drivers and labourers from other states. The probability of spreading AIDS among these flying sex-workers, lorry drivers and labourers is very high. In 1999, a project was started with the objective of spreading health awareness among 7,620 flying sex-workers and their customers. Under this project about 48,000 condoms were distributed in *Ultadanga, Kashipore* and *Dum Dum* area. This organization also planned to open cress for the children of those sex-workers.⁹⁶

By a Bengali Newspaper of 1999, it was brought into notice that in that year the number of child sex-workers in India was about 5 lakhs. In this, most of the girls were compelled to fulfill sexual lust of the tourists and the foreigners residing in India. But the child sex-workers and their exploitation is not only dominant in India, but this is largely practised in China, Philippines and Thailand too and the number of child sex-workers in such countries was about 9 lakhs during this year. These girls are left with no choice but to accept this profession later on. According to this report, the number of

⁹⁶ Swati Bhattacharjee, *Kolkata'i Rastar Jaunakarmi Barche, Barche AIDS Sankramaner Ashonkao*, Aanonda Bazar Patrika (n.d), 1999.

child prostitutes was about 10 lakhs in entire Asia. According to a survey, it was known that in Asia, the child prostitutes are the maximum victims to the sexual exploitations. But in India, the foreign tourists also harass the child prostitutes. During 1992 -1994, about 160 tourists were arrested in connection with sexual harassment of child prostitutes and out of them 25 were American citizens. According to this newspaper report, there were about 3 lakhs child prostitutes in America in 1999 and they all were below 18 years of age. The factors driving children into prostitution are really miserable. Some girls are misguided. They come to the city after being lured with the promise of getting job but finally they are sold off to the pimps. Dire poverty and family problems sometimes constitute to be the major factors driving many girls into the profession of prostitution. The girls who are trapped in the hands of the anti-socials/criminals, they are sold off to the distant areas. The girls who work as maid-servants, they are also not always live a secured life. In many cases these girls are sexually exploited by their landlords but they are left with no other options but to tolerate everything quietly. This news report also gives information about an organization named, '*AND CHILD PROSTITUTION IN ASIAN TOURISM*' (ACPAT) that had joined hands with some Delhi based organization during the month of November of that year. To completely eradicate all sorts of exploitations from which the child sex-workers suffer to extreme level in India, was the main objective of this mutual collaboration initiated by ACPAT. ACPAT also expressed its plan of raising the issue of rehabilitation of prostitutes with the help of UNICEF and World Health Organisation (WHO) in the International Conference in Sweden during the year of 2000.⁹⁷

According to a Hindi News paper report in 1999 the total number of prostitutes in West Bengal was 40,000. Only in Calcutta their number was 12,000. It was somewhere 5,000 in Sonagachi. According to this report, the total number of prostitutes in Calcutta's *Sonagachi, Tollygunje, Sethbagan, Khidirpore, Bowbazar, Chetla, Kalighat, Jorabagan, Dalpatti* and *Rambagan* was almost 12,000. In the suburbs of Calcutta there were 4,000 prostitutes and in different districts their number was about 20,000. Apart from this there are lots of prostitutes who do not reside in the red-light areas. They come from the suburbs areas to the city and ply their trade and return back home in the night. They solicit for securing customers by standing on the road and at the several turning points of the roads. They are not included in the above mentioned number of the prostitutes.⁹⁸

The entire Calcutta has now become a hub for 'flying sex-workers'. In this regard an article by *Rajarshi Dasgupta* published in one of the newspapers during 2002 is of very much importance which explains the perception of the flying sex-workers and along with that the reactions of the general mass and police or the administration towards them. This article also speaks about the

⁹⁷ Staff Reporter, *Bharate Nabalika Patita 5 lakhya, Asai 10*, Ananda Bazar Patrika, 29th August 1999

⁹⁸ Ajay Kumar Singh, *Ghinone Dhadhe se Nijam Pane ke Ummid Me*, Jansatta, 10th September, 1999.

initiatives taken by *Durbar Mahila Samanbay Committee (DMSC)* to generate health awareness among these flying sex workers.

Nowadays the availability of flying sex-workers is so easy that one does not need to go to *Sonagachi* or *Prem Chand Baral Street* (alias *Harkata Gali*). One can have an easy access to them at *Dharmatala* or at *Park Street* definitely, but in present time *Shyambazar* or *Bhawanipore*, *Deshopriya Park* or *DumDum* – all the places have become the centers for sex-workers, where they flock in the evening and ply trade. As soon as one gets out of the metro station or stand in front of the cinema hall, it is not very difficult to spot these flying sex-workers who are always found to solicit in these areas. During present days there is no dearth of flying points in entire Calcutta. Some people may have been benefited from this as it gives them the chance to have easy access to the sex-workers to fulfill their sexual needs. But this has created uncomfortable situations for the general women. Most often they have to face unwanted hazards. During the evening as soon as they get out of the metro station some are subjected physical harassment. Some people do not hesitate to hold female's hands and pull them. In the *Dharmatala* area girls and women have to face indecent filthy comments and gestures quite often while waiting for bus. *Chandrani Ghosh*, an employee of a private company located in central Calcutta, shares her experiences in this regard, "the situation is gradually becoming unbearable in such a way that it creates problem to wait in the bus stand alone while returning from the office. Almost everyday I request my male colleagues to accompany me until getting into a bus." Calcutta police is also aware of this new problem and accept it. According to an officer of the Hare Street Police station, "these attitudes of the sex-workers cause a new problem in conducting as well as implementation of the law and order. These sex-workers do not have permanent place to solicit. It is also always not fixed that who will stand in which place on what day. This is the main reason due to which we are unable to keep them under control." The problem is becoming more acute for the police as because of a large section of the sex-workers are not professional prostitutes; various circumstantial factors have driven them into practising prostitution. *Durbar Mahila Samannay Committee (DMSC)*, an organization committed to the work for upliftment in the living conditions of the sex-workers, is also very much concerned and worried about this increasing problem. According to them the number of such flying sex-workers in the city is about a thousand. According to the Project Director of this committee *Mrinal Kanti Dutta*, "it is becoming very much difficult task for us to spread awareness among them regarding their health and sex matters. Due to them the infectious diseases are increasing." Therefore, at last *Durbar Mahila Samannay Committee* has taken initiatives to train one or two of such flying sex workers about AIDS in order to spread the awareness. A section of the sex-workers, plying their trade from such floating points, are mainly accusing police in this matter. A sex-worker named

Shikha, who solicits to secure her customer by standing in front of metro stations of north Calcutta, says, 'what should I do? Police raids anytime and demands money. Beside that, there are *dadas* of the locality. In order to avoid such problems, floating point is better.' According to *Sudipta*, solicits in front of the cinema halls in *Tollygunj*, 'I carry out my profession in full freedom, there is no fear of *dada*, *dadal*, *mashi* in this floating – profession. In order to avoid them and their exploitations, we resort to the profession of flying sex-workers.' They have fear of police, *dadas* (hoodlums), and local political leaders. These elements mostly play the roles of dictators in the lives of sex-workers. Sex-workers have to face financial extortions and meet those high demands raised by these people; apart from that they have to fulfill several other demands too. These floating points have mainly formed in order to get rid of such exploitations and sufferings. Whatever may be the reason, now, days are gone when a place can be marked as 'prohibited area'. Now it is in the reach of every one and it is present everywhere.⁹⁹

According to a contemporary Hindi news paper of Calcutta, during 2002 the total number of sex-workers in Calcutta was about 20,000 and in entire Bengal it was about 60,000. A large section of labour class is suffering from dire poverty. Sudden lock out of many factories, mills in Bengal is the main factor that has reduced them to this poor and miserable living condition. Finding no alternative avenues, females (wives, sisters) of these families have got into the profession of sex-trade as their livelihood. According to *Mrinal Kanti Dutta* of *Durbar Mahila Samannay Committee*, during this year their number was about 4000. But they are not permanent resident of any red-light areas. Everyday they come to the city, ply their sex-trade and return home in the evening. The survey conducted by the organizations named "*Nagarik Mancha*", which works for the development and benefit of the people of Calcutta, was the main source that has provided the above information.¹⁰⁰

A news paper reported in 2002 that the number of flying sex-workers was slowly increasing in *Coachbihar* and the common people and the sex-workers of the red-light area known as *Priyaganj Colony* started getting disturbed with this growing numbers of flying sex-workers.¹⁰¹

These kinds of sex-workers are in plenty in Calcutta. *Dankunni's Ramtarini Devi's* grandchild, *Shefali*, works as a flying sex-worker in the Harkata Gali. She is 20 years old. When she was 15, in a train accident she lost her parents. She got married to a black-smith at the age of 17. Within a

⁹⁹ Rajarshi Dasgupta, *Gota Kolkatai Ekhon Jaunakarmider Bhasoman Thek*, Sanbad Protidin, Wednesday, 23rd October 2002, (5 Kartik, Bengali era 1409), Kolkata.

¹⁰⁰ Anwar Gopal, *Karkhanao Ki Bandi ne Mahilao Ko Dehbyapar Me Dhakela*, Prabhat Khabar, Friday 22nd November, 2002, Kolkata.

¹⁰¹ Staff Reporter, *Uro'der Dapot Barchhe, Samasyai Sthayee Jaunakarmira*, Uttar Banga Sanbaad, (North Bengal News), 21st November, 2002.

year her husband deserted her when *Shefali* got pregnant. At this juncture she had no body except her grandmother. They both live at a small hut in *Dankuni*. Her baby was alive only for five months. She has done all kinds of jobs in order to earn her bread and butter, i.e. worked as a maid servant in three-four houses, engaged in the work of packing detergents, worked as a helper of masons in the house construction and making incense sticks but nothing was financially profitable for her and naturally she was not satisfied with any of these works. Finding no other avenue at last she joined this flying sex-trade along with a girl *Arati*, who was five years elder to her. She secures her customers on road-side and then based on *Adhiya* business rule, she has to give the half of her income to *mashi* and with the rest half she runs her family of two members. She is going through this continuous struggle in this trade as she has to compete with the other girls of her age in getting customers. The timing for her sex-trade is from 2 in the afternoon to 11 in the night. She carries her trade in Harkata red-light area. Her grandmother comes to the local Bowbazar area and waits for her, near the *MB Sarkar* shop till that time until *Shefali* reaches there. After this, both of them return home late night by catching up the Galloping train. Like *Shefali*, the number of flying sex-workers in Calcutta is almost 3 to 4 times higher than the number of permanent sex-workers of the red-light areas. These flying sex-workers do not have any union and thus they have no other ways but to tolerate the torture at the hands of the police, the *gundas* and the *malkins*. Mostly, the flying sex-workers, like *Shefali*, have to give a big share of their income to these elements. After sharing a big amount of their income, it becomes very tough for them to arrange two meals a day. Different age groups of females, ranging from 20 years to 40 to 45 years, are involved in the flying sex-trade. Along with that there are also teenage girls between the age group of 12 to 14 years. Most of them are married. About 30% of them are divorced; about 75% of the females are deserted by their husbands, only 6% are unmarried, 4% are child-widow and girls who have their husbands for name sake, they do not have the ability to feed themselves and their children. This is why these wives are left with no option but compelled to choose this profession. They are seen in the crowded places of Calcutta like *Sonagachi*, *Rambagan*, *Kalighat* or near the *Howrah – Sealdah* railway station etc. In one of the journal named "*Namskar*" edited by *Dr. Samarjit Jana* and published from the *Bhabani Dutta* lane of Calcutta, it was mentioned that about 62.5% of these flying sex-workers are illiterate. 15% of them have studied till the primary class and 8% of them studied till matriculation. A large section of these girls are trapped by *dalals* and trafficked here from Bangladesh and Nepal. Besides this, they are also continuously trafficked from different parts of India and brought to Calcutta. In *North* and *South 24 Pargana*, most of the poor parents send their daughters for flesh-trade to Calcutta in the name of work. They work here for about 7 to 8 hours and rest of the time they spend in search of some other jobs and at times they get it too. This is how they run their life.

50% of the customers of these flying-sex workers do not use condoms; 26% of them use regularly and rest all use partly. This is why they are very prone to get infected by AIDS and 70% of them finally get infected in this disease. Because of non-existence of union among them, unlike other sex-workers, they do not get the medical benefit run by *Durbar* or other such organizations. But from 2002, about 41% of them are under this project. Few of them go to hospitals or clinics but none of them are have financial abilities to go for long term treatment, because in that case they will have to stop this sex-trade and have to suffer from dire poverty and starvation. But in this regard one development is highly visible that, due to the AIDS control projects and awareness programs initiated by different private and governmental organizations, gradually, a sense of health awareness and consciousness has been generated among almost 90% ‘flying sex-workers’. During 2002, from 3rd to 9th March, *Durbar* (it comprises of about 60,000 members and its office is situated in the *Nilamoni Mitra Street* State’s largest red-light area – *Sonagachi*) organized an International level Peace Festival at the *Yuva Bharati Krirangan of Salt Lake in Calcutta*. Sex-workers from all over India participated in this festival and along with them a large number of research scientists, social-reformers and overseers from different parts of the world also participated in this peace festival. On this occasion, in Calcutta University Institute, a discussion forum was organized for exchange of opinions and knowledge between some of the leading activists of *Durbar* and the intellectual journalists. Intellectual personalities like *Shibnarayan Roy* and *Amlan Dutta* were also present in this discussion. Few flying sex-workers also participated in this discussion forum. The information discussed above was mainly produced from this discussion forum.¹⁰²

According to the follow-up survey on the prostitutes of West Bengal conducted by *Durbar*, the ratio of child prostitutes was as follows:

Table: 2.2.P

Year	Sample Size	Percentage Ratio
1992	450	24.89
1995	496	21.47
1998	513	3.56
2001	629	3.58

Mrinal Kanti Dutta, Project Director of *Durbar Mahila Samnnay Committee (DMSC)*, presented the above survey report produced by *Durbar* in response to the article entitled “Child Prostitutes are Increasing in the State, Survey by UGC” (“*Shishu Jaunakarnee Barchhe Rajye, Samikhya UGC'r 23/12*”).¹⁰³

¹⁰² Amitabh Dasgupta, *Bhalo Aachho Kolkata?* Sanbaad Protidin, Wednesday 19th June, 2002.

¹⁰³ Staff Reporter, *Shishu Jaunakarmi, Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 12th January, 2004.

According to the English Daily newspaper ‘The Asian Age’ report in 2004, the sex workers made up for around 20 lakhs of the countries population. This number was claimed by the *Durbar Mahila Samannay Committee (DMSC)* working in West Bengal and *Pragatisheel Mahila Sangathan* working with sex-workers at Delhi’s largest red-light area located at *Shradhanand Marg* (both organizations are run by sex-workers) in the seminar claiming recognition of their right to work in Delhi (2004).¹⁰⁴

In 2004, according to the estimates of *Durbar Mahila Samannay Committee* (an organization run by the sex-workers) published in an article entitled ‘*Rajpathe Deher Pasra Jure*’, in the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, the total number of floating sex-workers in Calcutta was about 8,000 during this year.¹⁰⁵

An article, entitled ‘*When body is Business*’ (*Deho Jakhan Byabsa*) published in the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* during 2004, provided very vital statistics about the sex-worker’s average age and the types/nature of girls in the red-light areas. It largely helps in understanding the characteristics of demography of this profession: ¹⁰⁶

Table: 2.2.Q

Average Age of the Prostitutes		Girls in the Red-light Areas		
Year	Avg. Age (In Years)	Year	Non-Professional	Adult
1991	22	1995	14%	9.69%
1995	22	1998	14.67%	12%
1998	27	2001	21.12%	16%
2001	28	2003	26%	22%
2003	28.57			

NGOs like *Sanlaap*, *Durbar* and other International organizations agree that the “the demand of sex is gradually on rise in city. A large number of young educated girls belong to the well to do families of middle and upper middle class are nowadays getting into this sex industry through the sex racket in order to meet this rising demand for fulfilling sexual appetite in the city. The recent raids and arrest of these kinds of sex rackets in *New Alipore*, *Salt Lake* and *Laketown* areas has also proved that.” In this regard, along with *Durbar*, few other NGOs like *Sanlaap*, Institute of *International Social Development Sanstha* are also working in Kolkata red-light areas and its suburbs. *Tapati Bhowmick* from *Sanlaap* has successfully rescued many young/minor flying sex-workers from the areas like *Rasbehari*, *Gariahat*, *Hajramore*. According to her, “most of these girls choose this

¹⁰⁴ Staff Reporter, *New Delhi Disabled Approach Kalam: Delhi, Kolkata Sex-workers meet for rights*, The Asian Age, New Delhi, 31st March, 2004.
¹⁰⁵ Soma Mukhopadhyay, *Rajpathe Deher Pasra Sahar Jure:Sharir Byabsar Muktanchal*, Anando Bazar Patrika , 3rd June, 2004.
¹⁰⁶ Staff Reporter, *Deho Jakhan Byabsa*, *Ananda Bazar Parika*, 2004.

profession due to poverty and unemployment. They normally stands by the road-side and they are also little educated. But most of the girls, in *Lachipur* of *Asansol* or in *Bowbazar* area's *Prem Chand Baral* Street, are hailing from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh or Nepal. In most cases, their parents themselves are selling their daughters for practising prostitution." *Rajarshi Chaudhury* of NGOs like *International Social Development Sanstha* says, "Demand for sex has increased phenomenally in metro cities of third world country India. You would be shocked to know that school-college girls from well to do middle class families have got into this profession. We can rescue the minor sex-workers from road-side or from the brothels, but how can we stop these teenaged student professionals who are involved in the sex racket carried out in flats." She said with profound grief, "The one who can stop these teenaged/minor girls from getting into this sex trade are those rich customers who constitute to be a part of this so *bhadralok society*. But, ironically, like others, they also desire to have access to these minor girls in order to meet their sexual lust."¹⁰⁷

According to a survey, in 1997, the total number of child prostitutes across the globe was about 1 crore. Then in the last six years it must have reached somewhere near 1 crore and many lakhs. In Asia, Africa and Latin America the market of child prostitution is very good. There is also a huge supply of child prostitutes in order to meet these high demands in these zones of the world. In Brazil the number of child prostitutes is about 3 lakhs, in Philippines it is about 60,000, in Thailand 8 lakhs, in Sri Lanka 30,000 and in India it is 4 lakhs (according to the news report of 2004). The very reason for the rapid increase in the child prostitutes in these third world countries is the low economic conditions. The child prostitutes are increasing in the same way as the number of child labourers are increasing in various factories and mills. The minor/teenaged girls trafficked from remote areas are generally very much innocent by nature and a weak helpless nature. That makes them more vulnerable and unable to raise opposition against any sort of violence, exploitations they are subjected to. It further aggravates the possibilities where men/women can easily exercise control over them and make them victim to their all tortures, exploitations. It is not that much difficult to bring these innocent poor helpless girls under control, because, finding no other way out, out of extreme fear they surrender themselves to the existing situation very easily. The one of the major reasons of high demand of child sex-workers is due to the prevalence of one popular concept among general mass that – 'minor girls are virgin, therefore, having sex with them make the is less prone to get infected by STD/venereal diseases!' A Calcutta based survey has explored the information that a large number of these child prostitutes are mainly trafficked from Bangladesh by female *dalal*. They are mainly trafficked in from *Satkhira*, *Mohanpur*, *Jessore*, *Jhinda*, *Rajshahi*, *Nababgunj*, *Jaipurhaat*.. These female *dalals* give false assurance to their poor parents of giving

¹⁰⁷ Krishna Kumar Das, *Protarona Diye Shuru Ekhon Shudhui Byabsa*, Ananda Bazar Patrika, 2004.

their daughters jobs, get them married off and they even offer these parents some cash too for securing their consent in this regard. Another country is Nepal from which a huge number of child/teenaged prostitute is trafficked in India. Large number of girls is trafficked in from Katmandu, *Beragunj*, *Biratnagar* to Calcutta and then they are sent to Delhi, Mumbai. There are few reasons behind this influx of large number of Nepali girls in India. These factors are as follows: i) Illiteracy; unawareness, innocence of Nepali people; ii) dire poverty; iii) lack of natural resources; iv) absence of political awareness; v) absence of strict control in Nepal and India border. According to *Dilip Majumdar*, “by living life being confined within the four walls of brothels and trading their bodies everyday, these innocent and pure hearted children – teenaged girls, gradually, would be turned into a machine like the 45 number prisoner of ‘*Deshe Bideshe*’ (a Bengali novel), written by *Syed Muztaba Ali*. Love, hatred, feeling, heart, wish, hope, family and society are absent in their lives; if they have something, it is the male physical desire and sexual lust, to which they have to surrender themselves everyday like machines.”¹⁰⁸

The following newspaper report throws a glimpse on the topographic as well as demographic picture of prostitution in Calcutta and Bengal which includes minor prostitution as well. It also talks about the ‘self-regulatory board’ setup by the NGO Durbar with a motto to prevent child prostitution and girls who are forced to drive into this profession – prostitution:

Reasonable estimates point out that about 5% of the State’s 80,000 sex-workers working in 71 known red-light areas are minor girls. “Our success in Kolkata can be copied elsewhere. Here the number of minor sex-workers is only 1.2 percent from over 25% decade back”, claimed Dutta.¹⁰⁹

Table: 2.2.R

Dark Alleys	State	City
Red light areas	71	27
Sex-workers	80,000	20,000
Minors	4,000	250

A contemporary English News paper report provides a numerical data about the ‘flying sex-workers’ soliciting in some of the areas of Calcutta.

- The absolute number of flying sex-workers touches – **5,193**
- Women operate through the length of Rasbehari Avenue – over **260**
- Near Ruby Hospital – **100**
- In Moore Avenue – **45**
- In Ballygunj – **30**
- In Phool Bagan More in East Kolkata – **80**
- In Beadon Street – Hedua Crossing – **120**

¹⁰⁸ Dilip Majumdar, *Balaikara Janiilo Taharao Ramoni*, Sanbaad Protidin, 20th July, 2004.
¹⁰⁹ Rakeeb Hossain, *A Ray of Hope for Teens in Flesh-trade*, www.hindustantimes.com, Saturday, 25th September, 2004.

- In Park Circus – **over 50**
- In Lake Town (around Jaya Cinema) – **as many as 30**

At known red-light areas of Calcutta the number of commercial sex-workers stands at 21,507 (2004).¹¹⁰

Author *Debrani Kar* has widely discussed about the nature of prostitutes that includes married, unmarried, adult and teenaged and minor girls in the brothel of Calcutta during 1995 while she was engaged in writing her book entitled '*Kolkatar Nagarnati*' (Prostitutes of Calcutta). According to the survey conducted during the contemporary period the numerical strengths of married and unmarried women in the prostitution was almost equal. In some of the brothels the unmarried women were preponderant. But, according to the survey report of the Intelligence Department of Calcutta Police in 1972, the preponderance of married women among the prostitutes was more prominent. Numerically, adult girls mean the girls above 17 years were most dominant. The girls aged between 12 years to 16 years are considered to be child prostitutes. But, according to the survey conducted by contemporary journalist *Shukla Rudra*, their average age stands 13 years. But, according to the survey conducted by author *Debrani Kar*, their average age stands 12 years. These minor girls are turned into adulthood through artificial procedures (the detail description of this procedure has been narrated in the section entitled 'Socialisation of Prostitutes' – Chapter IV entitled 'Self Perception and Culture of Prostitutes'). *Debrani Kar* found girls in the *Watgunj* red-light area who lost their virginity even at the age of 10 years. Most of them had not yet reached the puberty. At that point of time, there was no statistics available of the child prostitutes in Calcutta. But according to *Shukla Rudra's* survey, the proportion of child prostitutes in entire India was about 20% of the total population of prostitutes. *Ms. Shukla Rudra* had divided 30,000 child prostitutes according to their areas. But rapid rise in the number of child prostitutes can reach the equal proportion of the general adult prostitutes – this possibility was also not totally ignored by them at that point of time. Not only in India, but demand for/of child prostitutes is also enormous across the globe. In Thailand there is a separate wing/residence for the child prostitutes where they are kept and not allowed to go outside. Thousands of girl child are forcibly involved in this profession. They are trafficked in from South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and other neighbouring countries and sent to the various brothels. At times they are also sent to various places in order to accompany the officials of private companies while they travel. The reason for the high demand of child prostitutes is that the clients give more importance to the virgin girls than others. Besides, it is widely believed that having sex

¹¹⁰ Aditya Ghosh, *AIDS threat looms large as sex-trade creeps into 'safe' neighbourhoods*, Times of India, Friday, 1st October, 2004.

with child prostitutes is less prone to get infected by STD/venereal disease. Moreover, there is a popular belief in brothels that says having sex with virgin girls cures all STD/venereal diseases.¹¹¹

During the first half of the 20th century *Manada's* statement regarding the condition of women in the society and fallen women also explores that how hidden prostitution was also present during that time. About these we can/are/ have been come across from the census report of early 20th century too. And very late 20th century's primary sources also provide detail information about clandestine prostitutes, 'Flying Sex-workers, call-girls, with its diverse nature. Therefore, there is a continuation throughout the country with regard to the nature of the profession of the prostitution; in present day which has been termed as 'sex-work'.

Manada Says:

Gradually I understood that those girls who left home on their free will or after being seduced by some wicked men have other problems than mere 'what to eat' or 'where to stay', 'How to live?' was their main worry. In the city of Calcutta, a woman could earn enough money for herself by doing various jobs or small business. But I noticed that most of these women who learnt to fend for themselves, were again going the wayward way of a prostitute. The reason was that they had not come through the rigid frame of the family life of a married woman. These women worked and earned money as – '*paanwalis*' (beel-leaf sellers), maid servants at boarding-houses or homes, vendors of fish or vegetables, cooks, factory workers, cleaning and sorting of spices, theatre-actresses, folk-singers at temples or roadside, nurses, music-teachers, midwives, lady-doctors, railway booking clerks or telephone office clerks. All of them could earn enough money for themselves and if wished so, could lead a normal and pure life. But from my experience I can say that most of them did not do that.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, Mitra and Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1401, Maagh (Bengali Era), 1995. p.38-39

¹¹² Manada Devi, *Shikhita Patitar Atmacharit* (Autobiography of an educated Prostitute), Chirayat Prakashan, Kolkata, January 2004, (Poush, 1410 – Bengali Era). p.48

2.3. Dynamics of the Operation System:

The flesh trade or the institution of prostitution possesses a highly organized base and superstructure. Brothels are that place which is frequented by sex starved people. But the clients do not constitute the only determinant to regulate the entire brothel organization. The entire brothel organization is maintained by various elements like pimps, money-lenders, madams (*Mashi*) and others.¹¹³

2.3.1. Shop-keepers:

If we look at the earlier situation we can see the style of business done by shop-keepers in the brothel area. All things used to bear a higher price than the M.R.P. (the maximum retail price) of the item. If a piece of soap costs 4 rupees outside, it would cost 6 here. A bottle of cold-drink would cost 7 rupees instead of 5. If anyone questions the shopkeeper, he would react, 'Take if you want to, or else get lost'. The prostitutes did not dare to protest in fear of being noticed or of eve-teasing. Unless absolutely necessary, these girls were reluctant to go out to the market. After the foundation of 'Durbar' (an NGO run by sex-workers spearheading movement for the assertion of sex-workers' right), its volunteers made them understand that these girls were their customers. If the shop owners charged them higher price, they would get things from outside. Moreover, this kind of arbitrary pricing would bring them under the purview of the consumer forum or the customer protection laws. These shopkeepers were given a notice to collect the correct price. If not, the girls would go out to buy things from outside the locality. On such occasions, if there is any report of eve-teasing or any harassment 'Durbar' would interfere and book the culprit.¹¹⁴

2.3.2. Money Lenders:

Most of the prostitutes lead life without having any definite aim or plan for the future. They are more concerned about their present life rather being bothered about the future which is full of uncertainty¹¹⁵. Their uncertainty of live and vulnerable condition often subjected them to various exploitations. Before the starting of 'Sonagachi Project' (1992) there were two types of economic exploitation (i) *Dadon* which includes three types of money-lenders (a) *Kistiwallahs* (b) *Goldsmith* or local Jewelers and (c) the *Chotawallahs*. The other was (2) '*Chit-funds*'¹¹⁶ though after the

¹¹³ B. Joardar, *Prostitution In Historical and Modern Perspectives*, Inter.India Publication, New Delhi, 1984. p.100

¹¹⁴ Mrinalkanti Dutta, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.121

¹¹⁵ B. Joardar, *Prostitution In Historical and Modern Perspectives*; Inter.India Publication, New Delhi, p. 121

¹¹⁶ Mrinalkanti Dutta, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.133

establishment of Durbar (The NGO run by sex-workers) these types of money lending operations have substantially reduce even though it cannot be claimed that they are totally uprooted.

Dadon:

Kisti System:

The 'installment' money-lenders are known as '*kistiwallahs*'. The rate of installments in this *Kisti* system is like this: - If someone borrows 500 rupees, she would have to pay back at the rate of 10 per day for seventy-two days, which is 720 rupees with interest. Again, if any one fail to clear the loan in seventy-two days after the due date she will have to continue to pay a daily fine of rupees 5 per hundred. If it was 500, she will have to pay 25 as fine daily for breach of contract, over and above the loan amount. This fine is known as '*khelap*' (*khelap* - failure to keep one's word).¹¹⁷

Girls from the various prostitute-colonies generally have to bear a perpetual burden of debts. Since they never have enough savings, they have to borrow continuously for medical treatments and other things. A class of money-lenders thriving in Harkata, Watgunge, Kalighat and Sonagachhi localities give loans at a high rate of interest. These loans are to be repaid within 72 days. Because of this tremendous financial pressure, the girls have to earn money even when sick or menstruating. Sometimes we hear about instances of suicide under unbearable pressure. But mostly women of very low income group only suffer this fate.¹¹⁸

The rules of *Dadon* are so intricate that it would confound anyone beyond limits.¹¹⁹

Pawn Brokers:

If someone notices it will be seen there are many small gold shops around the brothel areas of Calcutta. The reason for mushrooming of this gold business was that, firstly, the prostitutes prefer to keep their savings in the form of gold jewelry, which they could use to raise loans in times of emergency, or keep for their retired life. The same shop owners would give them loan against the gold ornaments. In those days it was difficult for these 'fallen girls' to go to the banks to open accounts. They therefore remained outside the mainstream of society. The only more or less safe method of saving was by buying gold ornaments, or by 'opening a book' at the gold shop. This 'book' was a small 4 inch by 3 inch notebook bought from the stationers to keep their accounts. Even though it resembled a bank's pass book, it was by no way a savings account. Banks at least used to give interest at the rate of 4% on one's savings. These petty goldsmiths not only gave any

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995. p.68

¹¹⁹ Mrinal Kanti Dutta, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.133

interest, they even refused to sign the entries of money deposited in the 'book'. Entries were like this:

23.5.1984Deposited Rs. 400

There was ample scope for the moneylenders to cheat the girls at a later date; even though such instances were rare. Now let us see how they pawned their gold for cash. In case of exigency these girls used to keep the ornaments at the gold shop and take money as loan. In those days, the interest charged by the shop keepers was at the rate of 6 rupees per month per 100 rupees loan. That comes to a huge interest of 72% per annum. In some other case, the girl had to give in writing that if for some reason, she fail to clear the loan amount within a certain period, the ornament would go back to the shop owner. Whatever was the current rate of gold on the day of taking loan was the basis of the amount of lending loan. The price or monetary value of the deposited gold jewelry would be measured or weighed on the basis/line of that current rate of the gold on that particular day concerned and half the value of the gold was the available loan amount. For example a girl goes with a gold chain weighing 1 *bhori* 4 *annas* (approximately 11 grams); and on that day the going rate of gold was 2000 rupees. Then the price of the chain on the day comes to 2500 rupees. The maximum loan amount available to the girl would be 1250 rupees.

Chotawallas:

Those who did not have gold, use to borrow money from '*Chotawallas*'. In these red light areas, these *chotawallas* were usually the rich and influential men of the locality, like landlords, local *Dadas* or goons or their relatives. Before lending they used to get a white paper with a revenue stamp signed (thumb impressions in most cases) by the borrower. It would read as follows:

I, Ms. so and so is borrowing 5000 rupees from this Dada. I will repay him within such and such date. If I fail to do so, I am bound to give my such and such thing to Dada.

There was no mention about the interest. But in effect, the dads would collect 2 rupees per day for 100; and that came to 730% per annum. Here too, the fine or payment for default was similar. If any sex-worker failed to repay on a certain day, her penalty @ 5 per 100 rupees would be added to the principal. For example, a girl has borrowed 1000 rupees. She repays a daily amount of 50 (20 rupees interest and 30 towards principal). After repaying for 5 days, her repayable loan amount come to the original loan amount less Rs.30 for 5 days {or, $1000 - 30 \times 5 = 850$.} For some serious problem if a girl fails to make any payment on the sixth day, her *Dadon* or loan amount would become 5 rupees per 100. That comes to 40 rupees for 800 + 2.50 for 50 = a total of Rs 42.50. In case of *Kistiwallas* or installment payment, there was a convenience. Once the principal amount was repaid, the penalties were deducted on a daily basis. But in case of *Chotawallas*, the penalty

amount was added to the principal amount .So, or failing to repay on the sixth day, the principal becomes $850 + 42.50 = 892.50$.¹²⁰

At this rate if anyone failed to pay the installment for 5 days in succession, one can imagine the consequences. Interest, and interest on interest, would bind the borrower in a perpetual debt-trap from which it was impossible to come out. All her belongings would go to the *chotawalla* one by one. And finally she herself would be reduced to a slave. As long as she lived, until she fell sick, all her earnings would go to the *chotawalla*. As long as she was not too old or till she had some flesh left on her bones, she had to 'work' for her moneylender and stand on the street from morning 9 to night 12 o'clock. There was no question of rest even for common cold, fever or menstrual periods. If she refused, the severity of punishment would be unimaginable. Thrashes and beatings with sticks were routine affair; there have been instances where hot chilly pepper was put inside her vagina in a most cruel form of punishment.¹²¹

In this respect the case history of Bina cited by the insider Mrinalkanti Dutta brings out the mechanism very well. Bina'di was a Nepali woman. She was having a son named Mohan, whom Srikarna used to teach. Bina was an exceptional Nepali woman, normally Nepalis are timid and keep them within themselves, but Bina'di was not that kind. She was exuberant and helpful. She had only one fault—if she saw anyone beating up or even reprimanding her child, she would protest and even turn abusive. It was unbelievable that such a person could run away leaving behind her son, Mohan. During this time, Mohan was under the supervision of Mrinal Kanti Dutta. A long time passed but there was no sign of her return. After three months when no rent was paid, the landlord locked the room. And after the fifth month, the owner of the house auctioned all the furniture, deducted five month's rent and paid the balance to Mohan. Poor Mohan had to leave the house which was given on rent to another girl. Poor Mohan used to pray long for the return of her mother but everything was in vain. Finally Mrinal Kanti Dutta came to know through a girl named Chapala, who visited Kamathipura red-light area, that Bina'di was by that time settled in that well know red-light area Kamathipura of Bombay. Both Mohan and Mrinal Kanti Dutta immediately reached Bombay and finally there they found Bina'di. The deteriorating condition of beautiful Bina'di was really shocking to Mrinal Kanti Dutta. Initially, he even found difficulties to recognize his known Bina'di. The woman, who was known as Nepali-Bina in Kalighat, came originally from Nepal and was very fair-complexioned and exceptionally beautiful when he last saw her. She had dark circles under her eyes and looked skinny. She had become old in the last few years. When they came to know the reason why she disappeared, it made them numb. Usually these Nepalese sex-workers

¹²⁰ Ibid. p.133-35

¹²¹ Ibid, p.135-36

lived together in one room sharing their earnings. Twenty years back, there was a practice among them. If four girls shared a room, they would spend their daily earnings on food and rent and keep the balance in a mud-pot. At the end of the month, whatever was saved would be equally shared by the four. Bina'di helped a Nepali girl named Hena when she was in badly need of money which she had to send to her village for the purchase of a land costing Rs. 50,000 as she got a letter from her parents asking for the amount. But with their meager earning, this was a huge amount. However, Bina became compassionate and together they took Rs. 40,000 loans from a money lender named Atul at 10 rupees interest per day and also scrapped their savings which was close to Rs. 10,000. Bina had to sign the loan paper as a guarantor. Hena went to her native place but did not return. This way months and months passed. The interest shoot up to Rs. Rs.4,000 per month which was far more than her monthly income of Rs. 2,500. The moneylender's red-eyes and threat started mounting in intensity. Mrinal Kanti Dutta explains:

....Finally, Bina had to go to Nepal in search of Hena. No, Hena's parents had no idea. They never wrote any letter, and there was nothing about this land. What they knew was that Hena married a boy from the next village and was settled. Again Bina went in search of Hena and found her in the adjacent village in Nepal. To her utter dismay, she found a different Hena. Seeing her, Hena flared up in anger, shouted at her and said she did not know Bina at all. Being thrown out of Hena's house Bina di had no way but to come back to her house in Kalighat, the burden of loan still on her head. This moneylender Atul was always after Bina for sexual favors. He was ready to spend any amount on her landlady or to offer drinks to her friends and pimps to get Bina's favor. Now he got a chance to exploit her to the utmost. It was a boon for him. He started visiting Bina regularly and she had to sleep with him every night against her will. Even though Bina got used to him within two months, Atul was not the type to let things go so easily. His frustrated attraction for her for the last ten years had made him cruel and perverted. He started severe sexual abuse on her. First he started with oral sex, and then went on to sadistic ways of torture by biting or scratching all over her body. To see her bleed gave him pleasure. In the meantime, in spite of paying all her daily income to Atul, the interest amount had reached a whopping 60000. The calculation of this was beyond Bina's understanding. All her protests were answered by threats of court case. Poor, illiterate Bina avoided going to the court. Being frequent victims of police raids, these prostitutes were used to being to police stations. But going through the paraphernalia of making a complaint and following up a case was beyond her capacity. The fear of losing the case and facing worse tortures at the police station prevented her from asking for legal help. So, finally Bina di chose escape as the easiest way out. She gave an overdose of drink to Atul and went out on the pretext of going for a 'night show'. To make the matter look more natural, she left her dear son, Mohan at home and left for Bombay alone on the same night. How could she leave Mohan? She depended on me, she said. 'I knew, if you live only on salt and rice, my Mohan would also get his share of salt and rice and live under your care.' she said.¹²²

¹²² Ibid. p.125-30

Chit funds:

Usually no sex-worker can save for more than a month. After saving money for a month or so, invariably the news of her saving becomes known to all. As soon as the secret is out, either the *babu* or the landlady grabs her money. If the entire money does not vanish too soon, it is spent on drinks. The moment her landlady or employer comes to know of the extra money, she starts whimpering—'please dear, I need the money very badly, I will return it to you next month'. If she shows reluctance, she may have to leave the house the very next day. Totally at the mercy of the *masi* or landlady, usually the girls do not displease the *masis*. Month after month passes, but the money does not come back; the girl is afraid to ask lest she is thrown out of the house. Now if the *Babu* ever comes to know that the girl or his *Bibi* has saved some money, he would be in the seventh heaven. He would leave no stone unturned to get hold of this money earned by the poor girl. His excuses are like this: 'I am in great trouble. If I can not send this money immediately to the village, this land that I had got, will go out of my hands' or, 'If I cannot pay the LIC premium the entire money will be forfeited.' Like this, by begging or pleading, he would somehow get hold of the money. While taking, he promises to pay her back double the amount and pretends that it is only a loan. But neither the double nor single amount ever comes back. For all these reasons, a sex-worker rarely saves any money. She loses interest in no time. Mrinal Kanti Dutta says, "Month after month passes, she never gets back her hard-earned money. They carry on their day to day existence; the rest is left to God."

Some girls are more independent. They do not much care for the *babu*, nor do they have any landlady to pay. Then again, they have a tendency to spend their money on drinks at the slightest pretext. If they are sad, to drown their sorrow they drink. For example, Mrinal Kanti Dutta describes, 'a girl has earned for months to bring up her brother. She paid for his marriage. Then finally the same brother does not care to keep in touch. Does not allow her to his house and does not even invite her to his wedding. Out of dejection, she takes to drinking. She drinks during the day; she drinks at night. Days pass in drunken stupor until she finishes her entire savings and cannot pay for liquor any longer. So the money of a prostitute flies into thin air. It is eaten up by *Masi*, by *Babu* or on drinking.'

For all these above-mentioned reasons, the most favorite saving-scheme of a sex-worker is 'daily collection'. Before this, the 'Chit-Fund' used to collect whatever amount they chose to pay for 2/3 years. After the end of that period, say on the 25th month they used to pay ¼ of the amount on top of the principal. And after 3 years, they would pay half the amount as interest. Like this tempting them with the assurance of paying ¼ or ½ a rupee for every one rupee, these chit-funds used to collect

money for years. Then, as the time for repayment neared, they put down the shutters of their office and vanished. Being illiterate, the women were unable to make FIR, social factors did not allow them to do much by way of demanding justice. They had no other go but to cry their hearts out. 'In this way in red light areas many Chit Funds have thrived, made lakhs of rupees and finally closed down and fled.'¹²³

In connection with this one incident narrated by M.K. Dutta stands very much relevant. He says:

Then I was attached to the Kalighat clinic under 'Sonagachhi Project' as clinic attendant... at the end of the month I had to go to the store-keeper to get condoms and medicines from the All India Institute of Public Hygiene and Public Health... as I was going to enter the small room next to the room No 205 of the Dept. of Epidemiology ... I saw a group of 'peers' from Tollygunge coming noisily with a girl into the room... removing the crowd around me I peeped and saw a girl sitting and weeping...occasionally wiping her tears with the end of her sari...from the whispers of the people around I gathered that this girl Laila's *Babu* or fixed customer has cheated some eighty to ninety girls of the area and ran away... how can so many girls be cheated simultaneously? I wondered. What was the total amount? I asked. Some said it was 5 lacs. Some said ...even more. After asking different people standing around me, I calculated and gathered that this man had cheated various girls at different times and had taken away about some 2-2.5 lacs of rupees. I asked why all of them had given so much money to Laila's *Babu*? What they replied was in a nutshell –'Laila's *Babu* was working in a bank. So we all had opened our accounts there. Whatever we could save daily, say 5 to 50 rupees, we used to give him, and he would deposit them in our respective accounts. He was an agent of the bank. He had said that after three years we would get half of what we saved as interest along with the principal .Like this he was collecting money for the last one and half years.' I understood that they were told if anybody deposited some ten thousand in installments, after three years she would get back fifteen thousand rupees. Laila's client Bhombol was not even a proper Bank employee; he was an agent of one of those chit-funds that close down their shutters just before the promised three years and their workers vanish into thin air. ... Through the tearful whimpering of Laila we could gather that Bhombol had fled. We dispersed for the day; but within a few days we fell into great commotion when we went to investigate in Tollygunge. We were surrounded by an irate crowd, as if we were the cheaters. Finally we had a meeting and it was decided that an F.I.R. would be made at the police station against Bhombol as well as the company. Even though the case is still going on, till now not a single girl has got back even a single rupee back. Bhombol was already absconding; after 2/3 months, even Laila left leaving her room filled with all her belongings. Nobody knows her whereabouts till date.¹²⁴

One chit fund which was not that much famous was the Monali Fund. This chit fund collapsed and resulted into 'losses of hundreds of thousands of rupees of sex-workers in the Sonagachi area'. After this incident sex-workers and other residents moved to the police-station and lodged a complaint but despite all efforts they never got their money back. It is very much easy to borrow loans and taking loans is intrinsically connected to the part of the system in the red-light area. Mashis and land lords lend 'soft loans' and the repayment of that loan is subjected to the adjustment

¹²³ Ibid. p.136-37

¹²⁴ Ibid. p.131-33

against the rent that is paid daily basis, with interest. Traders are also found to lend money/loan. The common interest on loans is 60 percent.¹²⁵ Excessive expense over/more than income often push larger section/most of the sex-workers into debt. 'Traders going from house to house sell their goods-foods, clothes, jewellery – at a mark- up, and give easy credit with high interest to sex-workers.' Many women are indebted not only to money lenders and landlords but also to tailors, clothes sellers, food-stalls owners, dispensaries, cigarette stall owners and police as well as clerk of the court of the law.¹²⁶

One news report gives information about the money lenders in brief:

It is a regular pay day for the daily labourers of the municipal corporation. Bleary eyed men in soiled dhotis line the corridors of the account department, perspiring in the sweltering heat, waiting eagerly for the moment when their palms will clutch the slim yet familiar bundle of paper. Only to be snatched away. The legendary pathans of Kabul might have donned trousers in keeping with contemporary fashion, but they have hardly changed their vocation. The archetypal money lenders still thrive in the dark alley ready to advance a paltry amount for exchange of human blood. And the humane angle that Tagore strove to attach to one of their kin shatters dismally as they wait in the gates to extract the money that they lend at exorbitant interests. They are always there with unfailing regularity, waiting behind the long queue of workers on any pay-day.Mr BiraSingh, Mr. Avtar Singh and Mr Jogendar Singh have prospered for generations in this business behind the façade of their glittering office and electronic goods in Bowbazar, lies their real business of money lending. Mr. Avtar Singh loans money at an annual interest for 20 percent. In the beginning of every month, his imposing frame waits patiently inside the corporation building waiting to extract his due. ...The sex workers of Kamani Mansion face the same problem every month: "We don't mind paying their share, but they invariably extort more", said one. The money-lenders advance anything between Rs 10,000 to Rs. 12000 at a rate of 25 percent of them. And as if being subjected to the "ire of the society" is not enough, the prostitutes are ensnared once again in the vicious webs of these mercenaries. The saga of exploitation continues and as the ever growing needs of humans consolidate the foundations of such injustice, the joy of each pay-day will remain eclipsed by the visits of the should destroying creditors'.¹²⁷

2.3.3. Bariwallis/Brothel Keepers:

Definition:

The literal meaning of the words *Bariwallis/Bariwallas* is 'house owner' which means the 'brothel keeper' in the Brothel world. These brothel keepers might be male or female. The *bariwallis* or female brothel keepers are the counterpart of the madams of the brothel in Europe. The *bariwalli* is also a prostitute who is in most cases a retired or old prostitute having some capital.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree, Kolkata*, 2002, p.98

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.95; for knowing this money lending system and exploitation of Sex-workers entirely, please see. 'Namaskar', Year 7, Volume 1, January 2005, Durbar (Patrika), Durbar Prokashani. p.11-19

¹²⁷ Tikli Basu. *The Special Report/Money lenders thrive at the cost of human compulsion: Kabuli Caper: More loan is more cash*, Asian Age, Calcutta, 5th June, 1995.

¹²⁸ S. N. Mukherjee, *Prostitution in India*, DasGupta & Co, Calcutta, 1936. p.182

The Categories of the Bariwallis/Brothel Keepers:

In the red-light areas, there are two types of house-owners. Those who take the house on lease from the actual landlord are called 'Managers'. And those who takes one or two rooms on rent to run the business by taking a share of money earned by the girls are known as '*Malkins*' (something like a proprietress). *Malkins/Bariwallis/Masis* are mostly old sex-workers who after retiring from the profession, employ younger girls in their rooms and start business by earning through them.¹²⁹

The definition of *bariwalli* is found in the well known autobiography "*Sikshita Patitar Atmacharita*" by Manada Devi, an educated prostitute, where she says:

The same carriage took extra money and took us to a prostitute's room in Harkata Gully at Champatala. This woman was known to Rajbala. She had taken the entire house on rent and used to run the brothel by letting out rooms to individual whores. Other than her own trade, she earned some more money in this method. Such women were known as '*Bariwallis*' in these quarters. This woman was known as '*Rani-bariwali*' in the locality.¹³⁰

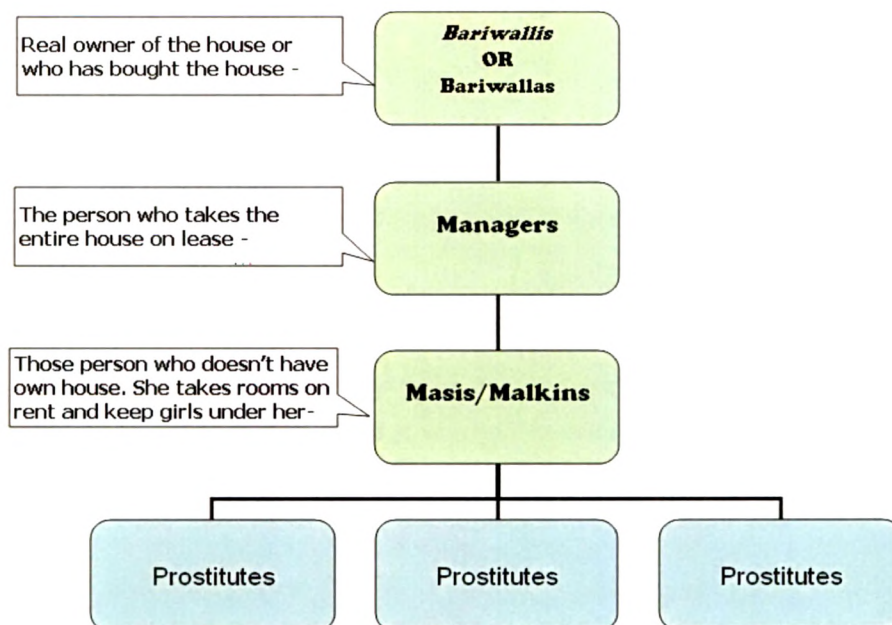
But in today's world the structure of the ownership of the house has changed to certain extent. The expansion of hierarchy in the ownership has made the things more complicated now. Though the line between these categories is not that much clear and generally the terms used *Bariwalli*, *Masi*, *Malkin* overlapped. But there is a sharp difference between these categories:

- Real owner of the house or who has bought the house is called: - *Bariwalli/Bariwalla*
- The person who takes the entire house on lease is called: - Manager.
- The person who takes room on rent and keeps girls under her, called *Malkin*. In this case the rent is collected by *Bariwalla/Bariwallis*.

From this hierarchy it is simply understood that the mere prostitutes bear the actual burden as they are at the bottom level of the hierarchy.

¹²⁹ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005. p.113; In the Gaurishankar Lane of Sonagachi red-light area, Government is the owner of this road like other roads. And the owner of the land is the person who bought it. And the owner of the house is the person who buys or builds it, that means the landlord or landlady. The ownership of the room goes to the person who either takes the room from the landlord on a rent or on a condition from the tenant of the room. What will be the cost of the room depends on the size of the room. Depending on that the monthly rent varies from 500 to 4000 rupees. Landlord has his own person who pressurizes the tenants to collect the rent on time. Agents have no role to play here. - *Jaunapallir Chalchitra* (A Pen Picture of Brothels/Red-light areas), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2001. p.87

¹³⁰ Manada, Devi, *Sikshita Patitar Atmacharita*, (autobiography in Bengali), Chirayat Prakashan, Kolkata, 2004. p.51



The Class Structure of the Prostitutes: A Major Determinant to Regulate the Roles of Bariwallis/Brothel-Keepers:

In this line the business with body has four kinds – self-employed, 'adhiya', contract & 'chukri'.¹³¹

(a) Self-employed Prostitutes:

Those who are independent; they have their own rooms or flats and do not have to share their income with anybody. They are called 'self-employed'.¹³² In Sonagachi, first class sex workers mostly live in exchange of either monthly or daily rent from their landlord or *malkin* (owner). The monthly rent varies from 500 to 5000 rupees. Daily rent can be between 20 to 100-150 rupees. Basically they are in this profession independently. Sex workers of the second class take rooms by giving money to their landlord or *malkin*. They give monthly rent of 200 to 500 rupees.¹³³

(b) *Adha-adha* or *Adhia*:

Those who have no place of their own and use rooms owned by others and have to pay half of their income to the owners are called *Adha-adha* or *Adhia*.¹³⁴ In Sonagachi a lot of sex-workers entertain

¹³¹ Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003, p.85.

¹³² Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.113-14.

¹³³ *Jaunapallir Chalchitra* (A Pen Picture of Brothels/Red-light areas), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2001. p.79.

¹³⁴ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.114

clients in this *adhiya* custom. Some old and ex-sex workers keep the girls in their rooms in this custom.¹³⁵

(c) Contract:

In the 'contract' type, the girls take rooms on rent at fixed cost from the landlady. They make profits if the business goes well, and they are in losses if it doesn't.¹³⁶

(d) *Chhukri* (young girls):

The fourth category of young girls, who are either abducted, seduced or directly purchased. They never earn any money. They are kept by *malkins*, who provide them with food and stay, and take away all their income in return. They are forced to serve customers even when they are sick or unwilling for some reason. 'There are reports of incidents when *malkins* have mercilessly beaten or tortured the girls for refusing to obey. One form of torture was to put chilly powder on their bodies

¹³⁵ *Jaunapallir Chalchitra* (A Pen Picture of Brothels/Red-light areas), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2001. p.79; In this line the business with body has four kinds – self-employed, 'adhiya', contract or 'chukri' kind. They who have their own rooms, those who do not have to give their share to anyone but the landlord are called self-employed. Those who don't have to their own rooms and use other's room for their business and thus have to give half of their income to the landlady are called 'adhiya'. In the 'contract' type, the girl takes the room for rent at fixed cost from the landlady. She makes profit if the business goes well, and they are in losses if it doesn't. See - Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.85-86 Stage1: The Adhiya System & Stage 2: The contract System. These are the two distinct stage of Modus operandi of prostitution. All the children in their initial years are operated through the 'adiah' system. In adiah system the girls pay half of their income to the '*Malkin*' (Madam). In return the girls are given food and shelter by Mashi and all income are kept under track by the Madams. The adiah prostitutes also pay 'an additional sum of Rs 25-30 per day for the food'. The girls are provided with lunch & dinner a day. The morning breakfast and evening snacks are needs to be arranged by the girls themselves. An example can be cited here; If a girl's earning is Rs 300/- for 3 clients then 150/- should be paid to the Madams and 25-30/- needs to be paid as an additional charge for food. So, only Rs125/- are left with her, with which she manages snacks, cosmetics, clothing and pays for 'her dependents'. There are many cases where the girls do not go out on the streets for serving clients, the Clients are brought by the Madams in the rooms of the girls. In this case the girls are compelled to entertain those clients. In these cases Madams play a rigid role and these girls 'on refusal to meet the client's expectation are extremely abused by Madams. "In case, the girls are unable to 'work' due to some ailment or unforeseen contingencies, her food charges are carried over as a debt to the next day. So, on the next day, she has to pay for her current expenditure on food as well as debt amount". Sometimes these girls are cheated by their Madams. In their initial months these girls 'go without pay' with the belief that their money is safe in the hands of madams. But mostly these claims are denied by Madams and after growing up when the girl want to get herself free from the clutches of the Madams, these madams don't even hesitate to even 'accuse them of theft or make debt claim'. The word of Madam is the ultimate truth and nobody dares to challenges her. - A study on children in Prostitution in Kolkata' – conducted by ATSEC, West.Bengal, commissioned by CINIASHA (Urban Unit of Child in Need Institution), April 2005. p.47. In the 'Adhiya system' the madams deals the financial side of the prostitutes. In this system a 'Khata' (copy) is maintained by the Madams where the girl's accounts are maintained. The settlement of the account is done every morning and debts are noted. - Ibid. p.48

¹³⁶ Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.86; "Contract System" is the second stage of the professional life of the children in prostitution. In this system experienced, older children in prostitution get out of the clutches of the Madams and begun practicing independently or even girls are under her and she act as a Madams. Their room rent is Rs 70- 150 per day to be paid to the brothel owner. The inability to pay the rent on daily basis, the amount is charged as a debt. These girls go out and solicits on the streets for securing client or have fixed clients. These girls can manage hours and schedules by themselves. But in theory it can happen but mostly in practical field these girls are left with 'little option' as they are liable to pay daily rent to the brothel owners. - A study on children in Prostitution in Kolkata' – conducted by ATSEC, West.Bengal, commissioned by CINIASHA (Urban Unit of Child in Need Institution), April 2005. p.47-48. In the 'contact system' the girls maintain their own accounts by themselves and the account of the girls kept under them are also maintained by them. - Ibid. p.48

and particularly in the vagina. In most cases these girls became seriously ill after some time.¹³⁷ In this type the girls who work have either been lured in the name of job or have been sold to the landladies after marriage. The landladies make them work like slaves. They are punished if they once protest against any injustice. They are made to stand in the gate from the morning at eight to twelve in the night. There are no breaks even if they are ill. If they don't get customers, ink is spread on their faces to get out of the ill omen. If they can't get customers even after that, they receive beatings with sticks and belts. The girl has to give in exactly to the way the customer wants to use her. If she does not, she has to suffer extreme torture. Srikarna has cited an incident regarding this of which he was witness –

I have seen it with my own eyes. Once a girl was slightly refusing to take in customers due to illness for which her landlady pushed a stick inside her vagina.¹³⁸

In this *Chukri* custom the girls are provided with something to wear by the brothel keeper. These girls are bought either with one time paid money or some amount of money is sent to their families occasionally.¹³⁹

The owners of the houses of Avinash Kaviraj Street (which is one of the main lanes of Sonagachi and the most aristocratic red-light area in every way) bring the sex workers under themselves and run their business in their own guardianship. There are cases of some businessmen taking the rooms on rent from the owners and decorating them according to their wishes and then running their business by renting them to the girls or on some other conditions. The appointed persons of the landlords collect the money. Plenty of money is taken as advance from the new tenants in these houses. The rent is also much higher here than other places. The monthly rent at present varies from Rs.3, 000 to 12,000.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata 2005, p.114

¹³⁸ Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.86

¹³⁹ *Jaunapallir Chalchitra* (A Pen Picture of Brothels/Red-light areas), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2001. p.79

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p.82; There are 'three basic income criteria' in the child prostitution. These are following:- a). On a 'Shot' basis; b). On an 'hourly' basis; c). On a 'one night stand' basis. The terms 'shot' is used in the red-light area to denote the meaning of a 'single act of sexual orgasm', allotment of time for this is 10-15 minutes. In this case, as the girls or their Madams possess an extreme professional approach and the 'clients are pushed out of the room as soon as the time is over'. The rate for a single 'shot' varies from Rs 60-120 per 'shot'. The rate for an hour, range between Rs 100 – 200. The rate is 'relatively cheaper' for one night stand it costs around Rs 400 – 500 per night. In these cases, clients usually are asked to pay before a 'contact' which means 'an informal agreement between the Madam and the client upon selection of a girl for a 'specified time'. In many cases incidents of violence are reported where the client did not pay early and later refuses to pay after being entertained. In this regard two statements of 2 prostitutes stand relevant. The name of the prostitutes is not mentioned in this report. Case I says: "First we take the money and then we enter the room. What if they don't give any money later! The Madam will deduct it from my other income". Case II Says: "A customer (client) did not have any money after spending an hour with me. The Madam beat him and took off his clothes. He was pushed out in the streets with only a towel." - A study on children in Prostitution in Kolkata' – conducted by ATSEC, West.Bengal, commissioned by CINIASHA (Urban Unit of Child in Need Institution), April 2005. p.48

On this same line we find ample information from archival document of the early 20th century. During this time on the subject of terms of employment of the class of prostitutes called dependent or semi-dependent the conditions varied. If the relation was only that of landlady or tenant-rent of the room occupied was paid. Receipt books were kept and rents varied from Rs.4 to Rs.16 per member. In some cases girls had let their rent to get behind for longer or shorter periods and so become debtors. In the cases in which the prostitute were engaged by the mistress or *bariwalla* and became part of the establishment, the usual arrangement was stated to be that half takings were kept by the girl and half were given to the mistress. In some places clients used to pay directly to the girl, in others directly to the mistress for the girls. It appeared to be almost invariably the rule for such girls to be in debt to the mistress. In a brothel near Wellington Square one girl had only been in the house for ten days, but her debt was Rs.25 for clothes and ornaments. Several girls had stated that they owe Rs.150, Rs. 200 or even more rupees. And however, much they gained by their trade the ability to repay, if it occurred, did not seem to be used. In the cases of some prostitutes the mistress claimed some sort of relationship and on the basis of that claim used to take all the earnings. Such women or girl had remained often in virtual slavery to the establishment. The mistress used to feed the girls, give drink to them and their customers and runs up claims on various other accounts so that the meshes of circumstances could quickly be tied around and unfortunate and friendless girls or women came to be introduced to brothel life. On the mistress' side there was always the fear that the girl employed might run away with clothes or ornaments of considerable value. In the British official record it was stated that 'In a recent case at Diamond Harbor when three girls ran away from a Calcutta Brothel, this is what had occurred. It is therefore, desirable on the mistress part to make her employees contented with their lot, and I have met cases where girls have been working for a period of years and appear happy contented.' In certain brothels men used to appear to have special connection of employer to individual girls; they acted as their pimps and in the battering as to price to be paid and use the income derived as their means of support.¹⁴¹

We further get a vivid description of the evolving situation in the brothel conditions and the exploitation of the prostitutes under the authority of the *bariwallis* in Sandal Street from this official document:

The mistress has five resident girls, two of whom rent go down each at Rs. 4 per mensem. All of them had been recruited from Mufassal districts, Midnapore, Howrah, etc., or after being in Calcutta sometime in another quarter had been brought to their present situation. Each was in debt to the mistress for food, clothes, ornaments and other things. They could go away conditionally on living security for the debt or paying it up. Half then takings went to the *Bariwallah*, who contrived as most of the class do, so to get the girls into control

¹⁴¹ Prostitution(s) among Indians in Calcutta : Conditions of Brothels in Bengal: . File p 14 B – 3 of 1917, progs . 14 – 19, July 1918. [Political Dept: Police Branch], Article page.5 py.pg.71

financially that they don't allow the debt to be paid off entirely. The youngest girl in this brothel was about 16. In recent investigation, I have met occasionally women, who had not left the premises they were in for a long time, but they said that they had nowhere to go and no desire to leave. While, it would be too sweeping a statement to affirm that many of the women in the houses of prostitution are really in slavery, it is perfectly true that a proportion of them are in such virtual restraint that they do not know how to get free.¹⁴²

In this regard, the following two case histories stand very much relevant:

Madhu (name changed) used to be a naughty girl who did not like the discipline of a school life. So when her brothers were grueling in the school, she played with her friends in the village. A distant brother-in-law brought her to a brothel and sold her for Rs 50000 at the age of 10 years. Her 'Malkin' (madam) licked her in a room and forced her into the "Flesh trade". She was beaten, tortured, drugged and debarred from any communication with the outside world. She received only food, clothing, and no money for her services for 3 years. One day, in one of the rarest occasions she along with some of the other girls were taken for a film in a near by cinema hall by the Madam's brother. She fled, but before long, the police took her in custody. The Madam was informed who claimed that she had stolen Rs 30,000/- Madhu started off on her own and repaid that money.¹⁴³ Dipika (name changed) was married off by her family at the age of 13 years. Her husband was alcoholic and a drug-addict. He did not work. He did not allow her to go out of the house and did not feed her himself. He beat her everyday and bad mouthed her. Dipika stayed at her husband's house only for months, before she fled to her mother's house. There, she faced shame and humiliation as her parent insisted her ion going back to her husband. Her parents were badly in debt from her marriage. They did not want to keep her. The other alternative that they gave her was to repay heir loan in whatever mean she could. Dipika was illiterate and had little option. She decided that the 'flesh trade' was where she wanted to be. As married woman. She felt stigmatized her husband raped her in many occasions. At least, here, she would get some money for the same work. However, that is not the end of the story. Dipika came here with a distant relative, who sold her to a Madam. She worked for 4-months without pay. The madam assured her repeatedly that her money was safe with her. Dipika received only food and clothing. After 4-months, when she wanted to go away to a hew house her Madam denied all her dues. She started from the scratch. She takes in more than 5 clients per night to repay the debt incurred due to her marriage.¹⁴⁴

Statement of 'Lakshmi Das' (aged approximately 45 years, illiterate and independent prostitute), resident of the No.73 House in the ground floor of Premchand Boral Street in Harkata red-light area,

¹⁴² Ibid. pv.pg.69

¹⁴³ A study on children in Prostitution in Kolkata – conducted by ATSEC, West.Bengal, commissioned by CINIASHA (Urban Unit of Child in Need Institution), April 2005. p.85

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p.87

focuses upon the inter-relationship between the *mashi* and the prostitute which further throws immense light upon the vulnerable condition of a prostitute under the exploitative treatment of *mashi*. She says:

I started earning my livelihood by selling my body for money in Dharmatal (Esplanade). In order to save myself from the hands of police and gundas in Esplanade, I started working in Harkata under a masi in the Adhiya system. The gundas in the Esplanade area were scoundrels. For nothing they used to flash dagger in face with the motto of extracting money. In the initial stages of my staying in the red-light area, I was very frightened and was afraid of my life. My mashi taught me some tricks at the initial stage. But she was a big alcoholic and a bitch. She was Bangaali (from the East Bengal) and possessed a very cunning character. I was not that much shrewd. Once, when the gundas came in search of me, she put me under the beddings and told them, 'she is not here; she has gone to her natives.'

Lakshmi used to keep her money in her Mashi's custody. On asking, whether mashi has not misappropriated her money? Her reply was,

'Yes, that is very normal.'

Which means that lot of her earnings was misappropriated by her mashi. From a known person to her, I got this information that she had bought a land which her mashi in 'tricks and tact' misappropriated. She used to get a whole lot of beating from the mashi and a mark on her back still carries the memory of such tortures. There was an engineer babu, who used to love Lakshmi very much. He used feed Lakshmi by segregating the bones of fish too. But because of mashi's too much greedy attitude and high demand of money, he gradually stopped coming to Lakshmi. When she was asked that 'have you spent 30 years in the very same room under the same mashi?' Her answer was,

'Yes.' Why she would leave me, who will get her so much of money?

But despite living for so long with mashi, mashi has spent all her money in mashi's relatives who have not even taken care of her during her last stage of life.

And on the other side, despite having so much of bad experience with mashi, she forgot everything and took care of her during her illness and at the age of 70 her 'mashi' died. After her death, Lakshmi got the house in her name.¹⁴⁵

S. N. Mukherjee portrays a picture of lower class-prostitutes and how they were treated by the *bariwallis* during the first half of twentieth century. The street walkers were lower class prostitutes. They were extremely exploited and led a miserable life.¹⁴⁶ They used to entertain more than one client every evening. The fee was fixed at per hour and varied from a few *annas* to several rupees

¹⁴⁵ Lakshmi Das, Harkata – red-light area, Premchand Boral Street – 73 No, House – Ground Floor. Approx Age – 45, Category – F1, Class - Independent, Education – Illiterate.

¹⁴⁶ S. N. Mukherjee, Prostitution in India, DasGupta & Co, Calcutta, 1936. p.110

according to the beauty and the qualification of the girl. In case of a low class prostitutes, the prostitute used to be forced by the *bariwallis* to entertain a dozen or more clients even in case they were not in a position to entertain even a single client.¹⁴⁷

Meghnad Gupta offers a picture of the living condition and exploitation of prostitutes with full sensitivity in his work "Rater Kolkata" (Calcutta by night) during the early twentieth Century. He states:

The wretched, hapless prostitutes, what abnormal lives they have to lead! Their regular visitors are people who have very little tenderness or mercy in them. For them, the flow of fun and enjoyment is something far more devastating than the ravishing floods. These women, fallen into the dungeon of misery, are silent victims; they are the epitomes of tolerance. The amount of money for which they tolerate this kind of life, is so meager that I fail to understand how they can bear this subhuman existence; it is worse than that of animals. Each night they face the fear of death. It is not uncommon to find a girl lying dead in the morning on her bed behind closed doors—either poisoned, or hacked to death. Their might have been a fight over money. The men folk had vanished with all her cash and ornaments. Those who can kill a helpless girl like this, cannot just be called murderers, their sin knows no definition. I find no word to describe their cruelty. The daughter of a prostitute has no other way but to become one as she grows up. She has to bear the burden of a haunted life. But those who choose to leave home to join this trade soon realize their mistake. Possibly the first few days' excitement may pull them along this path of vice. But later, instead of enjoyment, they face the lifelong torture of Hell. I can vouch for the fact that the best or the prettiest courtesan is not happy within herself. Their suffering does not even have the glory of self-sacrifice; so demeaning is their livelihood. Have you ever seen a prostitute smile? No. Even their smile looks like a grimace. They smile to suppress their tears. Crying out loud is better than the smile they show to cover up the pain within. Most prostitutes are ugly; the reason is their unnatural lifestyle. The poisonous atmosphere of the locality dries up the most beautiful flowers within a few days. I have witnessed a few girls from normal households turn to prostitution. Some among them were great beauties. Even now I come across them occasionally. Now to look at them is nauseating; I turn my head in disgust. The most ravishing beauty lasts but two days in this place. In this kind of environment, beastliness is the natural outcome. In the brothels of Kolkata, there are houses which can be termed as Hell on Earth. There, a group of men and women carry on a cruel flesh-trade. They have their agents roaming the streets of Kolkata and the villages. Their job is to seduce young girls from various places. We have heard many young girls getting lost from the streets of Kolkata. Most of them end up in such houses and are kept locked inside rooms for days. If they do not break down easily, there are methods to teach them lessons. Some are denied food. Some get beaten up. There are other ways of forcing them to yield.¹⁴⁸

A British official document of 1913 gives information regarding the methods. Organizations were vogue in the city of Calcutta with regard to recruitment and conduct of houses during the early 20th century:

European prostitution, as a trade, is not conducted on haphazard lines. It is highly complex organization with wealth and brains behind it, operating centers in various part of the world,

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p.258

¹⁴⁸ Meghnad Gupta, *Rater Kolkata, Pratik*, Kolkata, 1991(1923 1st Publication), p.35-36

and fearless men and women engaged in it. India is only one of the markets, but it is a growing market. The women who come or are sent are not girls fresh from their homes, but those who have lived the life, voluntarily or under coercion, in other cities of the world and are under no delusion as to their occupation. The trade is engaged in because it spells wealth. It is generally believed, and there is foundation for the belief, that many of the foreign women in the Indian market acquire, within a comparatively short period. Sufficient means to enable them to spend the rest of their short span of life in comfort. But it is not so generally known that gambling speculation and the sale of drink in brothel are contributing factors. Exactly how much drink profit is made cannot be computed, but the women have themselves admitted that it is a considerable source of income. The direct question was a few days ago, guardedly put to the keeper of one house who mournfully replied that the change of residence had cost her at least Rs 600 a month in drink profit alone. Some of those who have retired from "business" in Calcutta have been reported to do so with a capital expressed by five figures. While two at least left with an account to their credit running into six figures. Every European house is under the management of a "Missus". She occasionally accepts visitors but usually plays the part of hostess. Each house has several resident girls, but it is worth nothing as a development of Indian Conditions that it is not in common for a Missus to have her extra list local girls who do not reside on the premises but are sent for as occasion requires. Each resident girl enters under contracts of which there are two kinds, the "50%" and the "pin-money". Under the latter she receives a regular allowance with "privileges". In this case there is no freedom of selection. The girl must obey instructions. Practically no house could be run without a "Missus". Every third or fourth year a girl gets a short furlough in or out of India, when exchanges are affected. The Missus also takes furlough but at longer intervals. Recruiting arrangements are made at these times. The Missus either settles matters personally while on furlough or corresponds with some other Missus, the girl proceeding on furlough being used as the transmitter of the communication. It is probable and more than likely that other methods are also employed, but the committee speaks of those which have come to its knowledge. Most of those who are in Calcutta market come from south Russia and Eastern Europe. A few come from other countries with reference to the local girl question it may be of interest to mention that one was recently induced to enter a rescue home in the city. She did not, however, stay very long.¹⁴⁹

The Organised Network: The Role of Bariwalli/Brothel Keepers (Police, Gundas, Mashis):

Prostitutes are always regulated by an organized network and in the Red-light areas all the elements of this network are interlinked to each other either directly or indirectly. Here, if the *Dadas* are considered to be *Lakshmis*, the landlord, landladies may be called as *Saraswatis*—both powerful goddesses of the Hindus. A common saying is that, 'in Red light areas, police, local goons and landlords or landladies are all birds of the same feather. If one's interest is hampered, all will unite.'¹⁵⁰ In this regard the information given by an official document of 1947 stands very much relevant. We find the information about the number of prostitutes, their premises and the authoritative elements under whose control they used to be regulated in the Dhakuria Bagan Lane and Umadas Lane in 1947. The areas were inhabited by several prostitutes even after the

¹⁴⁹ *Legislation to Suppress the importation of foreign women for prostitution and to punish the importers and other profiting thereby*, file 2A/22 of 1912, progs nos 18.3 Serial nos 3.16, February, 1913 [Political Dept.: Police Branch]

¹⁵⁰ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005. p.112

declaration of these streets public thoroughfare for the fulfillment of the purposes of the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act 1933. Public of these place had appealed to the Government of Bengal for the eviction of prostitutes from these areas in 1947. This letter stands very much informative about the nature of the prostitution and its organizational network carried out in those areas:

The prostitutes residing in these localities were evicted by the 2nd of February 1945. Soon after their eviction some of the houses were let-out to the public but most of them were retained by the *Bariwalis and Gundas* with their deliberate ill-intention to prosecute secret and mobile prostitution therein. Just after two or three months of these most of the prostitutes thus sheltered came out with their old ugly affairs and began regular prostitution in this locality. ...As this was apprehending dangers applied to the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Lalbazar after the formal and futile information to the Taltolla Police and on this account some of us were victimized by the Taltolla Police. However, at our instance the Lalbazar Police took some passive step to catch hold of the prostitutes and actually about 25 of them were take into their custody and later on released (in August – '45). After this their prostitution went on continuously but the case has been quite otherwise for sometime past. That it was often found that any surprises visit by any Police official is foiled by the Taltolla Police who inform the Goondahs, *Bariwallis* of it before of it before hand, which we deem a mere "a managed force". The police in turn exact "Dasturi" (illegal gratification) from the *Bariwallis*, goondahs and the prostitutes. Those now were terrifically alarmed at the present situation which was encroaching our civic rights. There has been a considerable influx of prostitutes in these two lanes for sometimes past and everyday there has been the opening ceremony of new brothels made by these *Gundas* and *Bariwallis* quite un-hampered. *Bariwalis* like Ramchandi and Durby have sheltered many prostitutes at 24, Umadas Lane (1st and 2nd floor) and 3 and 8, Dhakuria Bagan Lane, who come down in open street and carry on prostitution day and night. ... We simply wonder how these notorious and immoral acts are being committed under the very nose of the Police and under the control of a government which is said to be civilized one in the 20th Century.¹⁵¹ For detail, please refer **Table: 2.1.B**.

During 2000, one contemporary News paper published an article entitled: "The famished Road" which provides ample information about child prostitutes. Role of NGOs in Rescue and Rehabilitation Program, factors, HIV, conducts of Prostitutes in the brothel, how they get subjected to the violence in the Red-light areas and how the network exists between the Police and Madams etc. It says:

Saudible and her eyes do not shine any more. Her delicate hands sit on her lap, twisting and turning at all the horror life has thrown her way. She appears listless and depressed but there is anger seething just below. Sona is angry because she is HIV positive. She is angry because at 14 she thinks she has already lost life's battle, she is angry because at was her own father who made her a child prostitute when she was only eight years old. He took her from Calcutta and sold her to a brothel in Mumbai for Rs 25,000/-, leaving her to the wolves. She was locked up, beaten and abused by the horde of men and "madams" who told her "once you get in, you don't get out from here". Sona did get out in a police operation after surviving hell for two years. Today she is recovering at a shelter along with other girls whose lives too have been twisted and gnashed by the blood thirsty network of traffickers.

¹⁵¹ Prayer from the public for the suppression of immoral traffic act Dhakuria Bagan Lane and Umadas Lane, File No. – P.14B – 3/46. Proce B.418, January 1947, [Political Dept: Police Branch].

The dark windowless world she left behind continues to haunt her Trafficking is illegal under the 1986 prevention of Immoral Trafficking Act but the problem has only grown over the years. Nearly two million children are trafficked globally every year and almost half of them are forced into prostitution. The police and the judiciary seem unable to cope. The police do their quota of raids but often rest by freezing just one or two girls instead of cleaning the entire house of minors. Rescued girls repeatedly say that at the time they were taken away from the brothels. There were many other girls with them whom the police failed to rescue. The police fulfill the bare minimum requirement because many of them get their cuts from the same madams activists allege, "It is a beautifully choreographed movement. The police enter the brothel but no one is present". Says an activist, who has been actively involved in rescue operations for more than two years, "We tell them the girls are standing in the Bowbazar, but when they go, the girls disappear. The facts speak for themselves." Madams have well paid informers inside the police department who alert them at the very whiff of a raid. The girls are put inside box beds or shoved into closets and locked. These children have no lights and no protection from the predatory adults who surround them. On an average a child may spend five to 10 years in such conditions. The economics of the profession are no less frightening. According to a study done by Prof. K. K. Mukherjee of Delhi University and Joseph Gathia, a social activist, some 900000 sex-workers transact nearly Rs 37000 crores every year. Thirty percent of them are minor girls in the age group of nine and 16 years. Rescue, recovery and rehabilitation of these children are not a task that NGOs alone can tackle. A greater awakening is needed on part of the police, social workers stress.¹⁵²

Children in the prostitution living in the red-light areas are subjected to this non-stop violence. They have no way out of this. There is a scare rooted in their mind about the new life. They are extremely scared of the madams, older women in prostitution, clients, police, and the judicial system. "They are scared of reporting their fate to any of them to them reporting an incidence of violence is an act of desperation. So it is not worthy to learn that when they do report, do they receive justice, is any action taken on the basis of such report!" In this NGO report, any action taken was absent for 7% despite reporting the incidence. For some girls action were negative – 'The Madams' to whom these girls have reported in many cases, have even tortured them into being raped by the clients".

One prostitute said:

- *"I have not reported this to anybody. I think this is my business, I have to do it."*

Another prostitute said:

- *".... most of the actions are in the interest of the brothel owners."¹⁵³*

In Joardar's work, he said while discussing with most of the police officer on the matter of prostitution, the statement of police officers was this:

We must not disturb each other. For the sake of law we are bound to do our duty, but at the same time we must think about 'them'. This is why before combing operation are inform 'them' in advance, at least half-an-hour before. We have suggested to them some procedures to follow, so that they can escape the related laws. If they can run their business

¹⁵² Seema Sirahi, *The famished Road*, the Asian Age, (n.d), 2000

¹⁵³ 'A study on children in Prostitution in Kolkata' – conducted by ATSEC, West.Bengal, commissioned by CINIASHA (Urban Unit of Child in Need Institution), April 2005.' p.57-58

smoothly, only then we can get our Hapta (weekly bribe). Our principle is to 'live and let live', so that both of us can live without disturbing each other.¹⁵⁴

Involvement of Bariwallis in Trafficking:

We get information from two news reports published in 2005 about how the *malkins/bariwallis* are associated in the trafficking in girls and how they hide girls during the Rescue Mission. In 2005 there was a report of trafficking in girls from different districts of West Bengal to the red-light areas of Pune. The landlady/*bariwalli* of Pune red-light area named, 'Tara Moktan' was arrested by police. This lady used to buy girls from different mediators. Police arrested two such mediators from Baruipur based on the interrogation of Tara Moktan. They were namely Gopal alias Joynaal and Raju. Former was arrested from Baruipur station and the latter (Raju) was arrested by South 24 Parganas Police using Joynaal's cell phone. Police reports that 9 girls were rescued from the red-light areas of Pune who were trafficked from West Bengal. Tara Moktan bought all these girls and she was arrested in the red-light areas of Pune. These 9 girls were from different districts of West Bengal. Two were from Jadavpur, 'which is the constituency of our Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya', 3 were from South 34 Parganas, 1 from Nadia, 1 from Howrah and 1 from Bihar. Joynaal and Raju worked as chief agent for Tara Moktan in the state. They used to traffic girls from Baruipur, Sonarpur, Baghajatin, Jadavpur stations. During interrogation, Tara Mokatan accepted that in the past few years she came to Calcutta many times in order to invigilate the work of her agents. She used to buy girls sitting in Pune based on the information received from her mediators of the urban and sub-urban areas. She used to buy girls at the cost of Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 50,000. The girls whom she used to buy at Rs 30,000, they were forced in to flesh trade in the red-light areas for a minimum of three years and the girls whom she used to buy at Rs. 50,000, they were forced in this profession for minimum of 5 years. Police tried to find other mediators from the interrogation of Raju and Joynaal, and wanted to check whether they had any link with any international racket and also what and who were the source of such big investment in this line. According to Tara Moktan, she illegally migrated to India 15 years ago by crossing the border and then she got trapped at the hands of the pimp and was sold off in the red-light areas of Pune. She got involved in trafficking from last few years. The Bengali 'customers', who used to visit her in the brothel, she started using them as mediators in the business of trafficking in/of girls by luring with a huge amount of money. The investigating police team said, "all the 9 girls whom we have recovered, they all are accusing a person name Raju. Though they all have named the same person, but the physical description that they have given does not match with each other. We believe that there are many mediators working using the same name, 'Raju' in this racket." Apart

¹⁵⁴ B. Joardar, *Prostitution In Historical and Modern Perspectives*; Inter-India Publication, New Delhi, 1984. p.106

from one girl of Jadavpur, all others had been sent to the Liluah Home as per the instruction of the court. The girl from Jadavpur was handed over to her parents. Information was also sent to her hometown for the girl from Bhagalpur of Bihar. D.I.G Presidency Range, Harmanpreet Singh was optimistic on the unveiling of this racket. She/he said, 'the information which we have been able to gather from those girls and 3 accused, we hope we will be able to crack down the entire traffic racket.'¹⁵⁵ In this year during the second week of August, another 4 girls were rescued, after the rescue of 9 girls in the first week. Within a span of 7 days, due to police and NGO's combined effort, a total of 13 girls were rescued. But the experience that both police and the NGO had during this rescue operation, that was not at all healthy. There were plenty of girls who were trafficked from Bengal to Pune's red-light area. The newspaper report has been quoted below for better understanding of the picture:

During the first week of August, 9 girls were rescued and in the second week 4 more are brought back. Due to the dual effort of police and NGOs, 14 girls of this state had been rescued within 7 days from Pune's red-light area. And the experience that this team of police and NGO had in Pune was not at all healthy. Almost in every house they got Bengali girls, who were missing from their house. During the first week of this month, in order to rescue three girls from West Bengal along with the help State Police, an NGO from Calcutta got a big blow. They searched in all the red-light areas of Pune taking the photograph of those three girls. They found that most of the girls are trafficked from different districts of West Bengal. They came to know that these girls were brought by the mediators with the promise of a job and they were finally sold off here in the red-light areas. They rescued 9 girls, except two, all others have been handed over to their parents. This time, the police from the Lake police station also rescued 4 girls from the red-light areas of Pune during their raids. Two of them are from Canning; all the four girls were brought to Alipore Court. The rescue team believes that if they can raid the red-light areas with the permission of the Maharashtra government, then they could get information about many more trafficked teenaged girls from Bengal. The co-partner of the police, the NGO says that they had tough time in order to rescue girls from that area. Many times they had to use power also. A girl was kept inside a trunk to hide her from the police. That girl was rescued by breaking the trunk. The NGO is worried about the future of the rescued girls. For the time being their families have accepted them but how the society will accept them, for that the NGO has appealed to the Ministry of Social Welfare.¹⁵⁶

Brothel Owner: The Exploitative Machinery:

In the Calcutta Red-light areas to stay in the house, a sex-worker has to abide by the rules set by the landlady or landlord. Even though there were exceptions, but in most of cases the rules were more or less like this—

(a). If anybody wants to drink, he or she has to buy liquor from the landlady, which definitely would cost more than in the shops. If anyone chooses to do otherwise, he or she has to pay a fine according to the quantity and the brand of the liquor. For example, if it was 'English' or foreign liquor,

¹⁵⁵ *Banglar Meye Kena.Bechai Dhrito Puner Nishidhya Pallir Malkin*, Ananda Bazar Patrika, 10th August, 2005.

¹⁵⁶ *Puner Nishidhyapallite Trunk Bhenge Banglar Taruni Udhar*, Ananda Bazar Patrika, 12th August, 2005.

for 180 ml one had to pay ten rupees. For one *pint*, twenty rupees and for one full bottle one had to pay a fine of forty rupees. Of course, for common country-liquor, fine used to be limited to five, ten and twenty rupees.

(b). If anyone wanted to go to movies, she was allowed. But, since during that time she would not earn by way of servicing customers, she would have to pay a heavy fine—for going to noon shows and matinee shows-- twenty five rupees, and for evening or night-shows full one hundred rupees. If any night-customer did not take liquor, then too, a girl had to pay fine of twenty rupees. Otherwise, she would not be allowed to go out any more.

(c) In the Calcutta red-light areas if any customer wanted to enter the house after the main gate was closed at night, or if for some reason anyone wanted to leave early in the morning before the gate opened for the day, they had to pay a charge of ten rupees. Usually most brothel doors close at 12 in the night. For clients entering within one hour, that is, by 1 am, it is ten. The charge increases as the night grows. From late night till early dawn the meter-rate for opening and closing the gate grows higher and higher.¹⁵⁷

In this connection one incident should be cited here. There was one Bubu De Sarker, a cheap liquor seller, who was also an acting manager of a brothel. A girl named Rina Das had taken a room on contract at 75 rupees per day. One day she got news from her native place that her 5 year old daughter had some problem with her eyes and could not see properly. In a hurry she left for her home in the village in Murshidabad. The doctor suggested immediate treatment in a good hospital in Calcutta. So, she came back in a hurry and admitted the child in a city hospital. Afterwards, when she came back to the room, Bubu the malkin came and asked for the rent. Rina broke down and said she was not in a position to pay. In fact she needed some loan for her daughter's treatment. To Bubu all this did not matter. All she needed was the rent for 15 days. While talking, Bubu lost her temper and started beating Rina at random with a stick. Rina ran to the branch office of 'Durbar' at Boubazar. The agitated girls of the branch went to the hospital, got medical report, went to the police station and got Bubu arrested. She later came out on bail and started boasting that nobody could touch her with the long end of a pole, she was so powerful etc. On this, there was huge commotion in the locality, the girls of the entire area went out in a procession to the police station and compelled the officer to arrest Bubu finally. After some time when Bubu came out on bail, she and her group of rowdies started propaganda that the 'Usha multipurpose Co operative Society' run by 'Durbar' was cheating girls in the name of saving money in their names. The society only catered to its own friend and relatives. Misled by this rumour, some sixty five girls came in a group and demanded withdrawal of all their savings. Within half an hour, the workers of the society managed to

¹⁵⁷ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata, 2005. p.112-113

give an amount of about 3.5 lacs to the girls. There was one benefit—within a few days, 'Usha' got more members. Seeing the functioning of the co operative, along with the earlier sixty five, thirty five more girls joined the society. The case against Bubu is still pending for decision, but the practice of ill-treatment to the girls at the slightest pretext has come to an abrupt halt.¹⁵⁸

To talk about physical, emotional violence by the brothel owner *two statements physical violence of 2 prostitutes stands* very much relevant:-

Physical Violence:

- One prostitute said: *"The owner of the place used to beat me with an iron rod and on the back and legs".*
- Another prostitute said: *"....beaten for sexual intercourse with someone intoxicated person."*

Emotional Violence:

- In the words of another prostitute: *"The Malkin (Madam) used to threat me to send me to some unknown place."*
- One prostitute expressed her agony: *"The brothel owner used to threaten to harm me and my family."*¹⁵⁹

Bariwalli/Masi/Malkin always finds some clue to exploit prostitutes. The motto is only one that is to make profit as much as possible. Prostitutes who are her employee are always extorted in various ways. She needs to keep her *bariwalli* Masi pleased in all ways just to carry out profession peacefully. The literally meaning of Masi is though 'aunt' but in this world the relationship between prostitutes and her Masi doesn't promote the real meaning of 'Masi' in reality. Masi mostly possesses an extreme ruthless character and attitude towards the prostitutes.

Let us take the incident of Jyotsna:

A few days back, Jyotsna had got her sister married. And almost pauper now, she has not been able to give the aunt (mashi), the owner of the house, the bonus for the Pujas, clothes, 'atta' and 'sindoor'. As a result for three days, getting the most vulgar abuses she has got the punishment of not standing at the gate after eleven at night and not taking in any customers in her room.¹⁶⁰

Another incident shows how this *Bariwallis/Masi* plays trickery to extort the money from the prostitutes. Protesting against the rule of *Bariwallis* leaves no way for the prostitutes but to vacate the room. Exactly this is clearly evident in the case of Soma, a sex-worker. Mrinalkanti Dutta has cited the incidence of Soma:

It was noon time and I was relaxing after lunch. I was dozing off, when Sunil, the *Babu* of a girl called Maya of Nimtala rushed inside and asked me to come to his house. What was the matter —I asked. Sunil replied that a new girl named Soma has come as a tenant and

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.p.115-116

¹⁵⁹ A study on children in Prostitution in Kolkata' – conducted by ATSEC, West.Bengal, commissioned by CINIASHA (Urban Unit of Child in Need Institution), April 2005. p.52

¹⁶⁰ Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.45

started a terrible quarrel with the landlady regarding phone... Curious to know what has transpired, I put on my shirt and accompanied him. What was this 'matter about phone'? I wondered. We promptly got down to the street and marched towards the Nimtala house. As we neared the house, we heard the loud, roaring voice of the landlady Uma Masi—

'You bitch, what do you mean you won't pay? Pay you have to—this is not an empty house; to stay here you have to follow my rules! I don't want to know what you have done where! You think because you are a little educated you can do anything you like? Vacate my house tomorrow itself, if you don't like my words.'

[Masi= matron / landlady, common name for an elderly prostitute]

We crossed the first and the second quarters of the big house and reached the third and faced Uma Masi herself. With the end of her sari tucked at her waist she was in a warlike temper, ready to kill Soma. Seeing me, she expected moral support and groaned—'*see dear, this bitch, she has just arrived and thinks she knows better. She tells me I am doing illegal stuff, and she can call the police and get me arrested.*' I stopped Uma Masi and approached the girl to find out what the matter was. She said, 'See *dada*, I got a phone call from home at Uma Masi's room and I spoke for ten minutes. What was her problem? She is asking for twenty rupees for using the phone. You tell, how much does an incoming call cost? Twenty rupees? For what? I'm trying to explain to her and she started abusing my forefathers!' I knew Uma Masi had a fridge and a T.V. in her room and in value these items ranked fifth in the locality. But I had never heard about the phone. Why does she need the phone? She has grown old and does not need to talk to customers any more! She explained- 'Your uncle (her *Babu*) needs it for business talk'. When I remarked that uncle was retired, and does not do anything, she surrendered, 'Oh, you don't understand, we have taken it to earn some money'. Then I told her that really incoming calls should not be charged; only if someone uses the phone for making calls, she may charge. Losing my support, she became furious and told me not to interfere in her personal matters. I retorted that it was she who called me, and left the place instructing Soma not to pay a single rupee. I heard later that even though Soma did not pay anything, she had to leave the Nimtala house, for arguing with Uma Masi and for threatening her to get arrested. Such was the unwritten laws of the 'red light areas'.¹⁶¹

Sometimes prostitutes become the victim of superstitious mentality of *Bariwallis*. In this regard,

Mrinalkanti Dutta narrates an incident recalling experience in his childhood. He says:

The memories of my childhood days when I was 6 or 7 are still vivid in my mind. I can never forget the day when I along with my mother had to leave the house in half a day's notice. The very thought of that helpless situation, the reason for that cruel expulsion, still give me creeps. As human beings, we were so petty, so detested and helpless; the realisation cannot be expressed in words. Since my birth, till the age of 6, I grew up in a brick building owned by one Khadi aunty. In the locality, out of 34 houses ours was the only pucca two-storied building; hence the name-'*Kotha-bari*'. Khadi auntie's mother Bhuti-amma was a well-known prostitute of those days. Officers, singers, actors and such other well established men used to visit her regularly. So in no time she uplifted herself from a shanty to a brick building. From childhood Khadi was an ill-tempered girl. At the slightest provocation, she used to raise her fists and abuse. She was a storehouse of the choicest abuses which she poured lavishly without reservation. I felt, if was to write a dictionary of abusive Bengali words, she could have her name in the Guinness Book! Even though Khadi inherited the house and was quite rich, nobody came to marry her because of her fierce temper. As was the custom in those days, no woman could remain a spinster for life, so her mother married her off to a huge sacred scythe or sword (*Khara*) in Kalighat temple, the one

¹⁶¹ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005. p.103-04

seen in the hand of the powerful Hindu goddess Kali. As it is, she was vile-tempered, on top of that was added the suppressed sexual urge of youth. So, later after the death of Bhuti-amma, Khadi became more and more irritable, short-tempered and cruel. The funniest part was that, even though her mother was a prostitute, and she owed all her property, income and status to the earnings made by whores like us, she shared the common hatred for whores, and considered them as 'fallen women' or 'bad omen'. She avoided seeing the face of a whore on waking up in the morning as it was supposed to bring ill-luck.

She would lie in bed until the sweeper came and she could see her face first and then get up. If anyone of us wanted to go to toilet, we had to pass Khadi's bed. We would hide our face and run quickly towards the toilet, lest Khadi auntie saw us. One day, we were planning to visit my father's place in Kharagpur, and were leaving the house early in the morning with my mother and father. On that fateful morning, as luck would have it, as we were opening the main gate, we suddenly came across Khadi, who had just woken up. Unannounced by the servant, she had come out of the room. And we were too early to wake up, as we had to take the morning train. My mother's eyes met Khadi's. All hell let loose. In a fearsome whisper she asked mother, 'Where are you going?' Mother, embarrassed and panic stricken, mumbled, 'To our native place; will be back tomorrow.' Khadi's eyes glared, pointing her finger at my mother she screamed, 'don't go anywhere. Go back to your room. And vacate the house by evening.' My mother could never dream of such a heavy punishment for so small a mistake. Her small and timid protestations were smothered by roars and screams of the foulest of abuses—'you filthy whore! Won't you go? If you don't leave at this instant, you will see your son's dead face, I tell you.' etc. She entered the bathroom still growling. And we had to shift overnight to a small shack of a flat in Dahiwallah Gulli, leaving the brick house.¹⁶²

The Exploitation of Girl at her initiation into the prostitution:

In case of new girls, the situation is more horrible. These girls face brutal torture at first stage while showing disinterest to entertain clients. To break their spirit they get abused continuously. Finally being overwhelmed by so much of pressure they surrender themselves to the situation. Fear of social stigma and financial and social problems become the main hindrance for the minors to return back. They fail to get out of the clutches of madams of the brothel and resume the work as prostitutes. In the case of young girls they are kept under the lock and key and clients are supplied to them by the agents. They are not permitted to meet anyone and are totally in the control of Madams. During the police raids generally these girls are ignored as Madam settles certain deals with policeman.¹⁶³ Everywhere the new comers are treated more or less the same way in all the brothels. The girl is kept in tight security under the trafficker, the owner and pimp in her initial days

¹⁶² Ibid. p.71-72; If there is more inflow of customers, it means more commission for the landlady, and more sale of liquor. So the landlord or the landlady as the case may be, in his or her own interest is eager to ward off any evil eye on the house. So, it was the practice to hang a tortoise-shell or a used broom at the front door of the house. Some Hindu owners would bring holy water from a Kali temple (the water after washing the chopper or large knife used at the sacrificial altar), and sprinkle all around the house. Similarly, Muslim owners would bring flowers and rose water from their shrine on Thursdays and purify the house. Now, in modern time, the new addition is, to hang a string of lemon and chilly at the doorway. Ibid. p.92.

¹⁶³ Report on the consultation meeting to combat trafficking in children and child prostitution' Organized by 'Socio.legal Aid Research of Training Centre', sponsored by UNICEF Calcutta and Dhaka & Red Barnet South Asia Regional Office. p.78

of brothel. Till the time this girl is capable of earning, she is surrounded by the security of these people because these people are stake holders of her income. At times, in order to fulfill their own interest, these people tend to become little softer towards the girl. But how many 'customer' she would entertain, this decision too is not of per the girls' will. This is decided by the owner of the brothel and the *malkin* that how many customer she would entertain and what would be her work schedules. If her work is satisfactory over a period of time, then based on that she would get food, clothes, make-up, medical treatment and in leisure hour, her entertainment would be considered and slowly her decision to select 'customer' would also get considered.¹⁶⁴

The statement of Nasima Khatun plays an important role in this regard. In her own words:

One day I met a girl in the station and she asked me why I am so worried? I told her everything – considering her a friend. How could I know that she would turn into a foe? With the promise of getting me a job away from home, she took me to Mumbai. ... She told me that she would arrange me some job. But she didn't tell me where I would get that job. I was scared as it took three days in train. I did not inform my parents. I did not know how far I am going. When she saw that I was getting scared, she asked me to have faith on her. We got down from train, then Sofia asked me to wait at a place and then she went away telling me that she was going to get a taxi. After waiting for long time, two persons came and said, 'Hey! Come with us!' I looked at them in surprise and then they

¹⁶⁴ Indrani Sinha, Prosonga Pachar: Kichu Jigyasa (Trafficking – Frequently Asked Questions), ABARBONITA – A Quarterly Journal against the Sex-trade, Jan. Marh 2000. p.13; Two distinct systems' regarding children are operated via the brothels of the red-light areas of Calcutta. These systems are as follow:- The new comerchildren who had not prior sexual encounter; The veterans ...who have had previous encounters through marriage or otherwise. The new girls are bought by madams from the pimps, their range vary between Rs 500/- to 20,000/-, this price depends on the 'various attributes of the girl' e.g. – age, beauty, naivety etc. The treatment towards all the new girls, especially young girls usual whose age are under 12 are subjected to the torture of psychological counseling is initially different). The Madams plays the role of a counselor initially and through the conversation they try to mould the psychology and the values which the new comers nurtured in their previous life in the conventional society. Seeing no way to runaway/escape the girls gradually accept the profession of the prostitution. Thus the value structure charges and thus Masi plays a major role in the initiation process of the new girl and changes of their value structure. The young girls usually who are below 12 years are locked up in the rooms after they were purchased off. For 3 months they are provided with food and madam looks after them. All connections with the outside world are thus lost. These girls suffer from mental trauma and attempt to escape. In this cases only madams and sometime some old prostitutes interacts with these girls. Various "Psychological and physical means are used to 'break in' new girls". They are counseled and told by Madams that they have already stayed in the red-light areas and their return to the village will not be beneficial for them as village people will never believe that these girls were not involved in practicing prostitution during their stay in the red-light area and so, they will not accept these girls no help them out. Therefore, gradually the girls make her mentally strong and begun to practice as prostitutes. For securing rich client 'dalals' (pimps) are contacted by the Madams. The experience of 'first encounter' usually occurs at a hotel or outside the brothel in case of these girls. But sometimes it occurs in the brothels occasionally. These girls are taken by the Madams who take them 'on the pretext of going for outing' to those places mentioned above. Here these girls are offered to 'customers' who were already 'renegotiated'. In this case the negotiated price is extremely high ranging from Rs 5000 – 20000 for a one night entertainment. Thus, the girls are initiated into the profession of prostitution. Their inaugurations thus take place and officially they start practicing as prostitutes. In the initial stage, (mainly during the first few months)girls are forced into prostitution but slowly, by the passage of time they get accustomed to it and without having no other option they accept 'prostitution' as a way to live life. But, situation differs in the case of 'veterans' these girls had previous sexual experience either through the institution of marriage or forcible sexual relationship by a friend, neighbor or others. These girls are driven into prostitution mainly 'due to economic need or oppression in the family'. They also kept locked in their rooms at the initial stage for few months. Madams are the main authority to control them directly. The Clients are secured for them who are brought in their rooms by their Madams. The girls unaware of the mechanism of the red-light area are often oppressed by the Madams. - A study on children in Prostitution in Kolkata' – conducted by ATSEC, West.Bengal, commissioned by CINIASHA (Urban Unit of Child in Need Institution), April 2005. p .46

forcefully took me into a taxi and when I tried to shout, they hold my mouth with their hands and told me 'listen, Sofia has sold you off at Rs. 15,000 to us. Now you have to do whatever we will ask you to.' ...They took me to brothel, later I came to know that the place is known as Kamathipura. When I went there, I was about to attain 15 years. Then, I started living there. First two days no one was sent to me. Then they forcefully sent men in my room. ... I used to get afraid as I was very thinly built. Men would hold my face and force me to do filthy things. They used hold my leg and widen them, which was very painful for me. Initially the landlady used to provide me with food and clothing. She would give me good food to eat but they used to lock me in a room. Life was terrible in a small dusky room. In my village I used to roam around in open field and here I felt like hell in a locked room. When police used to raid, we would be kept in a hidden room upstairs. Even if you shout, the sound will not come out from there. We used to spend in that small room anyhow for an hour or so. We all used to cry in fear. One of us hide herself below the cot and surrendered that is why they started misbehaving with us.¹⁶⁵

In this regard one prostitute's statement clearly throws light upon the actions of *mashi* in saving girl for her own interest during police raid. She says:

*"When the police raided, I was made to wear a torn nighty and pretend to be a maid."*¹⁶⁶

We can visualize the brutality of the red-light areas from the prostitutes like the Shabnams, Babitas, ukshanas and the Nasimas from Bihar in their own statements. The dark lady with beautiful eyes, Babita, who is barely 22 years old, according to her:

You know, in this trade, if a new girl comes, at first they have to sacrifice their body to the local hoodlums and police. If someone denies or disagrees, then in presence of the police, these hoodlums would throw them into the well and will kill them. In Bihar, law-justice and administration – all vanishes in the small rooms of the red-light areas." This does not end here, the one who got have license to be a Baiji (their profession is only singing and dancing), and many a times they are being raped by these hoodlums. The girls from the state of Lalu-Rabri have accused this. Before Babita could finish her agony, Nasimas and Rukshanas start their story, "oh yes, please also write about the tortures of the owner of the house/*malkins*." What kind of torture you face, even before finishing this question; 19 year old young lady Rukshana says as if she was her answer ready, compelled by the situation and the time, our mothers came into this trade. And we, their children, who are studying, going to college, we want be away from this profession and want to bring our mothers also out of this. We want to live independently. These *malkins* do not want that we should live with pride and without this sin. They are conspiring with the local police and hoodlums and kidnapping the girls by bringing vehicle at the doorsteps. They are torturing our mothers. To save ourselves from this injustice and torture, we have come to Calcutta to learn the tricks to fight against all odds and to live life with pride and honesty.¹⁶⁷

The girls who newly come to the brothel or are brought through Trafficking or procured with false promises are always victim at their initiation process to the brutal torture of *Bariwallis/Masi/Malkins* and other elements. This issue has already been discussed above in this section. In connection with

¹⁶⁵ Shraboni, *Nasima Khatuner Jibon o Mrityu*, ABARBONITA – A Quarterly Journal against the Sex-trade, Annual Publication, 2000. p.3

¹⁶⁶ A study on children in Prostitution in Kolkata' – conducted by ATSEC, West.Bengal, commissioned by CINIASHA (Urban Unit of Child in Need Institution), April 2005. p.57-58

¹⁶⁷ Krishnakumar Das, *Police Ke Jabdo Kora Sikhe Gelo Shishura*, Sanbaad Protidin, 4th May 2004 (21st Baisakh, 1411)

this fact two case histories are being cited here. The pathetic victim's (Tobossum's (Bengali) story goes like this. Tobossum Khatun was from Rongpur of Bangladesh who was brought to India by her distant relative (brother). Harun, who made her false promise of giving job to her, lastly sold her to the Monua *Bariwalli* of Walgunj red-light area of Khidirpur. After extreme torture she succeeded to run away from that brothel and was brought by a kind hearted kuli (porter) to the house of Maladi who was an active sex-worker of Durbar and asked her to wait outside the house till morning then she could easily meet Maladi who may be able to send her back to the Bangladesh. As she was extremely tortured and chilly powder (Bengali) was inserted into her vagina by the Bariwalla, she was suffering near the drain in pain and her condition became almost to die. In this situation suddenly Maladi came to know and rescued her and after sometime while primary nursing was done by Maladi Tobossum felt bit better than before. And she began to narrate her life incident with full of tears in eyes. Sobbing all along, she told her story:

My name is Tabassum Khatun. Father is Jahan Ali. Mother's name is Suraiya Banu. My home is in Rongpur, Bangladesh. ...There was a boy called Harun in our village....

Tabassum went on recalling between sobs:

... Harun da brought me to this house and made me sit in one room and spoke something to the owner. They started arguing regarding some point, but became quiet after some time and I was relieved. Then he came to the room and introduced me to Manua as my master. He told me to obey him. I should not tell anyone that I was from Bangladesh, he said, since I had no passport or visa. He said he was going back and would come again to see me after two months. Though I was reluctant to leave Harunda, I was happy to join the new job and agreed; I told him that I would do my work properly, and would not tell anyone". When Maladi asked how was Harun da to look at, Tabassum said: "He is tall and fair, has no beard; he has lot of hair. He has a scar with stitch marks on his right cheek. He was between twenty and thirty years of age. He says he drives a taxi in India. As soon as Harunda left, the owner came to his real self. After some time he came in drunk, entered my room and locked the room. He ordered me to undress. In protest I exclaimed 'why do you do this? I have come here to work.' To this he replied that to do this work Haru had sold me to him for twenty thousand rupees. The moment I heard about 'selling' the sky seemed to have come down on my head. I fell on his feet and said you are the master, master is God. I beg you, please do not do this to me. But who would listen? Before I understood what was happening he pounced upon me and raped me. He did rape me like that for three days. After four or five days Manua told me to stand at the gate. I stood. But nobody came. So Manua started beating me up severely. A woman named Jayanti lived with Manua. She would ill-treat me too. I never got a chance to meet or talk to any other girl in that house. Once I secretly spoke to a girl and got beatings from Manua again. Everyday Jayanti and Manua used to whip me with thin bamboo sticks. Standing on the road for almost 16 hours at a stretch, from morning 8 to 12 in the night – my legs would swell. In return, if I asked for anything other than food or clothes, they would beat me mercilessly. Their way was to thrash one with stick like driving a cow down the street. After spending about a week like this, that terrible day came. That day Jayanti had brought a customer for me. That customer stayed with me from 3 o'clock in the afternoon till the whole of night. As it is I was tired in the day – then the strain of having a whole-night customer— I was very sleepy and could not wake up in the morning. And that was doom for me. For this late rising, Manua lost his

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Tabassum Khatun

(Source: Mrinal Kanti Dutta, Jaunakarmeeder Jiban Satya)

After this Tabassum made up her mind not to stay there any longer, whatever happens. So, her plans started accordingly. There was no question of opening the gate in the middle of the night; Manua himself held the keys. Therefore she planned her escape through the backside at the end of the building where there was a high wall. Tabassum planned to jump that wall. Usually her room was under lock and key. Jayanti did not lock it on that day as she was supposed to start the daily chores

thought. Jumping from the 8 feet high wall, she hurt her legs badly. Tabassum stood up slowly braving the pain. A man sleeping there, may be a coolie or laborer, suddenly grabbed my hand and started shouting 'thief, thief!' she covered his mouth with my hand and whispered in his ears – 'I'm not a thief. In fact, I'm the one who has been stolen and shuttled to this place!' Then she explained everything to him. The man had earlier heard about *Mala Singh* as a leader of 'Durbar'. But he was an old man, and could not find the way properly at night. He made Tabassum sit there and told her to meet *Maladi*, she could send me back to Bangladesh. Within this time *Manua* got the news and came with his gang to the clinic. As it is, after hearing Tabassum's pathetic story, everyone was in a fit of rage. So when *Manua* came to claim his 'property' back, they all flared up instantly. It was like adding fuel to fire. The situation was so chaotic that *Manua* was about to get a good beating. *Maladi*, the leader of the organization quieted everybody urging them not to take the law in their own hands. At last after taking the girl to P.G. Hospital and treating her in the emergency ward, an F.I.R. was lodged at the Watgunge Police Station. *Manua* was arrested.¹⁶⁸

The story of *Maladi* whose real name was Reshma Khatun is very instructive:

I was born in the village Kantalia in Barrackpur. ... we reached Sealdah Station and found our way to house No. 12, Khidirpur. On the first two days after we arrived, *Jharnadi* used to hide me under the cot. I would be lying on a mat under the cot and the bed-cover would be pulled down low to cover me, so that nobody would notice me. A man and a woman would enter the room and get on to the bed, the Cot would move, but I was totally unaware of what was happening. I felt like peeking out from under the bed to see what was happening, but lacked the courage. After three days I was allowed to come out and do small household chores. I saw girls standing outside at the gates with heavy make up, dressed colorfully. I too wanted to dress like that; I thought probably it would help me get a job. When asked,

¹⁶⁸ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata, 2005. p.144-151; 'There was a boy called Harun in our village. He used to visit all houses. He was friendly with my mother too. This Harun advised me one day that if I went to India with him, he would give me a job and if I could return home with a lot of money, my husband might take me back and be under my control. He also added that he had already taken many girls like this to India. Now they earn a lot of money and are all fine. I am not educated, so didn't understand much. When I told this to my stepmother, she too said that if I returned with a lot of money and stayed with my husband, she would be the happiest. A few days before the Id festival, I saw Harun da and proposed to go to India with him. He said that I could go, but I should not tell the matter to anybody except my mom. If the matter was known somebody might inform the police. I had no passport and visa; so if we were caught not only Harunda, but also everybody in my family would be arrested. I believed whatever he said and decided to travel as early as possible on the next morning. Harunda said 'somehow you reach the bus stop before sunrise. I will be there.' Whole night I dreamt of earning a lot of money and coming back to buy my husband's love. I hardly slept in excitement and got up while it was still dark. Without informing anyone I packed a bag with a few clothes and left home at dawn to reach the bus stand. Soon Harun came well-dressed in suit and shoes. With a few minutes the Dhaka-bound bus arrived. We saw both sides – nobody was watching us. Happily we got in and sat in the bus on our way to India. On the way the bus halted and we had some tiffin. Once Harun asked if I wanted to eat rice or not. In the excitement of traveling to a foreign country I had lost all feeling of hunger. My only worry was when to enter India and start earning money. The bus first brought us to Dhaka, then to Jessore and then proceeded to Bongaon border via Khulna. I spent the night on this side of the border in someone's house, then again one night in another house on the other side of the border. While crossing the border Harunda gave some money to the *jawans* (guards of the Border Security Force) as bribe. When I asked Harun da why he paid them so much, he said – "I had to waste so much money just for your sake. You have no passport or visa, what to do? Though I had a lot of tension and worries for coming out like this, my trust and gratitude for Harun da went up many times after seeing this. He brought me to a village house. We spent the whole day and night there. Next morning by an early train Harun da brought me to Kolkata. From there I came to this house.' Ibid. p.145-147

they would scold me, or even hit me on my head as a rebuke. After two days Jharnadi's *Babu*, Prabirda came back from his native place. He saw me and asked 'From where did you get this girl?' Jharnadi replied that she brought me from her place some seven days back. Prabir asked, 'you'll feed her? Or are you sending her on job?' In reply Jharnadi said, 'If you ask I'll send her today itself. But she is a novice, doesn't know a thing!' Prabirda exclaimed 'Don't worry about that, I'll do whatever is to be done.' He asked Jharnadi to close the door. Jharnadi obediently locked the room and asked me to take off my clothes. I shivered in unknown fear. When I asked Jharnadi the reason, she told me to first remove my clothes and then watch what happens. When I mildly protested and refused to strip in front of *Jamai Babu* (Brother-in-law / Jharna's husband), I got a tight slap on my cheek and Jharnadi herself removed my clothes in one stroke. Prabir, Jharnadi's *Babu* was drinking in one corner of the room. Now he jumped up and was ready to rape me. Though I was only fourteen, I was well built and strong; so Prabir found it difficult to grab me. Now Jharna came to assist Prabir, threw me on the bed and pinned my hands down. Even after all this, Prabir's efforts fell flat. My organ was still not developed. Prabir could not penetrate. After a lot of bleeding, I was taken to a local clinic. Though I was howling and crying all along, nobody in the house came to my rescue – out of fear of Jharnadi and Prabir, or due to some other reason. After treatment and medication for five days, a new treatment started. To enlarge my vagina, a candlestick covered with penicillin ointment was inserted into my vaginal opening. After treating me like this for fifteen days, I was forced to take customers. Whenever I disobeyed, Prabir and Jharna would beat me up mercilessly. They would use a stick and beat me whenever and wherever they liked like beating a thief. So I was somewhat compelled to digest all the torture. I had to take some ten to twelve customers daily; and had to stand at the gate from morning 8 o'clock to 1-30 in the midnight. In return I got nothing except food and clothes. When customers gave me tips, that too was snatched away by Jharna and Prabir. Sometimes I wished to escape. But there was Jharna's maidservant sitting at the doorstep keeping vigil whole day, and running away was impossible. One night when I just sat down to eat rice, a group of policemen thundered in to raid the brothel. They entered the house, picked up all the girls and took us to the police station. After spending the night at the police station, next day at noon we were produced at the Court. Finally my place was in a rescue home. After going there, I had a new experience. The other girls there used to ask me often 'why have you come here?' I could not answer in shame. They used to tease me and abuse me. Moreover, as I was young, they would make me sweep the house, massage their bodies and do many other household chores.



Maladi

(Source: Mrinal Kanti Dutta, Jaunakarmeeder Jiban Satya)

In this I was somewhat better off than before. But quite often the other girls used to ask me something; they would ask me 'didn't you get a call yet?' Whose call? What call? I would wonder. If I asked they would snigger at me. Anyway, at last I got that call one night. The person who called me was the watchman of a gate next door. Other girls encouraged me to go fast. It was 12 or 1 o'clock in the night. He took me to a room. There, a man was sitting on a broken chair and drinking. I was told to sit in front of him as the watchman left after saluting the man and closing the door behind him. First the seated man offered me various kinds of food. Among the things offered, there was alcohol too. I was feeling shy sitting like this in front of a stranger; and declined the food. Gradually the man started sliding his hand inside my panty. From my previous experience I knew that playing with the panty was the prior indication of rape. I tried to resist with all my strength and screamed. But I had to surrender to a big hulking man like that soon and that night I was raped again. After a few days of this Prabir and Jharna appeared at the Home mysteriously and asked me – 'Do you want to escape from here?' In fear and disgust I agreed to get out of the shelter. Then Jharna di bribed the Home administrator 5000/- rupees and posing as my sister took me out of that place. After coming out I asked for only thing; grabbing Jharnadi's feet I begged her to take me to my mother once. 'Please let me see my mother once. I promise you I will repay whatever you spend on me.' At this she seemed to take a little pity on me. She took me to her house in Barrackpur to allow me to see my mother. While going, I met some friends on the way who advised me not to go to my own house. As it is, because I ran away, my family members were ostracized in the locality. My father was made to do sit-ups seven times holding on to his own ears (a method of shaming and punishing a person). He was asked to spit and then lick his own spit seven times as a mode of making amends for his daughter's sin. At this stage if I entered the house, it might cause horror and bloodshed. In

fear I took refuge in a friend's house and called for my mother. Ma came in the evening with a bowl of my favorite homemade sweet. She broke down in tears. After feeding me, mother told me the truth. 'Stay wherever you have gone. If you ever try to come back home, your father will drive me out of the house.' Hearing my mother's words I broke down in despair. I came back sheepishly following Jhamadi back to No. 12, Munshigunge. After coming back too, I had no peace. Jhamadi used to beat me up everyday under some excuse or other. If the same customer came for two or three days consecutively she would suspect that he might seduce me and take me away. She would drive away such customers. I had a clever idea of saving the tips I earned by hiding them inside a pillow. I would roll the notes like thin cigarettes and push them through a small hole made in the pillow. When Jhamadi noticed that I was not giving her any money for a few days, she followed me and found out about the pillow. She in fact saw me lifting the bed sheet and putting the money inside. After catching me red-handed, she tore open the pillow and got a bunch of notes. She took it all out. Seeing my hard-earned money vanish like this, I was heart-broken. The same day I decided that I would somehow escape from this place. Otherwise I would have no future. Just like Tabassum, I too, escaped from the brothel by jumping over the compound wall. I reached the big lane in Kalighat. After staying there for two days, I took a room in the post office lane. Though, in between Jhamadi and Prabir came in search of me, they were driven out of the locality, shooed away by the girls of Kalighat. I carried on, shuttled from one place to another finally setting down in the same house in Munshigunge of Khidirpur. I am the Ex-general Secretary of Durbar Mahila Samannoy Committee.¹⁶⁹

Jhamadi's story offers a detailed description of life at the red-light areas. From her story how much value of a prostitute matter to the *bariwalli* becomes clear. Once the capacity to generate money fails the girl is thrown out or the *bariwalli* lose interest in her. Shrikarna narrates the story of Jhamadi:

Jhamadi was a rather soft-natured girl from Nepal. Her full name was Jhamadi Tamang. She was very fair complexioned, about twenty-four and was extremely beautiful to look at. About seven years back, stricken by abject poverty, Jhamadi's father had sold her to a middle-man

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p.151-56; 'I was born in the village Kantalia in Barrackpur. ...I had two brothers elder to me. Mother was always partial to my brothers; she used to care more for them. Some days it will be like that, at mealtime, brothers got pieces of meat. But on my plate there were only some lentil and greens. Similarly, during festivals even if new clothes were bought for my brothers I had to manage with old and torn clothes. Ma used to say too, 'Will you perform my last rites? What's the use of feeding you? Boys will earn money, but you will leave home after marriage. If I keep you in comfort at this age, you won't be able to toil in your husband's house'. Even though I was only thirteen at this time, my mother's discriminating attitude made me hostile towards family life in general. I understood that if life was so painful in my mother's home, what torment might be awaiting me in my husband's place. So I was trying from that time to find a job somehow. A girl in our neighborhood named Jhamadi, who was the elder sister of my friend Runu used to work in Kolkata. She was rather respected and honored at home. So I first disclosed my wish to my friend Runu. Runu used to stay a few houses away from ours. I told Runu, please ask your sister to somehow get a job for me in Kolkata. Next day her sister Jhamadi came home and I grabbed her hands, 'please Jhamadi – arrange for a job for me somehow or other'. First she was hesitant, then she said, 'Jobs are not so easy to come by that you'll get whenever you wish. Still, since you are serious, I will try. I will let you know next week'. Next week, as soon as Jhamadi came, I asked – 'could you make any headway?' She thought for some time – 'yes, I've made some progress. But to get a job there you have to first spend some money. But once you learn, earning three to four thousand rupees per month is not at all difficult.' 'How to do that?' I again grabbed her hand. She said, 'Not a problem. If you can take out the gold jewelry from your parents' cupboard, we can get six months charges for learning work by selling them. And you can stay with me. I will bear the cost of your food and lodging.' When I asked her when we should go, Jhamadi said – 'Tomorrow I'm going back to Kolkata. If you can, bring the gold tomorrow early in the morning, we'll go together.' After coming back home I somehow finished my dinner and waited eagerly for my parents to go to bed. When they were asleep, I groped in the dark, opened the box and took whatever gold ornaments I could get. I wrapped them in a handkerchief and tied a knot. As soon as the early morning lights came I took a rickshaw and came to the Barrackpore station. That was the first time I saw a train. Never thought such a huge vehicle could really run. When the train started I watched how all the things on both sides of the tracks were running backward. Before I could understand what was happening, we reached Sealdah Station and found our way to house No. 12, Khidirpur.' Ibid. p.151-153

for three thousand rupees. Jharna, left for the city with a hope of getting to eat *dal* and rice everyday even if she did not get a good job. After a lot of ups and downs and playing hide and seek with the police she finally reached the 'red-light area'. The same middleman or pimp sold her to a landlady (brothel owner) for thirty thousand rupees. Jharna could not repay the amount of thirty thousand to the landlady even after taking eight customers on an average everyday at a rate of forty to fifty rupees for five years. Finding no way of getting rid of this landlady, Jharna ran away to another locality after five years. In fear of getting caught by the lady she went to another powerful landlady and worked under her for one year at a system known as '*Adhia*' (sharing half of her earning). In the 'red-light' areas Nepalese girls quite often suffer from tuberculosis or TB. Coming down from the hills to the plains of Bengal, most of them get infected by TB within one to three years. For some it is due to the climate, while others say that the strain becomes too much for them. To tell the truth, how they get it is a matter of research but for Jharna the strain was unbearable. She got an attack of tuberculosis. Gradually the new landlady lost interest in Jharna and she came out.¹⁷⁰

Bariwalli/Masi/Malkins possess a very shrewd character. They are aware of all the tricks and possess an impressive communication skill through which they always try to convince girls to get introduced into the profession. A Mashi has also to arrange clothing, dress, cosmetics and other necessary things which include medical treatment and other things for her inmates. Sometimes, a role of a 'banker' is also played by her while she lends money to the inmates with high interest. The valuable ornaments and other things are sometimes deposited by the inmates while taking loan from the Masi.¹⁷¹ Manada's '*Shikshita Patitar Atmacharit*' gives ample information about the role of *Bariwallis/Masis* in the brothel world and in the life of a prostitute.

Manada Says:

At this helpless situation Rajbala said, 'For tonight I can take you somewhere. We will see what can be done tomorrow morning.' We had to agree. It was late night. The same carriage took extra money and took us to a prostitute's room in Harkata Gully at Champatala. This woman was known to Rajbala. She had taken the entire house on rent and used to run the brothel by letting out rooms to individual whores. Other than her own trade, she earned some more money in this method. Such women were known as '*Bariwalis*' in these quarters. This woman was known as '*Rani-bariwali*' in the locality. Seeing Rajbala and noticing the three of us with her, '*Rani-bariwali*' was extremely happy. With great care she arranged for a good room for us which had sufficient beds; food was also arranged. Rajbala started talking to the '*Bariwali*'. I was rather worried. This is the first time in my life I entered the house of an established, practicing whore. I was feeling uneasy. The room was at a corner in the ground floor, it had no ventilation. A strange, ugly odour filled the place. I looked around – there were drunken people vomiting, some were engaged in song and music, some in brawls – seeing this, my heart sank; but where to go if we leave this place. Next morning Khedi said she would go to her aunt's place in Beliaghata. We did not stop her. She went away. We stayed on for three four days. In the mean time, '*bariwali*' coaxed and made us agree to take up prostitution. We could not argue any longer with that clever woman. The reasons she gave in favour of prostitution were thus, 'whores are free;

¹⁷⁰ Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p 93

¹⁷¹ B. Joardar, *Prostitution In Historical and Modern Perspectives*; Inter-India Publication, New Delhi, 1984, p.103

God has given them beauty and the guiles to seduce men, for what? – To earn money by selling them. A barrister sells his brains, a scholar his knowledge; even a Guru sells his spiritual *Mantra*; then why a beautiful girl would not make money by selling her body? In every business there are risks; this is no exception. All big and renowned men are tied to these beauties. All rich men's money comes to these girls. One glance from these beauties cost a thousand rupees.' Manada lost her way:- I was convinced. '*Bariwali*' started looking for a room for me, Kalidasi took a room there itself. In a slum on Amherst Street, where at present City College stands, Rajbala and I took two tiled huts on rent. '*Rani-bariwali*', lent us some money and gave us some clothes to start with. ...After late evening, we used to get dressed up and go to the nearby temple in the pretext of watching the evening prayers and worship of the idol. After standing there for some time, when we noticed that we have attracted attention of some well-dressed guy, we would start walking towards home. The dandy would also follow us. Our landlady ('*bariwali*') had taught us this method of catching a client. At first I refused to go out. I was afraid that I might come across someone from my own house. May be Nanda-*dada*, the maidservant Harimati or father's driver or even my father himself might spot me on the street!.... *Rani-bariwali* used to visit us often; we called her Rani-masi Ranimasi said, 'you say your father thinks you are as good as dead; doesn't want to take you back; neither do you wish for his protection – then why do you fear him?' I said, 'Still, if my father sees with his eyes that his own daughter has come to this sinful path, won't it make him sad?' Ranimasi said, 'If he is so sad, he can easily take his daughter back home and get rid of his sadness. Dear, you have come to this line; you'll see many new things. You'll find daughter working as a whore in front of her father – you'll see a mother sending her daughter to the streets daily dressing her up for the purpose. You will find brothers, sisters and relatives living on the money earned by a prostitute. It is not only us that are fallen. The whole society is 'fallen'. Gradually my fear vanished.¹⁷²

Any profession requires a proper training. If the profession is a particular art-form, then training to get expertise is all the more necessary. Prostitution or harlotry has been characterised as a special 'art form'. The main responsibility of the harlots lies in pleasing and entertaining different types of men. Men can be of various kinds—handsome or ugly, refined or crude, educated or illiterate, all have to be satisfied. Therefore, a whore has to dress up and bring out a seductive attitude in her speech, behaviour and movements. Above all, she has to understand the psychology of her visitors. Only physical beauty is not enough; they have to use sexually arousing words, speeches and bodily movements. There is a saying in Sanskrit- "*Stabdhasya nashyati yashah*". A beautiful and well-dressed woman, if reticent, fails to arouse interest. If a silent doll could seduce, then there would be no need for music, dance and other vibrating art forms.¹⁷³ In today's brothels, learning of make-up and the art of dramatics or of the sixty-four postures have become obsolete. But silent preparations go on in picking up the basic art of alluring the man. The initiation into the sex-act varies from person to person. In some, it is utterly common, in some it starts with cruel barbarism and for some the experience comes with sheer beauty. Girls who are traditionally in this profession start learning the whole thing from the age of 7 or 8. The artistic and the carnal come simultaneously to them.

¹⁷² Manada Devi, Sikshita Patitar Atmcharit, (autobiography in Bengali), Chirayat Prakashan, Kolkata, 2004. p.51-53

¹⁷³ Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995. , p.69

While the mother is their first teacher, in some cases a male member of the family gives the first instructions on the hidden knowledge of sex, and in time she becomes an expert. The girls, who are bought or are forced into the trade, learn all these finally from the *masi* or the keeper. Naturally over a period of time in their own interest to earn more money they learn the special language of the whores along with some music and dance and most important of all, the methods of birth-control.¹⁷⁴

In this regard the experience of Manada narrated by herself in her autobiography, '*Sikshita Potitar Atmacharit*', stands very much relevant. She narrates:

Staying in these unhygienic surroundings my health deteriorated day by day. As per Ranimasi's advice I was taking some medicine to prevent getting pregnant – after that I developed various diseases. Rajbala also had the same medicine, but she had no problem. I became very thin and weak. The whole body ached. Hands and feet had ugly marks. Face was covered with rashes that turned into painful eczema. Ranimasi saw me and said 'You have to go to hospital – no other way!' I lost all hopes of living. Lying in bed I used to cry day and night – wetting my pillow with endless tears. That time I thought for the first time that may be death is pleasurable. I had no friends or relatives. All other women are busy with their own chores. After evening all are going to stand at the doors for business. Spending the night with drinks and other excitements, they would wake up late – by 8-9 am. Who will look after me? I found everything filthy all around me. As if, we were all pigs – a bunch of pigs rolling in mud. I realized that it was time for my death. Ranimasi and Rajbala together took me to the hospital. After three months I recovered fully and came back home. I did not have a single *paisa* in my hand.¹⁷⁵ ...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 allies of the pros' quarters, the love-god Cupid confuses them and blurs their vision.'¹⁷⁶ 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.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p 69-70

¹⁷⁵ Manada Devi, *Sikshita Patitar Atmacharit*, (autobiography in Bengali), Chirayat Prakashan, Kolkata, 2004. p.55

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. p 56

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p 56-57

In the present day, the girls of the whore-colonies have to learn all these very same tricks; and in these the *masi* is their main coach.¹⁷⁸

From the above discussions it appears that *Malkin* / *Masi* most of the time possessess a ruthless character towards the prostitutes under her. But few incidents offer contrasting image:

Sonali (name changed) was first raped by her mother's *Babu* [?] at the age of 10. Her mother was a woman in Prostitution (commercial woman in prostitution) and her father was ice-cream seller. She had an elder bother, her mother claims, torture her brother unnecessarily and even tied him up and kept him under the Sun as a punishment for petty mischief. Sonali lover her brother and sympathized with him. She would unite him as soon as their mother left them. Then one day a well-wisher sent her to a boarding house. Her brother unable to bear the torture anymore, fled from home. Her mother brought her back home before long. They went out for a vacation to a distant place. Little did she know that her mother had one their on a 'contact' with her '*Babu*'. Her mother's '*Babu*' raped Sonali. They left the place. Once in their home, her mother started taking her to a brothel in a different locality. She forced her into prostitution for four months; this went on until the local club in this brothel objected. Her mother took her away. Sonali fled from home. She went to another brothel and started prostitution independently. A pimp took her along with two more girls in the same brothel to another city. There they were kept locked in the attic of a brothel. The Madam loved them and saves to their well being. Client came to their rooms for entertainments. During this time, the frequency of the police raid was increasing and many girls of their age-group were confiscated. The Madam freed them and told them to go back to Kolkata. They came back to their place of origin and started all over again. Sonali dreams to be a mother in the near future. She had aborted a baby at 7 months.¹⁷⁹

One prostitute's statement was:

Nobody dares to force us into any other type of sex. The Madam protects us.¹⁸⁰

Though, this case is quite exceptional.

In the red-light areas, as it has already been mentioned above that there are two types of house-owners. Those who have taken the house on lease from the actual landlord are called 'Managers'. And those who have taken one or two rooms to run the business by taking a share of money earned by the girls are known as *Malkins* (something like a proprietress). As it is said in Bengali--'even the father has a father', so these Managers are also exploited in return by the actual owners of the houses. In Mrinal Kanti's memoir we get a vivid description:

Dipak da, as he is known in our area owns five houses. I noticed, when he visited the ladies (managers) of three of his houses, he was affectionately called by them as 'darlings'. Only a few days back Rekha or Lata who managed the Lal-bari (red -house) or Tablawallah Bari used to call him '*dada*' (elder brother). I asked Rekha, 'Since when has Dipak become your darling?' With a big smile Rekha answered, 'Many days. But since I have four more

¹⁷⁸ Debrani Kar, Kolkatar Nagarnati, Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995. . p.71

¹⁷⁹ 'A study on children in Prostitution in Kolkata' – conducted by ATSEC, West.Bengal, commissioned by CINIASHA (Urban Unit of Child in Need Institution), April 2005.' P.89

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p.51

darlings, I used to feel shy and called him as elder brother.' I noticed Dipak entering the house. Dipak was friendly and I used to drink with him at times; so I casually pulled him by the hand and brought him out and asked him 'How many more darlings will you have?' He laughed and said 'No more, unless I decide to change any manager!' 'At this age, you really...' I said. He became a little serious and said 'You know something? I have no interest in them, or in sex; I am not their *babu*. But as long as I treated them as my sisters they used to cheat and steal my money. But now, I swear, since I started living with them sharing their pillows, a sort of relationship has grown. Now not only have they stopped cheating on my profit, if required they are ready to feed and look after me.'¹⁸¹

2.3.4. Role of Pimps:

Another peculiar class in the brothels of Calcutta and world over is that of *dalal*. From ancient time, like in any other business, *dalals* have enormous power in the brothel world. They have been referred by many names, somewhere agent, somewhere mediator, pimp, bully, john, souteneur.¹⁸² The pimp plays an important role in the brothel world. The appropriate client are escorted by the pimps and straight brought to the brothel to the prostitute concerned. These pimps are very much proficient in the art of convincing the client. After seeing the clients they can easily make out their preference and according to that the pimp starts advertising the charms of the prostitutes of the special brothel and tempts the clients to come to that certain specific brothel for the entertainment. The prostitute who maintains pimp is regarded as a high class prostitute than the other prostitute of the brothel who can't afford to have any pimps. According Benjamin and Master, 'the whore who does not have a pimp is regarded as those in like with suspicion, in the argot of whoredom she is an outlaw.'¹⁸³

In recent times Pimps like Kailash *dalal*, *Babu Dalal*, *Khokan dalal* etc. are very familiar names to the sex-workers of Calcutta. It is believed that pimps are basically the sons of prostitutes. This is not completely right, some may have their root from this world but for many others it is a side business. Many unemployed and anti-socials from the areas like Watgunge, Sonagachi, and Harkata are involved in this business. Apart from them, the fruit-seller at the station, taxi or auto-rickshaw drivers, the waiters, the biri-shop owners near the station, the cobblers, who daily transact with many people, are also involved in this business. The business is based on commission. *Dalals* act like a mediator, as most of the newcomers do not know how to get in to brothel directly, *Dalals* act like a mediator for them. For some of the *dalals*, getting client is the only means of earning. They also live in the same area and they get 25% as commission from the girls. They also bring girls in the area. At times it has been seen that the fixed-client of the sex-worker has acted as a

¹⁸¹ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.113-14

¹⁸² Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995. , p.45

¹⁸³ Cited in B. Joardar, *Prostitution In Historical and Modern Perspectives*; Inter-India Publication, New Delhi, 1984. p.132

pimp for her. These pimps have some peculiar characteristics; firstly they have natural skills of trapping clients. They are very sharp. They know each and every single thing about getting girls from other area to getting clients and they are very skilled in this. They are aware of almost all the things of notorious world. Not only this, they also acquire the skill in judging the client about his taste, whether he needs young or old, novice or expert in making sex etc. In order to complete the first step of selecting girl, if required, they give complete history, structure and details about the girl to the client. Here is how it works: the *dalal* follows the client by saying 'want to go sir?' client will say nothing in this. *Dalal* again says, '*Kashmir ki Koli sir!* (a proverb of describing beauty) I have the catalog sir! I have the pictures too! Want to see Sir?' Client is still silent; he again goes with 'She is fresh sir, just two days back she has been into this business!' Now the *babu* will turn. They start bargaining and *dalal* takes him to the hell.¹⁸⁴

In *Rater Kolkata (Calcutta by Night)*, Meghnad Gupta sketches a picture about the role of pimps in the red-light areas. But we can draw somewhat, a picture of the pimp-prostitute relationship from that: In Sonagachhi and Rupogachhi, unless the prostitutes were starving, they didn't bother to strain their legs standing on the balcony. Mostly, through friends and other known people they used to get regular clients. And those outsiders who used to come occasionally, escorted by pimps or middlemen who fixed the rate beforehand. The pimps used to get one-fourth of the rate fixed. So, when there was a middleman, the rate went up. In order to raise his share, the pimp used to quote the eight rupee-girl at ten rupees.¹⁸⁵

Information about the roles of *dalals* or pimps in brothel world is also found in *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya* (Truth about the lives of the sex-workers) by Mrinal Kanti Dutta. He has talked about *dalals* or agents or pimps, who are not for buying and selling girls. Their job is to get customers for the prostitutes. They usually help the 'A' category girls, whose rates per customer, per shot are above 100 rupees. Usually the women of 'A' category do not come out on the streets like others and maintain their status by remaining in their own rooms or flats. They have to depend on the *dalals* to obtain clients. The *dalals* too, in the pretext of bringing customers get a chance to enter the girls' rooms. Seeing a new or a pretty girl they also demand a little favour in the middle of the night. The girls have to oblige in fear of losing business.

After 'Durbar' started its AIDS awareness campaign, some of these 'A' category girls refused to entertain customers without condoms. Then the customers approached the *dalals* and offered them extra tips to be allowed to go without condoms. If the girls were adamant in their stand, the same

¹⁸⁴ Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995. .p.45-46

¹⁸⁵ Meghnad Gupta, *Rater Kolkata*, Pratik, Kolkata, 1923 (1st Publication), 1991, p.31

fate awaited them—that is, they would lose business. In fact these pimps were so powerful and united that they could totally boycott a prostitute and jointly bring her down to the point of starvation.¹⁸⁶

The girls are supplied to Sonagachhi through the pimps. It is difficult for the women to come there directly. Even pimps of Sonagachhi have their own organisation; a well-organised pimps' association. To get into the profession of pimps, one has to deposit a sum of Rs.500 to this association. On the occasion of death of any of the pimps, their last rites are arranged and their bereaved family-members are taken care of by this organisation. It has a president and a general secretary like any other organisation. Rules of commission etc are decided by the committee. One pimp cannot deduct his commission from the same girl and for the same customer more than three times. After the third time, the girl gets the full amount paid by the client.¹⁸⁷

Most of the pimps of Sonagachhi are from Bihar or Uttar Pradesh. Generally they inherit these professions from their father. Even though there are a few who are sons of sex-workers, most of them are from Bihar or U.P. Every two-year one among them is selected as *mukhiya* or leader by raising hands. The job of this *mukhiya* is to supervise the work of other *dalals* -to see that nobody encroaches into another's area of business and that nobody misbehaves with girls or customers. If found guilty, they are fined heavily. Usually it amounts to a goat (obviously for a feast of mutton) costing nothing less than 1000-1200 rupees and cash of up to 3000 based on the type of crime. If the guilty refuses to pay, he is not allowed to work. After the fine is paid, on a Sunday, all of them go to the Kalighat temple to sacrifice the goat in the name of *Ma Kali* (goddess Kali) and have a sumptuous meal with the balance money.¹⁸⁸

A detail account of regarding the characteristic of the '*souteneur*' is also found from an official document of the League of Nations, 1929:

The profession is a very old one, as old in deed as prostitution. Rome condemned the procurer in no uncertain terms: 'Infamia notatur qui lenocinium fecerit'. Prostitutes, especially the poorer ones, always sought out this 'protector'. At epochs when public security was more precarious than nowadays, the prostitute felt the need of protection against possible dangers. In modern times the *souteneur* plays a somewhat different part. His chief endeavour is to keep his associate out of reach of the police; should she offend against public order and decency or (in certain countries) evade the sanitary regulations, the *souteneur* is always there ready, if need be, to employ his skill to cover her escape. Although the profession of *souteneur*, if historians are to be believed, goes back to the remotest ages, the fact remains that the great modern cities are particularly favourable to its growth. The *souteneur* is an offender to be found chiefly in wealthy and prosperous cities.

¹⁸⁶ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.119-20

¹⁸⁷ Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995. .p.58

¹⁸⁸ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.120-21

He is not found much in places in which the economic conditions are generally unsuitable. The *souteneur* is generally a young individual fit to work, without private means, moving about a great deal, with an occupation which is more apparent than real and which leaves him with plenty of time on his hand; he divides his time between gambling and places of amusements, where he keeps a watch on the women dependent on him. He exercises what amount to tyrannical domination over his victims and possesses and ascendancy over them which specially have shown in their studies to be of pathological origin. According to these specialists, mental deficiency and nervous disorders play a large part in such cases when the personality of these unfortunate women is entirely subjugated. A special point about this association between *souteneur* and prostitute is that, once it has been brought about, only one of the party has power to dissolve it. The *souteneur* can give up his prey or hand her over to a "colleague", but the prostitute, having chosen a *souteneur*, can't get rid of him except with great difficulty. There is a monstrous solidarity between these two individuals; they cooperate to track down a woman who has resumed her liberty and who even if she leaves the district cannot, as a rule, escape their vengeance. ..., the *souteneur*,..., is not always a man. Women exist with brutal instincts who encourage the prostitution of younger and weaker persons, exercising a dominion over them equal to that of the *souteneur*. There is also the *souteneur* who encourages male prostitution. These victims are, for the most part, mere youths, often almost children. The punishment of such offenders is an essential part of the work of moral protection attaching to child welfare. ...*souteneurs* often belong to gangs of cut-throats and dangerous thieves, while those who derive bigger profits from their profession are content with smaller thefts and practice blackmail.¹⁸⁹

2.3.5. Clients/Babus:

Clients and Babus (fixed clients) play a dynamic role to regulate the lives of prostitutes in the brothel world. These aspects have been vividly analysed in Chapter 3, entitled 'Prostitutes and Clients'

2.3.6. Role of Anti Socials or Hoodlums:

The sex-workers are easily subjected to the violent exploitation by local anti-socials or hoodlums. The organized violence of the latter can easily control the position of the former. The hoodlums also think that they can easily get the possession of women of their choice and can exercise control over them.¹⁹⁰ If any new girl comes in the area, whether she wants or not, she has to cater to the *dadas* of the locality. If she does not agree, she would be harassed in different ways. The goondas would tease them, push or trip them when walking on the streets. They would drink and create nuisance in front of their houses. Whenever the girl comes out to solicit for clients, she has to face these local hoodlums: 'you have to take me first/entertain me first, then only you would be permitted to entertain other clients.' The only motto is to enter the girl's room at any cost. If nothing works then they

¹⁸⁹ League of Nations: Traffic In Women and Children: Concise Study Of the Laws and Penalties Relating to *Soutneurs*. File P.3R-44.Progs.B308-309(Permanent), November, 1929. [Police Department: Police Branch].p.3-4

¹⁹⁰ Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree*, Kolkata, 2002. p.85

would handover a bill of an exorbitant amount during festivals. Finally, the new girl has to come to terms with the local musclemen, or else she has to leave the place. In 1995, in the brothel area Munshigunj, in Khidirpur, a local goon wanted to enter a new Nepalese girl's room. She refused to take the man in. Then the angry man along with his friends forcibly entered her room, stripped her and scorched her body all over with burning cigarettes. The terrible news spread and immediately steps were taken by 'Durbar'. They rushed to the spot, 'gheraoed' Watgunje police station to lodge the complaint and within 2/3 days the culprits were arrested.¹⁹¹

Thus new sex-workers are identified by the local hoodlums whom they want to be with and they decide themselves to become babus of those women, even ignoring any protest raised by those women. This means hoodlums enjoy free access to particular women. These women sometimes are forced to live with them as if they are lovers. In the areas where women have not been able to organize themselves into groups, often then are intimidated to accept this proposal of hoodlums who are supported by other local anti-socials. Sanlaap worked with a case where a sex-worker was beaten up by hoodlums who wanted her to belong to a man who would have become her babu. She disliked the man and refused to become his partner and so was beaten up by several men. She was taken to the hospital and the police station. But police did not show much interest and simply a general diary was filed by them without doing any investigation. The woman suffered a temporary breakdown after the assault. There are also women who have been forced to give shelter to hoodlums who hide from police or other gangs in their room.¹⁹²

The terror is exemplified by the incident that was witnessed by 23 years old Mita in her short life of a prostitute. 'Another girl used to stay with Mita sharing the same room. That girl once resisted against the everyday oppression of a famous customer after she could not bear it anymore. For that a local *gunda* with the permission of *mashi* killed the girl by stabbing her continuously in front of Mita and then threw her in the main road. Mita could not sleep for one month. With a babu she escaped to another brothel'.¹⁹³

Another important incident needs mention here in this regard. Mrinalkanti Dutta alias Srikarna documents a case of a sex-worker when one becomes her babu what are the storm sweep over the woman:

The incident is of the month of December, 1993. The setting is a famous red-light area of Kolkata. The girl was completely inexperienced and new. Spending a few days in another

¹⁹¹ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005. p.109-111

¹⁹² Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta, Stree*, Kolkata, 2002. p.85-86

¹⁹³ Debrani Kar, *Kolkatar Nagarnati*, Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1995, (1401, *Maagh*). p.80

area she has just come to this locality. Naturally an undeclared competition has started among the men of the locality for becoming her babu because once you become a babu, your job in the red-light area get fixed. Added to this the girl was more or less pretty, in spite of being dark she had a slim figure, had long hair till her waist, she was young too. When taunting, even physical advance could not hook the girl, the second step started. Now film tickets began to be offered through another girl of the same house with whom she had talking terms. When even that did not work out, spending some more money they started drinking at her neighbouring tenants' room and send her to invite that girl to join the party. Let me inform you about something then the aunt who had introduced her to this line once told her casually that if the men of the locality become babus, they will initially spend some money for one or two months; then they will enjoy upon everything you have on top of that enquire how many people you had that day, even questions you about why the number of customers was less than the previous day. That's why with this formula not working he had to take up his extremist measures. Now when the girl went out on the streets men straight away started bargaining for being customers. There too 'I think you to be my elder brother', 'you are like my younger brother' – if she wanted to avoid this way, there started slaps and trashing. But there too was the mind questioning. How many slaps can there be centering on the single 'no'. Therefore here too when there was no reply other than tears. Then, night threatening started. It can be mentioned that the girl had rented a small six by eight feet room by the side towards the end of the bathroom. It was completely separated from the rooms of other tenants. There was no better room available in the locality. As a result there were pushers on the tin, breaking of windows with punches and then hurting her with their nails. The only intentions being – if she afraid went for a babu for 'shelter' but destiny was not in favor. The girl was very much afraid of ghosts. As a result all the people of the locality were dumbstruck at what happened the next day. From the very morning the girl was delirious with that she started running aimlessly here and there. First it was thought that a ghost had gotten inside her but when it was seen that she had no consciousness about her clothes, moreover when the turmeric and burns of the 'Roja' (indigenous method of getting rid of the ghosts) did not work, it was realized that this was no ghost. What has gotten in her is something greater than a ghost. Then at last after having recovered in a famous mental hospital for a few days what the girl came back and told me was, the boy was drunk and was punching on the door finally breaking it entered her room, it was raining heavily on the tin roof, the other tenants, therefore could not hear her screams or may be even if some did hear, they did not have the courage to become an enemy to the local 'dada'. She did faintly try to protest but at the time it seemed a demon has gotten in the boy. As a result the protest was not successful. If this is a blow her, the other blow was from that day onwards the boy forced her to make him her babu. She could not keep herself still amidst the pressure of these two things. She became mentally imbalanced.¹⁹⁴

The red light areas of Bowbazar are always eventful – full of news of tortures, burnings and murders but a political incident which took place in 1990 can suppress all these incidents. Continuously for forty two days there where riots, Bombings, fighting and operation by the police went on without any 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.¹⁹⁵ The sex-worker of the

¹⁹⁴ Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.11-12

¹⁹⁵ Jaunapallir Chalchitra (A Pen Picture of Brothels/Red-light areas), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2001. p.61

Rani Rasmoni Bazar had to face physical and mental futures. At the time of the Zamindars Durga Puja was the main festival of the area. The Pujas were held in the houses of the Zamindars, with the decadence of the Zamindar system Durga puja began to be celebrated as a public festival. Presently the number of Kali pujas held in this area and their grandeur are comparatively more. The local people have to suffer threat full times when they were forced for monetary contribution, for various pujas and festivals by the young guys of the area. Those girls who were incapable to contribute they were restrained from carrying on with their profession, by the local youths. At times these women had to forcefully go into physical relation with these youths, despite of their unwillingness. Then they were deprived of their payments. But they were afraid of being restricted to carry on with their profession, which would land them without earrings, so they never protested. Thus to resist these misdeeds and injustice, together, the Durbar Women's Joint Committee have started their work here almost two years back. Previously with the help of Jaanbazar's 'Mannagali Friends' Association and later with that of 'Tarun Pragati Sangha' this project is being carried on successfully. Besides the rise of health consciousness, self respect is also growing among the women of the area. Along with the power of self-control the will to protest against opponent forces have united the women of Jaanbazar area.¹⁹⁶

During 2004, one sex-worker was brutally tortured and raped by two persons named – *Parimal Sarkar, Lakshman Adhikari*. This incident occurred in *Bardhwan*. This sex-worker was extremely wounded and in a serious condition was admitted to *Durgapur District Hospital*. Various parts of that woman's body were heavily wounded and several scars were found on her body. According to the police report, this woman was taken by *Parimal Sarkar* from a *dhaba* located by the road side of *G.T. Road of Rajbandh* area, with the permission of the *dhaba* owner – *Lakshman Adhikari* and then she was taken to a warehouse owned by *Chitta Sheal* where irons accumulated through smuggling were stored and this warehouse was situated at *Uttarpur* of *Gopalpur* village in *Kanksha*. The sex-worker was not only raped but after being raped, her sex organs including other parts of the body were brutally wounded with sharp weapon by the rapist and then she was thrown into a bush near by that warehouse. After that rapist *Parimal Sarkar* fled from that place. When 3-4 hours were over and even then she did not return to that *dhaba*, naturally, it created tremendous anxiety among other workers of that *dhaba* and they started searching for her. Suddenly, she was found by them in that bush in senseless condition. Afterwards, she was admitted to the *Durgapur Hospital* and complaint was lodged at Police Station. After that, following the instructions of Police Superintendent *Niroj Kumar*, *Parimal Sarkar* and the *dhaba* owner *Lakshman Adhikari* were arrested by the officials of the *Kanksha* police station. *Parimal Sarkar* was, actually, an anti-social largely

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. p.97

nourished and supported by smuggler *Chitta Sheal* who was involved in coal and iron smugglings. Though, general people of that locality were aware of all these kinds of criminal activities since long time and became sufferer but due to the lack of courage they never dared to file complaint against them. Therefore, this arrest gave immense mental peace to the local people for sometime.¹⁹⁷

This is an incident of 2007. A sex-worker was brutally tortured at the hands of an anti-social. The local residents handed over the accused, named *Shambhu Chakraborty* to the police. According to eye-witness, the female, named *Geeta Chanda* was taking the warmth of fire in the mid-night along with few of her mates on the *Premchand Baral* Street. Suddenly, at this time, *Shambhu* forcefully wanted to take her along with him, when *Geeta* protested, *Shambhu* started hitting on her face with a piece of burning wood. The member of Durbar admitted her to the hospital and from the Public Relationship Officer (PRO) of Durbar, *Maheshweta Mukhopadhyay*, it was known that they had filed an FIR against *Shambhu* with an allege of 'attempt to murder'.¹⁹⁸

Handing over a bill of an exorbitant amount during the festivals is a mechanism for the hoodlums to exploit sex-workers. If any new girl comes in the area, whether she wants or not, she has to cater to the *dadas* of the locality. If she doesn't agree, she would be harassed in different ways. The *goondas* would tease them, push or trip them when walking on the streets. They would drink and create nuisance in front of their houses. Whenever the girl comes out to solicit for clients, she has to face these local hoodlums: 'you have to take me first/entertain me first, then only you would be permitted to entertain other clients.' The only motto is to enter the girl's room at any cost. If nothing works then they would handover a bill of an exorbitant amount during festivals. Finally, the new girl has to come to terms with the local musclemen, or else she has to leave the locality.¹⁹⁹ In the year of 1995, some sex-workers were subjected to the exploitation of extracting an excessive amount of subscription during the festival of *Kali Puja* by local hoodlums/anti-socials. A large number of sex-workers as residents of U.K. Mondal Lane of Tollygunge red-light area in south Kolkata lodged complaint against a number of local *puja* committee in this regard. During this year, at the same time, sex-workers of Kalighat red-light area also became victim of this exorbitant bill imposed upon them. During this year one *puja* committee of Tollygunge *fanri* named, '*Chakroshree*' had demanded rupees twenty thousand as *puja* subscription. It generated a tremendous resentment among sex-workers and under the leadership of DMSC they decided to rally protesting against all these

¹⁹⁷ Staff Reporter, *Jaunakarmeeke Akathya Atyaachar, Greftar 2*, Sandhya Aajkal, Saturday, 17th July 2004 (1st Shrawana, 1411 – Bengali era)

¹⁹⁸ Staff Reporter, *Jaunakarmee'ke Jalanta Kaath Diye Maar, Dhrito ek*, Aanonda Bazar Patrika, Kolkata, 3rd January 2007

¹⁹⁹ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.109-110

exploitations.²⁰⁰ In the month of October, 2004 sex-workers of Kalighat red-light area got victim to the atrocities of hoodlums and their exploitations during Puja once again. Like previous years, this year also they were asked to pay an exorbitant bill as Puja subscription. DMSC (Organisation run by the sex-workers) complaint against this and said, "since Durga Puja, these kinds of exploitations have been resumed in *Baragali*, *Chotogali*, *Nepali Gali* of Kalighat red-light area. The members of Puja committee of local clubs under the leadership of *Kanai*, *Sambhu*, *Rochan* (young guys) are mainly exploiting sex-workers and their clients of these *galis*, snatching away money and other things from them besides the exorbitant bill demanded as Puja subscription from them. Till date, per customer 5 rupees used to be charged from each sex-worker as Puja subscription but this time since very early even before Durga Puja, subscription in the name of Kali Puja collection has been started. And per customer 10 rupees or more than that are being charged from each sex-worker as puja subscription. The amount of subscription demanded from clients is very high this time and inability to pay that amount is making them subjected to extreme harassment." In this regard, the Police of Kalighat said that till that time no such written complaints against those kinds of activities had been reported but in case if any complaint was lodged with proof or evidence then they would surely take proper steps in that context. The sex-workers of Kalighat red-light area further said, "the main Puja committee, of which name is being used by these three young boys extracting subscriptions like this, may not aware of this fact. Because, whom so ever are given the bill for paying the subscription, immediately, after their payments those bills are being snatched away and torn off by these guys!" They said, several times, these sex-workers or the owners of their houses raised their voice and protested against those exploitative activities but every time they were heavily beaten up by those anti-socials.²⁰¹ After this a complaint was lodged at Police station but rather the problems got solved out, those anti-socials increasingly started torturing those sex-workers more than before. Therefore, it caused a tremendous resentment among the sex-workers and the chairperson of DMSC, *Swapna Gayen* and *Rama Debnath* came to the Kalighat Police station as the representatives of Durbar and all sex-workers at mid-night itself. They filed diary at Police station against atrocities of those guys in '*Baragali*' and exploitations exercised over *Jharna Ghosh*, the resident of '*Baragali*' who was holding the Position of Treasurer of the central committee of Durbar. Diary number was 101. According to *Swapna Gayen*, "few days back some guys were extracting money as Puja subscription from the sex-workers of Kalighat in the name of one local Puja committee. The police complaint was lodged against this. Once Police came to visit the area it

²⁰⁰ Staff Reporter, *Police Tatpar*, *Julum o Cholche: Chanda: Byabsayeeke petalo Smashan-Swapaner dalbol*, Aajkal, 19th Oct, 1995.

²⁰¹ Staff Reporter, *Kali Pujor Chanda: Julumer Abhijog Jaunakarmeeder*, *Bikeler Protidin*, Thursday 28th October, 2004, (11th Kartik, 1411); See—Staff Reporter, *Teen Jubaker Chandar Julumer Abhijog Jaunakarmider*, *Sanbaad Protidin*, Friday 29th October, 2004

had left some impact on the existing situation to certain extent but that was for sometime, just for two days the situation was under control. But again the atrocities came on rise and the situation started getting worst. *Jhama Ghosh* (Treasurer of Durbar) became victim to the exploitations, tortures of those anti-socials for raising her voice against all these atrocities. She was heavily beaten up by those anti-socials. Despite of filing diary against a person named *Sambhu*, till now no one has been arrested.” Though, in this regard the comment of contemporary O.C. *Jayanta Das* was like this, “on Monday clash broke out between two rival groups of anti-socials against each other. Police is investigating into the matter.” On Tuesday, again another deputation was conducted by Durbar at Kalighat Police station in this regard. Durbar got determined this time to see the end of it.²⁰²

There is a strong organized network exists between police, political leaders, hoodlums, bariwallis. A common saying is that, ‘in Red light areas, police, local goons and landlords or landladies are all birds of the same feather.’²⁰³ Sex-workers are not out of being the victim of all kinds of exploitations exercised upon them by *dala*, hoodlums, frauds, police etc. To which police station she will go to file the diary in order to lodge complaints against all these exploitations? Which Human Rights Commission would be formed who could to take strong steps against those political leaders who compel each of these vulnerable sex-workers to caste twelve to fourteen false votes by changing their attires? Police and hoodlums mostly play the role of dictators in these areas and anytime can spoil the life of any one of these sex-workers. As these girls are casting votes for twelve to fourteen times, so naturally they have the right to claim the Indian citizenship for twelve to fourteen times more than general citizens. But ironically, they do not even have the right over their own lives and earnings. A small hoodlum can also harm them anytime distorting their faces marked by scratches with blades.²⁰⁴

Every day sex-workers are victims of various tortures, exploitations and maltreatments. Hoodlums, Police are few of those main elements who exploit them continuously. But the incident happened to the sex-workers of ‘*Garbagan*’ red-light area (Sheoraphully) was something different. Hoodlums of this area compelled those sex-workers to give ‘*sale*’ (discount) on their business rates during entire ‘*Chaitra maas*’. They were forced to give ‘*sale*’ (discount) for twenty five percent to forty percent on their actual rates. Already, in reality sex-workers generally don’t enjoy healthy economic conditions

²⁰² Staff Reporter, *Chandar Julumer Abhijog Janiye Aakranto Jaunokarmeera*, Bikeler Protidin, Tuesday 2nd November, 2004, (16th Kartik, 1411). See – Staff Reporter, *Chandar Julumer Abhijog Janiye Aakranto Jaunokarmeera*, Sanbaad Protidin, Wednesday 3rd November, 2004

²⁰³ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.12-13

²⁰⁴ Raghav Bandyopadhyay, ‘*Baro – Choddota Vote, Baro – Choddogan Nagoric, Tabu Gaale Blade Tane Mustan*, Aanonda Bazar, Patrika, (n.d) 1996.

and while entertaining clients with these rebates during the period of 'sale' brought a severe blow to their financial conditions and made their lives more miserable. Their earnings were reduced to a larger extent. General businessmen make profits while selling clothes with discounts in the period of 'sale' but the vulnerable sex-workers were not at all benefited by these kind of 'sale' rather it aggravated their sufferings. In this red-light area a cordial relationship is always maintained between police and local notorious hoodlums – *Shambhu, Sibbu, and Swapan*. And due to this network the local G.R.P and one section of corrupt police continuously exercise their authorities over these vulnerable sex-workers and often make them victims of exploitations. Capitalizing this organized network between police and hoodlums these elements openly 'loot' (capture) the earnings of sex-workers. Sometime police van is seen patrolling the area. But in most cases these kinds of police patrolling are just for formality. The real picture is something else. In return of presenting a false picture in front of general mass they raise their monetary demands regularly availed from the hoodlums to some extent.²⁰⁵

In the year of 1999, 150 sex-workers, who were the residents of *Babubazar* red-light area of *Khidirpur*, were illegally evicted just due to being unable to pay the huge amount of subscription – 1 lac rupees demanded for the Puja purpose. The flourishing business of promoters and the direct supports availed from administration, police and political leaders made these promoters (have gradually become) very powerful and increasingly got involved in various notorious activities. During this year, on 22nd September, at 6pm – 6.30pm, despite having the authentic 'Dalil' (will) along with *Nasimabibi Bariwalli* of *Khidirpur*, she and all the sex-workers residing in her house were forcefully and illegally evicted by these notorious promoters who were largely supported in this case by the contemporary as well as ex-councillors of that area. Afterwards, when all those sex-workers went to the local 1 No. Port Police Station to lodge complaints and file FIR against this incident, the O.C *Muhammad Hussaein* refused to file FIR. It is important to note here that 14-15 numbers of flying sex-workers used to come in this area on daily basis from *Bongaon, Barasat, Howrah, Bata, Ranaghat* etc. places to ply their trades. The main area of plying trade and seeing clients was 'Panchanantala Wattgunje' of 'Khidirpur'. After that to entertain those customers they used to bring them to this 'Rampur Gali', where they took rooms on rents. The incident started on 21st September afternoon onwards. One day the young group of guys of 'Kabitirtha Club' of *Khidirpur* had set a huge demand of money as subscription for Puja from *Bariwalli Nasima Bibi*. But on *Nasima Bibi's* refusal to pay that exorbitant bill, this group of young boys got furious and started abusing her with filthy languages and then they went off that area. But the real incident occurred in the next day afternoon. They forcefully entered the rooms of sex-workers and along with their things all the sex-

²⁰⁵ Staff Reporter, *Sheoraphullyr Jaunakarmeera o Sale Dichhen*, Sandhya Protidin, 13th April, 1998.

workers were being thrown out of their rooms and within half-an-hour of this incident one group of armed guys blocked the entry point of the *Rampur Gali* and claimed that: 'This area is *'bhadralok's'* locality. Therefore, no more prostitution, sale of additives, e.g. *chullu*, *ganja*, *charas* etc. would be carried out in this area.' So, sex-workers were compelled to leave that area within an hour. After this incident occurred, the sex-workers contacted DMSC (the organization run by sex-workers) over telephone and made them aware of the entire incident. After that, once *Reeta Mallik*, the supervisor of AIDS Prevention Programme of that area, accompanied by committee chairperson *Mala Singh* and *Sadhana Mukherjee* reached the spot; immediately the entire area was surrounded by the police of 1 No. Port Police Station and no one of DMSC was allowed to enter that area. The statement of the threatening given by the O.C of the local Police Station was like this: 'If someone attacks with the bomb, then neither we will be able to take any action nor remain responsible for that!' Then without having any other options, about 1500 sex-workers had to withhold the blockade created by them. While *Mala Singh* along with other members of the DMSC tried to contact with *Mamata Bandyopadhyay* – the Congress leader, she directly and clearly refused to discuss or pass on any comment on this matter. Naturally, it spread a tremendous resentment among those sex-workers. They gathered all together in front of the house of *Mamata Bandyopadhyay* and started screaming and burst out with tremendous anger: 'Do not you feel ashamed when stand in front of these bad-women and beg for votes? All shame is now when time arises to support them!' Then another Congress leader of the same area named *Rampyashi Ram* also refused to talk on this matter with them. After this, within a short period of time, O.C. of the Port Police Station taking along with him the ex-councillor went to *Rampur Gali* and sealed eight houses of that area with locks. Amidst this incident when photo journalists attempted to click photographs of this incident, Police, hoodlums, boys of the *Kabitirtha Club* snatched away the camera from them and started abusing them with filthy languages, not only that, even a female journalist of one premier newspaper, was also physically tortured. All these mishaps, lastly led 150 sex-workers to surround the police station but they were not only obstructed physically, rather they were also threatened that if they did not retreat from those action then they would be fired. One member of DMSC commented like this: 'till date Govt. and numerous NGOs have talked about bringing sex-workers under rehabilitation programme; so today these sex-workers should be rehabilitated!' In this regard it must be mentioned that, sex-workers of 50 years and above were 20 in number and an NGO *Sanlaap*, which was talking about their rehabilitation programme for old sex-workers since a long period, their reaction was also very strange with regard to this incident! The reaction of the employees of *Sanlaap* was like this: 'we were not even aware of this incident!' The resident of the this *Rampur Gali* of *Munshigunje* red-light area, *Sandhya Roy*, *Mithu Das* outburst their anger with complaint and said: 'till date when every one including ex-councilor *Daul Singh Yadav*, O.C. of local

Police Station was continuously humiliating us, torturing us, then what happened to their prestige? The red-light areas of *Sethbagan*, *Munshigunje*, *Wattgunje*, *Tollygunje* became temporary shelters for those evicted sex-workers of *Khidirpur* red-light area. With regard to this issue the repercussion of the D.C (Port), *Harin Rajen*, was: 'till date, I was very much busy with festival (Puja) matters. Now I will arrange a meeting to discuss on this issue.'²⁰⁶

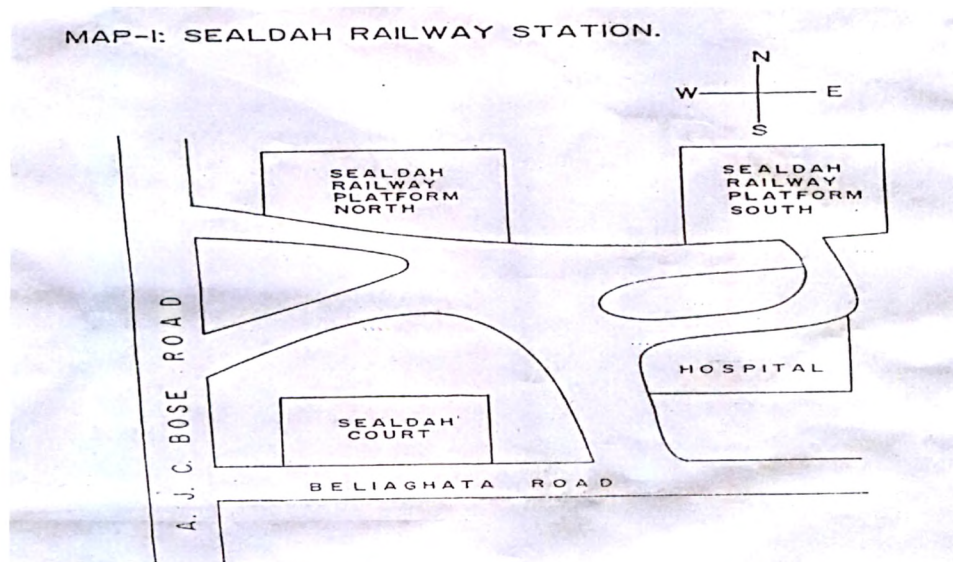
A news report published in 1998 is very much informative about the lives of the sex-workers in the red-light areas, their expansion outside the red-light areas of Asansole. The most striking facts are, while describing the factors it shows the pictures of hoodlum's and Police's roles in the exploitation of sex-workers of Asansole and the strong network existed between them. In *Asansole*, prostitution is not only confined to the red-light areas, gradually, it has started spreading over other areas outside the red-light area. Trafficking in girls is a flourishing business in this area and local Police is also aware of this fact but remain indifferent to this matter. Naturally, any strong steps taken against this is found to be totally absent. A number of poor girls are lured with the false promises of being offered with good jobs and brought to this city but at last, they are forcefully driven into the profession of prostitution. In the year of 1998, one underage maid-servant was in same way lured with false promises of being offered with a job and thus getting her out of the house, she was lastly forced to take prostitution as her profession in a hidden place of the city of *Niamatpur*. This girl was a maid-servant in the house of a Police officer. This incident had generated a tremendous resentment among the mass which succeeded to draw the Police's attention into this matter to a certain extent, for sometime. These kinds of illegal, criminal, immoral activities are openly carried out here in *Niamatpur* with the full consent of one section of Police of *Niamatpur* Police Station. *Ranjana Gorai*, *Shanti* alias *Kurani*, *Mala* alias *Pintu* and *Sunita Sau* complained of trafficking business of girls being carried out at a larger scale where many girls from poor families have been deceived with fake promises of being provided with good jobs but lastly, they all have been compelled into the profession of prostitution in the red-light area of *Niamatpur*, and afterwards, these girls have been sold off at huge price and trafficked to Bombay. An adult young girl named *Shetthi* became the victim of such incident. A girl named *Kurani* belong to an extremely poor family. On her refusal to get into the profession of prostitution, *Kurani* became subjected to extreme tortures – her hands were crushed by grinder. And then, in exchange of a huge amount of money *Kurani* was made victim to the gang rape and then was thrown into the red-light area in the early morning in senseless and blooded condition. After this barbaric inhuman exploitation, *Kurani* was forced into the prostitution. If she tried to protest against this, then her hands used to get crushed with grinder

²⁰⁶ Kushin Mukhopadhyay, "1 lakh taka Pujor Chanda Dite Na Parai Dersho Jauno Karmi Uchhed", *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 1999 (forgot to take the exact date)

as punishment. This kind of same incident occurred in the life of *Ranjana* too. Her knee-calf was crushed with wooden stool and her ears were hurt in such ruthless ways that it turned herself in a deaf. With these tortures everything was not over! After this, she was thrown into starvation for one week and amidst in this condition she was forced to entertain clients. In the same year one girl child below 18 years, was trapped into the racket of traffickers involved in the business of trafficking girls. This incident created a tremendous upsurge among general mass. According to the complaint lodged by *Geeta Devi*, mother of that girl, her daughter was forcefully abducted and handed over to a truck driver. Firstly, this girl was brought to *Durgapur* with the name of marriage. After that, once the marriage got over, just as a show off to the public, then she would be trafficked to Bombay – it was the exact plan but this time it could not succeed as the prior information reached the police department and fortunately, this time the girl was rescued. But local people are not pleased with the 'role of police'. Their repercussion is that despite numerous mishaps taking place like this and people's complaint to remove this red-light area in order to stop all kinds of criminal and notorious activities police has always possessed an indifferent attitude to this matter and have never taken proper steps in this regard. The complaints of *Shanti*, *Ranjana*, *Mala* were like this, a similar kind of 'Den' of all notorious criminal activities is getting flourished in the backside of D.I.B (Department of Intelligence Bureau). A number of girls like, *Kanti*, *Bijali*, *Jhanpi*, *Purnima*, *Basanti* have been forced into the prostitution but that is just for the sake of names. Actually, they are forcefully engaged in sieging truck during mid night. In this entire operation police is involved. During mid-night on the G.T. Road trucks are stopped and these girls are got into these trucks, after that police vans start their patrolling and follow those trucks. After chasing the trucks for sometime, in a quiet and open area police stops the truck and after getting those girls out of the trucks, they start looting the truck imposing the false accusation on truck drivers of being involved in criminal activities like – getting girls into the trucks. These kinds of incidents are taking place with the leadership of the strong network between police and anti-socials. A large number of truck drivers have also not denied this fact. But police was not ready to accept this matter. The red-light area of *Asansole* is mainly 4 KM away from the main city and it is covering an area of 1 KM. But now gradually, this area has started expanding to all of its sides. And undoubtedly, these mishaps are happening with the full consent of Police. Nowadays, gradually, it has started spreading over the city areas which has caused a major tension for the middle class society. The sex-trade is going on openly in those flats under construction, in the *Asansole* city area. Except the people of *Kulti*, *Barakar*, *Niamatpur* cities, people of entire *Asansole* is worried about this rising problem. Once upon a time *Soumen Mitra* (Additional Police Superintendent of *Asansole*) took a strong initiative to get them (sex-workers) back into the mainstream society from where they had been fallen once upon a time. But his individual effort did not succeed to continue for long time due the lack of proper thought process and personalities like

him, therefore, sex-workers were left with no choice but to live miserable lives with full of sufferings in the red-light areas. If the ideals and activities of *Soumen Mitra* could be continued then today's picture of *Asansole* might be something different!²⁰⁷

The colourful night life of the busiest railway station of Kolkata – '*Sealdah Station*' has been nicely portrayed in a recent newspaper report. The inactive as well as exploitative role of the railway police and the mutual understanding between anti-socials, sex-workers and railway police are sharply visible in this report. The autocrat and corrupt police along with hooligans always suppress the poor hawkers, the grocery owners and the daily passengers. They are forced to fulfill their monetary demands to carry out their day to day business. Here everything is measured in terms of monetary strength, so here nothing is impossible in exchange of money. With the support of the police and anti-socials, the illicit trade of alcohol is carried out openly. The daily passengers are finding it tough to bear. If the security personnel (police) themselves are showing dishonour to the law and order, then what sort of security can be expected! When the question of security was raised, an employee with the RPF (Railway Protection Force) said, "What sort of security will we provide? Look at this rifle. One cannot say when the last bullet was shot using this rifle or may be it is still in locked condition. Security that too, using these weapons!!"



Source: Project on Abuse of Children as part of Commercialized Vice: Socio – Psychological Perspective and Rehabilitative Strategies; CINI (Child in Need Institute), 1993

The information given by an official document of 1947 stands very much relevant. We find the information about the number of prostitutes, their premises and the authoritative elements under whose control they used to be regulated in the Dhakuria Bagan Lane and Umadas Lane in 1947.

²⁰⁷ Bijoy Kumar, *Asansole Shahare Deho byabsa Kromoshai Barchhe*, Ananda Bazar Patrika, 8th February, 1998.

The areas were inhabited by several prostitutes even after the declaration of these streets public thoroughfare for the fulfillment of the purposes of the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act 1933. Public of these place had appealed to the Government of Bengal for the eviction of prostitutes from these areas in 1947. This letter stands very much informative about the nature of the prostitution and its organizational network carried out in those areas:

The prostitutes residing in these localities were evicted by the 2nd of February 1945. Soon after their eviction some of the houses were let-out to the public but most of them were retained by the *Bariwalis and Gundas* with their deliberate ill-intention to prosecute secret and mobile prostitution therein. Just after two or three months of these most of the prostitutes thus sheltered came out with their old ugly affairs and began regular prostitution in this locality. ...As this was apprehending dangers applied to the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Lalbazar after the formal and futile information to the Taltolla Police and on this account some of us were victimized by the Taltolla Police. However, at our instance the Lalbazar Police took some passive step to catch hold of the prostitutes and actually about 25 of them were take into their custody and later on released (in August – '45). After this their prostitution went on continuously but the case has been quite otherwise for sometime past. That it was often found that any surprises visit by any Police official is foiled by the Taltolla Police who inform the Goondahs, *Bariwallis* of it before of it before hand, which we deem a mere "a managed force". The police in turn exact "Dasturi" (illegal gratification) from the *Bariwallis*, goondahs and the prostitutes. Those now were terrifically alarmed at the present situation which was encroaching our civic rights. There has been a considerable influx of prostitutes in these two lanes for sometimes past and everyday there has been the opening ceremony of new brothels made by these *Gundas* and *Bariwallis* quite unhampered. *Bariwalis* like Ramchandi and Derby have sheltered many prostitutes at 24, Umadas Lane (1st and 2nd floor) and 3 and 8, Dhakuria Bagan Lane, who come down in openly on the streets and carry on prostitution day and night. ... We simply wonder how these notorious and immoral acts are being committed under the very nose of the Police and under the control of a government which is said to be civilized one in the 20th Century.²⁰⁸ For detail, please refer to **Table: 2.1.B**.

In order to capture the true picture of the red-light areas in his book, 'Rater Kolkata (Calcutta by Night)', Meghnad Gupta has portrayed the crime in the prostate:

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.²⁰⁹

In *Shikshita Patitar Atmakatha* (Autobiography of an educated prostitute), Manada has mentioned about the incidences of lootings, expressed the unbearable lives of the prostitutes.

²⁰⁸ Prayer from the Public for the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act Dhukuria Bagan Lane and Umadas Lane, File P14B – 3/46, proce. B-418, January 1947. [Home Dept: Police Department]

²⁰⁹ Meghnad Gupta, *Rater Kolkata*, Pratik, Kolkata, 1991 (1st Publication 1923), p.36

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'.²¹⁰

The vivid descriptions of the domination and atrocities of the hoodlums and anti-socials in red-light areas and the clashes frequently occurred between different groups of these miscreants in early days have been clearly captured in the narratives of *Mrinalkanti Dutta*:

At that time I was very small and a student of class I or IV. One day I went along with my mother to see a fair (*Rother mela*) held in the place nearby the Gurudwara located in *Rashbehari*. On the way back suddenly we saw people running away to the opposite side, from our area. Suddenly looking at the situation my mother rushed into a shop taking myself in her lap. Thereafter, I came to know that an inner clash and fight was going on among hoodlums and anti-socials in front of Kalighat *bazaar* (Market). After waiting for sometime in that shop following the shopkeeper's advice we started moving towards our home and after crossing various *galis* (lanes) when we reached the neighbouring colony called '*Chakraborty Para*' (Colony) we found a huge gathering of local people flocked to the entry point of this colony. As my mother stepped to move forward, local people asked her not to do so. In my childhood I was a very coward child. Though I was feeling scared from the very beginning but till that time, being secured within my mother's lap I was able to keep my all tensions and fear a little suppressed but the moment I heard that we should not move towards home, I started crying out of severe fear. Despite my mother's relentless effort to convince me saying that, after the fight among hoodlums, anti-socials got over we would go home; but my tiny heart started shivering out of fear and crying was not stopped. After sometime, once those clashes came to an end/calm down following others my mother started moving towards home. After crossing certain area suddenly I observed many pieces of broken glasses scattered all over the road. I was overwhelmed with the feeling of joy, the moment I came to know that we were very nearby our house and automatically I stopped crying. But the scattered broken pieces of glasses pointed out a question within me and according to that I asked my mother about the sources of those glass pieces. From my mother I came to know that hoodlums and anti-socials had snatched away all the bottles of soda water from those shopkeepers who run their business selling the bottles of soda water. Thirty two to thirty three years back when two different gangs of different colonies used to get engaged in fighting against each other, at that time bottles of biron soda water was more used as weapon instead of today's bombs, bullets etc. Afterwards the small bombs made of the caps which are used for small revolver largely accessed by children during the festival of *Kali Puja*, came in use. Gradually, in course of time the powerful bombs were invented and started being used to a larger extend. But the main problem with bomb is that it cannot be randomly used in every situation, therefore, in between these things the weapons like *khur*, *chaku*, *nepala*, *pipegun* came to be used rampantly. One area used to get hold over other area mainly with the prime motto of extracting *hafta* from the people of that area. Though all hoodlums generally possess the same nature, which is full of aggression, harmful attitude and mostly they earn money without putting good/honest effort but sometimes there are slight differences lies among some hoodlums/anti-socials. Some hoodlums/anti-socials seizes other colony and establish their authority in that area but they never harm or misbehave with any women. Some of them even consider misbehaving or ill-treating women

²¹⁰ Manada, Devi, *Sikshita Patitar Atmcharit*, (autobiography of an educated prostitute), Chirayat Prakashan, Kolkata, 2004. p.57

as such activities that degrade their own position and undermine or make their heroic nature ashamed off.²¹¹

Before formation of Durbar, sex-workers used to lead most pathetic and suppressed lives. Despite having been subjected to the day to day non-stop violence and exploitations that pushed them in the corner and made their lives miserable, they never dared to raise voice against all kinds of atrocities. The absence of collective consciousness of unity constituted as the major factor for their lack of courage. At that time, frequent clashes used to occur between different red-light areas on each matter of discontentment. The cordial relationships were totally absent between different areas. There were several factors remained responsible for these kinds of discontentment. Inter clashes between illicit liquor shop owner of one area and that of another area or inner conflict between babu or son of sex-worker, resident of one area with the babu or son of sex-worker of other area etc. often caused all kinds of clashes between different red-light areas. The distribution of profits made out of selling liquor or if any boy belongs to one red-light area used to visit other area to enjoy with girls of that locality and showed much heroism, then these kinds of incidents generally broke out tensions between two areas. Once, tension broke out, then no sex-workers dared to enter other red-light area outside her own area due to the fear of being harassed and physically tortured. No one had enough courage to raise oppositions against all these activities and lodging complaints against that to the police. Actually, police mostly never play the role of saviour in the lives of the sex-workers, therefore, sex-workers and bariwallis largely do not possess a sense of reliance upon them. Moreover, they thought, 'it is impossible to fight against crocodile being in the water!' therefore, they prefer to be tortured, tolerate all kinds of exploitations rather protesting against all these nuisance/atrocities. Though, one or two sex-workers would have strongly protested but lastly, being victim to the extreme torture and exploitations, they were compelled to leave the area.²¹²

Biral was one of the most notorious hoodlums, whose main objective was to exercise power and control and establish his sole authority over the red-light area of *Kalighat*. He had a dream of capturing the red-light area of *Chetla*. All the innocent sex-workers of the area were victims to his ruthless tortures. *Biral* neither used to get involved in any sort of political parties of his own or other localities, nor he was seen to get engaged in any sort of clashes taking favour of any particular political party against other party or favouring his own group against any other group of other red-light areas. Basically, he was a hoodlum with a coward nature. Being afraid of other hoodlums, he never used to come out during day time. His power and authority used to be exercised only over those innocent sex-workers or the other innocent people of the red-light areas. From 1982 to mid of

²¹¹ Mrinalkanti Dutta, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.164-65

²¹² Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.168

1986, many girls of the Kalighat Post Office area and girls from both *Choto* and *Bara Gali* area, leaving behind their belongings and room, left this area due to *Biral's* tortures and terror. At that time the *Post Office Gali* of *Kalighat* red-light area was so less populated that it seemed to be just like a graveyard. The locality was calm and rooms were locked from outside. It was tough to get human beings there. Even if there were few, their condition was such that after having so much of beating, they did not have the ability to speak. Though *Biral* was not seen during the day time, he used to appear at around 1:30 to 2 O'clock in the mid-night with 7 or 8 of his followers in search of his hunt. If the landlord or landlady was late in opening the door, the first thing for sure was *Biral's* slap on their face after opening the door. At times he used to kick those elderly people to the floor also. Once in, he used to order for beer or whiskey to the landlady. In sheer fear of his brutality, the landlady/landlord would bring beer or whiskey on his order. And after having 4 to 5 pegs of beer or whiskey, his real brutality used to come out in action. After opening the door boys of *Biral's* gang would ask the girls to get outside their rooms being naked according to their boss' order. Once the girls were out, whomsoever *Biral* liked, he used ask her to do oral-sex first. If for any reason, they refused or shy away, then *Biral* used to burn their breast or vagina with the cigarette. And even after this, if the girl in sheer pain says, 'dada, I do not do this', and then no one could save her. It was not just beating; it was brutality to the core. *Biral* would hit her on the back/chest/ribs or on head with whatever he got from the verandah to hit. Seeing this, his followers also used to get 'stand-still'/speechless. Because, a man also can not be beaten up so brutally which these women used to suffer from. After all this, the girl had to do the oral sex. After he finished his act, his followers used to follow their *dada* and start doing all sorts of nonsense (making sex, physical abuses etc.) with the girls openly in the courtyard. This used to go till early morning and once all these were over, *Biral* and his gang would leave the place.²¹³

Lattu of Rambagan was not so cruel like *Biral*, but he was expert in using the dagger in girls' face. A new comer in the area or someone who was having a bit high income, they were targeted by *Lattu*. He used to catch hold of these girls with *Khur*. Then he would come to her room and rape her and used to loot all her belongings. And for all this, Dipti Pal, Sadhana Mukherjee and Kamala Singh and few others protested against him. One fine day, *Lattu* got an opportunity and slashed Dipti's face with a *Khur*. Injured Dipti was taken to Medical College and there she was given 18 stitches in her face for this injury.²¹⁴ Remembrance of Indubala's foot steps made the girls of Rambagan realise that in order to resist any sort of torture on them, they need to be united at first. And this realization led them to develop Drubar Women's Joint Committee in the year 1995. The women of

²¹³ Ibid. p.165-166

²¹⁴ Ibid. p.167

Rambagan were more instigated to be united when a guy called 'Lattu' of the same locality gradually grew up with his notoriety and the women became utterly frustrated with the disturbances caused by him. Lattu in a drunk state would forcefully demand money from the girls of the area and if not given then they were treated monstrosly by him. Lattu used to carry dangerous weapons and had also suffered imprisonment after being accused in some murder cases. The police force of the area even failed in their attempt of keeping him under control. Dipali Mitra, a resident of 1, Daupal Mitra Lane was attacked by him. Lattu wounded various parts of her body by using a very sharp weapon. Then Sadhana Mukherjee a resident of the same building leapt protest against this incident. Gradually all the women of the building joined her and later all the sex workers of the area united themselves to resist the activities of Lattu. For a long they forgot cooking and eating, and only waited alert with brooms and sticks to catch latter and his companions. This time they were determined not to submit before Lattu's torture. Finally, after spending seven days in this way, they did trace Lattu and then handed him over to the custody of the head of the local police station. At this time the local councilor, the club members and political leader came to their help, on being requested. The nature of unity among those women frightened both Lattu and the local police force. Thus unlike other times, this time Lattu was not released from jail. Lattu was severely punished, which led him to keep his head bowed for the rest of his life. Those, whose lives were made restless due to his activities, began to search for support to lead a normal life. He seeks help from the Women's Joint Committee of the area. These women even warmly welcomed Lattu's wish to lead normal and peaceful life.²¹⁵

The story of Langra of Sethbagan was almost similar. He also used to rape and loot those girls including new and old, who had more earnings than others.²¹⁶ Here two incidents can be cited, which occurred in Sethbagan, to show the range of exploitations and atrocities exercised by the hoodlums upon the residents of red-light areas. First Incident: Probably it was the year of 1985 or '84-85, one 27-years old sex-worker was gang raped by 10-12 persons. Hands and legs of that girl were tied up with rope and a black cloth was inserted into her mouth so that her screaming could not reach outside people. That girl was extremely physically tortured, not a single hole of her body including her mouth, vagina, anal and all the carved portions of her body were left out by those rapists. This girl had a pet dog. This dog came to the girl at last and took the cloth out of her mouth. After, hearing her painful screaming people from that area rushed to the spot and rescued her. Immediately, she was admitted to the hospital. But unfortunately, after two days she died. Second

²¹⁵ *Jaunapallir Chalchitra* (A Pen Picture of Brothels/Red-light areas), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2001, p.76-77

²¹⁶ Mrinalkanti Dutta, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.167

Incident: One 28-years old girl was tied up with a lamp-post with rope and *kerosin* was sprayed over her body and directly, she was set on fire, naturally that girl died on the spot.²¹⁷

Finally, in leadership of Putul Singh, Promila Singh and Manju Biswas a union named, *Shramjivi Mahila Sangha* was formed and this union protested against *Langra*. During the late night (in dark) when *Langra* entered the Gali, the girls started throwing bricks from the top of the roof and in retaliation *Langra* started bombing but the sex-workers did not retreat and fought this battle against him being united. Finally, *Langra* was defeated and compelled/had to leave the locality.²¹⁸ In this regard, we must mention the name of *Asha Sadhukhan*, who like the other prostitutes, was also a courageous woman. She not only protested against these *goondas*, but for long-run sustainability of her protest, she formed an organization, the strength of which is still vibrant:

My revolution began in 1985... To raise voice against all kinds exploitations and mishaps fifty women of our area including myself came forward being united and formed a *Sangha* (organization) called *Mahila Sangha*. We fought against all kinds of atrocities continuously for three years. We needed, to acquire recognition, registration of the *Sangha*, foundation of Club including three fundamental demands – 1. To stop any new girls forced into the prostitution. Police and hoodlums were always active to forcibly compel girls to drive into prostitution. Because they remained always concerned to fulfill their own interests – A large number of girls' getting into this profession generally provided these police, hoodlums with more avenues from where the latter could have extorted money. Through our relentless protest and movement we succeeded to stop the flow of girls driving into the prostitution. Two girls aged between 12-13 years came to this red-light area from *Midnapore* and *Sonarpore* but they were rescued by us and sent back to their parents. 2. Our second demand was to remove all kind of exploitations exercised by police. 3. Our third demand was to demolish all sorts of atrocities of hoodlums and anti-socials. Police raids were frequent in our area as per their wish, they never took any steps against hoodlums and their criminal activities, rather the girls who used to become victim to all kinds of exploitations exercised upon them by those *Mustans*, were most of the time taken to the police station. On this issue we raised our voice and gheraoed/surrounded police station for three times. Those hoodlums generally used to throw bombs targeting those houses from outside. They generally avoided throwing bombs entering within the area of the house because due to lack of space the possibilities of getting injured by themselves were high. We used to gather into the roofs of our houses at night in order to attack on the hoodlums and to blockade their movements from one roof to another roof. Bricks, hot water and broken liquor bottles were my main weapons. There was no scarcity of broken liquor bottles in our area. Once *Mustans* started bombing from outside then the first attack from our side used to take place in throwing bricks targeting them and this initiated from my house - House no 7. Following my

²¹⁷ Asha Sadhukhan, *Aamar Katha*, in Abarbonita – Quarterly Journal Against the Sex-Trade (edited by Indrani Sinha and Nabarub Bhattacharya), First Edition, January – March, 2000. p.3-4

²¹⁸ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.167; The sex workers of Seth Bagan have much contribution in the history of protest against the exploitation, deprival and torture to the sex workers. They were being tortured continuously by a few anti-socials and when this went to the extremes then these girls united and moved together against this everyday problem under the banner of 'Shramajeevi Mahila Sangha Sangathan'. The sex workers were able to restrict the antisocial through this committee. At present at Sethbagan area there is no hazard of antisocial, landowners or administration. Among all the brothels of Kolkata, the brothel of Sethbagan has been able to maintain its liberal existence. Jaunapallir Chalchitra (A Pen Picture of Brothels/Red-light areas), Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2001, p.93

action others also started throwing bricks, broken liquor bottles etc. targeting those hoodlums. This way of protest initiated by ourselves used to succeed to leave them with no choice but to retreat/push them back. After each incident occurred in the red-light area police usually visited our area and arrest us and took to the police station. But the real criminals – *Mustans*, hoodlums, anti-socials neither got punished nor got their free movements restrained by the police. After surrounding police station for three times, the frequent arrest of us and police raids in the red-light areas came to an end. We have succeeded to resist those hoodlums and at last put an end to their atrocities and dictatorship.... Due to our non-stop struggles and movements against hoodlums' atrocities in the red-light area, later on, police also extended their co-operations to help us out in this regard. Police officers started taking initiatives to arrest a number of hoodlums in several cases in order to demolish their criminal activities and audacity. O.C. of *Jorasanko* police station, K. Burman said me – "*Mustans* are largely supported by Tiger". To fight against them you also have to become tigress". I replied – "You people have to be supportive towards me regarding this matter and have to stand by my side always to help me out in order to fight against these hoodlums and anti-socials." According to my plan, the entire operation was conducted and finally police arrested those hoodlums. Later on, we also helped police through various ways like we snatched revolvers from hoodlums, anti-socials and handed them over to the police department. Those hoodlums, once, who used to abuse us in filthy languages, beat us most often, in later days those hoodlums started addressing us calling "Maa" and showed immense respect. Presently except *Langra's* house all the residents of rest of the fourteen houses have become members of our *Sangha* (Organisation). Initially out of sheer fear of *Langra*, no women wanted to join our *Sangha* and participate in the meetings.²¹⁹

Masua of *Titagarh* was a little different from the above mentioned hoodlums. He was not selective. In the *Talpukur basti* of *Titagarh*, mainly 'C' grade prostitutes stay in their *kuccha* houses whose roofs are covered with *tali*. During the dark at night, *Masua* used to enter their huts by removing the *talis* and after entering the huts, whomsoever he got be it aged or young, he would first rape her and then loot all the belongings. At the time of leaving the house if anyone tried to protest against him, then they were not left out but used to be beaten up brutally by him.

In *Durgapur*, the incidents used to occur in more planned and organized way. Though there were no physical tortures to the girls but one can be shocked by hearing the way they were exploited here. It has been heard that in the Police station near to this area, every three months this red-light area was auctioned. The party who called for highest bid, they had a rule over the area and used to be called as the '*Dakparty*'. This party used to work like this, for example if a new girl came in the area, she would first be taken to the leader of this party. By looking at the beauty of the girl the party would decide how much they want from the landlady; rate used to go as high as 15,000 for a beautiful girl and for all other girls the rate was 8,000 to 10,000. On giving this money to the party, the girl used to get the certificate of getting into this profession of that area. So at the very beginning

²¹⁹ Asha Sadhukhan, *Aamar Katha*, in *Abarbonita* – Quarterly Journal Against the Sex-Trade (edited by Indrani Sinha and Nabarub Bhattacharya), First Edition, January – March, 2000. p.3-5; *Here Tiger word denotes double meaning. Actually here it means some powerful personalities e.g. political leaders etc.

of getting into this profession, the girl already had a loan of 15,000 on her. It is worthwhile to note here that the interest of this loan was so high that the girl was never in position to get out of the clutch of this huge loan. Apart from this, if two sex-workers or babu-bibi had a fight, they had to come to this party for the justice. In the very beginning of the process of judgment, they had to deposit Rs 151 each. After this, based on the judgment, whosoever was found guilty, he/she was made fool by whatever way this party wanted. It was seen that generally, whosoever took this party's side, they had the victory smile or in the case of those who were the mistresses of the members of that ruling party, they always won the victory. The justice in true sense was absent. Apart from this, the girls had to give Rs 5 per customer she entertained. There was also a night charge levied upon the girls. If the girl had a night customer, then the girl had to pay Rs. 60 per night per customer. Failing to this, they were not allowed to entertain customer at night.²²⁰

Some of the incidents which have been discussed below, in one hand depict the barbarism of the hoodlums in the red-light areas and the protests of the sex-workers; similarly on the other hand it also largely signifies the role of NGO – Durbar, in the empowerment of sex-workers and making them able to raise their voice against all kinds of injustice. Shortly it can be said that it has succeeded to a great extent in generating a 'sense of self-reliance' among the sex-workers.

The story of Tapati – (an active and powerful sex-worker, member of Durbar as a part of Sex-workers' movement) reveals strong side of a sex-worker. Srikarna says:

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 is 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.²²¹

A report was published on 15th September 1995 in The Telegraph about the protest of the sex-workers against the tortures of the hoodlums. The headline of this report was entitled: '*Sex Workers Protest Rowdies' Torture*'. The report was as follows.

Sex-workers at Munshigunj red-light area are being physically tortured and harassed by three anti-socials of the locality. They have even threatened peer educators and volunteers of a welfare forum working there, for reporting the matter to the police. The rowdies led by a youth called Buro, were arrested by the local police last Friday after an FIR was lodged the previous day, saying three young sex-workers, all of Nepali Origin, who had recently entered the trade, were locked up in a room on 12, Munshigunj Road, by them on September 7. They were then brutally tortured with cigarette butts, bitten and injured with sharp instruments in their private parts. Despite all this, they were released on bail on Tuesday and have started threatening the sex-workers and volunteers of dire consequences. A huge rally was organized at Munshigunj today by the Mahila Samanbay

²²⁰ Mrinalkanti, Dutt, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005, p.167-168

²²¹ Shrikarna, *Babuder Andarmahal Theke*, Durbar Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003. p.63

Committee, the Welfare forum, to protest against such terror tactics and brutality by anti-socials of the area. Nearly 1,000 sex-workers from 20 red-light areas in Calcutta, Howrah and South 24 –Parganas, who arrived in Matador vans, unanimously voiced their protest. The meeting was held outside the clinic run by all India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health as part of the STD/HIV intervention programme. A convener of the committee criticized the prevention of Immoral Traffic Act, the provision of which indirectly encourage vandalism against sex-workers. A call was made to fight the landlady-mafia-police nexus in red-light areas. Local councilors also spoke, condemning the activities of the hoodlums of the area. Dr. Smarajit Jana, Project Manager of the STD/HIV intervention programme, explained the relationship between physical health and social health and emphasized the need to maintain a conducive environment.²²²

The story of an active worker of Durbar, Swapna Gayen, in protest of these hoodlums is thrilling. In Swapna Gayen's own words, she always had the voice but lacked in courage. However, she was down but not out. Her continuous fight against injustice and extortions of the girls was unconditional, most importantly without the support of her husband and local girls for whom she fought. Swapna's first step in the form of revolution took place when she gave shelter to a girl name Rekha, who was thrown out of her house for no fault of her by a local goon named Labu. In brothel area, it is considered a daring act if someone provides support to a girl if she has been driven away by a local goon or dada. Swapna didn't stop here, in stead she complained the matter to the central office of the committee and lodged a complaint against Labu in the local police station. And Labu was asked to ask pardon from Rekha, however, the story doesn't stop here. Labu wanted to take revenge from Swapna for her this act. He convinced the local girls, who were mostly middle aged, as these girls used to depend heavily on the income of their babus and these babus used to work under Labu, Lal and other goons of the locality. So, it was easy for Labu to convince the girls against Swapna and complaint to Police. Her husband too reported to police stating the allegation which Swapna had lodged against Labu were false, this incident shook Swapna badly. But, she did not give up her fights.

²²² *Sex Workers Protest Rowdies' Torture*, The Telegraph, 15th September, 1995



শুভ্র আঁহত অবস্থায় হাসপাতালে সম্পাদিকা স্বপ্না গায়েন

Swapna Gayen: Serious condition in hospital

(Source: Mrinal Kanti Dutta, Jaunakarmeeder Jiban Satya)

One night, about 8:30pm, local goon Panchu called all the girls of the locality and came along with Labu in a drunken state to her house and started abusing her, soon the girls entered Swapna's house. Swapna rushed inside the bathroom and informed the project manager about this. However, she could not avoid the brutal tortures by both Panchu and Labu who beat Swapna very badly; they tore her sari, banged her head on the wall and kicked her on her back and chest. Within 15 minutes, police came in and a formal complain was lodged against these culprits. Swapna was admitted to hospital as she was suffering from pain in her head and was having breathing problem. Later police arrested Labu; Lal and Panchu also surrendered themselves to the police. This not only shows Swapna's courage but her dedication for the work – most importantly without any support from the people themselves for whom she was fighting. She says:

... I am not afraid to come forward to fight for justice on behalf of other victims of injustice and torture. I represent the organization in various meetings and seminars in and outside the country. Now I do not only think of me. I fight for all women. Unless more women come and join the organization, 'Durbar' will remain as a small association. I want more women to join and broaden the scope of our activities. I am looking for girls who have no fear and no vanity, who do not compromise, who can respect their own profession; and hence can respect others and work selflessly. I have to run from place to place all over West Bengal. If you think I am tired of running, you are mistaken. I was tired when I had my husband and Dilip above my head. Now I have nobody bossing over me. Now I have friends. Having a friend at your side is totally different from having someone over you. I do not want to lose my friend 'Durbar'. That is why I traveled with my 21 days' old new born child to attend a

meeting of 'Durbar' in Contai. Sometimes I feel if 'Durbar' was not there, I would not have been able to get rid of my tyrant babu, nor could I stand up in protest against the anti-social elements of Tollygunge. I salute to 'Durbar' – as always.²²³

The story of Bharti Dey goes like this. Bharati Dey entered in to the profession of prostitution in 1986. At that time, there was a goon named Matha, who was a son of a sex-worker, used to rule the locality. If any new girl came to the area, Matha would be the first one to enjoy her. Along with that he would demand a bottle of foreign liquor and about 1 kilogram of spicy mutton curry as gift. If refused, he would not only drive away the new tenant, he would also lock the room of the landlady. Bharati was living with Matha's mother and was working as an adhiya. One night she saw that Matha was holding a gun behind the head of Tarsha (another goon who worked together with Matha earlier) and his companion pulling Dilip out of his house. Next morning it was heard that both Tarsha and Dilip were murdered. Matha's men threatened the locals that anyone who would raise their voice will face the same consequences. When police came, Bharati gathered some courage and told police the truth. Neighbours were not happy with Bharati's this act. Bharati along with few girls, whom she could pull in her group, complained to the party office that because of Matha, police has stopped them from coming out on the streets and hence no customer is coming to the area. She won the confidence in party office and was promised that police will not raid them and Matha will not enter in to the area.

In 1996, one day at midnight, police raided on party's instruction and put half the population behind bars. Initially only Bharati and Manju were released with the help of a person named Pardeshi Chacha, but Bharati made it clear that she would not go alone until and unless all the girls are released. So, he helped in releasing all the girls. Very next morning, Bharati and the girls went to the party office and came to know that their leader has gone to Delhi. But she insisted on talking to him over phone and decided not to move from there until the leader's number is shared. However, the leader was called and it was assured to Bharati and the girls that there would be no more police raids and policemen in the area. Soon after this election were on the corners. Party leaders came and wanted to have a discussion with Bharati, their main objective was to allow Matha in the locality. Bharati agreed to this with a condition that he cannot collect donation in the name of various festivals like shiv-puja, kali-puja etc. On this one party man said, '...Matha is our star. We get all the votes from this Talpukur area only for Matha.' And hence Matha was back in the locality.

²²³ Mrinalkanti Dutta, *Jounakarmeeder Jeebansatya*, Durbar Prakashani, Dey Book Store, Kolkata 2005. p.181-87; Also See-Staff Reporter, 'Sex-workers beaten up by the goons', The Statesman, Tuesday, 8th October, 2002; See-Staff Reporter, *Sex-Worker beaten up for opposing goons*, Hindustan Times, Kolkata, Tuesday, October 8th, 2002; See-Staff Reporter, *Women beaten up by goons*, The Telegraph, Tuesday, 8th October, 2002; See-Staff Reporter, *Durbar Sabhanetri Prohrito Tollygun-e*, Aajkal, 8th October, 2002.

One day at early morning police raid the locality and told Bharati to inform Matha that he needs to report to the police station. Bharati did inform this to him however, he took it casually and in the afternoon he was arrested and police also seized illicit liquor from the pond. Liquor was also found from the house of a girl named Mamta, who spread the rumour that it was Bharati from whom police got tips to arrest Matha. Matha's men locked the door of Bharti from outside and later police broke the lock and after this Matha vanished from the place. After this on the repeated persuasion of Durbar Mahila Samannay Committee, Bharati became the secretary of their Talpukur branch.

...After being the secretary, I was under such pressure of work that I could not go out into the streets on many days. Since I was rather rebellious from childhood and was enthusiastic about protesting against any injustice, my days as the secretary passed with great pleasure. In the mean time I accepted a client of mine named Ganesh as my babu. He met all my expenses. After one year, all of us girls were very glad when the clinic at Talpukur was opened under the supervision of D.M.S.C.

But happiness was not in her fate. In 1999 another goon named Mojaheed started frequenting their locality. He used to misbehave with all others, though he was never rude to Bharati. But for Bharati, it was very tough to keep quiet as he was rude to her own sisters of the locality. He wanted to open a liquor shop but Bharati and the girls were deceptive on this mode of Mojaheed. So they took the matter to the party office. Party said that since Bharati was managing the area, she can decide on this. Bharati and the girls decided to give him a chance but it came out to be a bad decision. He started torturing people and the liquor shop became depot of anti-socials. She says:

...One day Mojaheed entered the house of a woman named Laila through the roof of her house by removing the tiles; he tortured her and threatened her that if she tried to complain to anyone, he would rape Laila's daughter and kill her son. She was terrified and the other residents of her house advised her to tell me everything. ...At once I went to their liquor shop and confronted Mojaheed. He said 'See, sister I have nothing against you. I won't harm you.' Hearing this anger knew no bounds. I started shouting, 'what do you mean? You won't harm me, so I'll keep quiet?' I started a serious argument with Mojaheed. But the matter ended there for that day.

Later Mojaheed threatened Bharati of throwing acid on her face. On the advice of the in-charge of the police station, Haripada Shil, a Women's defense group was formed and they used to guard the locality during night. A formal complaint was lodged at the local police station but police was unable to catch him as he was having a nexus with a policeman of that local police station who used to inform Mojaheed well in advance of a raid. This policeman was later transferred and Mojaheed calmed down after this.

It is worth to note here that Bharti not only fought and raised voice; she was equally sensitive for human being. Once she came to know that Mojaheed has been beaten badly by some miscreants, she rushed to the spot along with the girls and took Mojaheed and 3 of the others to B.N.Bose

hospital. Mojaheed and one more person died but the other two survived. While going back they told Bharati, 'Didi, we were trying to throw acid-bulb on you. But if you had not taken us to the hospital on that day, we wouldn't have lived now.' The area a fine till the local officer in charge of the police station, Haripada Shil was there, soon after his transfer, Matha was back in the locality. He bad mouthed against Bharati as the spot where Matha used to have his liquor shop was now having a school. And she was told that now onwards Matha would look into the problems of the area. She continues:

It was the 1st of June 2001, a Sunday. Immediately I informed the project manager through mobile, who promptly sent a matador-van full of girls to Talpukur. Even on the next day more than a thousand girls arrived in a procession and came to surround the Talpukur Police Station in protest. When they blocked the road, police started charging with batons and injured some thirty-five girls of our group. A senior sex-worker named Gita Sarkar who was also an actor in our theatre group 'Komal Gandhar' was seriously injured. The police beatings had broken her left arm. When this news of road blockade along with all other details came in the newspapers and television channels, the O.C. of the police station directed all his anger towards me. But the news flash prompted the police to nab Matha and his group. We heard Matha was released on the very next day under the instance of a particular political leader. Even after all these incidents, I did not leave my old locality. That angered them all the more. All they wished was to drive me out of my own area; they planned for it day and night. But I did not budge from my residence. Then, to find a way out, a local party leader called me to his office. Relying on him, as soon as I came down from my room, four goons of Matha's group pounced upon me. I fought as long as I could with those four, but one came from behind and hit me with a stick on the back of my head. It broke my skull. In that bloody condition I went to the party office and found it closed – a lock was hanging on the door. If I had gone to the police station instead of the party office on that day, they would have shot me and killed me then and there. Matha had thought that after the fight I would have gone to the thana; so he had deployed some paid killers on the way to the police station to get me killed. After this I phoned the secretary of our Central Committee and came back. I found that terrorized by Matha, all were sitting indoors with doors bolted and lights switched off. When I returned home in that condition, I found my son sitting in one corner of the dark terrace, sobbing. When he did not reply to my queries, a little boy said 'aunty after you left, Matha came and had beaten up Bappa with a stick.' Then a large number of girls came to submit a report to the police, and they were arrested; but were released on the very next day. Even after all this, I did not leave the place. During this time, many girls went and contacted various leaders of the other group among the party. They promised a lot, but did little. We conducted street-corner meetings in the Titagarh Bazar area and exposed the various exploits of Matha and his group to the market-goers. They shifted their tactics and made new plans. Then they decided – instead of physical assault, they would now resort to dishonoring my family and me. They made up a false case of 'rape' against my son and made an F.I.R. Their allegation was that he had molested a little girl by slipping his hand into her panty. Within a few days the parents of the little girl came and cried in surrender. I took the girl and her parents to the Titagarh police station and made them withdraw the F.I.R. Though my son was released after this, he had already spent fourteen days in jail custody until the diary was withdrawn. After coming back my son refused to carry on his studies; it broke my heart. Again during this crisis, my babu one day gave me a tight slap and told me 'It's for you that we have so much trouble! Come just now, touch Matha's feet and ask him to forgive you.' Hearing this I gave one slap on my babu's cheek and drove him out of my house. Even though he was repentant and accepted his

mistake, I never allowed him into my house again. In the meantime, it was decided in the A.G.M. that I would not have to work in Titagarh Clinic. I could work as a common worker. Hearing this I was heartbroken. Others consoled me saying that I could definitely come back to Titagarh after everything was settled. Now I think, if 'Durbar' wasn't there, how would I gather the courage? Even though I was defeated by Matha, one thing was of immense pride to me – to get rid of a small fry like me – even a party leader was after my life. When I was driven away from the locality I had a feeling that for me everything was over. As in the case of most organizations those who are on the downhill, are placed at the sideline. But no! 'Durbar' had given me the respect of a crusader. Particularly our chief advisor Dr. Smarajit Jana and the leaders of 'Durbar' had given me a place in their hearts. Durbar had informed that those who fight for 'Durbar' – their sacrifices never go to waste.²²⁴

The story of Jyotsna Basu gives the picture of the extreme ruthless character of the hoodlums in the Red-light areas:

I am Jyotsna Basu. My pet name is Asha. ... I joined the brothels in Kada Road in Durgapur. After joining the line in Kada Road, I found the place infested with cruel and tyrant policemen, local goons, musclemen, landlords and babus. In the month of July 1984, one local goon was going away without paying money after having sex with a girl. All of us girls went together and extracted the money from him; in anger he came in the night with his group and set fire to our hutments. When we tried to protest, they attacked us. So I took all the other sex-workers of the locality and went in a procession to the offices of S.D.P.O., B.D.O., MLA and MP. We cordoned their offices and demanded justice. We filed a case against those musclemen and finally police arrested them and they were jailed. One evening after they came out from prison, I was lying in bed and reading something. My head was towards the open window. Three or four guys came outside the window and threw some liquid on my face and head. It felt like liquid fire; I could feel my skin and flesh coming off my head and face. In pain I groaned and thrashed about on the bed. My friends got the news in the meantime and tried to carry me to the hospital. Those days, there were not many vehicles on the Durgapur main road. Somehow they put me in a cycle-rickshaw and took me to Durgapur sub-divisional Hospital and got me admitted there. After being treated there for a month, the doctor sent me to P.G. Hospital in Kolkata. The skull behind my head was exposed and my eyes were deteriorating day by day. In P.G. Hospital again there was problem regarding bed. There was no vacant free bed. So, I was admitted to paying bed. First all my belongings were sold to pay for the treatment. Then my friends contributed to bear the expenses. When I spoke to the doctor about the problem, he said, 'stay here for at least one year. Then I will see that you shift to a free bed.' At last, after one year there, the order came for shifting me to free bed. Then after spending three more years in the hospital, I came back home somewhat recovered. After coming back, it was difficult for me to earn money. Even small children were afraid of me – my face looked so horrific. My babu offered to take me to his native place. But I did not wish to be dependent on anybody. So, I refused his proposition and remained wherever I was and started working as housemaid at other sex-workers houses. I also started teaching a few children. Just after one month I realized that my babu had started visiting another girl. The matter came to light, but considering my own condition I did not oppose him. In the meantime, in 1996 on April 30, some women came from Kolkata and heard about our tales of woe. They advised us to get united and start a sex-worker's organization. Encouraged by the words of those sisters, we opened the Durgapur branch of Durbar Mahila Samanay Committee.²²⁵

²²⁴ Ibid. p.181-87

²²⁵ Ibid. p.196-99; 'My story is not very different from that of the others. Since I did not have my parents in childhood, I was brought up by my elder sister and her husband. (Jamaibabu as referred to in Bengali). Jamaibabu was a



Jyotsna Basu

(Source: Mrinal Kanti Dutta, Jaunakarmeeder Jiban Satya)

Hearing the news of their united effort, some unknown crooks created a division amongst them. There was rivalry regarding who would form the Committee. The fight became so serious that there were two clear divisions; the girls on this side of the pond were afraid to go to the other side, where the other group lived. Lastly a team of workers came to them from the Central Office and explained that as it is these sex-workers everywhere are divided among various localities. They were so disunited that for any cause, a thousand workers could not join in a single procession. If in one single locality there were divisions, even 100 girls would not be found to fight for a cause. Hearing this, Jyotsna and her team realized their mistake and identified the miscreants responsible for creating this confusion. The liquor merchants and other anti-social elements did not want these girls to unite and thus created the division. After this, in 1998 their Clinic was opened and Jyotsna joined with Baby-di and Bishu-da as health workers. Then they started explaining everyone about the Durbar Mahila Samanyoy Committee. It was a memorable as well as an encouragement for them when the then Health Minister Partha Dey came to inaugurate their Clinic on February 7, 1999. On April 10, Jyotsna and other girls took a unanimous decision that they would not pay any money to the extortionists. Though paying donation as per demand was stopped after this, other tricks were

drunkard and was into gambling; so we never saw money. My sister and I used to work as maids in various houses. I was fourteen. The babu or the man of the house where I worked used to call me close to him and under the pretext of caressing me, used to slip his hands under my panty or dress. After three or four years like this, one day this man forcibly raped me. Then onwards, he would often sexually assault me and would threaten me in many ways. I could not say anything. After this, when I told everything to my friend, she said, 'Look, can you do what I do?' When I replied 'why not?' She told me about prostitution as profession. I told her – 'if I have to sleep with my employer every now and then and never get any extra money, wouldn't it be better that I join the profession?' with her effort and her guidance, I joined the brothels in Kada Road in Durgapur.' Ibid. p.196

being played. Two police vans were posted in front of their lanes, they were from the local Police Station. Whenever a customer entered the premises or came out they were scared and looted of all their belongings. Jyotsna and her team informed this to S.P. Sri Ramesh Adhikari, he immediately took steps and thereafter police raids were stopped. She says:

After forming the organization we were relieved from the torture and harassment of police, landlords, goons and babus of Kada road. We had got a new life. Now I am working as the joint program coordinator of the 'Ganga-Bhagirathi Project'. I never imagined in my life that I would be able to move in such educated and respectable circles and talk on the same platform; that I would talk on the stage on loudspeaker; that I would travel from place to place in flight; and I would join in meetings and processions along with of MLAs and MPs. To tell you the truth, when I came back from the hospital and saw my face in the mirror I got the shock of my life. How could I earn? What would be my plight? I had no intention of living at all. Had 'Durbar' not visited our locality at that time, I might not have lived. 'Durbar' gave me my will to live, to dream about the future. I am very happy to be a worker of Durbar Mahila Samanyoy Committee.²²⁶

Despite raising voice against hoodlum's atrocities and getting united to fight against them, it can never be claimed that these anti-social or hoodlum's domination criminal activities have totally been uprooted in the red-light areas. Though, there are incidents where DMSC had organized sex-workers to fight against these anti-socials and hoodlums but even then DMSC also could not get respite of these miscreants' further attack.

In 2002 a peer worker of the Durbar Mahila Samannay Committee (DMSC) who was working in the red-light area named *Ghoradanga* in Howrah district was allegedly raped by four youth at 'dagger-point' in night. The peer worker was attacked by them after she saved a young sex-worker from the clutches of them. The Sonagachi-based committee which had been recognized in the International level for its HIV/AIDS Intervention Programs had lodged a complaint at Howrah Police Station. On the basis of this complaint those three youth had been detained. They were identified by the victim. The peer worker, resident of *Bhagwandas Ganguly lane*, in the *Ghorandaga* area had asked the young girl to get food from a nearby kiosk around 10:45pm. While going out to get the food, the girl was approached by the youths, aged between 20-25 years. The peer worker's own statement was: 'I gestured the girl not to accept the youths' proposal since they looked like ruffians, but they forced her inside a room, holding her by the scruff of her neck. I managed to save the girl but then the youth turned to me and raped me.' After raping her, culprits fled with a gold chain and some brass utensils. The victim later complained of having pain in the chest and lower abdomen. The FIR was logged by the DMSC president who urged the police to inflict punishment upon the guilty 'in a fashion that they would fear to repeat such acts.'²²⁷

²²⁶ Ibid. p.198-199

²²⁷ Staff Reporter, *Peer Worker Gang raped in Howrah*, The Telegraph, 27th April, 2002.

The constant attack on sex-worker by the hooligans and due to their threat the shut down of the clinic in the Tollygunge red-light area can cause the rise in HIV/AIDS and surely it was an hammering on the confidence and sense of 'self-determination' of the sex-workers and their power of negotiation with their clients was also hammered. As the real culprit in the case of *Swapna Gayen's* assault '*La*' could not be arrested by police, therefore, dissatisfaction still remains with regard to the role of Police-Administration. And failure and non-cooperation of police, Administration may block the struggles of sex-workers against all exploitation including sexual exploitation too. With regard to these incident *Dr. Moni Nag* said: 'The closure of the clinic is likely to result in an increase in the incidence of STDs and HIV/AIDS among sex-workers in the locality until the authorities take proper action to punish all the culprits and restore a sense of security among sex-workers in the area, their morale can't be lifted. This will impede their struggle against exploitation they face, including those of a sexual kind. After all, such sexual exploitation is responsible for the high incidence of HIV/AIDS among sex-workers.'²²⁸

The 'Durbar Mahila Samanbay Committee' had been forced to close a medical camp for sex-workers on *Bhabani Dutt* lane due to extreme pressure of the criminals and *goondas*. DMSE authorities complained on the indifferent attitude of police with regard to this matter and despite repeated complaint lodged to the police, they didn't take any initiatives to stop the criminals. In this program organized at the Academy of Fine Arts, *Swapna Gayen*, the victim further said, 'for last six months, I have not been allowed to work by the local goons.' She claimed that there was no assurance from police to give her protection. The project Director, *Mrinal Kanti Dutta* of DMSC said; 'the torture has increased manifold and we were forced to close down the medical centre in October. We are trying to open it again but the police is not assuring any help.' *Bharati De*, a sex-worker from Barrackpore raised allegation against the political parties as the main supporters to the local *goondas*. She claimed that these local goons had forced many of the sex-workers to leave the area and 'the police didn't help us at all', she said.²²⁹

During 2002, in the month of October, the care-taker of orphan house *Rahul Vidya Niketan*, located in the area of *Ramnagar of Baruipur* was wounded with the bullets shot by *tolabaz*. The name of the care-taker was *Kanubhushan Debnath* and this orphan house is run by DMSC. This incident spread a tremendous anxiety among all including residents of that home, employers and employees of DMSC. Later on, Police reached there but failed to arrest main culprit *Vasudeb Mondal*. *S.S.Pandya* (additional Police Superintendent – Rural of *South 24 Parganas*) said in this regard,

²²⁸ Moni Nag, *Still A Rather Long Way to Go*, The Telegraph. 26th Nov, 2002.

²²⁹ Staff Reporter, *Sex-workers protest atrocities*, The Times of India, Kolkata, Thursday, 19th December, 2002.

'Police team is engaged in searching that *Tolabaz – Vasudeb Mondal* in the entire area. It has been directed to initiate investigation on this matter.' According to *Mrinalkanti Dutta*, the programme Director of DMSC, 'since last three days some *tolabaz* of *Ramnagar* area are continuously demanding rupees 5 lacs from *Rahul Vidya Niketan*. Not only that they are also demanding an exorbitant bill separately for Kali Puja and threatened that the result of failing to pay this amount would be disastrous for them.' After receiving this threat administrators of *Rahul Vidya Niketan* and DMSC lodged a complaint against this in local Police Station. This incident made those *tolabaz* furious. *Rahul Vidya Niketan* possesses 26 *bigha* lands, in some portion of that land few rooms had been constructed for providing children of sex-workers with accommodations and some portions of this area was surrounded with 6 feet height wall. Rest of the area was surrounded by barbed wire (*Kantataar*).²³⁰

With the rise of sex-workers' movement to generate collective consciousness among themselves to protest against all kinds of injustice and exploitations to which they are often subjected has succeeded to bring this marginalized section in to the close contact of intellectual section of the society.

The physical assault of the chairperson of Durbar, *Swapna Gayen* in the hands of hoodlums created tremendous upsurge among general mass. The intellectual section of the society also felt sympathized with the sex-workers on this brutal incident took place in the life of *Swapna Gayen*. After this incident occurred in the year of 2002, a conference just like discussion forum was organized in the Academy of Fine Arts, on the topic of 'Exploitations of Sex-workers: Present Bengali Society.' This conference succeeded to gather a large number of intellectuals of Kolkata at one place. These intellectuals were – *Madhavi Mukhopadhyay*, *Amitabh Dasgupta*, *Kalyan Sen Barat*, *Debanjan Chakraborty*, *Amlan Dutta*, *Subha Dasgupta*, *Maitreyee Chattopadhyay* etc. In this conference, in the context of narrating the brutal experience, the victim *Swapna Gayen* put her expression: At 11pm three hoodlums rushed into my room and then started beating me up ruthlessly. They attacked with punches and kicks on my abdomen and chest!' *Bharati Dey*, a sex-worker of *Barrackpore* also gave almost same expression. Actually, being into the profession of prostitution and plying trade mostly in night, all prostitutes have to face lots of hazards in their daily lives. Local hoodlums, musclemen, *tolabaz* are the main elements playing as exploitative machines in the lives of sex-workers but these sex-workers are also subjected to police exploitations. All these continuous sufferings have made the lives of the sex-workers miserable. According to them,

²³⁰ Staff Reporter, *Tolabajer Gulite Homer Karmi Jakham*, Ananda Bazar Patrika, Monday, 28th October, 2002. See— Staff Reporter, *Taka Na Peya Shishuder Abasike Gooli Chalalo Duskritira*, Sambaad Protidin, Monday, 28th October, 2002

the year of 2000 onwards they started increasingly becoming victim to these kinds of exploitations, violence and ill-treatment. After listening to all expressions of the sex-workers, everyone including intellectuals decided to approach Govt. of Bengal claiming the protection to the rights of sex-workers as citizens. Intellectual *Sukumari Bhattacharjee* said that, this is the oldest profession in the world. 1900 years back also this profession was found to exist. He mentioned about '*Kamasutra*' of *Vatsayana*' and said that during that time anyone, for exploiting sex-workers or misbehaving with them used to get inflicted upon with heavy punishments. The most famous and respected economist mainly tried to uphold the concept of 'legalising prostitution' and said, 'the environment should be created in such a way so that anytime any sex-worker can easily quit the profession of prostitution without any kind of resistance'. After long discussion on the conditions of sex-workers and how their lives can be nourished in a better way; the main conclusion arose that the profession of sex-work must receive legal sanction. That may be termed as 'Legalization of Prostitution'. In this regard a decision was taken according to that a memorandum asking to stop all kinds of violence and exploitations in the lives of sex-workers signed by intellectuals was about to be submitted to the chairman of Left-front and Chief Minister. Along with this, another decision was taken, to claim maintenance of Law and Order by Police on regular basis. Sex-workers who are now determined to bring a transition in the thought process of the people in the society and thus bring social changes also expressed their dreams and plans about the future of their children. They hope for a better and bright future of their children, so that neither of them has to get into prostitution in future.²³¹

During 2003, in the month of January, sex-workers submitted a memorandum to the chief minister with an appeal of taking up proper steps to remove all kinds of violations and exploitations exercised upon them by the hoodlums, anti-socials etc. In this regard, sex-workers found immense support from the intellectual section of Kolkata e.g. writers, artists, teachers etc. and others. The main objective of this memorandum was to approach Chief Minister *Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee* seeking for his personal interference into this matter. The largest organization run by the sex-workers – DMSC played the leading role in this entire process. One group of representatives from DMSC went to *Mahakaran* and there they had submitted the memorandum that contained several signatures of some famous, strong, influential personalities like – democratic writer *Indranath Bandyopadhyay*, who belongs to the organization of artists and writers of West Bengal, *Kalyan Roy Chowdhury*, the member of it's State level editors' Committee; *Sanjiv Ghosh* – Professor of *Rabindra Bharati University*; and other intellectuals – *Amlan Dutta*, *Sukumari Bhattacharjee*, *Kalyan Sen Barat*, *Madhavi Mukhopadhyay* etc. All these intellectuals wanted Chief Minister's personal interference in

²³¹ Staff Reporter, *Jaunakarmeeder Sangey Samabyathi Holen Budhhijibira*, Khabarer Kagoj, 19th December, 2002.

this matter as it was essentially required to demolish all these kinds of atrocities and tyranny of hooligans and anti-socials from the lives of the sex-workers.²³²

Various Clubs founded in Kolkata center play influential roles in the lives of the sex-workers. The 'local power groups' around these clubs formed in connection with various political parties. These clubs are run by men and mostly for men. Despite having same geographical areas often these clubs have great difference to each other. These difference lies in their membership which is done according to 'party affiliation'. These clubs are always directly involved in the political work which comprises 'organizing campaigns, protest and manipulating votes during elections etc'. They also 'organize sports, social events and other community activities'. Some clubs are involved in the social work and therefore, sometime they are seen to be connected with some NGOs, and other outside group or organization. But mostly women are left out to be members for these clubs. Participation of them in the functions is expected and often they are subjected to the compulsion for attending political rallies and giving donations. Due to having political connection and 'group strength' these clubs always remain responsible to maintain law and order in the particular area is concerned. The young men hailing from red-light areas hardly get opportunity to find out an employment, which are stable; therefore, they work vigorously for the local club and often are involved in organizing the sex-trade. The associations of local *goondas*/hoodlums with specific club and a political party are often seen.²³³

After the Sonagachhi project started, these *dadas* are approached and meetings and discussions are being arranged to explain to the *Dadas* that what they were doing was wrong. Similarly the girls are also being assured that they need not take anyone to their rooms against their will. If any problem is created, 'Durbar' would tackle the situation. Finally, the extortion of money by way of donation is under the strict vigil of 'Durbar'. Earlier while girls were forced to shell out 100 rupees, now they give any amount according to their own sweet will. But harassing customers by demanding money cannot be totally controlled. Just a few days back, the boys of a club near Kalighat were extracting donation from people during Kali Puja; they were so powerful that nobody dared to protest. First the branch members of 'Durbar' went and protested. When that did not work, the central committee gave written complaint to the state government. For this reason the president of the organisation, 'Durbar', Ms. Ratna Debnath and the treasurer Ms. Jharna Ghosh were manhandled. Finally the matter was taken to serious heights. The police-station was 'gheraoed' and

²³² Staff Reporter, *Samajbirodhi Hamla Bandhe Jaunakarmeera Budhhor Kaachhe*, Protidin, 16th January, 2003.

²³³ Indrani Sinha and Carolyn Slightholme, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta*, Stree, Kolkata, 2002. p.13

the news was broadcast over television. Then the culprits were arrested and the forcible extortion of donation partly came to an end.²³⁴

'A Report by the National Commission for Women' (1995-96) also informs that *goondas* and the criminal attacks are commonly present in the lives of the sex-workers. It further states: - "Extortion, beating, gang rape are routine experiences for many in the women. However, complaints against them are not registered. It is believed that five women are murdered in every state every year but not case are ever registered. *Goondas* often burn women with cigarettes and cut women with razor blades. Lodging complaints with the police, by the women or NGOs is a theoretical possibility. The police play an invisible role in ignoring this violence and instead of enforcing the law and protecting the women, often turn a blind eye. Medical professional are often pressurized or bribed to give false 'cause of death'".²³⁵

2.3.7. Businessmen:

In the present time red-light areas are not only the areas to be widely accessed by police and anti-socials but nowadays big businessmen have also started taking interest in the red-light areas. They have started investing money in these areas. Every year they are investing crore of rupees in the red-light areas. The profit margin in the red-light areas is more than hundred percent. *Indrani Sinha*, director of NGO *Sanlaap* has brought this shocking news into the limelight. According to her, these businessmen have carried out a market survey and came out with the conclusion that having investment in the red-light areas always return with excessive profits, that is impossible to make in any other field. Besides, in this case, businessmen do not have to face too much hazards and main capital of the investment can also be recovered very fast. This is why some established as well as renowned businessmen of Calcutta have started investing in the area like Sonagachi, Kalighat and Bowbazar etc. In this regard *Indrani Sinha* said,

According to me, my assumption is that, in course of time these businessmen will gradually find more interests regarding their capital investment in the red-light areas. And certainly it would result into the flourishing of numerous red-light areas all over the city, but definitely those will never be having the names like Sonagachi, Bowbazar etc. rather these places will be called with some sophisticated names like – *Soanli Resort*, *Rupali Resort* etc.

Sanlaap is an NGO working for the upliftment in the lives of the sex-workers. Their main objectives include several things – rehabilitation of the sex-workers, spreading education among sex-workers, raising voice against police exploitations and empowering sex-workers to make all kinds of protests to stop violence exercised against them etc. *Sanlaap* has succeeded to meet their objectives to a

²³⁴ Ibid. p.110-112

²³⁵ *Social 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.18

great extent. Moreover, the activities of this NGO are not only confined to the sex-workers of town or villages but several research oriented works related to the sex-workers and sex-work are also continuously being pursued by *Indrani Sinha*. According to the director of *Sanlaap*, *Indrani Sinha*,

Since long time I am engaged in various activities carried out in the numerous red-light areas of Calcutta along with the sex-workers but, within last couple of years suddenly, the nature of all these red-light areas have started undergoing a transformation. But these kinds of changes or transformations are not at all pleasant rather extremely shocking. There was a time when the average ages of most of the girls coming to the red-light areas for plying trade were 20 years to 30 years. The span of their average work lives used to be till 55 years to 60 years. But, nowadays child sex-workers are flocking to this profession and capturing the sex market that was dominated till date by the sex-workers explained above. A large number of girls aged between 12 years to 14 years are forcibly driven into the prostitution. And clients are now largely demanding child sex-workers. We have conducted a survey which explored that, 40 percent of the girls initiated into this profession within last one year are child prostitutes. For this sudden rise in the demand for child sex-workers in the sex market, these businessmen remain largely responsible.

To explain the reason, *Indrani Sinha* says,

An organization named *Nashia Watch* had conducted a survey in the year of 1994 which explored the fact that every year five thousand girls are brought from Nepal to India and then sold off in various red-light areas. These girls are either trafficked in or brought after arranging false marriage. In the same way near about three thousand five hundred women are being trafficked in each year from Bangladesh. This trafficking network is extremely organized and mostly *dalals* play major roles in this regard. The entire transaction is carried out in cash. So, *dalals* having more capital would be able to purchase girls in large number. But due to the sudden transition occurred in the tastes of clients, the aged women have lost their market demand. As a result, demand for child sex-workers have got tremendous hike in the sex market. One needs lots of capital to purchase child for the purpose of prostitution. It is not possible for normal *dalals* to invest so much capital in this transaction. In this regard, big businessmen are extending their helping hands towards these *dalals*. These businessmen are now utter only one line 'invest as much as you need but bring the girls'. This is why *dalals* have started borrowing money from these businessmen to purchase child girls. The demand in the sex-markets and rates both are high in the case of child sex-workers. Therefore, this invested capital is also getting recovered along with a bulk of profit within a year. Without any kinds of hazards, these businessmen are also getting their money back very easily.

According to *Indrani Sinha*, this business is carried out openly, so one can easily have a clear idea about this kind of transaction. Besides that students of school-college are becoming victim to this racket. They are being lured with promising offers and trapped into the sex racket. Total number of resorts flourished by the sides of Diamond Harbour Road has reached 36 within last few years. Within this period, already, information has come into focus that nowadays college girls in large number are being used to meet the sexual lusts of clients. Their number is on rise every year. But, in these kinds of cases, all the girls are not always victims to the compulsion, procurement, false promises, cheating etc. Many girls are flocking to this profession in order to balance with western countries' life styles. Many girls find it as an avenue easily available for earning loose money

without putting too much effort and therefore, do not hesitate to join this profession. *Indrani Sinha* assumed that this business of sex-trade would be more flourishing in course of time. She claimed to have already recognized some businessmen. In this regard she said,

After hundred percent confirmations, we will unveil their real characters in front of the entire society. And that day is not very far enough!²³⁶

²³⁶ Ujjal Mukhoypadhy, *Baro Byabsayeeder Baro Lagni Patitapallite*, Protidin, 16th June 1997.