

Interrogating Patriarchy, Power and Sexuality: A Critical Study of the Portrayal of Indian Prostitutes in Select Fiction

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DECLARATION

I, Esha Gaurish Nadkarni, hereby declare that this thesis represents work which has been carried out by me and that it has not been submitted, either in part or full, to any other University or Institution for the award of any research degree.

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CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that the above Declaration of the candidate, Esha Gaurish Nadkarni, is true and the work was carried out under our supervision.

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-Hillary Clinton

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Chapter 1

Unravelling Flesh Traders

1.1 Introduction

India, the land of *Kama Sutra* is familiar with the art of pleasure, eroticism and sexuality. Likewise, India is not a stranger to selling sex in exchange for money or the practice of prostitution. India has housed devadasis, courtesans, and common prostitutes over the years. The artistic courtesans and pious devadasis were an integral part of India's social fabric, and were eventually equated with sex workers.

Kama Sutra discusses courtesans in one of the sections where Vatsyayana writes how a courtesan has intercourse with men for her sexual pleasure as well as for her own maintenance. He adds that "a courtesan should not sacrifice money to her love, because money is the chief thing to be attended to" (Ratnakar 38). He categorises courtesans into eight types, "a bawd; a female attendant; an unchaste woman; a dancing girl; a female artisan; a woman who has left her family; a woman living on her beauty; and finally, a regular courtesan" (38). The courtesans were neither looked down upon nor was their profession unrecognised during that time. The *devadasi* system in India can be traced back to 1230 AD. It is an ancient practice prevalent in South India where young girls are dedicated to the Goddess Yellamma, the God of fertility. The girls are ceremoniously married to the goddess and are not allowed to marry anyone else after. Years later Sudha Murthy in *Three Thousand Stitches* writes about her experiences with *devadasis* from North Karnataka when she was involved with the Infosys Foundation, a non-profit organisation set up to make a difference to the commoner. Murthy discusses how traditionally the *devadasis* enjoyed a high status in society before getting

reduced to mere sex workers. Over years human trafficking has exponentially increased due to the high demand of sex workers and brothels. She witnessed innocent girls being pushed in sex work, some under the pretext of a job or because they did not have any other means to earn money. These girls who are exploited by society, are filled with guilt and shame (9). Human trafficking has its roots in the slave trade. Girls are bought and sold at an alarming rate even today and forced into prostitution, all without their consent. Trafficking is an organised crime and is unfortunately still a part of the social fabric.

Post colonisation all prostitutes irrespective of the means through which they enter the trade or the culture/traditions at play were reduced to the end product of selling sex and hence were put in the same group of sex workers without considering their socio-cultural significance. This research will examine avenues of entry into the trade, the impact of traditions and cultural factors and not solely consider sex work. Hence the terminology of “prostitutes” is used instead of sex work, to encompass broader dimensions. This is done to keep their uniqueness and differences in mind and not assuming that all of them practise sex work. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) writes in her impactful essay ‘Under the Western Eye’, the diversity of women must not be overlooked by putting them together as a homogenous group. Therefore this research will adopt the overarching term “prostitutes” to encompass these individuals, offering a more inclusive framework compared to the narrower designation of “sex worker”.

The Random House Dictionary Of The English Language defines prostitution as “an act or practice of engaging in sexual intercourse for money”, similar to any job where one provides services in exchange for money, and not someone who sells her body like a commodity.

Nivedita Menon (2019) writes about the “commodification of the female body” which discusses the representation of women as objects of male desire (146). Media portrays women with skimpy clothes as desirable; including participants of beauty pageants which advertise

women's beauty; to women who sell their body in exchange of money, all of these women are a part of commodification. Feminists critique how a woman's body is treated as a commodity in a capitalistic world and is the basis of prostitution.

Society required women to be chaste before marriage and outside her marriage. Women were also not expected to consider sex enjoyable but rather as a duty towards their husband. This was the reason men sought sex workers to fulfil their sexual urges. Married men would visit sex workers when their wives refused them or they wanted variety or engaged in acts considered unacceptable in marriage.

Prostitution emerges with a paradigm of patriarchal dominance and systematic oppression, relegating women to objects of exploitation and subjugations. This perpetuates a hierarchical construct where women are pushed to secondary status at the disposal of their male counterparts. Marry Wollstonecraft (2004) discusses Rousseau's thoughts on women, "she was formed to please and to be subject to him; and it is her duty to render herself agreeable to her master- this being the grand end of her existence" (99). The basis of women's existence was assumed to be for pleasing men and being at their service.

Sheila Jeffreys (2009) elaborates on Mary's views and writes about manhood and the woman's role in her subordination;

Prostitution performs the function within that political system of creating "manhood", raising men's status by enabling them to use the subordinate class of women specifically for what they are seen to represent and be "for" in that system. Woman is used as "cunt" in a system in which it is precisely the possession of a "cunt" that places her in a subordinate class. (1194)

A man using a woman's body for his sexual gratification in exchange for money is nothing but objectification. Not only is the body used for sex, but it is also used as an outlet for violence. Prostitution is a form of male sexual violence. Since the act of sex is paid for, the

violence is considered a part of the package. These dynamics result in dehumanisation of the prostitute from her own perspective.

Amia Srinivasan (2021) delves into the framework surrounding the notion of “fuckability” (84) which dictates whose bodies are permissible or impermissible for sexual engagements. Women who are poor, undocumented, enslaved can be more easily engaged in sex than others. Consequently girls from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds may be subjected to sexual assault without any consequences. She further describes the functions of bodies, “some bodies are for the pleasure, the possession, the consumption, the worshipping, the servicing, the validating of other bodies...sex, which we think of as the most private of acts, is in reality a public thing...the rules of all this were set long before we entered the world” (xii). The sexual act is performed in private but it has socio-economic connotations. Society decides who can have sex with whom. Stark and Whisnat (2005) write how society has made prostitution an identity, not an occupation (14). This identity has no expiration date, and prostitutes are forbidden from breaking away from this identity and working in any other profession.

Indian cinema has undertaken the task to give visibility to courtesans, *devadasis* and sex workers. The popular *Umrao Jaan* (1981) depicts the story of Jaan who was a cop and sold to a brothel where she becomes a celebrated poet and witnessed the brothel shut down by the British. *Pakeezah* (1972) charts the story of Sahibjan, a courtesan from Lucknow. *Mughal-E-Azam* (1960) is about the courtesan Anarkali who falls in love with the prince. The famous *Devadas* is recreated several times, the last one being in 2002. This movie is about courtesan Chandramukhi celebrated for her dance and falls in love with one of her customers Devadas. *Chameli* (2003) shows the conversation between a sex worker and an investment banker who are stuck due to monsoons and the latter tries to free her from her pimp. *Begum Jan* (2017) is about eleven sex workers who refused to part ways with their brothel amidst India’s partition.

Alia Bhat's hit *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (2022) is based on the life of Gangubai who was sold to the brothel by her lover and later goes on to own the brothel and help several sex workers in Kamathipura. Indian cinema has produced several movies covering various facets of sex work in India. While there is an abundance of movies showcasing a side of sex workers unseen and unheard of, there is not much literary fiction written on Indian prostitutes or sex workers. This research will study primary texts written on courtesans, devadasis and trafficked women.

Prostitutes have no voice in public and therefore, their stories of violence and abuse remain hidden. They do not know that they are abused, nor do the general public. Leora Bilsky (1998) elaborates on the metaphor of voice in feminist writings;

literature examines the different ways in which women's voices are silenced, distorted, marginalised and expelled from the public domain. The lack of voice is understood by feminist writers as a source of injustice and various ways have been devised to introduce the missing voices. (48)

This research seeks to address the gap within scholarly discourse by delving into the literature concerning devadasis, courtesans and trafficked girls in India. This study will elucidate the interconnectedness of these distinct subjects as well as provide comprehensive analysis that both synthesizes existing scholarship and offers novel insights into the experiences of these marginalised groups. This research also aims to unveil the intricate socio-cultural, economic and political dynamics shaping their lives. This research will amplify their voices and contribute to conversations regarding representation, agency and empowerment of these marginalised groups.

1.2 Primary texts

The research project is engaged in the study of seven primary texts. The devadasi chapter will study *The Pagoda Tree*, *The Colour of Our Sky* and *The Undoing Dance*. The

courtesan chapter will examine *Courtesan's Quarter* and *The Woman of Basrur*. The trafficking chapter will examine *Sold* and *The Blue Notebook*.

The Pagoda Tree published in 2017 by Claire Scobie takes the reader to eighteenth century India with the protagonist Maya who is destined to be a devadasi. The fall of the empire and arrival of the British caused an upheaval in Maya's predetermined life. The novel captures her struggles in new India where there was no royal patronage or Kings to support her art. Scobie beautifully highlights Maya's adaptability with the ever changing times.

The Colour of Our Sky is about two girls, Tara and Mukta, with the narrative shifting between the village and the city of Mumbai. Amita Trasi published her novel in 2017 but she writes about Mukta who belonged to the family of devadasis during the twentieth century. Superstitions and societal pressure forces her to follow her family's path much to her mother's disapproval. Mukta is rescued briefly but then gets taken away to a brothel. Mukta wanted a better future for her daughter, and thankfully Tara (Mukta's childhood friend) rescues and adopts her securing her future. On the other hand Mukta's future looked bleak.

The Undoing Dance by Srividya Natarajan (2018) narrates the tale of a devadasi family set during the nineteenth and twentieth century in South India. The novel explores the plethora of voices narrating their individual stories within this hereditary family of devadasis; where the women have a pre-decided life dedicated to their God. While Jagadambal and Kanaka led glorious lives under the king's patronage, their descendants Rajayi and Kalyani suffered under the British laws (1930s) criminalizing and banning dedication ceremonies and dancing in temples. The novel delves into the yester years of glory as well as the changes post colonisation.

Originally written in Urdu and translated in English to *Courtesan's Quarter*, *Bazaar-e-Husn* (1919) is a tale set at the turn of the twentieth century about a housewife Saman who had an unhappy marriage. She was thrown out of the house by her husband which forced her to become a courtesan and support herself. By this time the western educated Indian men looked

down upon courtesans and wanted to uproot them from the social fabric. Saman leaves the courtesan's quarters and finds her purpose by managing an orphanage. The novel explores the image of an ideal Indian woman in modern India and demonstrates how the courtesans did not fit in anymore.

A translation from the Kannada *Mai Managala Suliyalli* (1970), K. Shivarama Karant's *The Woman of Basrur* is about strong-willed Manjula, a courtesan living in a small town in twentieth century Karnataka. Manjula was respected for her music and for her position in the society. She took her own decisions and lived life on her terms. This novel spans several generations of Manjula's family, exploring the themes of female sexuality and patriarchy in one of the oldest professions of the world.

Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2006) set during the twenty-first century, charts Lakshmi's journey as a young girl of thirteen years who travels to India from Nepal under the pretext of work and instead finds herself in Mumtaz's brothel. Her step-father had sold her for a few hundreds to buy alcohol and gamble. Lakshmi faces all kinds of abuse in the brothel and learns life's hard lessons. The novel ends on a hopeful note with a rescue mission which helps Lakshmi leave the brothel.

Jamie A. Levine published *The Blue Notebook* in 2009. The twenty-first century novel is about a nine-year-old Batuk sold by her father when the family falls in tough times. Batuk changed hands from Master Gahil, the Yazaks, brothel and finally to Iftikhar. Batuk is a creative person who uses her imagination and her writing to cope with her difficult life. Unfortunately Batuk's beauty and brain ultimately leads to her downfall.

1.3 Objectives

- Comprehend the social, cultural, political and cultural status of prostitutes within the framework of Indian society
- Highlight the challenges encountered by the prostitutes within the context of India
- Analyse and juxtapose the circumstances experienced by girls/women entering prostitution through diverse pathways such as the devadasi traditions, courtesan-ship and human trafficking
- Examine the legislative reforms and laws that have impacted their lives
- Illuminate the narratives of these marginalised individuals, bringing attention to their untold and overlooked experiences

1.4 Research Question

To scrutinise the representation of prostitutes in India through fiction and evaluate their socio-cultural positioning within society.

1.5 Research Method and Methodology

This research employs qualitative methods of textual and discourse analysis. The primary texts are read closely and analysed using the lens of feminist literary criticism, narratology and other schools of criticisms.

Feminism and feminist literary criticism help to liberate women from societal norms which attempt to marginalise them. Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn's (1985) confers how women's oppression is a reality along with a cognitive process which dictates how men and women perceive themselves and each other (3). Derrida and Lacan's view of phallocentrism states that the male phallus was equated to authority. The world is governed by a belief that

only men have the right to make all decisions and form rules, hence gender rules have been constructed to benefit men.

Eventually these rules become a part of the social fabric in the form of traditions, culture and ideology. Men used this ideology to oppress women. This oppression is done “through institutions such as the academy, the church, and the family, each of which justifies and reinforces women’s subordination to men” (Sultana 3). Continued oppression and brainwashing lead women to view themselves the way they were perceived by men, like second class citizens.

Gayle Greene and Coppeliah Kahn (1985) quote Claude Lévi-Strauss’ *Elementary Structures of Kinship* where he highlights how men exchanged women amongst themselves as gifts’, “(m)en, not women, have the power to determine the value of women in the exchange and the meanings associated with them” (7). He adds by saying that this indicates how culture depends on the subjugation of women. Girls/women being sold by their fathers or husbands or given away as *devadasis* validate how these men determined the value of the girls while the girls themselves had no say in it. Men perpetuate violence on women without batting an eyelid as they are considered unworthy and their lives are inconsequential. The primary texts cite multiple instances where the girls are treated like a property to be used, abused and then cast away which will be analysed through this research.

Greene and Kahn (1985) discuss the role of literature in disseminating ideology and shaping it. Hence it is imperative to achieve an accurate interpretation of literature. Texts incorporate historical and cultural illustrations showcasing the culture of the times it represents. Feminist literary critics seek to deconstruct “dominant male patterns of thought and social practice” (Bhat 6) and to reconstruct hidden and ignored female experiences.

Female historians have illuminated the obscure narratives on women predominantly written from the male perspective. Women’s history should not be marginalized as peripheral

history but must be made an integral part of mainstream history. The trials and tribulations of prostitutes are often hidden and are not a part of mainstream history; this research will help bring to light the stories of prostitutes who were ostracised and ignored in the past.

Literature accurately represents culture and therefore literary texts enable the reader to reach the heart of the dominant culture. Novels written on the overlooked prostitutes can be considered parallel narratives or anti-narratives that place them in mainstream narratives. Robert Scholes explains the concept of the anti-narrative in Silbergleid's (2010) work by stating how they do not work against the narrative but "strategically explores and undermines narrative convention" (332).

Garg (2013) emphasises how literature is a form of dissent. Writers have expressed their dissent or refusal to comply with societal norms through their writing. Writing a piece of literature and publishing it for a larger readership is a powerful way of breaking their silence (Lanser 7). While writing is one way of dissent, maintaining silence is another, the act of remaining silent can be acknowledged not as absence but as a statement of refusal (Wyss 122). The refusal to engage is another way to showcase dominance and non-compliance as silence is fighting its own battle.

This research will further examine the primary texts by employing the principles of narratology. The narrative techniques and structures used by writers are gendered in nature. Male and female writers write differently as their perspective varies. Male writers are often criticised for writing about female experiences they haven't experienced themselves. While literature written by women has two layers of voices, the surface text which is obvious and clear to the reader and the hidden subtext which unearths her hidden feelings. Gendered study of narratology will help the readers easily retrieve the hidden subtext. 'Mind Mother: psychoanalysis and feminism' add to this by elucidating the opinion of feminist literary critics

for whom 'mind mother' represents the contradictions of women's experiences in a patriarchal atmosphere where mind is male (Gardiner 114).

The primary texts are not only personal stories of the protagonists but represent their communities. The community's voice emerges through the protagonist. Their voices represent the plight of their community and share similar history and concerns with each other.

Literature plays the dual role of representing literature as well as social contribution. It leaves an indelible mark on history and contributes to the advancement of culture. The primary texts will be examined through the aforementioned approaches and methodologies in this research endeavour.

1.6 Literature Review

The literature review encompasses diverse dimensions pertaining to prostitution at the global and national scales covering economic, social and cultural aspects. This segment endeavours to offer a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted nature of prostitution, further facilitating a nuanced understanding of the primary texts and central theme under investigation.

1.6.1. Prostitution around the world

Micheal Foucault (1998) writes in *The Will to Knowledge* that sex used to be policed in eighteenth century Europe, "it was essential that the state know what was happening with its citizen's sex, and the use they made of it" (26). Sex was accepted only in the parent's bedroom, however, it was required that they make space for "illegitimate sexualities", and so the brothel, pimp and prostitute were tolerated but unspoken about (3-4). Following the eighteenth century, the attitude towards sex changed and talking about sex was not shunned or looked down upon.

Mary Wollstonecraft's (2004) *A Vindication of the Rights Women* written in eighteenth century Britain, examines the development of a woman into a prostitute. Wollstonecraft writes that a fallen woman who has already lost her honour believes that she cannot redeem herself and hence turns into a prostitute to support herself financially (94). She further writes that a woman's honour was the only important virtue, and honour, once lost, could not be regained. She believes that women have only learnt to please men and depend on them. In a different chapter titled 'Modesty' Wollstonecraft refers to the prostitutes as shameless, "[t]hey trample on virgin bashfulness with a sort of bravado, and glorying in their shame, become more audaciously lewd than men..."(154).

The eighteenth-century European society considered prostitution as important. Beauvoir (1997) quotes Schopenhauer who writes, "prostitutes are human sacrifices on the alter on monogamy" (134); she also quotes Lecky a European historian of morals who called them "supreme type of vice, they are the greatest guardians of virtue" (134). Even though the Church and the State condemned prostitution, society could not live without this vice, and hence it continued as a necessary evil. The prostitutes were not respected, their life was difficult, and they had to wear signs on their clothing which identified them as prostitutes.

Simone de Beauvoir (1997) also writes about religious prostitution, where a woman was not only a way of gaining pleasure but attaining a state of "*hybris*, righteousness, in which the individual exceeds the bounds of self" (183). She also observes that prostitution increases during wartime and social disorders (572). Beauvoir's take on the courtesan's need for man is also a part of her book *The Second Sex*. There it says how a courtesan depends on the man and his desire for her in order to secure her future (582).

Marro's *La Puberté* compares a wife to a prostitute differentiating between them only based on the price and duration of the contract. Marro states how sex is a service, while the wife is in it for her lifetime, the prostitute's contract is for a short duration. While the wife and

prostitute both offer the same service, the former is respected while the latter is not (Beauvoir 569).

The common prostitutes were sexually and economically exploited, and troubled by the police as well as customers. The high-class hetaira differed from the common prostitute as she was distinguished and was recognised as an individual. While the common prostitute relied on the show of her flesh, the former also offered unique talents;

The girl flute-players of ancient Greece charmed men with their music and dancing. Algerian Arab women do the *danse du ventre*; the Spanish girls who dance and sing in the Barrio Chino are simply offering themselves in a delicate manner to the connoisseur (Beauvoir 579).

The Second Sex highlights the duplicity of men during that time. The very men who shamed prostitutes used to visit them often to fulfil their sexual urges. He looked down upon prostitutes and condemned them, however, it is their own demand that created the supply (625).

Greek Prostitutes in the Ancient Mediterranean, 800 BCE-200 CE provides insights in the Greek society at that time, where prostitution was common, but yet again prostitutes were not revered, "many terms used to describe prostitutes associate them with filth and dross (e.g., chamaitypē , a thing pounded into the dirt, and s pod'esilaura , heap of ashes, dross)" (Glazebrook and Madeleine 7).

Prostitutes were a part of their traditions like a boy's initiation into manhood, when the father takes his son to the brothel. Visiting brothels and prostitutes was accepted in Athenian society as long as such interactions did not lead to marriages (Glazebrook and Madeleine 9). The prostitutes were also seen as a means for the men to fulfil their desires without them going astray, and saw in them a solution both "democratic" and "saving" since with access to prostitutes young men would not go astray, "in the urgency of their nature, after what didn't belong to them" (Glazebrook and Madeleine 127). The Greek prostitutes were also known to

have participated in political conspiracies and indulged in violence as is represented in the literature of their time. They had the power and ability to “destabilise the aristocracy's dominant position in society” (197). Thus the prostitutes who were considered necessary in the society, were also feared because of their influential position in the Greek society.

The ancient city of Pompeii boasted of several brothels with no social stigma attached to prostitution. It was considered a norm for Roman men to visit brothels. The brothels used delicate fabrics, candles and frescoes depicting sexual acts to build the ambience for their visitors. These images helped to decorate the rooms, build desire as well as serve as a menu card for the types of services provided by the prostitutes. The prostitutes in ancient Pompeii were mainly slaves who were paid a meagre amount by the brothel owners and lived in poor conditions, until tossed away by the brothel. Even though prostitution was acceptable, the prostitutes lacked respect in the society (The Brothels of Pompeii).

In Japan, geishas were a group of women representing oriental femininity in the entertainment industry. Amy Stanley (2013) writes how the earliest geishas were actually men, and the women came into the picture only later. Male geishas would throng the 'pleasure quarter' of Yoshiwara and were followed by female dancers and musicians in the mid-eighteenth century who were also called as geishas after they began offering their services to men during gatherings (540). The brothel owners were worried the geishas would eat their business; hence, they insisted that geishas from that area do not sell sex. Apart from the sex trade, geishas attended schools, sewed police uniforms and donated their money to educational institutes (541).

Geishas were primarily entertainers, and all of them did not provide sexual services. The twenty-first century Japan still boasts of geishas but their number is dwindling. While there is no lack of prostitution in Japan, the Geisha culture is suffering due to the lack of wealthy patrons

and the willingness on the part of girls to become geishas.

Prostitution was widespread with different names and various roles, but as a common practice found all over the world.

1.6.2. Prostitutes in the Bible

Throughout literary history, including The Bible, there are numerous references to prostitutes, indicating their vital role in society.

In the Book of Joshua, Rahab who lived in Jericho is referred to as a harlot, some versions call her an innkeeper, while some call her a prostitute. She housed the two spies sent by Joshua in exchange for her and her family's safety and well-being. She believed this was the Lord's plan and hence helped them, "I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us.... The Lord, your God he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Joshua 2:9-11). Rahab's faith in the Lord aided Joshua in leading the Israelites.

Avaren Ibsin (2009) justifies the version of Rahab being a prostitute by stating that the two spies chose her house to hide as it was common for strange men to visit her house without raising any suspicion (57). Ibsin further adds that Rahab was ready to abandon the city and the people also because, as a prostitute, she must be ill-treated and disrespected by the others, "rejected by her people, therefore had nothing to lose by giving them up, but had everything to gain by saving her family"(74). Rahab plays a vital role in the Book of Joshua and in the lives of the Israelites who respected her and gave her a new chance at life.

The New Testament mentions Mary Magdalene thirteen times, never labelling her as a prostitute; however for years, readers have tagged her as one. Kennedy (2012) recalls how as a child, she was told how Mary Magdalene was a sinner and had to wash and kiss Jesus' feet to show that she had changed (121). She was one of the disciples who followed Jesus, the only disciple who understood him and the first one to whom Jesus Christ appeared after his

resurrection. Christ considered Mary important at a time when society and the Church did not accept women in a position of power and labelling her as a prostitute might be a way to weaken her position. Kennedy believes that "given the persistence of patriarchal power structures, it is easy to understand how the Magdalene in public memory has been subject to and has shaped the gendered ideologies that constrain and diminish women's authority" (123). Magdalene is portrayed as a prostitute in the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), but Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* has her as the wife of Jesus and the mother of his child.

The story of Adam and Eve is well known to everybody, but there also exists a version where Adam is said to have married Lilith before God created Eve. According to medieval Jewish tradition, Lilith demanded equality and refused to be a subordinate to Adam; since that was not possible she went away and refused to return to Adam; after which God created Eve to give Adam company. Lilith was unhappy and angry and turned into a seductress who seduces men in their sleep and wakefulness. Patai (1964) writes that she roams at night seducing men who lay alone; she also adds about Lilith's activities when men are awake. Lilith is known as a seductress who did not leave any stone unturned in seducing men whenever she could.

She adorns herself with many ornaments like a despicable harlot and takes up her position at the crossroads to seduce the sons of man. When a fool approaches her, she grabs him, kisses him, and pours him wine of dregs of viper's gall. As soon as he drinks it, he goes astray after her. (Patai 302)

The Bible has many instances of adultery, seduction and prostitution. The Bible condemns prostitution by women as well as men.

1.6.3. Prostitution in Ancient India

Sukumari Bhattacharji (1987) has mapped the history and tradition of prostitution in Hindu and Buddhist texts in her article 'Prostitution in Ancient India'. She writes that the earliest mention of prostitution is in *Rgveda*, India's most ancient work. The distinction between a lover and a prostitute was brought by exchanging sex for money. The Pali term *muhuttia* and the Sanskrit word *muhurtika* meant temporary unions without attachment or commitment.

Over time more women joined the profession due to several reasons as discussed by Bhattacharji. These women were the first women to earn their own money for upkeep, hence making prostitution the world's oldest profession for women.

Gradually, there arose a section of women who, either because they could not find suitable husbands, or because of early widowhood, unsatisfactory married life or other social pressures especially if they had been violated, abducted or forcibly enjoyed and so denied an honourable status in society, or had been given away as gifts in religious or secular events such women were frequently forced to take up prostitution as a profession. (33)

Sengupta (2014) in her 'Courtesan Culture in India' says how the Indian courtesans not only entertained the kings but also gave political advice to them (124). They were also the first paid working women in India. Sengupta further adds about their role in the society;

In ancient India, the courtesan was treated as a public good, to be of service to society. As distinct from women of regular society, courtesans, as professionals, were freed from confinement of domestic routine, child bearing and social convention and seclusion of the inner realms of the home. (124)

Kautilya talks about four sources of recruitment of prostitutes, "either they were born

as prostitutes' daughters, or they were purchased, or captured in war, or they were women who had been punished for adultery” (Bhattacharji 35).

The Vedic literature refers to fertility rituals where the prostitutes participated along with the Brahmins. The *Samyapradipa* mentions that the sight of a prostitute is auspicious. The Mahabharata talks about women being abducted by barbarians after wars, and Hindu texts are witness to women being presented as *dakshina* or gifts to men, “[a]t Yudhisthira’s horse-sacrifice women were sent by other kings as a donation to make up a necessary part of the entertainment” (41). Brahmins received pretty maidens as gifts during the *shradh* ceremony. Such girls often ended up being prostitutes.

As townships and cities emerged around trade routes by the sixth-century, courtesans attracted travellers, tourists, traders, merchants, soldiers and others. The Ramayana also writes about “ganikas and vesyas in the list of comforts, luxuries and status symbols” (Bhattacharji 41). Prostitutes became a symbol of prosperity in urban civilisation. Prostitution was recognised as a profession with laws regulating it as it satisfied the man's need for sexual gratification and brought revenue to the state.

All the prostitutes paid taxes depending on their status and income. Organised red light areas and brothels paid fixed amounts as tax and paid them regularly; hence they had more protection and security. As the profession was recognised, taxable and protected with laws, men who misbehaved with them were punished and hence the prostitutes in ancient India were safer as compared to now. The *Yjnavalkya Smrti* fined 50 panas for molesting a prostitute and 24 panas each if she was gang raped (Bhattacharji 47).

Ganikas did not have any right over the property. Her daughter could inherit her property after her death, she could only use it but could never sell or donate it. The temple

authorities paid the temple prostitutes. The state would pay the maidens part of the royal harem or the king's court. If a prostitute refused to serve any customer after she received her fee, she would have to pay double that amount as a penalty. "In other words, society refused to look upon her as a human being; she was just a commodity, nothing more. If a price had been accepted the commodity was the customer's for use"(Bhattacharji 39). Kautilya made a rule that retired prostitutes were to be paid a pension by the state, the others begged or did odd jobs after their youth faded. They were employed as "cooks, store keepers, cotton-wool and flax spinners, and in various other manual jobs, so the state did not have to pay the pension until they were too old or weak to work anymore. In old age some prostitutes became *matrkas* i.e., matrons-in-charge of a brothel". (Bhattacharji 45)

Considered a profession just like any other, the prostitutes paid taxes, had laws safeguarding them and were taken care of by the state. Over the years they lose every shred of respect and are reduced to their bodies and are shunned from society.

A woman who was not committed to just one man was called as *sadharani*, *samanya* (common one), *varangana*, *varastri*, *varavadhu*, *varmukhya*. This showed that the woman had to look after herself as she did not belong to one man. Later she was called *panyastri*, a woman who could be bought with money (33).

Old Delhi houses an earthen-red mosque with carvings known as "Randi ki Masjid". Britisher David Ochterlony entered into a temporary marriage with Mubarak Begum, a nautch girl and was commissioned to build a mosque in her honour. The mosque was formally called Masjid Mubarak Begum, but as this was the first time a mosque was commissioned for a nautch girl instead of royalty, it was known as "Randi ki Masjid" (Bhula).

The Nair families from Kerala followed a different family structure than the other

Indian families. The men did not marry but had *sambandhams* with women; this was not a contract but a relationship that could be dissolved as easily as it was formed (Pillai). Madhvi Menon (2018) supplements this in her book, “many *sambandhams* lasted a lifetime, others a shorter duration. But what was remarkable was that the termination of the relationship was built into its founding” (268). The offspring belonged to the mother, stayed with her and was a part of her family. Kerala never frowned upon this arrangement, as such kind of sexual relations was not taboo and instead was part of its tradition. Nevertheless, the arrival of the British and exposure to western education changed everything for the matrilineal Nairs. Menon (2018) writes how only monoandry was accepted by the British and they could not accept polyandry by the Nair women, “the British were so deeply unsettled by this practice that they issued several pejorative statements about *sambandham*” (271). Pillai (2018) adds how the British and western education labelled the Nair women as mistresses, the practice of *sambandham* as concubinage and the children as bastards (Pillai). Thus the practice of *sambandham* was eventually discontinued due to the interference of the British. They introduced new laws like the Malabar Marriage Act of 1896 and the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 which only recognised a marriage contract and nothing else. Similarly, the British looked at the *devadasis* and courtesans as prostitutes. The arrival of the British and the change in outlook and the laws significantly changed things for Indians.

India has a long history of prostitution, in the beginning equal respect given to that profession but the arrival of the British brought about changes and slowly their respect and position saw a downfall.

1.6.4. The Devadasi System in India

The devadasi system in India can be traced back to 1230 AD. It is an ancient practice in South India where young girls are dedicated to the Goddess Yelamma, the goddess of

fertility. The girls are ceremoniously married to the goddess and are not allowed to marry anyone else after. The men from that village sexually exploited these girls during their lifetime, pushing them into prostitution, where they often went unpaid. Kathleen Barry writes about the devadasi system in her book explaining the term. She discusses how after the ceremony the girls were either auctioned or prostituted. The devadasi system “accounts for an average of 15 percent of the prostitution in India and upto 80 percent of those living in the southern regions of the country”. (Barry 181)

People would offer fruits, flowers and clothes to God, and then they thought of offering a bed companion to God as well, so people began offering their daughters. Meera Arole (1990) writes how it was considered pious to serve God, but soon devadasis had to obey the priests and later were reduced to mere harlots.

Caste politics is another aspect to consider about the devadasi system. Brahminical traditions in the name of devadasi system continue to subjugate *dalit* girls in the name of traditions, beliefs and religion (Alone 156). These girls’ sexuality is controlled by upper caste men who decide who has sex with devadasis first. It usually begins with the temple priest and then the chief patron, followed by landlords (Alone 158). Caste politics plays a major role in who gets dedicated as devadasis, brahmin girls are almost never dedicated but girls from lower caste families do.

Arole (1990) writes that in ancient literature namely *Kathāsaritsāgara*, *Brhatkathāmanjarī* and *Rajatarangini* mention how devadasis could be married and given the legal status of a wife (137). Inscriptions and archaeological findings also indicate the existence of devadasis, examples such as the *Jogimara* cave inscriptions, *Mukteswara* temple inscriptions, *Kharepatana* temple inscriptions and so forth.

Mapping the history of devadasis in Karnataka, Awadh Kishore Prasad’s (1983) ‘Devadasis in Karnataka’ claims the practice began somewhere in the eighth century;

In the year 800A.D. one Aridari Paleyamma of the village Mayile dedicated a virgin to a local temple, along with 8 *mattars* of land, 1,000 cows and a swing for the use of the deity. It is interesting to mention here that exactly at the same time, the Jain temple had also developed the practice of employ *devadasis* for the performance of dancing and singing. (149)

Prasad (1999) in his 'Origin of the Devadasi System' writes about Sage Dalbya's words to the fallen women; he asked them to accept prostitution as their profession and live in the temples. He added that the kings and princes were like their husbands, but they could serve others in exchange for payment (124). In this fashion, girls were exploited in the name of religion.

Cory Walia (2019) has written an article describing her maternal grandmother Indira Salgaonkar a devadasi from Goa who was sent as company to the young widower Maharaja of Devas. The Maharaja was expected to "enjoy" her but never commit to her, however he falls in love with Indira and breaks norms to marry her, making her the Maharani of Devas and has two children with her. Thus Indira, re-named as Her Highness Prabhavati Raje Puar was known as the devadasi who became a Maharani. However, after the Maharaja's death his family banished Indira and her two children from the kingdom owing to the stigma of her devadasi heritage.

Earlier the devadasis were trained in the art of dance and music and wooed the kings and patrons with their beauty and skill. Colundalur (2011) writes that with the devadasi system becoming illegal in 1988, all changed for the wives of God. They were reduced to mere prostitutes who earned their livelihood by spending their nights with villagers who often ill-treated them.

We read about this infamous practice in our school textbooks, assuming that it is a thing of the past and modern India will not have any traces of it. Nevertheless, in October 2017, a news article triggered an investigation which brought to light how several girls are still forced into becoming devadasis. The January 2011 copy of 'The Guardian' featured a news article discussing the age-old custom and how the British laws had stopped the custom but owing to poverty, parents prefer giving away their daughters as devadasis even as early as four years old. That way the parents would have one less mouth to feed and also benefit from her income.

1.6.5. Human Deities and Religion

While devadasis are married to God, some cultures worship young girls as Goddesses themselves. In India during Kanya Puja nine young girls are worshiped as the nine forms of Goddess Durga. Families whose family deity are Goddesses present gifts to young girls during festivals and auspicious events.

Nepal's Kumari culture is an integral part of their national identity. This practice is part of the Newari tradition in Kathmandu valley. A young girl with markings of the Goddess is chosen to be the living deity till she reaches puberty. She must go through purification, reside in the Kumari's house, and abide by the strict rules of being a goddess (Sigdel 8).

To Newar Buddhists, the kumari is regarded as the embodiment of the supreme female deity Vajradevi, a Buddha. To Hindus, she incarnates the great goddess Taleju, a version of Durga. (Tree)

It is believed that the spirit of the Goddess enters the young girl when she is initiated as the Kumari and will leave her if she bleeds. Utmost care is taken so the Kumari does not bleed through injury during her tenure and her title is passed to another young girl once she attains

puberty. The ex-Kumari is then returned to her parent's house and is expected to effortlessly fit in the society and follow societal norms. These girls find it difficult to adjust to a regular life after years of being treated as the Goddess and having lived in seclusion.

Many concerns have been raised about the girl's human rights and mental health as a Kumari deprived of education and regular life, and is then suddenly forced to become a mortal again. Many superstitions surround marrying ex-Kumaris like the death of the husband or that their vaginas turn into snakes and devour their husbands (Tree); this scares men from marrying them and the Kumaris mostly remain unmarried throughout their lives.

While India momentarily worships young girls as Kumaris, Nepal perpetually worships the living Goddess and ensures the continuation of this tradition in spite of concerns regarding the girls' human rights. The question arises if their reverence and adherence to customs is more important over the lives of these living Goddesses.

1.6.6. The Ganikas of India

The Indus Valley Civilization had the *apsara* cult, where the most beautiful girls were “taken as representatives of the goddess” (Singh 181). These were respected not just for their beauty but their manners; social etiquettes and their knowledge in subjects like arts. The ganikas were not like ordinary prostitutes, they were given the status of high-class courtesans.

In *Mrcchakatika* the *gaṇikā* is called *guṇānuraktā* (one who loves the virtue alone). From Daṇḍin we learn about a courtesan who is categorically mentioned as a *guṇa-śulkā* (one who cares only for the qualities of a person in relation to her fee) in contrast to an ordinary prostitute known as *dhana-śulkā* (one who takes money as her fee). (Singh 182)

Sukumari Bhattacharji (1987) writes how the *ganikas* enjoyed a superior status due to

their youth, beauty and training. Since she received an expensive education she could name her price and only the wealthy were able to afford her. She was often patronised by kings and other wealthy merchants till her beauty and youth would last (38).

1.6.7. The Courtesans of India

Smita Surebankar (2012) writes about the courtesans in Karnataka, saying that in Kannada inscriptions, they are referred to as “*varangane*, *ganika*, *rajasule* (harlot), *pany angane* (public women) and dancing girl (*patra*)” (367). The seniors trained young girls so they could do justice to their profession. Surebankar emphasises that a courtesan's only valuable quality was her youth; without that she would be a non-entity. They were guardians of music and dance and they contributed towards the development and preservation of the same, yet they were stigmatised and ostracised by others.

With western morality creeping into India, the new age Indians wanted to transform their art and make it suitable to be taught to children through music schools and concerts (Qureshi 360). The dance and music got *brahminized* and changed from the original form to suit the new India. The dance tradition of devadasis and courtesans was known as *sadhir attam*, *dasi attam* and *karnatakam* (Jeevanandam 736). The social pressure due to anti-nautch campaigns led to suppression of *sadir* by early twentieth century in Madras and was later revived as a pure form as Bharatnatyam, which was performed by elite and middle class girls and women (Srinivasan 1869).

While devadasis and courtesans were forbidden from dancing in public owing to the new laws, Brahmin girls were learning Bharatanatyam and performing it in public. In an article written before 1957 Rukmini Devi claimed that “Bharata Natyam was the quintessential dance described in *Naātyaśāstra*” (Coorlawala 53). Renaming *Sadir* to Bharata Natyam and

linking the dance to *naātyaśāstra* was to show that the dance possessed ancient spiritual heritage (Coorlawala 53). The dance underwent certain modifications like: the dance was textualized as a means of purification, the words or movements considered lewd were omitted and the women were not just performers but also interpreters of arts (Srinivasan 1875). The poetic texts calling God as lover or King as patron or lover were forbidden and it was now interpreted as *bhakti* or devotion to the divine form; emotions of lust, sexuality, greed were erased from the performances in order to maintain purity (Coorlawala 55). Coorlawala (2004) sheds light on the transformation of *sadir* to *bharatnatyam* due to the political change in India. New India was not ready to accept the dance for its lewd words and gestures and hence modified it to suit the common man.

With the original dance form being modified, the contributions of the *devadasis* and courtesans were disregarded in modern India, “[t]he moral and sexual economies of nationalist modernity could not accommodate either the *dasi* or her art” (Jeevanandam 735). Cultural contributions of *devadasis* and courtesans were erased by nationalist reform movements post-independence leaving very little historical traces of their contributions to Indian culture and art forms.

The courtesans are said to have contributed significantly to India's economic growth as they frequently purchased luxurious articles of trade like betel leaves, ornaments, precious stones, cosmetics, etc. They also bought several musical instruments, artifacts and paintings. (Surebankar 369). The courtesans were taxed as the government recognised their profession.

Many wealthy courtesans were philanthropic and often donated land, money and goods to temples, people and even villages. They would also “set up works of public utility: they sank wells, constructed bridges, temple gardens, *caity* (sacred mounds), donated money to the needy, gave gifts, and generally served the community through such works for public utility (Bhattacharji 48)”. The villagers respected them and even named villages after them as a mark

of respect (Surebankar 370). They had a social identity, and the Bhakti movement made them more legitimate.

There were contrasting opinions regarding the courtesans. While some viewed courtesans as greedy and driven by money instead of love. Others awed them as they were independent and not “subordinated in their interactions with men” (Adiga 199).

1.6.8. Trafficking and Prostitution

Kathleen Barry (1995) in her book *The Prostitution of Sexuality*, discusses how trafficking is the oldest method to introduce girls to prostitution. She sheds more light on traffickers by calling them traders as either they bought girls from their families or through deception (165). Barry writes how trafficking occurs in the poorest countries, and women are usually the poorest of the poor making them the easier target. India is listed as one of the poorest countries in the world making the Indian woman an easy target for trafficking and prostitution.

Women are often trafficked from one country or state to another, rural to urban. Barry writes that the movement away from their homes and hometowns is sufficient to break the women's will. She elucidates, "traffickers rely on the change from rural to urban, from one country to another, to keep the women from escaping or knowing how to return to their country and village of origin" (178). The shift of these girls and women is safer as there is seldom a chance of recognition in a different state and a low chance of escape as the area is unknown and unwelcoming. This breaks their will and takes them away from their previous life.

Barry (1995) examines the patriarchal perspective towards trafficking of women. Girls offered to the groom during marriages is equated to women being sold to the brothels, during both instances their status is similar to that of furniture. Barry clarifies that it is not the backwardness of the rural people which makes them sell their girls to brothels, but it is “the

power relations of marital feudalism” which makes them do so (184). The belief that men are entitled to make decisions about women, including selling them, is the root cause of trafficking.

The high demand for commercial sex workers, coupled with the helplessness of the girls and their inability to escape, is aiding human trafficking to thrive.

1.6.9. Male Sex Workers in India

This research exclusively focuses on female prostitutes but it is imperative to recognize the existence of male sex workers. “On Becoming a Male Sex Worker in Mysore: Sexual Subjectivity, Empowerment, and Community-Based HIV Prevention Research” contains interviews of a few male sex workers from Mysore; most of them have said that early exposure to same sex relationship especially in their childhood is the primary reason they entered the sex trade.

What is significant about most of the narratives is that they rarely describe entering into sex work as a moment in which they consciously decide (or had to decide) to become a sex worker. It is the precipitation of bodily desires brought on by external, social influences that compels their entry. (Lorway 155)

In Mysore, it was primarily men who used male sex workers’ services; some of their male clients were married to women and indulged in sex with male sex workers. While in big cities, men as well as women used the services of a male sex worker, “they nevertheless can turn their feminine behaviour on or off as the situation demands. This fluid behaviour potentially helps them to 'play with gender' in the context of sex work” (Shinde 41).

Men are at a high risk of HIV and STI and report anal insensitivity issues compared to women sex workers. All men do not rely solely on sex work for income but for additional

income while having other day jobs. Society does not acknowledge male sex workers and very less research has been conducted on them as compared to female sex workers.

1.6.10. Types of Violence

Prostitutes are subjected to different forms of violence throughout their tenure in the flesh trade. Violence serves as an entry point into the trade as well as mechanism for maintaining their subjugation and control. The johns or brothel keepers use violence to force the girls to forget their old ways and mould them into their new life. Frantz Fanon (2001) states how violence destroys native form, customs and mannerism (31). The World Health Organization (WHO) has given the following definition of violence;

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal development or deprivation. (Krug et al 5)

Prostitutes or sex workers witness violence in several forms like physical, sexual, psychological and even cultural. 'International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers' is commemorated on 17th December every year, acknowledging the violence faced by sex workers and its refusal to be overlooked or dismissed.

The most common violence faced by commercial sex workers is physical or sexual. Physical violence can be understood as when physical force is used to control someone's actions; and when one is forced into sexual activity without consent, one is facing sexual violence. Almost all commercial sex workers face sexual violence. Kathleen Barry (1995) differentiates between sex that is exploitation and sex that is positive human experience (57). Prostitutes are also raped but the concept of rape amongst prostitutes is not a well-accepted idea as the masses do not believe that women who sell sex can also be used for sex unwillingly.

Criminologist Patricia Eastaun debunks the view that rape is a sexual act, she asserts that rape is an act of violence instead, “Rape is not a sexual act. Rape is an act of violence which uses sex as a weapon. Rape is motivated by aggression and by the desire to exert power and humiliate” in Jeffrey’s (2009) *The Idea of Prostitution* (244). Sex in such cases is a manner of exploitation, even when the sex workers accept this as their faith, sex always remains exploitative and never becomes a positive experience for them.

Sex workers also face cultural violence, which occurs when a person is harmed due to the practices in their community or their personal lives. Devadasis are often ostracised and face violence due to their community. This cultural violence is faced by generations of devadasis as well as courtesans. Sex workers and their families face similar kinds of cultural violence as the society refuses to accept them back after they leave their old life behind.

One literature suggests that the violence against sex workers is “symbolic of a hierarchical struggle for an Indian internal identity in overcoming its traditional caste system” (Dalla et al 88). While most sex workers or devadasis belong to lower castes, physical and sexual violence is a way to kill their self-respect and subjugate them further.

Society recognises and accepts women when they have well defined relationships with men, like a daughter or a wife. Sex workers do not have a definite relationship with men and hence are not accepted or respected by society. Etienne Krug (2002) writes that cultural norms should be handled differently as people’s sentiments and traditions are tied to it (16). This non recognition of sex workers results in more violence and further subjugation.

1.6.11. Prostitution as Slavery

Sex trafficking or selling girls in marriage is correlated with slavery. One can see parallels between slaves taken away from their hometowns with trafficking victims who are sent far away from their homes. Similarly, the enslaved people are often given new names to

wipe off their old identity, this practice is also followed with prostitutes as they are renamed after their initiation into the flesh trade (Jeffreys 177). Jeffreys (2009) believes that prostitution was a fall out of slaveholding as it follows the same principle (180). The master-slave relationship where the slave has to obey the master ultimately is also seen in prostitution where she has to follow the orders of the pimp, brothel keeper and the man who has paid for her. There are a lot of similarities between slavery and prostitution, which shows that prostitution is the same as slavery. Maybe the modern sex trade might be slightly different, but that thrives on male supremacy as well.

1.6.12. Prostitution as Labor

While some perceive prostitution as slavery, an alternative perspective equates sex work with labour. Supporters for decriminalisation of sex work are of the view that sex work can be a personal choice and voluntary (George 66). This view differentiates between trafficking which is forced and consensual sex work. The objective of movements facilitating this idea was to abolish the stigma and negativity attached to this profession.

Promoting prostitution as "work" was supposed to counter what pro-prostitution activists have called the "whore stigma", which blamed prostituted women as dirty and bad for how they were used by men. (Jeffreys 161)

In ancient India prostitution was considered as any other job and hence some laws safeguarded them and the prostitutes also had to pay taxes as discussed earlier in the chapter. Modern activists are trying to regain their older status by legitimise sex work in order to improve their condition. Harry Benjamin and Masters views quoted in *The Idea of prostitution* show that "a prostituted woman sells not her body but "sex as service"" (Jeffreys 163). The pro-prostitution groups argue that the prostitute is not selling her body but is getting paid for her time and skill just like any other profession. Eva Rosta, an English prostitute and sex

counsellor states, “all work involves selling some part of your body... I choose to sell my vagina” (Jeffreys 164). This concept is not new; in 1844 Karl Marx wrote, "prostitution is only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the laborer" (Vijaykumar et al 92).

Sex workers in India have joined the Indian Labour Movement seeking protection and justice. They want to redefine the term “labor” to include the sex workers. The article ‘Sex Workers Join Indian Labor Movement’ brings to the notice how many facets of sex work is criminalised in India, namely soliciting; brothels and so on and hence the sex workers find the need to redefine the terms of their profession and ensure that it falls in the bracket of ‘labor’.

"Worker" identity provides an alternative to the existing state relationship to sex workers: as potential criminals, deviant fallen women, hapless victims of sexual violence, or vectors of HIV/AIDS. (Vijaykumar et al 95)

Once sex work is decriminalised, the harassment faced by them will lessen as well as well-defined laws will ensure they are not mistreated or cheated by anyone. This might also be a way to drastically reduce trafficking and protect those who voluntary choose sex work.

1.6.13. Patriarchy and Power in Prostitution

Patriarchy and power play a significant role in prostitution. As per Sheila Jeffreys (2009) men visiting female prostitutes stems from a man's biological need to use a woman to fulfil their sexual urges. She adds that choosing to use a woman is “socially constructed out of men’s dominance and women’s subordination” (3). The premise of prostitution lies on the need of a man to use a female and that women exist to be used by men. This profession heavily relies on patriarchy and man’s innate sexual needs for its continuation.

Kate Millet believes the act of prostitution reduces a woman to a thing that can be bought. Millet further adds that, “It is not sex the prostitute is really made to sell; it is

degradation. And the buyer, the John, is not buying sexuality, but power, power over another human being, the dizzy ambition of being lord of another's will for a stated period of time" (Jeffreys 66). The male gaze objectifies women and subsequently puts her in a lower position in order to satisfy his sexual urge. The sexual nature of male dominance can be seen through the use of force and aggression towards the women. These acts of aggression project the man as a dominant and supreme leader and pushes the woman to become submissive and powerless. Sexual politics goes beyond sexual urges and has hidden social implications as well. The woman is made to feel powerless, disrespected and helpless when used for sex while the man revels in his power and bravado of manliness. Prostitution often aids in inflating manliness amongst the men as they look at it as an act of using, dominating over the other gender and an act of asserting their penis' dominance.

A man's feeling that he wants to "fuck", the fabled male sex urge, can be explained through the need to reassert masculine dominance, rather than through biology(...)Through this process of realising masculine dominance, the person who is "fucked" is made not a real person. (Jeffreys 218-219)

The woman's vagina assumes a subordinate position while getting penetrated by the penis, the act of penetration makes the man feel superior to the woman who is getting penetrated. Jeffreys further adds that "prostitution uses that part of a woman's body which signifies her second-class status, and it is this that is likely to provide its excitement to the men whose superior status is created by such use" (194).

Patriarchy facilitates power play, and men ensure that they continue to exercise their dominance. Men believe that the only way they will attain the status of superiority is by dominating women and keeping them under their control. Thereby patriarchy ensures the domination of men over women to maintain their superior status in society.

1.6.14. Post-Colonial Influence

Ancient India held courtesans and devadasi in high regard, recognizing their cultural and religious importance. But the fall of the empires and arrival of the British changed the social order of India. To begin with the absence of kings meant lack of patronage for the courtesans who provided entertainment in the royal court. The dancers of the Indian courts were called *nautch* by the British. *Nautch* is the distortion of the word *naach* which means dance. The British clubbed all Indian dance styles as nautch disregarding their uniqueness. They also used the word “tawaif” to refer to the dancers, singers, prostitutes and any entertainers (Bano 261). They were unable to differentiate between the different dance styles or the artists. The colonisers did not attempt to understand Indian culture and traditions and conveniently equated the courtesans and devadasis to dancing girls or sex workers. Sarah Waheed (2014) adds that “the female entertainer, now understood as a prostitute, was no longer a person with a trade or craft, but a commodified body” (995).

The colonizers used their Christian morality to shame and subjugate the devadasis and courtesans (Johar 44). Subsequently the English education provided to Indian middle class men changed their mind and the latter began to view them suspiciously, leading movements that threatened the patronage and livelihood of courtesans (Qureshi 360). Further the British expressed concern over consent, trafficking of minor girls and introduced laws to criminalize dedication and seal the courtesan’s quarters. Yet common prostitution was allowed and indulged in by the British themselves.

By the nineteenth century, India witnessed social movements like the anti-dance and anti-nautch movements that associated all devadasis and courtesans with loose morals, low culture and prostitution (Chakravorthy 117). The twentieth century witnessed a movement to remove prostitutes from city spaces as they were considered a threat to moral order and

marriages (Waheed 995). The British changed the social order in India and tried whitewashing the culture. The arrival of the British shifted the tides and significantly changed the lives of devadasis and courtesans in India.

1.6.15. Lack of Agency

There has been a steady demand for female entertainment and sex workers in India from the ancient to the contemporary times. While this research has explored the male demand for sex, the woman's point of view is yet to be explored. The question arises if women consent to live the life of a prostitute or they lack agency to make their own decisions.

Young girls belonging to families of devadasis and courtesans find themselves responsible to continue the lineage and family traditions. Their accountability makes them join their family trade and hence cannot be considered as an act of 'individuality'. (Abeyasekera 5). This forced responsibility along with cultural violence forces them to conform and not move away from the profession of their ancestors.

While joining the trade might not be their personal choice, similarly leaving their profession might not be their selection. The arrival of the British and subsequent laws forced the traditional system to shut shop. The idea of New India and the requirement of modern Indian women did not fit them and hence they were discarded. The educated Indian men wanted the image of the Indian woman to be pure, chaste and morally upright. They introduced new and progressive social orders which encouraged marriages and discouraged visiting 'other women' (Srinivasan 2227). No matter what the situation, the women were deprived of choice to either be a part of the system or leave the system.

Girls sold by their family members and then trafficked to brothels also lack agency. Their consent was never asked before selling them, neither were they informed about their life

changing situation. In this form of illegal migration the concept of agency and voluntariness is important. Sometimes the girls were promised a job or marriage and instead sold to a brothel. In this case while they volunteered to move, the use of deception negates their choice.

The girls are rarely given any option and hence the question of agency seems absurd. The lack of agency or rather the power to take decisions about their life is an important aspect in prostitution. In a patriarchal set up women lack agency while the men do not, further curtailing the former's freedom. Patriarchy works efficiently by depriving women of their agency in order to empower the men. Men are given the authority to take decisions on behalf of the women, further weakening the position of women in the society.

Some feminist critics point out that the argument of choice versus force is not an accurate understanding of sex work (Nivedita Menon 149). This is because many times women have several work identities; they dabble between many occupations, while sex work is one of them. In these cases, sex work will not be their primary identity or profession. The question arises if it was truly their choice to participate in sex work, or forced by her circumstances? Will the world start recognizing sex work as a form a labour if it is consensual? While anti-sex worker groups label all sex workers as victims, blaming men for their fate; pro-sex workers argue that victimization denies them agency, and instead call for their empowerment (George 67).

1.6.16. The Trauma of the Victims

Courtesans, devadasis and commercial sex workers encounter many forms and degrees of trauma. Their collective experience transcends the ordinary, often characterised by violence, uncertainty and peril.

Physical and sexual violence which causes intense pain can unmake the victim's sense

of the world and break down their will. Sex workers lose their sense of self and are often disoriented after facing violence. Sometimes they are not able to recollect their early days, and often they choose not to speak about their trauma.

Courtesans and devadasis face cultural trauma as a collective community. Girls belonging to these communities are forced to follow their family tradition even when they do not consent to it. They are attacked and forced into the trade in the name of tradition. These communities face physical, sexual as well as cultural violence;

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a community feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. (Alexander et al 1)

This is not only about their whole community facing pain, but the collective discomfort becomes a part of the community's identity. The plight of devadasis forced to have sex with the men in the village is one such shared example. When literature is written about a courtesan or a devadasi, that one protagonist represents the whole community and their collective suffering.

Sex is not a simple matter but a fallout of power struggles in the society. The man-made religion grants the authority to powerful men to have sex with devadasis, it is often the upper caste and upper class men who exploit them. While sex is not God given, it is God and religion who decides who should have sex with whom (Isherwood 20). Sex reduces the devadasi into a function where she herself has no value but only the act of sex holds significance. Critics have identified the penis and the act of penetration as symbols of power, while vagina is considered submissive. In this way men use sex to reinforce that women are submissive and do not hold any power.

The trauma faced by the victims remains with them throughout their life. It tends to reappear and keep the victim in a constant state of alert and panic. Trauma when left undiscussed and hidden hinders healing. Psychoanalyst Laub asserts that the survivors ‘did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive.’ (Lavrijsen et al 221).

Novels written on these protagonists try their best to capture their trauma in words and yet some fail. Writing effectively about lived traumatic experiences to make the reader understand their plight is no mean feat. Trauma fiction empowers silenced voices to tell their own tale. Whitehead (2004) identifies repetition as the key strategy to trauma fiction where the experiences, plot, language or imagery is repeated to mimic the effect of traumatic events (86). The novelists use a narrator as a mediator to tell these powerful stories and experiences which are not their own (Whitehead 8). Such stories are important and help not just the victim but also help the world understand the lives of sex workers.

1.6.17. Writing Histories

Devadasis and courtesans were the earliest Indian women who could read and write; yet they have seldom written about their lived histories. Accounts about them have been mainly written by men who describe them and their experiences through their point of view. The primary texts on the courtesans: *The Woman of Basrur* and *The Courtesan's Quarter* are written by men, *The Blue Notebook* about Batuk who is sold by her father is also written by a man. While women writers have written the other four novels: *Sold*, *The Pagoda Tree*, *The Undoing Dance* and *The Colour of Our Sky*. There has always been an ongoing debate on the authenticity of novels written on women by men, and the importance of women writing their own histories. Women in such cases are characterised by the male gaze. Men writing about women will vary from women writing about themselves as the former will not have personal

feminine experiences. The biological and psychological difference between both the genders will prevent the male writer from capturing authentic female emotions in his work. Gardiner supplements this view, “A woman’s sense of gender, her sexuality, and her body may assume a different, perhaps a more prominent, shape in her conception of her self than these factors would for a man”. (360)

Mridula Garg’s (2013) understanding of writing is that one writes when they either are not willing to accept the world they live in or disagree with their portrayal (181). As previously mentioned, there have not been many first-hand accounts of devadasis, courtesans and trafficking victims; and one could question the reason for their absence. Is it because they are satisfied with their portrayal or does their silence mean something else? Hillary E. Wyss (2007) shares her take on the silence of women who have not written about their lives, “perhaps silence can be read as other than absence or lack. Perhaps, just perhaps, it is a statement, a refusal” (122). Silence in this case is not the absence of voice but it is a strong voice in itself.

Shedding light on women’s writing in the nineteenth-century in India; ‘Women’s Writing and Women’s Identity’ discusses how the writing emerged as individual acts of rebellion. Garg questions the ability of literature to bring social change as historically literature has not impacted social or political changes (181-182).

Women's writing further evolved and the twentieth century witnessed the concept of identity and broke away from the concept of injury which was seen in their previous work (Garg 184). They went beyond the theme of injury through the hands of patriarchy and shifted their focus on their identity. Feminist writers did not consider themselves inferior to men, and acknowledged their womb or reproductive duty as an enriching factor (Garg 185). They gave a new meaning to motherhood and connected it with nurturing; not just children but anyone in need (Garg 186). The themes revolved around re-discovering themselves.

Female identity is a long process which goes through various stages and is constantly evolving. A woman's identity is tied to her social relations and she is identified as a daughter, wife, mother or a sister. When a male views a woman, he views her through the male gaze and attempts to fit her in a social relation. But when a woman writes about herself, she detaches herself from social relations and views herself as an independent being. She will best understand her identity and will write about it in an authentic way.

The novels which write about their experiences may seem like personal testimonies but they are in fact a culmination of the journey shared by the community. Their voices or words not only capture their life but a life shared by countless other devadasis, courtesans or trafficked girls who have not had the agency to write their tale.

1.7 Scope and Limitation of the Study

Indian literature is an accurate representation of society, people and culture. While Indian literature is diverse and encompasses various facets of life, literature on courtesans, devadasis, and trafficked victims are limited. The other challenge was to find novels written or translated into English as some are only published in vernacular Indian languages. Further, this thesis is limited to seven novels and not all non-fiction literature written on these topics. In the future, this research can be expanded to cover more novels written on the same topic.

This research has mainly focused on patriarchy, power and sexuality; the research has scope to be expanded to incorporate more factors and more theories on which have influenced the lives of prostitutes in India. The chapters have given a glance at the current laws, movements and the fate of sex workers in India; it can further delve deeper into contemporary literature and their current socio-economic status in further detail.

As this topic is not as well studied or researched in India as it should have been, the scope for further study is immense, incorporating more literature, even written in vernacular

languages and considering many other factors which have influenced their lives and position in society in the olden times as well as the hold it has on their situation currently.

1.8 Relevance

Prostitutes are frequently dehumanised, regarded as commodities or rendered invisible. Literature serves as a platform to illuminate their experiences, celebrating their lives and also provides them an opportunity to express themselves. Although prostitutes in India may lack direct access to writing, other authors have provided them with a voice, bringing their narratives out of obscurity and prompting a wider audience to acknowledge their presence. A better understanding of their life will foster empathy and catalyze reforms for sex workers in India.

1.9 Plan of the Thesis

The research is divided into six chapters; the introduction; three core chapters; a chapter on narratology and writing and lastly the conclusion.

The first introductory chapter sets the stage for the research by defining the research question, stating the objectives, theoretical framework, scope and limitations. This chapter will also evaluate existing literature relevant to the research topic in the literature review.

“Knot of Doom” studies the devadasi system through *The Pagoda Tree*, *The Undoing Dance* and *The Colour of our Sky*. This chapter charts the history of devadasi system from the ancient times till the contemporary, particularly focussing on the changes post colonisation. Devadasis the wives of Gods and curators of dance held deep cultural significance in India until the colonial laws and influence stripped them of their honour by calling them prostitutes. This chapter foregrounds the contributions of devadasis in music and dance. Lastly this chapter discusses the need for literature on devadasis and by devadasis.

“Metamorphosis of the Maven” draws parallels between the courtesans from the ancient times and the post-colonial period through *Courtesan’s Quarters* and *The Woman of Basrur*. Courtesans were also custodians of music and dance and this chapter highlights their contributions to Indian art. This chapter charts the connection between devadasis and courtesans and also probes the conditions which lead to the fall of courtesan-ship. This chapter addresses the shift in writing about courtesans from women serving the male interest to recognising their individuality.

“Sold for Sex” scrutinises human trafficking which forces young girls into brothels through *Sold* and *The Blue Notebook*. This chapter examines the drivers which push girls into trafficking. It delves into the role of patriarchy and power in the business of contemporary sex work which ensures steady supply for the male clientele. This chapter shows the connection between devadasis and courtesans with sex workers. It unravels the changes ushered into the lives of these victims, their lack of agency and the long lasting influence of the violence they face.

“Writing history and Wielding Culture” identifies literature as a powerful tool to document and understand history and culture. This chapter evaluates the nuances of male and female authors as well as Indian and western authors in the primary texts. This chapter addresses the issue of gendered discourse and the role of the reader in de-fictionalising literature.

Lastly, the conclusion “End of the Beginning” connects the dots between the primary texts and the protagonists of the texts by drawing parallels between them. The conclusion readdresses the research question and summarizes the key findings of the research, highlights the contributions to the gap and addresses the fate of prostitutes in contemporary times. This is followed by a bibliography listing all the sources cited in this research.

1.10 Conclusion

Prostitutes are often not recognised as humans, and they are treated as commodities or as invisible people. Literature highlights their lives; it is not always a celebration of lives but also a medium to express oneself, to talk about unsaid issues. While prostitutes in India may not have access to writing, other writers have given them a voice and brought their stories out of the shadows and into the light, making others acknowledge them and their stories. Leora Bilsky throws light into Catharine Mackinnon's belief that lack of voice is often a trace of the struggle faced by the women and "attributes it to deliberate acts of men silencing women" (Bilsky 49). A better understanding of their life will sensitise people and trigger reforms for the women involved in the flesh trade.

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Chapter 2

Knot of Doom

*I am sinner,
I am saint.
I am the beloved and the
betrayed
—Kamala Das*

2.1 Introduction

Devadasi system or temple prostitution is a prevalent custom observed across various regions globally. The broader term for this practice of dedicating women in the name of religion is termed theogamy. William Harman (1989) defined theogamy as, “an elaborate, ritual statement of kinship responsibilities and obligations among deities and between deities and human beings” (353). Temple prostitution extends beyond the boundaries of India and is widespread in many other nations. Women were dedicated to temples in the Vestal Virgine of Europe, where their only duty was to dance before the shrine (Orr 4). Heliopolis or Baalbec in Syria has a custom that every woman has to prostitute herself at least once at the temple of Astarte to show her devotion to God (Arole 139). Meera Arole (1990) also writes about the Greek inscription from the second century A.D. that mentioned Aurelia Aemilia who served God as a harlot like her mother and other female ancestors (139). Cyprus also had a custom where women, before their marriages, had to "prostitute themselves to strangers at the sanctuary of the goddess" (Arole 138). Sumerian rulers would dedicate their sisters or daughters to the state deity to gain divine support (Misra et Rao 2). Shankar (1988) sheds light on many cults in Central America, West Africa, Rome, Greece, Egypt, West Asia, among other

places that would rampantly practice temple prostitution (34). This makes it evident that temple prostitution was rampant all over the world and was not only limited to India.

The devadasi system in India can be traced back to 1230 AD. It is an ancient practice prevalent in South India where young girls are dedicated to the Goddess Yellamma, the Goddess of fertility. The girls are ceremoniously married to the Goddess and are not allowed to marry anyone else after. This sacred marriage represents asexual relationships, however men from the villages sexually exploit these girls during their lifetime, pushing them into prostitution where they often went unpaid. Modern-day system has the girls go through the dedication ceremony, and then they are taken to a brothel in the big city, making it one of the means to enter the contemporary sex trade.

Devadasis were a unique class of women who were musicians, dancers, ritual performers who were married to God; and expected to be sexually available to men of power. While some scholars believed that temple women were chaste; most were of the opinion that they were sexually involved with men as it was a significant feature of the ritual and temple patronage (Ramberg 178). Even though the devadasis did not belong to one singular caste, they were part of the 'lower castes'. Girls from upper class or caste were not dedicated as devadasis and it was the lower caste and class which made the devadasi population due to poverty or cultural traditions. The protagonists from the primary texts also belong to lower economic backgrounds and traditional devadasi families.

'Origin of the Devadasi System' explains how the medieval period saw the growth of the *Bhakti* movement, which subsequently caused a rise in the construction of temples (Prasad 129). The construction, renovation, cleaning and decoration of temples, along with singing and dancing for the entertainment of the Gods, was seen as service to God. The Bhakti movement and devadasi system collectively evolved and spread in South India by the seventh century as the construction of temples and devotion of God was on the rise.

Awadh Kishore Prasad (1999) expounds on the beginning of the devadasi system in Karnataka. In 800 A.D., Aridari Peleyamman of Mayile village dedicated a virgin along with land, cows and a swing for the use of the God to the local temple (149). This is identified as one of the earliest practices of the devadasi system. An inscription from the tenth century from the Hebbal taluk at Dharwar referred to the allotment of land and devadasis to the Bhujjabesvara temple (Prasad 150). The Pidiyar temple of Kolar had twenty-four dancing girls and a dance instructor for training them (Prasad 150). The essential temples in Mysore had a troop of sacred women managed by the temple authorities or the state (Sudhamani 671). They would exhibit their dancing and singing skills throughout the year but would put up a spectacular show, particularly during the *Dasara* festival in Mysore (Sudhamani 667). Meera Arole (1990) writes about the Indian inscriptions which make a mention of devadasis, like the Megheśvara inscription of Anaiiga Bhīmadeva (1190-1198 A.D) in Orissa; the Khārepātana inscription (Mirashi, 1974:231) of the Śilāhāra king Rattaraja as well as the Jogimara inscriptions (137-138).

Indian mythological evidence of the devadasi system can also be seen in *Matsyapurana* written during the Gupta period. This Purana charts the abduction and seduction of several thousand of Lord Krishna's wives by the dasas. When the fallen woman asked Sage Dalbya about their duties, he advised them the following;

[t]o accept prostitution as their profession and live in the state capitals and in the temples. They were told that kings and princes were like their husbands, and on payment they could satisfy others too. (Prasad 134)

These words by Sage Dalbya fit the norms followed by the devadasis in India where they lived in the temple premise and served God, but also had sex for money with Kings or landlords.

Kalidas' *Meghaduta* made a mention of dancing girls in the temples. Similarly, a Jain

work of the eighth century writes about devadasis who were called *Vilasinis* and attached to Avanti's temple (Prasad 134). This demonstrates that ancient literature provides evidence of the prevalence of the devadasi system during antiquity.

Travel accounts of India by the Chinese, Arab and Europeans mention temple women in South India from the seventh to sixteenth centuries, however there is ambiguity if these were devadasis or performers who performed on temple premises. Later accounts of European visitors have evidence of temple women in the sixteenth century Vijayanagara empire (Orr 8).

There are several theories regarding the chastity of devadasis, one narrative by Hindu nationalists state that they were chaste women dedicated to their God-husband but were forced to do sex work after Muslim invasion affected temple economy (Ramberg 182). This Hindu narrative shifts the blame on foreign invasion which led to the fall of Hinduism. On the other hand the Buddhist account believes Brahminism is responsible for corrupting the devadasis (Ramberg 183). Both accounts do not blame the devadasi themselves but other external factors which forced them towards promiscuity.

The devadasi are referred to by different names depending on their geographical location. In Andhra Pradesh they are called *joginis*, which stems from the Sanskrit word *yogini* which means female sage. The etymology of the name can be traced back to the Bhakti movement in India which had significant women followers, some also joined the monasteries. Misra and Rao (2002) write how these women were treated as wives or priestesses of God, and while the priests were considered to represent the Gods, they became wives or mistresses of the priests as well (4). Portuguese Goa had public dancers called *kalavants* and devadasi who were called *bailadeiras* (Perez 130). There was a constant overlap between the two which consequently blurred the line of distinction between the two (Perez 131). As a result the terms were used interchangeably without distinguishing between the two, which ultimately resulted

in both referred to as *kalavants*. In some parts of Maharashtra, they were called *naikins*, *bhavins* (Shankar 53) and *kasbis* in Central India (Shankar 55). While each state had its own name for devadasis, the term devadasi became widespread after the revival of Indian classical dance. Devadasis appears to be a sanskrit-ised version of the Tamil *tevaratiyal* (Orr 5). *The Undoing Dance* has instances where Kalyani's mother was often referred to as *tevadiya* and Kalyani was teased for being the daughter of a *tevadiya* (Natarajan 43). The geographical location not only determined their name but also the duties and socio-cultural obligations. Their marriage to God was constant but the deity would vary depending on the region. Devadasis are an integral part of Indian culture who have inspired several other diverse subjects like art, dance, music, sensuality, sculpture, myth and so on.

One would think that ancient customs like these would be long gone in the twenty-first century, but unfortunately it continues to be firmly rooted. Orissa's Jagannatha Temple set up an interview to select devadasis in 1995. The candidates had to "dance provocatively to satisfy Lord Jagannatha before his bedtime" (Pati 2728). The six candidates who had applied for this job were educated and rejected the job because the payment of Rs 30 was too less. The women who applied for the job did not find anything else problematic except for the meagre payment. The copy of *The Hindu* in 2017 called the system "an exploitative ritual that refuses to die" (Kalivikodi) and quoted that NGOs and activists have mentioned how the devadasi system is still rampant in spite of being banned by the government decades ago.

India was the only nation in which immorality was practised as a 'hereditary and acknowledged profession, living in peace and amity with and amidst other avocations, fortified against attacks of time and change and endowed with the privileges of social sanction'. (Kannabiran 64)

This chapter will analyse three primary texts: *The Pagoda Tree* by Clair Scobie, Amita Trasi's *The Colour of Our Sky* and *The Undoing Dance* by Srividya Natarajan. The former is based on the lives of devadasis in the eighteenth century, the second about Mukta who was dedicated in the twentieth century. The third text spans from nineteenth to the twentieth century as Kalyani writes about her ancestors along with herself. Even though the novels are based in different centuries, the traditions and customs remain similar. The chapter will discuss the Indian laws about the devadasi system, their circumstances and traditions, the colonial influence on their lives and the influence of patriarchy and power as witnessed in the novels.

2.2 Devadasi System during Colonial Times

This long standing tradition experienced disruption upon the arrival of the British. The colonisers were not well versed with temple prostitution and could not comprehend the devadasi system followed in India. They considered this tradition archaic and indecent. Walter Sutcliffe is repulsed when he learns about the tradition, he could not comprehend how little girls were made to dance for God and used by men in the name of religion (Scobie 26). Daughters of pastors entered the Rajah's court when Jagadambal was dancing and tried to stop her, and wanted to help their "fallen sisters, imprisoned from childhood in the darkness of the jungle temples" (Natarajan 6). The British were quick to assume the *dasis* needed saving without seeking their consent. The colonisers used their Christian morality to shame the devadasis and Indian men who participated in this tradition.

The British struggled to categorise devadasis within their social framework, causing them to be categorised as prostitutes. Sutcliffe could not differentiate between temple dancers and public dancers, "They sound like whores to me. Same as the dancing girls who flock the West End streets of London, touting their wares" (Scobie 84). Their Christian guidelines labelled spinsters indulging in sexual activities as promiscuous. Scattergood, another Britisher,

assumes that temple women were “women of easy virtue” (Scobie 188). As time passed, they were officially categorised as prostitutes. In *The Undoing Dance*, the lawyer informs Rajayi’s family in 1931 that the bazaar women and devadasis would be treated equally.

The primary focus of the British reformers was on the issue of age of consent and exploitative prostitution of minors as they were incapable of taking their own decisions and could easily be influenced or forced into it. Another concern was their engagement in sexual activities against their will or better understanding. Devadasis were considered sexual victims (Orr 14). In 1937 when Rajayi was ready to be dedicated and dance in front of the temple, she had to sign a petition stating her willingness to do so, calling herself a prostitute and agreeing to be checked by the medical officer for diseases (Natarajan 221). She had to provide consent to convince the government that she was not forced into being a devadasi.

While some devadasis protested against the victim tag attached to them, British and educated Indians had started portraying them as victims prone to manipulation and initiated reform movements against the system. This was a step to restore man’s power over women and matriarchal traditions and re-establishing the patriarchal set up of a family (Sreenivas 73). The British supported and encouraged marriages among devadasis and other men. Rajayi wanted Kalyani to get married and move away from their village so she has a better life and is accepted by the society.

These reform movements categorised women as either wives or prostitutes derecognising the social, cultural and religious significance of devadasis. Once devadasis were isolated from the lens of religion, they were nothing but prostitutes. Equating devadasis to prostitutes can be seen as the colonizer’s way to resolve contradictions and mould the Indian society according to their social norms. Rajayi wondered “Can a mere name take away a man’s livelihood, eat his wealth up from month to month, make an outcaste of him?” (Natarajan 209). Maya’s mother held similar views where she realized that her daughter’s fate was being

affected by decisions made by foreigners living far away from India and “who seemingly lived without honour or god” (Scobie 54). These reforms impacted the lives of devadasis drastically.

Though sex work was legal in India, the traditionally accepted adoption of girls by the devadasi was equated to human trafficking and hence banned. *The Pagoda Tree* states instances where children born to British men through Indian partners were sent to England to be away from their Hindu mothers and have a better life (290). Walter sends his and Maya's daughter to Scotland, so she does not end up being a devadasi like her mother and has more opportunities in the future (360).

The recasting of devadasis as “nothing but” prostitutes in the colonial era was a site for the articulation of an emergent protocol of modern sexuality as well as shifting alignments between female artistic and erotic power, the state, and the temple in which sex, religion, and economy were being established as mutually incompatible spheres. (Ramberg 45)

The British was only apprehensive about the devadasi system and not against commercial sex work. When Portuguese, French and English traders invaded British India the exploitation of women increased as they used women for sex and kept them as concubines (D. 12). British commercialised sex work so their own people, soldiers and workers had access to sex workers in India. *The Pagoda Tree* mentions that Maya's aunt Sita was also accompanying a British soldier after the fall of the Tanjore empire. This continues as Kalyani's grand-aunt Komala was a European man's keep and had Lilavati with him before he passed away. Women were encouraged to indulge with British men and were paid handsomely.

The devadasis were branded as nothing but prostitutes disregarding their religious, social and cultural significance. This has led them to harbour assumptions and formulate laws banning the system.

2.3 Laws Concerning the *Devadasi* System

It has been observed that the roles and significance of temple women are influenced by historical, political and cultural perspectives. The status of devadasis changed significantly after the arrival of the British and post-independence. The age-old practice was labelled as immoral by the colonisers and educated Indians, which led to several reforms and laws prohibiting the same. While the British and most educated Indian men wanted to put an end to this practice, some were of the opinion that the devadasi system must not be stopped as it was an integral part of Indian culture and religion. Eventually the coloniser prevailed and stringent laws were put in place.

Madras witnessed a social purity movement in the 1920s, started by Raghupati Venkataratnam. He stood for chastity among temple women and educating men so they do not exploit devadasis (Kannabiran WS 64). Natarajan's character Komala had joined the anti-nautch and Self-Respect movements and was against dedicating Rajayi to the temple. She believed that women were slaves to men and men were in turn slaves to religion and removing the religion would bring progress (224).

In the 1930s the second phase of the movement was started by Muthulakshmi Reddy as she introduced the Devadasi Abolition Bill which made the *pottukattu* (dedication ceremony) unlawful. The bill also had a provision for punishing the guilty indulging in the system with five years of imprisonment. She urged the *devadasis* to leave their "life of vice and instead to fulfil their role as loyal wives, loving mothers and useful citizens" (Kannabiran WS 65). Muthulakshmi was of the opinion that the downfall of one woman is the downfall of the whole gender. She strongly believed that women alone could help women and protect women's interests. Rajayi recalls how Muthulakshmi called devadasis prostitutes and made the law that prevented them from dancing in the temple (Natarajan 209). Rajayi's mother told her that being termed as prostitutes was their downfall, "as long as we refused to use that word

about ourselves, we were safe” (Natarajan 209).

Muthulakshmi turned a deaf ear to the devadasis and tried to suppress their voices. However Twenty-eight devadasis from Periyakanchivaram formed a Sangam and sent an appeal to the Madras Legislative Council to stop Muthulakshmi’s bill and explain that devadasis and prostitutes are not the same. They appealed to the government not to put an end to the system and their rights (Kannabiran 67). Similarly in the text, Rajayi along with the Vakil (lawyer) collected signatures of two hundred and ninety dasis to make the government understand that devadasis and prostitutes are not the same (Natarajan 209). They made a petition that explained how the dasi women already enjoyed the freedom which the women’s associations have been propagating, but they needed modern education and recognition for their traditional skill (Natarajan 238). Their petition was ignored and brought no change. Madras Hindu Religious Endowments Act of 1929 stopped the practice of giving grants to devadasis for temple service (Sreenivas 69). Rajayi started selling flowers outside the temple because she was no longer given grants for doing temple work.

Nothing could stop the Devadasi Bill, it forbade them from marrying the deity or performing in temples, called them as prostitutes and urged them to marry mortal men. Eventually the Devadasi Act was passed in 1948 after India’s independence. The act prohibited Kalyani from performing her first dance at the temple in 1961, yet Rajayi made Kalyani perform. The repercussion of breaking the law was Rajayi’s separation from Kalyani as the latter was sent to a missionary school to be raised as a moral Christian.

The British government passed 'The Bombay Devadasis Protection Act in 1934 to make the dedication of girls as temple women illegal and abolish the system (Dalla et al 89). This was followed by the Karnataka Devadasi (Prohibition of Dedication) Act in 1982 (D. 23). The government of Andhra Pradesh passed Devadasi Apana Nishedh Act in 1986 (J. 59).

The Undoing Dance charts the development of the laws and its impact on devadasis through various characters. This text has several instances which show Komala as the reformer, Rajayi who suffered under the new rules and was unable to break free and Kalyani who was moulded to fit into modern India.

Although laws prohibiting and criminalizing the devadasi system remain in effect, the practice persists contrary to expectations. Some attribute its endurance to adherence to Indian tradition, while others suggest factors such as superstition, poverty, or deception contribute to its perpetuation. Ultimately, it is the young girls who bear the brunt of its consequences.

2.4 Caught in the Web of Traditions

This section will examine the diverse traditions associated with and practiced by devadasis in India. This was mainly a hereditary tradition where the daughters of devadasis would become devadasis themselves, making this a never-ending vicious circle trapping the girls. Maya was born to a family of devadasis and was destined to become one herself. She was said to have the signs of the Goddess, “Three moles- on her right cheek, at the centre of her chest and above the lips of her vulva” (Scobie 20). Her mother took great care of her and trained her to become a devadasi. Maya was raised to take great pride in her family profession and was looking forward to dancing and serving as a devadasi.

Apart from families and society ensuring these daughters were dedicated, there were also other reasons behind girls from non-devadasi families getting dedicated. B.V. Sudhamani (1999) writes how some tribes dedicate their firstborn daughter and also, in case of complicated pregnancies, the families will promise the dedication of the child if it happens to be a daughter in exchange for safety and health for the mother and child (667). Shankar (1988) mentions how some upper-caste parents would not only dedicate their girls to Khandoba, but also buy girls from low-caste parents for a small amount and dedicate them (61). Girls suffering from terrible

skin ailments, persistent illness or persistent fever are dedicated to Goddess Yellamma (Ramberg 31). Ramberg (2011) further adds that when families face deaths in the family, family quarrels or stubborn poverty, they dedicate their girls to the Goddess (31). Married women who were fed up with their husbands or had been widowed could dedicate themselves as devadasi as well (Shankar 65). Some people believed that dedicating girls to the Goddess would increase the fertility of the land, causing an increase in crops, human and animal populations (Misra and Rao 1). Villages also believed that worship of Mother goddesses like Yellamma, particularly during the Kaktiya period and dedicating girls to them would improve famine situations in the villages (Misra and Rao 6).

The dedication to God is indeed shrouded with superstitions. The girls were used as a shield to protect families or villages, without considering the impact on the lives of these young girls. *The Undoing Dance* shows an instance where a dasi tells the pastor's daughter that disease would spread in the town and harvest would wither if the dasis stopped dancing. In another instance Kanaka promised the deity to dedicate Rajayi to the temple if Lila and Rajayi do not get smallpox which had made the other family members sick. So in spite of the laws forbidding dedication Kanaka dedicated her daughter to keep her promise and ensure that God would not punish them. *The Colour of Our Sky* witnesses Sakubai's belief that her daughter had fallen sick because her granddaughter Mukta was not dedicated. Amma did not want Mukta to become a devadasi like them but Sakubai's superstitious belief forced Mukta's dedication.

None of the young girls had a choice or could decide for themselves if they wanted to be dedicated; on the other hand, the married women made their choice, but that was to avoid the social stigma of widowhood or of the fallen woman who has left her husband. The poor and weaker families are more vulnerable to such practices, which is more common in backward poor villages. Misra and Rao (2002) quotes *joginis* who complain about the lack of their awareness and ignorance during their childhood which led to their dedication without their

consent or knowledge (12). The young girls did not understand the complexity of the situation, neither did they understand how their lives would change after that small ceremony.

Superstitions and the fear of ‘what if’ perpetuates this system as people fear that ending this practice would cast an evil spell on the village or families. After Mukta moved to Mumbai and Tara's mother died in the Bombay Blast in 1993, Mukta thought it was because of her shadow that bad luck was cast upon the family. This was why she did not protest when she was taken to the brothel; she thought it was better for her to continue her trade than curse the family that rescued her. Superstitions are responsible for the perpetuation of the system. Mukta blamed herself for Tara's mother's death, Sakubai's words came back to her telling her not to move away from her traditions or to fear the worst.

Mothers play a significant role in the lives of devadasi. The devadasi families are matrilineal and the mothers or grandmothers decide the future of the younger generations. Maya's mother wanted her daughter to follow the tradition of devadasis, she was working towards making her to become a part of the king's court to ensure she had a bright future and a comfortable life. On the other hand Mukta's mother wanted a better life for her daughter away from the repressive traditions. At first Rajayi dreamt for her daughter to be a dancer but then realized that it would be best for her to get educated and be of use to India and eventually she wanted Kalyani to get married to a man and have an honorable life. The three mothers were independent, and showed empathy towards their daughters. Chodorow explains how “the young girl must identify with her mother and also separate from her” (Gardiner 356). Maya, Mukta and Kalyani identified as devadasis like their mothers, but also carved separate identities from them. Mukta was first sent to the city and then a brothel; Maya joined a dancing troop and then became a mistress to a white man; Kalyani got married and settled in her household.

While Maya had an elaborate ceremony to dedicate herself followed by another ceremony to mark her coming of age (Scobie 94), Mukta only had the dedication ceremony

and Madam did not want to wait for a few years to send her to men and did it immediately, “Madam wanted to finish the ceremony as quickly as possible, without much fuss, while Sakubai, who believed in the traditions of our ancestors, wanted everything to be done according to the right rituals” (Trasi 69). Sakubai was not entirely happy about not following traditions, but her greed made her agree to Madam's proposition. Rajayi felt deeply about Kalyani's dance at the temple and thought that this heritage was all that she could pass on to her daughter.

The dedication ceremonies are depicted in each of the three novels. Despite their similarity, nuanced distinctions between them can be discerned. Maya was nine years old in 1765 and lived in Tanjore when she had her ceremony. Maya was draped in a saree and taken to the inner sanctum of the Big Temple where a dome-shaped *linga* was present. She was branded with the insignia of the trident, and the priest put the golden *bottu* around her neck. Amidst prayers and cheers from the onlookers, Maya became a devadasi. Mukta's ceremony was conducted two centuries later in 1988 at Ganipur. While Maya had her ceremony amongst pomp and show, Mukta's dedication ceremony was combined with five other girls. Her grandmother dressed her in a saree, and they set out to walk half a kilometre leading to the temple of Goddess Yellamma. After chanting prayers, a *mutku* was tied around her neck, signifying her bond with the Goddess and the temple. Kalyani's ceremony was performed in secret because the laws had become very strict. Rajayi wanted Kalyani's first dance to be in the temple in front of their God and decked her up for her performance. Kalyani did not have a marriage ceremony like Maya and Mukta, but her dance was meant to signify her bond with God.

Maya and Mukta both had traditional ceremonies, Maya married Lord Shiva and Mukta to Goddess Yellamma. While Maya would wear a *bottu*, Mukta would wear a *mutku*, both sacred threads but with different names. Kalyani wore no such sacred thread as she did not

have a formal ceremony. Maya and Mukta do not marry anyone else later and entertain various men, Kalyani marries Balan and never practised sex work.

The devadasis had to abide by strict rules once they were dedicated. These rules broadly remained consistent for devadasis throughout the country and through different times. The girls once married to the deity could not marry any mortal man. Yet they were expected to entertain men who visited them for sex and were not allowed to refuse anyone. The devadasis were also expected to clean the temple premise, the deity and sing or dance to entertain their God-husband.

Historically the devadasis used to be the only women who could read and write. Maya learnt dancing and languages like Marathi, Sanskrit, Telugu and English. Kalyani was taught to sing and dance by her mother and her dance master. On the other hand, many years later, devadasis like Mukta did not have access to education. She wanted to go to school and study but was not allowed to do so. This sheds light on the change in their status in India.

In the olden times devadasi were highly respected for being the wives of God and also as they were visited by powerful men. Disrespecting the devadasis would amount to disrespecting God. Devadasis were considered auspicious as they were protected against widowhood, “she can never marry a man and precisely for this reason, she will never be inauspicious since she will never be a widow, one of the more inauspicious states a Hindu woman can go through” (Perez 136). Sakubai emphasises how they are *nitya sumangali* (Trasi 21) as they are free from widowhood which is a constant concern for other women. Widows were considered inauspicious and would either jump into their husband’s pyre or would live a life of seclusion and isolation from the society. In contrast to that, devadasis would never suffer from widowhood as their God-husband is immortal.

Devadasis were not allowed to work and their only means of survival was by entertaining upper caste men. Devadasis are repeatedly told that “men from the *gavgada* have

rights over her and she lives to offer her body to them as a blessing of the deity” (Tambe 88). The man who raped Mukta just after her initiation ceremony believed that he had to do it so the Goddess blesses his family. Secondly, having sex with a devadasi was considered prestigious and everyone couldn’t approach them. The belief that having sex with a devadasi meant blessings from the Goddess and the prestige that it brought the patron ensured the perpetuity of the tradition.

Devadasis were often given land, jewellery and clothes by their patrons. Sakubai was given a house by her patron, and that is where Mukta and her mother lived. Kalyani’s maiden house was Raja Lingarayan’s gift to her great great grandmother Kalyaniammal and was later repaired for her great grandmother Jagadambal by that Rajah’s son Muthurayan (Natarajan 71).

The arrival of the British and their reforms has been analysed in the previous sections. The devadasis took time to adjust to this new phase and yet the laws prevented the tradition to go as is. After the fall of Tanjore, Maya could not lead the life she had aspired to as court dancer and king’s consort. She was forced to join Uma’s dance troupe to repay her family’s debts. Maya used her dancing talent to earn a living and support her family. Sakubai dedicated Mukta in accordance to her traditions but the demand for devadasi girls in their village was not much in the twentieth century, hence she was sold to Madam’s brothel. Sakubai borrowed money from Madam for the dedication ceremony with the guarantee that Mukta would pay it back with her service. With Mukta’s escape, Madam did not rest till she found her and brought her to the brothel. Sakubai was firm about following traditions but also adapted to the modern time by realising that commercial sex work was the only way for devadasis then.

Neither Mukta nor Maya could choose their future or the men they had to bed. Uma told Maya that she had to go live with Mudaliar even if she did not want to because she owned her, “I decide who you like and who you lie with. You are there to please a man” (Scobie 160). In the case of Mukta, she did not understand what was happening to her the first time and,

neither did she consent to go to the brothel. Maya and Mukta are years apart, but their lives went on similar tracks.

Mukta and Maya were trapped in the transition from traditional to modernity. While Mukta remained trapped in the brothel, she hoped for a brighter future for her daughter Asha, "All I could do was wait and hope this life inside me found a better life- the dream my Amma once had for me" (Trasi 286). Tara rescued Asha and adopted her, breaking the never-ending cycle of the devadasi system in their family. Mukta did not have a good life as her mother hoped for, but Asha will. On the other hand Maya goes to England in search of her daughter Suranita who was sent away by her biological father. When Maya runs out of money, she decides to dance to earn money. Maya thinks that the act of performing in front of an audience for money is her way out of the devadasi system, "The end of one tradition and the beginning of another" (Scobie 364). Rajayi marries Kalyani to send her away from her traditions but that came at the cost of Kalyani letting go of her dance and music. She had an honourable life and was respected by the society, but she felt like she was cheating her ancestors by letting go of her art. While Mukta could not escape and Maya could finally break free; Kalyani was not happy in spite of her isolation from her customs.

The girls are truly caught in the web of traditions where either they are unable to break free or get stuck in another foreign web entangling themselves further.

2.5 Cultural Conundrum

Devadasis are synonymous with art, music and dance with their immense contributions to India. They are considered as manifestations or embodiments of the same. Over the years devadasis have contributed to music and dance in India despite the social stigma attached to their profession. While Indians were appreciative towards their art, the colonisers and educated Indians started belittling their contributions and aimed to erase them. Modern India neither had

a place for the sexually deviant devadasi nor for her art.

Devadasi did not dance purely for entertainment but as a form of religious devotion in front of her God-husband. Leslie C. Orr (2000) sheds light on the connection between dancing and religious devotion in the East (4). In *The Pagoda Tree*, Rao explains to Sutcliffe, the significance of devadasi's dance, "our God is Shiva and as he dances, the world turns and the universe spins; birth, life, death pass through their eternal cycle on the axis of creation. That is why he must dance and that is why the women dance to please him, so he never stops" (Scobie 84). Rao also tells Sutcliff that only the *apsaras* could read, write and dance in heaven, while on Earth it is the devadasis who do the same. The devadasi learn the dance scriptures and understand the meaning behind each posture. Rao compares The Natya Shastra (Sanskrit treatise of performing arts) to The Bible to highlight its significance in the devadasi's life (Scobie 83).

One of their duties included performing at the temple for the festival, Maya and her ancestors did it, Kalyani's ancestors did the same and so did Mukta's ancestors. The devadasis start dancing at the age of seven or eight and go on until their health permits. While Maya and Kalyani did get a chance to dance at the temple a few times, Mukta did not. Neither did Mukta learn dance like the other two. This indicates the difference between traditional devadasis and the contemporary ones who were dedicated to tick the box and immediately parcelled to a brothel. Devadasis in the contemporary times are not taught arts and hence do not get to perform it like their ancestors.

Abolishing the system would involve the loss of classical art forms of singing and dancing and other arts. Rajayi always felt strongly about her dancing and singing, "It is our art. It has been ours for generations. We are its guardians. This is why we must keep dancing" (Natarajan 48). This is why she felt it was important not to give up on her art and continue even when the government asked them to stop. The devadasis wanted to continue their art and take

it forward for generations to come.

On the other hand Uma realised that she must change to the times if she wanted to capitalise on dance, so she organised a dancing troupe. She warned Maya's mother about the imminent fall of the empire and uncertainty of Maya's future aspirations of being attached to the king. When the empire fell Maya does join Uma's dancing troupe so she could use her art to sustain them financially.

Maya's dance evolved with the circumstances. She received training under Palani, the king's consort for several years so she could join the court one day. Then she had to dance as per Uma's guidance in commercial dance troupes. In England she began dancing to earn money, but it is only here that she could dance the way she wanted. She did not have to dance as per Palani's rules or Uma's requirement but instead danced her heart out. Maya believed her dance would end one tradition and begin a new one (Scobie 364). She would not dance on other's tunes but instead follow her own heart. The dancing must go on and her art continues to live. Mukta's mother had also adapted to the new times and would dance in landlord's houses for parties, this way she continued her traditional art but monetized it by performing at houses instead of temple festivals which were banned.

Kalyani got married to an upper-caste man and moved away from her family, village and traditions. Her husband Balan was a connoisseur of music but did not want his wife to sing or dance anymore. He wanted her to be a respectable wife without any remnants of her past. Kalyani felt guilty for giving up on her traditions and being untrue to her art and her people. It physically pained her when she stopped singing the *padhams* (songs) her mother had taught her, "My mother's legacy of songs and dances was now lodged against my ribs like a thorn. The old *padhams* my dance masters had taught me went through me like knives" (Natarajan 123). Eventually Balan realised the significance of the devadasi art form and she could dance again, but not before suffering in silence for a long time.

With devadasis being labelled as prostitutes, the hereditary dance masters did not want to teach dance to devadasi girls anymore to protect their image. Samu Vathyar was hesitant to teach Kalyani but her mother Rajayi persisted until he gave in. He believed that the dance will soon die, “when something has come to the end of its time, and is ready to die, it must be allowed to die. This dance is finished” (Natarajan 42). The fall of Tanjore meant that the devadasis did not have cultural sponsors and the traditional dance masters did not have the same scope to teach dance to young girls. Like in the case of Mukta, devadasis in the twentieth century were not taught dance like they used to earlier and they were directly sent to brothels in the city. With the decline of devadasis, their dance was assumed to share the same faith but things took a turn.

There was a movement to transform the music and dance by devadasis and courtesans and make it respectable enough to be taught to middle class girls and boys through music schools and concerts (Qureshi 360). The dance and music got *brahminized* and changed from the original form to suit the new audience. The dance tradition of devadasis was known as *sadhir attam*, *dasi attam* and *karnatakam* (Jeevanandam 736). The social pressure due to anti-nautch campaigns led to suppression of sadir by the early twentieth century in Madras. The same form was later revived as a pure form and called Bharatnatyam, which was performed by elite and middle class girls (Srinivasan 1869). While devadasis were not allowed to dance anymore, Brahmin girls were learning and performing Bharatanatyam.

[T]he transformation of sadir to Bharata natyam remains a herstory of very human perceptions and misperceptions, of interactions between colonialism and nationalism, of local and global relocations...their meanings and values necessarily transform in the negotiation with changed contexts and intertexts... within an ongoing dialectic of identity and difference. (Coorlawala 59)

Modern Indians defended that Bharatnatyam was mentioned in the Naātyaśāstra. This was done to popularise the dance amongst young girls and middle class families. Renaming *Sadir* to Bharata Natyam and linking the dance to naātyaśāstra was to show that the dance possessed ancient spiritual heritage (Coorlawala 53). Kalyani quotes Rukmini Devi's words published in the newspapers where she is thankful that Bharat Natyam was rescued from the devadasis, "bharatanatyam was a jewel that had fallen in the mud of a certain caste and become dirty, and people like Padmasini were showing that the dirt could be washed off" (Natarajan 310). Rukmini Devi was trying to separate the dance from devadasis so that the dance was not considered sexual or overly religious, and would appeal to the masses. The movement to popularise the transformed dance form was fairly successful as young girls even in the twenty-first century learned the dance.

The art of sadir/Bharata Natyam is now monopolized by Brahmins in Tamil Nadu who clearly see themselves as having 'rescued' the art from the fallen 'prostitute'-the devadasi. (Srinivasan 1875)

The dance underwent certain modifications like: it was textualised as a means of purification, the words or movements considered lewd were omitted and the women were not just performers but also interpreters of arts (Srinivasan 1875). The poetic texts calling God as lover or King as patron or lover were forbidden and it was now interpreted as bhakti or devotion to the divine form; emotions of lust, sexuality, greed were erased from the performances in order to maintain purity (Coorlawala 55).

Balan, a Brahmin man wanted to save folk art from neglect and was in the search of unknown art forms in the villages of India, to open the world to Indian art and popularise it. Balan believed he was working towards saving the ancient, traditional art forms and considered himself broad minded. He had also enrolled his daughter to learn Bharat Natyam. However he

enrolled her with an upper caste Padmasini and not with traditional devadasis. Similarly while he promoted art as his job, he suppressed his wife's music and dance at home.

The young girls of modern India would attend dance and music classes with non-traditional teachers, while Kalyani, a traditional devadasi, did not have any future as a dance master because no one wanted to learn from a devadasi. The image of devadasi were that of sexually and morally deviant women and hence families did not want to send their children to them for classes. So ironically the devadasis were not allowed to teach their own art forms. While devadasis were not praised for their singing and dancing, the Brahmin singers were called artists and celebrated for their art. Rajayi wondered why they were not recognised as artists while the Brahmin singers were upheld for it.

The present day dancers claim that the devadasis lacked technique or theoretical knowledge as they only danced for and in front of God, in comparison to the contemporary dancers who considered themselves more elegant and better trained. Traditionally the male musicians or dance masters exercised control over the devadasis (Srinivasan 1872). But upper class and upper caste girls who were learning the dance now challenged the male masters and claimed their right to interpret dances (Coorlawala 54).

The dance, music and performances slowly shifted into the intellectual property based on texts and copyrights and the traditional dance and music masters suffered due to their ignorance (Coorlawala 55). Velu's ancestral palm leaf manuscripts on traditional music were taken by Padmasini under the pretext of publishing them and giving him credit and payment, but she never paid him and published them as her original work. Velu got cheated for not knowing the new ways of the world.

The devadasis were frequently raided by the police and most devadasi and musicians had sold their houses in the village and left for the city to look for work in cinemas or join

political movements. Some hereditary performers survived post-independence by adapting to changes in audience and music; but in this process they lost their voice and surrounded themselves with silence (Qureshi 349). A number of musicians who had left the villages in search of work in the cities returned back because there was no demand for traditional musical instruments. All India Radio, theatre and cinema provided opportunities to a few, Kalyani's aunt Lilavati was among the lucky few. Kalakshetra organized dance performances by devadasis to provide them with alternate professions (Jeevanandam 742). Few former devadasis who had reinvented themselves taught dance at Kalakshetra (Coorlawala 54). Kalakshetra was formed to revive and support Indian art forms as well as to provide devadasis with newer avenues but it was not a big success.

Post-independence the contributions of devadasis and courtesans was erased by nationalist reform movements as they wanted to white-wash the history and picture India as moral and pious. All India Radio took over musical patronage and slowly banished performers "whose private life is a public scandal" (Feldman and Gordon 312). Hence they disappeared from the cultural scene except some minor representation in literature and movies. Only those who could adapt themselves to the modern stage remained, the rest disappeared in the darkness.

The Undoing Dance mentions the establishment of National Academy of Traditional Arts and Culture (NATAC) as the Indian government's effort to preserve the cultural heritage and promote art, Kalyani's husband Balan was in charge of the South Indian branch of NATAC. Balan's NATAC closely resembles Rukmi Devi's Kalakshetra.

Padmasini wanted to make a short film on a devadasi in Kalyanikkarai and present her with the Lifetime Achievement Award. In spite of heading NATAC Balan was unaware that traditional devadasis were still present. He was excited to have devadasi's dying dance and music captured on video. Padmasini planned to film Kalyani's mother and exploited her by paying her barely any money and keeping most of the money for herself. Naïve Rajayi could

not negotiate and neither was she aware of budgets to settle on a decent amount hence Padmasini took full advantage of her. Eventually the movie was released and received very well by the audience making them aware of the plight of devadasis in present day India.

After Balan realized the need to safeguard the traditional form of art, he took a few measures through NATAC. He understood that children from hereditary families lack support, NATAC announced a scholarship for children from hereditary dance families to learn dance from their own kin. Secondly, Rajayi started teaching *padhams* to already trained students in a dance school in Madras so her art form could live on and more people would learn it.

Kalyani's grandmother Kanaka was hopeful that people would not give up on their dance and things would improve, "[n]o other life makes sense to me...I will dance until my death. It is our obligation and our pride" (Natarajan 227). Dance and music was not a small part of devadasi's life but consumed their whole being. When Kalyani's step daughter Hema starts learning dance from Rajayi, Kalyani re-enforces that is the way to move forward; ensure their legacy and art does not die and is presented to the world without any modifications.

2.6 Trapped using Patriarchy and Power

Patriarchy and, consequently power play a significant role in the tradition of the devadasi system and the rationale for its perpetuation. Young girls dedicated to a God or Goddess and sexually pleasing the village's influential men benefit the male members of the society more than anyone else. Evidently, they will want to continue receiving these favours and remain in power forever, making them exert a strong influence on the continuance of the tradition.

2.6.1. Patriarchal Influence

The society is male dominated with rules and laws formulated by men to benefit them.

The devadasi system is no exception to this rule, where the men dominate, oppress, and exploit the devadasis. Patriarchy has created a world where everyone relies on men to make decisions due to the belief that it is only the man's divine right to do so (Bahlieda 77). Bahlieda (2015) further writes about "Hegemonic masculinity" which hammers the male code of behaviour in society to everyone (43). The society is designed to meet the man's needs and the women behave in accordance to the norms set by men.

In this patriarchal set up men hold the ultimate power, making them dominant and pushing women into subordinate roles. This can be witnessed in the devadasi system where the devadasis are dominated by priests, landlords, kings or other men from the villages. Patriarchy coupled with state feudalism (Barry 178) where the landlords or priests control lives of poor people is an important factor behind the continuance of devadasi system even now. This chapter has uncovered how the power of ideology secures the consent of women who are oppressed. This oppression is done "through institutions such as the academy, the church, and the family, each of which justifies and reinforces women's subordination to men" (Sultana 3). The subordinate devadasis are kept under check using religion. Sakubai believed in the Goddess's curse and thought their family would be cursed if Mukta were not dedicated. Religion and the superstitions that come with it had a firm grasp on her; hence she conformed. Mukta's mother on the other hand, questioned this tradition where they have to "sleep with men in the name of God" and how they were "servants of God but the wife of the entire village" (Trasi 21). Sex work heavily leans towards women who provide the service and men who benefit from it.

Societal norms and expectations make women subordinate and inferior in the spheres of family, religion, law and society. Devadasis were constantly pushed to the lowest ranks in society post colonisation as they were equated to sex workers. The impression about them was that they were uneducated, backward and sexually deviant. Memsahib never accepted Mukta because she knew she was a devadasi. Her religion and tradition made her believe that

devadasis should not progress and must not move away from their role. She did not want Mukta to go to school and study either because she believed that devadasis did not deserve it. After Memsahib died in the bomb blast, their neighbors blamed Mukta because they believed that a devadasi deviating from her traditional role brought bad luck to the family. Education and modernity did not make them question these beliefs and they continued re-enforcing them.

The devadasis did not belong to one single caste but could belong to any caste consequently forming a class among themselves. The community or the class of devadasis were governed by their own set of rules which differed from the rest. The devadasis went through their share of violence and injustice as the lack of socio-economic resources made them more vulnerable.

Violence is an inseparable part of patriarchy; they faced physical, sexual and cultural violence as devadasis. Physical force is used to exert control and show dominance over the devadasis, especially if the devadasis do not blindly follow the society and the patrons. Sexual force was used to force them into sexual submissiveness and lastly cultural violence was to ensure that girls from devadasi families continue dedicating themselves. The three primary texts cite multiple examples of violence on the devadasis.

When Mukta's mother blamed the villagers for ruining her daughter in the name of religion and opposed the devadasi system, she was beaten to death. Additionally violence was used when the man took Mukta's virginity. She tried to get away from him and fight back, but he did not care and continued raping her. He told her that this had to be done and over time, she would get used to it. Mukta also faced violence in the brothel; one of the men banged her head on the wall because he felt that all prostitutes deserved violence. Mudaliar considered Maya his property and would beat her and treat her as per his whim. Rajayi rejected the Inspector to be her patron twice, he was humiliated and took his revenge on her by raping her. He hated her for rejecting him as well as disrespected her for being a dasi. Rajayi identified

this act as a way of snatching her dignity rather than quenching his sexual hunger. Bahlleda (2015) explains the relationship between patriarchy and violence, "patriarchy has carried out a process of cultural socialisation that has normalised male domination, violence, and control in human relations" (30). All through the texts violence was normalised and expected as a part of their life. The girls who questioned the violence were told to accept it as a way of life.

It has been noted in the primary texts how women would accept subordinate positions in exchange for protection or their livelihood. Maya let Uma, then Mudaliar and then Thomas dictate her life in turn for money, house and material possessions. Mukta accepted to live as a house maid in Tara's house so she gets protected from the brothel. Kalyani gave up on her music, dance and family to marry Balan and live a so-called respected life. Each of these protagonists have accepted subordinate positions in exchange for something. Farrelley (2011) seconds this by presenting the Marxist feminist view, that believes that the subordination of women is canonised with the creation of superstructures, that stabilises male oppression towards women (4). Women's access to resources and means of production depend on their sexual ties to men (Farrelley 10). Sakubai was given a house by her patron a long time ago, where they all lived together. Mukta's Amma received money from her patrons that would run the house. Maya's family lived in a house owned by the Big Temple for devadasis. Palani had a place in the palace and had her comfort because of her relationship with King Pratap. Maya's relationship with Mudaliar made her the mistress of the Malapore property and she was gifted clothes and ornaments. Later her relationship with Thomas makes her the mistress of Cheyney. Their access to resources depended on their relationship with men, without which they would have nothing.

Kalyani's maiden house was Raja Lingarayan's gift to her great-great grandmother Kalyaniammal and was later repaired for her great grandmother Jagadambal by that Rajah's son Muthurayan. The daughter was treated as the heir and would inherit her mother's property

and assets and could also perform her mother's last rites (Prasad 152). Hence the house was passed on to the daughters and granddaughters of Kalyaniammal and eventually remained with Rajayi; Sakkubai's house was also used by her daughter and granddaughter. The big temple owned houses and gave them to devadasis to live, Maya lived in one such house which was given to her ancestors and passed on from daughter to daughter so they could continue living there.

In this system, women's labour power, women's reproduction, women's sexuality, women's mobility and property and other economic resources – are under patriarchal control. (Sultana 9)

While women were the victim of patriarchy, they also contributed towards the continuation of male dominance. Sakubai wanted Mukta to continue the tradition of being a devadasi, Madam bought devadasis like Mukta for her brothel in Mumbai and Uma who bought Maya for her dance troop are victims as well as perpetrators of patriarchy. Kalyani's ancestors kept up with the tradition of dedicating their daughters in spite of stringent laws forbidding it. They were caught in the web of dominance, but instead of transcending and improving the plight of other girls, they became a part of the system and helped further it.

Amma was not a co-conspirator of the system; she wanted her daughter to break free from it but had no choice in dedicating Mukta. Amma thought that only Mukta's biological father, an upper-caste landlord, could help her. She, as a mother, had no control over society; only a man could save her. After Amma's death, the only way she could be away from the system was by leaving and going to Bombay, hoping that no one would recognise her there.

In the words of Bahlieda (2015), “[c]ulture is the social expression of ideology and patriarchy is the social expression of culture” (22). Patriarchy forms the ideology, which in turn becomes an integral part of the culture, this ensures that devadasis cannot escape the

system, and neither can they make any changes in the system; they do not have any say in the matter.

Devadasis lack agency in their lives, neither can they choose to be dedicated or not; nor can they decide to live life on their own terms. Uma did not give Maya a choice, and she was reminded that her only purpose was to please men and nothing more. After she knew that her faith was sealed with Mudaliar, she negotiated with him for a home of her own and jewellery and how she wants to be treated, “You treat me like a common whore who can be bought and sold. Who performs at *nautches* for foreigners like some travelling bard. That’s not how I will be treated” (Scobie 172). When things were not going well, and Mudaliar started beating her, she decided to run away. She does not contest the fact that she will have to be tied to a man, but feels that it is better if she chooses whom she will remain enslaved to. Maya did not choose to be without a man, but she wanted to choose which man she would be with, which is empowering enough as earlier, they were not given the luxury of choice.

Devadasis or sex workers are discouraged from having children as it hampers the business. Brothel owners would force them into abortions, and devadasis were asked to prevent getting pregnant; having a baby when they were ready for one was not a choice they could make. In the brothel in Bombay, the sex workers were not allowed to have children because it was bad for business. This way, even their production was controlled. Maya's mother Lakshmi wanted to have a child but had to put off having a child for a while because her mother warned her that the patrons would not visit her after she had had a child. Lakshmi did not believe her mother, but what she said was right. Fewer and fewer patrons called on her after she gave birth to Maya. Having a child makes them less desirable to men, even though men themselves cause the pregnancy; this situation is ironic. Controlling the production of devadasis is another form of domination rooted in patriarchy. Ideally no stigma is attached to devadasi but in reality these children were not considered equal to others. The children in her locality refused to play with

Kalyani and neither did they talk to her, she never questioned it and assumed that is how it would be. Mukta was not treated fairly by Tara's mother because she was a devadasi's daughter and looked down upon her.

Sex is not only a biological process, but it is also political in nature. The man who penetrates is considered superior and powerful, the men who sleep with devadasis were men of better social standing in the village. Sex in such cases is sanctioned by God, s/he makes the rules on who gets to have sex with the devadasis. Instead of religions helping people, it was encouraging men from having sexual relationships with helpless devadasis. The personal is political as what happens to one devadasi does happen to others. While the body of a woman is private, it is also under society's control to view it and use it at their discretion. The young girls belonging to devadasi families had their faith sealed at birth owing to their family lineage. The patriarchal society limits them making them powerless and subsequently subordinate to the dominant men.

Patriarchy and the ideologies that stem from the practice are not random but well planned and executed to secure men's interest and control women (Bahlieda 24). The devadasi system is a planned and well-executed system where in the devadasi women remain backward and unable to have a bright future. Kathleen Barry's (1995) views on sexual exploitation echo the same, "Sexual exploitation also forces women backward, regresses women into the harms it conveys, thereby thwarting women's ability to achieve, to move forward, to grow and to develop" (Barry 78-79). Feminist ideologies are attempting to free women from the shackles of patriarchy and help them move forward in life.

2.6.2 Wife v/s Devadasi

It is evident to draw comparisons between devadasis (the wives of Gods) and traditional wives. This section will discuss the similarities and differences between the two in greater detail.

One of the primary reasons behind dedicating daughters instead of marrying them is to avoid costs of marriage and dowry. Instead as devadasis the girls remain with the family and earn money. Devadasi daughters are an economic gain instead of girls who are usually considered as economic drain.

Devadasis are the wives of God yet their role is not the same as the traditional wife. Unlike a wife who will be shamed for having sexual relations with men other than her husband, the devadasi is not considered unchaste because she is involved with other men. It's ironic but a devadasi is not expected to be loyal to her husband while a traditional wife is. This might be the reason why over the years people stopped respecting devadasis as wives of God, and only considered them as a means to satisfy themselves. Mukta's mother states how devadasis are "the servants of God but the wife of the entire village" (Trasi 21).

The major difference between the two is morality and legitimacy. The wife is legitimate and morally in the right while devadasi is not, "the wife became increasingly what the prostitute could not be, the legitimate bearer of her husband's children and the embodiment of chaste womanhood for the new nation" (Ramberg 43). The purity attached with the wife gave them social recognition and respect over devadasis.

Widowhood was a constant threat to wives. Widows were either expected to jump in their husband's pyre or lead a life of purity and seclusion away from everyone else. Their lives would take a turn for the worst and they would be considered inauspicious and shunned by the rest. While widowhood was never a question for devadasis. Sakubai takes pride in being a

devadasi and not an ordinary wife. She is honoured to be *nitya sumangali*, who will never be widowed and believes that they do not need a man.

In central Karnataka devadasi are called *basavi* which means female bull. Ramberg explains the symbolism between the two by drawing similarities between the bull's bold and unstoppable nature, which makes him roam the village fearlessly, to that of the devadasi who is viewed under the same light (42). Devadasi is considered to have masculine privileges that the ordinary wife does not have. Palani explains to Maya how devadasis were educated while other women were not, and most importantly devadasis had the privilege of choice and independence unlike the latter (Scobie 97). Mytheli Sreenivas (2011) seconds this as she writes that devadasis had more opportunities presented to them in comparison to married women (63).

What made patrons with wives throng the abode of devadasis? Palani tells Maya the reason, “[a]n ordinary householder won’t be satisfied with a wife exhausted from the children and running the house. That is why those with money want a woman like us. To entertain and please them” (Scobie 98). Married men visited devadasis for their beauty, art and skill in bed. The men demanded variety and gaiety, which their wives could not provide and hence went to devadasis.

E.V. Ramasami started the Self Respect Movement in 1925 where mortal marriages were supported to reform the devadasis in Tamil Nadu. Their caste associations only accepted those who were willing to marry men and others were shunned and called prostitutes (Sreenivas 69, 75). Rajayi wanted her daughter Kalyani to be respected and have an honourable life, which is why she pushed Kalyani to marry Balan. While Balan knew his wife belonged to the devadasi family, she did not tell him any details of her past life. After her marriage with Balan Kalyani was considered chaste and recognized as an ideal Indian woman.

While some men married devadasis, their families did not necessarily accept them. Balan’s mother had a difficult relationship with Kalyani because she could never accept a

devadasi daughter-in-law. Post 1950s it was shameful to be a devadasi so Kalyani gave up the life of a dancer and became a wife to Balan. Rajayi thought marriage was the best way to secure her life and happiness but Kalyani always felt “trapped in the amber of transition” (Natarajan 24). Kalyani felt pulled from both sides, her traditions and her role as a wife. She found it hard to make the transition expected from devadasis at that time.

Marriage is nothing but the transaction of sexuality, on that note the marriage to a man and God is not too different yet the status of a wife will never be equal to that of a devadasi.

2.6.3. Culture of Violence and Trauma

Devadasis should not be perceived as individual women practicing the same profession, rather they constitute a distinct community by themselves. Their collective experiences and cultural traditions are intertwined, including the traumas they endure.

Since the beginning of the tradition the daughters of devadasis have been forced to follow the same profession as the society would not allow them to break the cycle. This form of forced initiation or cultural violence has been inflicted upon devadasi mothers and daughters in the name of superstitions and culture. Maya, Kalyani and Mukta came from hereditary devadasi families and they were expected to follow suit and not follow any other profession. Maya’s mother initiated her as a child, and she was training to become a dancer; Mukta’s mother was against her initiation but Sakubai and the village conspired for it and Kalyani was not hired as a teacher in spite of having education because she belonged to a devadasi family. All three girls were denied permission to move away from the culture thus facing cultural violence.

Along with cultural violence of forced dedications, devadasis also face cultural trauma. Jeffrey Alexander (2014) sheds light on the definition of cultural trauma by stating that it occurs

when the members collectively feel that some event has left “indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (1). The arrival of the British and the subsequent abolishment of the devadasi system is one of the biggest cultural traumas collectively shared by the community. Maya and many other young devadasis like her were left stranded without a ruler for patronage. The fall of Tanjore forced her to join a dance group and then become a mistress instead of living at the king’s court. When the British criminalised and banned the system, Rajayi gathered devadasis to fight against the abolishment act which outlawed them and their traditions. Their identity and livelihood were erased, and their futures stood on quicksand. The abolishment bills shook the collective identity of the community and impacted every devadasi. Devadasis collectively have faced shared traumas which have impacted the entire community.

The British forced their laws and rules on the local Indians while judging the native traditions for being immoral. They did not try to understand the sanctity or significance of the devadasi tradition before labelling it as trafficking and prostitution. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* discuss the most traumatizing situations that occur when the dominant culture imposes itself through force. As the dominant culture spreads through force or economic power, the native culture breaks continuity, questions its identity and resents the new culture. Their abolishment and criminalization of the devadasi tradition is considered as cultural imperialism and cultural aggression, which is deeply resented by the locals. The unlawful devadasis were neither consulted nor their voices heard while taking decisions about their lives.

2.7. Power of Writing

India is not rid of devadasis even in the twenty-first century; they persist within the social structure, existing in margins without representation, while their cultural contribution

remains overlooked and disregarded. Novels like *The Colour of Our Sky*, *The Pagoda Tree* and *The Undoing Dance* are significant as they wrestle with meaningful and forgotten themes of devadasis in India. While some devadasis have achieved recognition in contemporary society, they often do not advocate for their cultural heritage to the extent that is warranted. The voices of devadasis have been silenced for a long time and it is important for literature to address that gap. Navtej Johar (2016) writes that India has been “dismissive of voices that speak for the lived histories of the devadasis and challenges the cleansing of the tradition...these voices have been shrugged off by many a modern practitioner... according to whom the ouster of the devadasi was inevitable” (45). The voices of devadasis have been shrugged aside for far too long, hoping that they die out. Literature remains a powerful medium to convey important messages and shed light on neglected members of the society. Leora Bilsky (1998) writes about the silencing and distortion of women's voices from the public and acknowledges this as an injustice towards women (48).

This study has examined how education emerges as a potent motif across the three texts. While Mukta was deprived of education, Maya and Kalyani had the opportunity to study. However Mukta and Maya were not able to write their own story or engage in public discourse about life and struggles. On the other hand Kalyani writes about her family and herself so they become a part of India’s history and their stories could be widely read.

Devadasi wanted to adapt to the current times and realised the importance of education, hence a few devadasis wrote to the King and the government to give English education to dasi children so they could become doctors or teachers and serve the nation. Earlier Rajayi dreamt for her daughter to be a dancer but with changing times realized that it would be best for her to get educated and be of use to India (Natarajan 323).

Western writers exhibit pride in documenting their history and personal narratives, whereas Indians tend to refrain from such self-expression. They often opt for silence,

neglecting to write about themselves or their familial experiences. Ironically, this silence results in Western authors becoming the voices through which Indian stories are told, due to the absence of self-representation by Indians themselves. Rao explains the same to Maya, further adding that the English also write books about Indians despite not knowing much about them. As the Indians themselves do not write their stories, their side of the story will never be known (Scobie 296). Mukta was one of the girls living in a brothel, she had lost her name and identity, but a visit from the journalist Andrew Colt changed her life. He wrote a book including stories from brothels in India. He had included her story incorporating her grandmother, mother and also Tara. Colt gave voice to voiceless prostitutes. Even though they did not write their own stories, their voices reached others through his book. Andrew Colt was also responsible in informing the agency and Tara about Mukta's whereabouts which helped them trace her and rescue her. Mukta's meeting with Colt truly changed her life for the better.

On the other hand Kalyani had the privilege to write about herself and her family. She was educated in the missionary and taught English so her writing would reach a wider global audience. *The Undoing Dance* is not only the product of Kalyani's personal voice describing her life, but also represents the communal voice of devadasis narrating their shared history (Lanser 18-21). This form of narration is more authentic as a devadasi is writing about devadasis instead of a western writer writing about their community. The teller is as important as the tale as the narrator shapes the tale using his or her own experiences and understanding. Kalyani's attempt to write about her ancestors is significant because writing is a way to bring change;

[o]f my people, so many have died; those who survived left for the cities, searching for anonymity. For years I've been hearing silence where there used to be voices singing and feet stamping...Thirteen generations of my family I sing, my mother and grandmothers for thirteen

generations, orienting themselves to the dance and the temples.
(Natarajan 372)

The power of writing cannot be belittled; it enables the voice of the marginalised to reach far and wide and empowers them. *The Colour of Our Sky*, *The Pagoda Tree* and *The Undoing Dance* highlight the importance of expression and writing. Kalyani's expresses her motive behind writing;

[p]erhaps writing about the change would let me go back and undo some of the damage. And writing would at any rate be a substitute for the songs I could no longer sing, and for the movements that were forbidden to me .(Natarajan 74)

Through the act of writing devadasis are on a quest to be heard, respected and be in a position to influence the society. This will open more avenues of progress for the devadasis.

2.8. Decline of Devadasis

There exists multiple rationales and interpretations regarding the decline of devadasi in India. Over time several kings and landlords who supported devadasis that helped them accumulate wealth and prosperity. The male patronage slowly led to the moral downfall of devadasis who were more occupied with their patrons than duty towards their God-husband. This could be one of the reasons behind their decline. Ramberg (2017) blames the decline of the devadasi system on the sexuality angle of religious traditions. She believes that "the public sexuality that devadasis embody can only constitute a perversion, a loss of dignity, a violation of rights" (183). She adds how sex cannot be for Gods and can have no place in the religion.

Some scholars refused to brand all devadasis as prostitutes and reflect on their hereditary status, standing in the community, ritualistic significance, and mastery in dance. While some scholars question the real character of the temple women and believe that “India's political, social, and religious integrity degenerated over time” (Orr 8-10). These conflicting views lead to disagreements on the status of devadasis;

The reformers presented the extant temple-dancer as a 'prostitute' in order to do away with her; the revivalists presented the ancient Hindu temple-dancer as a 'nun' in order to incarnate her afresh" in the form of the high-caste professional classical dancer who performed "pure" traditional dance on the concert stage rather than in the temple. (Orr 12)

Even after the colonizers had left, the Indian minds were still colonized by Victorian ideals of purity and they wanted to make India morally superior to the west (Johar 43). Indians internalized Christian morality and ignored the original native Indian customs and religious beliefs. The decline of devadasis was inevitable but their cultural presence could not be erased from India's fabric. The devadasis were without any source of income and their world changed overnight. While some managed to adapt to the modern times, some could not. In all circumstances the devadasis suffered and so did their art.

Towards the nineteenth century elite Indians tried to reconstruct the image of the Indian woman as moral, pure and chaste. Indian women were seen as representatives of India with their chaste and traditional, spiritual and domestic characteristics, the devadasis did not fit in the same image as the latter were branded as prostitutes (Orr 13). Devadasi were the ‘other’ and posed a threat to the new modern India, hence they were shunned. The educated Indian men stopped patronising devadasis and the reform movements gained momentum. Rajayi says, “we did not belong in the world they knew they were making” (Natarajan 235). The educated

Indians who were working towards India's independence and political growth did not have any place for devadasis. The vakil came to Rajayi for eleven years but when he decided to join the Congress party and contest for the legislative seat, he stopped visiting her because public figures could not keep dasi women anymore (Natarajan 243). Maya's predetermined future changed drastically after the fall of the empire and left her without any patron. She joined a dance troupe and later became a mistress to an Englishman to adapt to the changing times. While Mukta was dedicated with proper customs, she was immediately sold to a brothel in the city because devadasis were not supported by the temple any more.

In spite of numerous factors resulting in the deterioration of the system, it has not been eradicated and is still surviving. The reason behind this is the socio-economic and religious nature of Indians, particularly those residing in rural India who have continued to follow traditions such as the devadasi system (Misra and Rao 15). Poverty, illiteracy and strong feudal influence are the major factors for the same. While some devadasis remain in their villages, some shift to brothels in the city. Maya lived with patrons in Madras while Mukta lived in brothels in Kamathipura and Sonagachi.

Poverty has also forced families to force young daughters into the system. Daughters dedicated and then sold to brothels bring them more money at home and hence the commercialisation of the system has proven to be beneficial to these families. The increase in urbanisation and demand for prostitution in big cities has forced more girls into the trade (Shankar 20). Over time the devadasi system has been absorbed by sex trafficking, leaving the religious ceremony aside, there is no difference between the devadasis living in brothels and trafficked girls in brothels.

2.9. Conclusion

The following are the key findings of this chapter. Maya and Mukta were devadasis

two centuries apart from each other, and while their life was similar in a few aspects, it also greatly differed from one another. Both were destined to be temple women and lived their lives as one for a long time before their fate changed. However, while Maya lived as a traditional devadasi, Mukta was trafficked and kept in brothels. One can see how sex trafficking takes over traditional temple women and sucks them into their web. Did modernisation make it worse for them instead of helping them? On the other hand Kalyani who belonged to thirteen generations of devadasis was taught to sing and dance like the custom, but was married to a mortal man to secure her future. The laws forbade practicing devadasi system and her mother thought the best course of action was to marry her and guarantee her a respectable life.

This chapter has documented the transformation or more accurately the evolution in the lives of devadasi in India. The lives of devadasis changed drastically after the arrival of the British as they initiated laws which banned the system and disregarded their heritage. Maya faced the brunt by having her entire life unravel and changed her destiny from the king's courtesan to a mistress. Kalyani had to let go of her dance and music to adapt and marry and Mukta experienced the commercialisation of the system.

For years the devadasis have lived in servitude, bowing down to rituals and traditions, for years they thought that this would never end, they would never have a bright future. The present looks better than the past in some ways and hopefully the future will free them from their shackles. "The sun was about to set and the sky was ablaze in colors of red...For women like me, our sky would be bright again. I knew. I could smell the hope" (Trasi 393).

While the laws have considerably helped to curb dedication of minor girls, it has not stopped completely. The goal is not only to stop this age old practice, but also to preserve their cultural heritage. While their dance and music is revived, some of it is also reinvented. The world is unaware about the magnitude of the devadasi's situation, writing their story will help bring awareness and subsequently a change in their lives. Their voices must not get lost, their

stories must not be forgotten, their voices must be heard loud and clear and their stories must be documented and spread.

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Chapter 3

Metamorphosis of the Maven

The cut flowers in the vases have begun to smell of human sweat.

*There is no more singing, no more dance,
my mind is an old playhouse with all its lights put out.*

—Kamala Das

3.1 Introduction

Courtesans, famed for their beauty, art and sophistication have made a mark for themselves all across the globe. They exist at the intersection of art, culture and politics influencing societies. Courtesans possessed musical skills, were literate and provided companionship to their male patrons, often indulging in sex or entertainment. Courtesans form an integral part of Indian culture and art. They are not just a part of India but courtesan culture is found in other parts of the world. Courtesans were educated as well as skilled in art forms and were found all over the world such as the Greek *Hetaira*, Chinese *Ji*, Italian *Cortigiana*, Korean *Gisaeng*, Japanese *Geisha*, Indian *Tawai'f* or *Ganikas* and so on.

A concise examination of courtesans spanning diverse geographical locations and time lines indicate the various similarities as well as differences among them. Berg (2013) wrote about Chinese courtesans during the late Ming discourse, who pursued martial arts and masculine activities. Xue Susu, a famed courtesan at that time, was multi-talented in literary and martial arts (174- 175). Italian courtesans were viewed with hesitation, their voice was an "irresoluble paradox- madonna or a whore, lady or harlot?" (Feldman 105). Sumerian gala were third-gendered musicians (Nielson 242). Geishas were skilled in entertainment, and sex was not always the conclusion, *yūjo* on the other hand were the women of pleasure (Dalby 56). Ironically the first Geishas were men who dressed up as women, while women entered the

profession much later (Stanley 540). Ancient East and Egypt had professional women musicians who performed in court; only some were concubines (Nielson 240). Courtesans for the Nomadic Arabs were slave women who were musicians as well as concubines (Nielson 243).

Courtesans all over the world have occupied different spaces. While China had pleasure quarters all over the city, the courtesans were not confined to one space and moved for private parties, tours, and other obligations. On the other hand, the Japanese Geishas have always worked within specific spaces. The Indian courtesan has been fluidic regarding the occupation of space and has moved around when they deem fit.

The issue of the mode of payment has yielded diverse responses. The Italian courtesans had poems, letters and books dedicated to them as a gift in exchange for their "service"; the Chinese courtesans accepted poems, paintings and lyrics as payment; the Greek economy was based on a similar exchange of gifts rather than money (ed Feldman and Gordon 12). Whereas Indian courtesans sought patronage in gifts like houses, clothes, jewels, food and others. It can be noted that courtesan-ship was their profession and only means of livelihood, hence Indian courtesans preferred material transactions for their services.

It is interesting to study the developmental trajectory of courtesans in India. The Indus Valley civilization and the bath of Mohenjodaro boast about *apsaras* who entertained through music and dance (Y. B Singh 181). However the Indian term *taw'aif* is derived from the Urdu word *tawaif*, which means movement and mobility (Waheed 987). The women were essentially nomads who performed in various places and hence earned this name. Subsequently fourteenth century Delhi had a class of musicians who performed at courts but did not participate in sexual exchange (Bano 253). Kingdoms and the Kings would consider it a matter of great prestige to host courtesans. It is evident that in the earlier periods courtesans were respected for their musical talent rather than for sexual purposes.

The *Atthana-Jātaka* names many types of courtesans in India, like *ganika*, *nagarsobhan*, *vannadās* and others; their price depended on their status (Roy 129). The *Kamasutra* clarifies nine types of courtesans, which are *kumbhadasi*, *paricarika*, *nati*, *rupajivas*, *ganika*, *kulata*, *svairini*, *silpakurika*, *prakasavinasta* (Gaur 159-160). The *ganikas* are differentiated from common prostitutes as they cared about the quality of their client and not just their fees like the latter. The term *ganika* indicates women who were part of a *gana* (corporation) and could only be shared by men from that *gana* (Darshini 167). *Ganikas* were not easily accessible like the prostitutes. They were celebrated for their manners, etiquette, knowledge of arts and beauty (Y.B. Singh 182). They received significant attention during the Gupta period, regarded as the Golden age of Indian Culture (Darshini 167).

The *Kāmasūtra* takes inspiration and is modelled on courtesans; without them, this text on pleasure would not be possible. Book 6 of *Kāmasūtra* called *Vaiśika* is dedicated to their role, activities and place in society (Gautam 7). *Kāmasūtra* is predominantly directed towards men, but Book 6 teaches courtesans the art of seduction. The terms used are "nayak" for the male and "nayaka" for the female partner in a sexual act. What was the need to use theatrical terms of an actor (*nayak*) and an actress (*nayaka*) to elucidate the practice of sex? This seems like an insight into the life of a courtesan who was not expected to be emotionally involved with her clients and treat the sexual act like pretence, "the actor assumes an identity that is nothing more than a mask" (Gautam 11). *Kāmasūtra* asserts that the courtesan should create the illusion of love before the sexual act because *kāma* means pleasure as well as love (14). Her artificial love should appear natural; nonetheless she must not forget that the act is part of her profession. The courtesans were asked not to rush into a relationship with her patron, and be in search of a relationship rather than quick exchanges. Courtesan marrying her patron was forbidden until Alauddin Khilji allowed them to marry to reduce overcrowding in their trade (Bano 252). By the eighteenth century a relationship with courtesans was accepted and legally

permissible. This indicates the change in outlook towards courtesans from women only reserved for pleasure to wives.

While writing *Arthaśāstra* Kautilya realized that the sex business could not be abolished hence he systematized and regulated it with laws. The state would employ *Ganikādhyaksa* or Superintendent of Prostitutes who dealt with sex workers inside the state (Sahoo 359). The state-employed prostitutes were categorized into lower, middle and top ranks and were paid their salary by evaluating their age, beauty and other qualities. The state also commissioned teachers to hone the courtesan's art. The courtesans paid monthly taxes to the state. The law of succession in case of the courtesan's death stated that the property would go to her daughter or in the absence of a child to her sister, and if everything failed then it was confiscated by the state (360). However, the *ganikas* were not allowed to sell, mortgage or donate their property as they weren't the complete owners of that property. If a customer wronged a courtesan he was made to pay a heavy fine (Bhattacharji 39). Similarly, if a *ganika* refuses a customer after accepting his fees, she has to pay him double the fees (Bhattacharji 39). The laws protected the courtesans and safeguarded their interests as opposed to an unstructured and unrecognized practice where the courtesans did not have any rights and lacked a forum.

Despite accepting them as a part of the state, Kautilya did not hold the courtesans in high regard, nor did he respect them. Manu looked down upon prostitutes and forbade Brahmins from accepting food from them (Darshini 169). He believed that all prostitutes were thieves (Bhattacharji 47). *The Woman of Basrur* states several instances where the Brahmin patrons do not consume food made at Manjula's house. Indian law and religious books held courtesans in contempt and did not consider the murder of a prostitute as a crime (Bhattacharji 47).

Courtesans feature in literature as women of debauchery as well as devoutness. They have been considered as interesting subjects for literature and movies. Courtesans have a dual

image in the society, she is considered socially inferior, as well a woman with respect. Ancient texts like the *Rgveda* and *Atharvaveda* mention courtesans. The Mahabharata also cites many instances with courtesans. One is that a courtesan waited upon Dhrtarastra when his wife Gandhari was pregnant; and another is that Kauravas courtesans greeted Krishna and courtesans accompanied the army of Pandavas (Darshini 168). Buddhist texts cite instances with courtesans, Ambapali and Salavati being noteworthy courtesans in those texts. A Jain text writes that a *ganika* with a faultless body and many accomplishments could charge thousand *karsapana* and be only affordable by the wealthiest merchants (Bhattacharji 38).

The Little Clay Cart is a Sanskrit play written in 400 AD on the courtesan Vasantasena. Vasantasena is considered socially inferior but several men want her as well as hate her. Carudatta loved her but was embarrassed to acknowledge his love; this shows the perception of society towards courtesans (Aditi Singh 102). There was social stigma attached to romantic relationships with courtesans. Early medieval Kannada literature would mention the courtesans in towns. Pampa Bhārata (Kannada epic) describes the prosperity of the towns of Hastinapura and Dvāraka by depicting the presence of courtesan's streets and quarters, respectively. Another tenth-century Kannada text *Vaddārādhane* describes a magical city perceived by Chandragupta with buildings, streets full of people, elephants, horses and a courtesan's quarter (Adiga 200). *Karnātaka Kādambarī* mentions that the queen, Dhārani Mahaādēvi is accompanied by courtesans of the harem. It was a common practice to give courtesans as part of a princess' dowry (Adiga 201). *Tulu Pāddanas* portray courtesans as wealthy and greedy. Tulu folklore is written from the perspective of their male patrons, and the Siri Epic is from the dejected wife's point of view. Hostility and lack of respect towards courtesans is brought out through Tulu literature (Adiga 203).

Qazi Abdul Ghaffar wrote *Laila Ke Khutut* (Laila's Letter) as a first-person narrative of the tawaif Laila. The novelette is "against the commodification of women" (Waheed 1002).

Published in 1932 it voices Laila's outrage at her social exclusion and the double standard of society. *Umrao Jaan* is an Urdu biography published in 1899. It is based on a courtesan who met Mirza Hadi Ruswa at a poetry gathering in Lucknow. In the biography she calls herself "*bazari aurat* (woman of the market) who will never receive God's blessing of true love". She wants to redeem herself by living her life in solitude and hoping that her biography will serve the purpose of moral usefulness (Waheed 999).

The courtesans stand for beauty, elegance, sophistication, art and pleasure. India always had a strong culture of courtesans but gradually the currents changed and there was a shift in their status. Some continued to privately admire, while publicly shaming them.

This chapter will review two texts written on the lives of Indian courtesans. The first is K. Shivarama Karanth's Kannada novel *Mai Managala Suhiyalli* which is translated in English to *The Woman of Basrur* by H.Y. Sharada Prasad. Manjula, the protagonist, is a legendary courtesan who writes an autobiography about her life in the town of Basrur in Karnataka in the nineteenth century. She belonged to generations of courtesans and was talented in music. This novel is written from the perspective of her grand-niece, who finds her writing, and it reinforces her decision not to become a courtesan herself. The second text is a translation from the Hindi novel *Bazaar-e-Husn* written by Munshi Premchand and translated by Amina Azfar to English titled *Courtesan's Quarter*. This novel is set in twentieth Century Benaras, Uttar Pradesh, on Saman's life oscillating from a respectable wife to an unreputable courtesan to a widow and then a teacher who finally earns back her respect. Saman became a courtesan to earn a living after her husband abandoned her. Her family and the Hindu society disowned her until she could prove her worth with her purity, piety and service. While both the protagonists are courtesans, one was born to a family of courtesans and the other joined the profession later. This chapter will explore the lineage of courtesans examining their contributions,

transformations following colonization, the impact of power and patriarchy, the importance of their agency and their eventual decline.

3.2 Lineage of Courtesans

Over the years, courtesans have joined the profession through diverse pathways. Ancient Near East and Egypt acquired them through trade, conquests or diplomatic relations (Nielson 240). These girls had to be beautiful and talented. Early Sultanate made their captive girls perform for them (Bano 251). In pre-colonial Maharashtra the Peshwas bought two types of enslaved women, *kunibinis* for agriculture and *bateeks* for sexual labour (Shankar and Sahni 118). These were either employed by individuals or dancing houses. It can be seen that in the ancient times courtesans were mainly acquired through conquests or trade.

Daughters of courtesans would automatically follow the preceding generations and become courtesans themselves. Manjula belonged to one such family in Basrur. Manjula's mother Bhavani had committed herself to Pala, who was like her husband; Manjula's cousin Kapila was a courtesan, and Manjula's adopted daughter Shari followed their traditions. However, Shari's daughter Chandri had vowed to discontinue her family's trade. Courtesan families were matriarchal so daughters would inherit their mother's assets. This was seen in *The Woman of Basrur*, with all the women inheriting their mother's or family's house, lands and jewellery. Manjula was happy to adopt her cousin Kapila's daughter so her assets would remain within her family rather than go to others.

The other method of initiation was often of the wife who was no longer with her husband. Piro, a famed Muslim Punjabi consort from the nineteenth century did not belong to a family of courtesans but was brought to a brothel due to her pennilessness after her husband's death (Malhotra 1510). A husband's death or abandonment makes wives join the courtesan's quarter to earn a living. Bholi did not like her husband and left him, after which she became a

courtesan; she believes that "Life is a gift, it was not given to us to be spent in misery" (Premchand 40). Saman's husband Gujadhara throws her out of the house for a minor transgression of coming home late, and Saman decides to work instead of begging Gujadhara or going back to her maiden house, this is how Saman found herself in the courtesan's quarter as her last resort. Ancient India permitted wives separated from their husbands to practice the sixty-four arts they had learnt as maidens to sustain themselves (Gaur 165). This meant that women were not expected to remain married against their will and they always had a choice to leave. Mekhala Sengupta writes that most courtesans in Lucknow in the twentieth century joined the trade after facing abuse and rejection in their homes (Sengupta 126). Saman was a very good singer and with a little practice her singing captured the hearts of many patrons.

Courtesans would engage with men but did not have to get married. Manjula mentions how marriages were not a necessity for courtesans and yet they could enjoy male companionship in bed. The Kamasutra asks the courtesans to maintain the appearance of real love but to remember that this is a part of their profession and they must not get married to their patrons (Gautam 14). By the eighteenth century, marriages to courtesans were allowed and recognized, which prompted courtesans to find a groom for their daughters. They were expected to lure wealthy heirs of *nagaraka* to marry them, who would in turn have to pay a price to the bride's mother to marry her (Gaur 162). This way the courtesans would secure a respectable and comfortable life for their daughters and themselves. Manjula's grandmother Chandri was a married woman and was well respected by everyone in Basrur. Even though her mother Bhavani did not get married, she was loyal to Pala like his wife and gained respect from society. Manjula followed her hereditary trade and did not marry nor stay with just one patron throughout her life. She chose to lead an independent life, but longed for a child.

One can conclude that the lineage of courtesans is fluidic, they can either belong to a family of courtesans or become a courtesan out of choice or necessity. Neither did courtesans

have to belong to a particular religion or caste. India had Hindu and Muslim courtesans united by their art.

3.3 Changes Post Colonization

The advent of the British precipitated a series of transformation within the nation particularly concerning courtesans and courtesan-ship in India. The major change being the fall of Rajas (kings), as they were either replaced or were kept as nominal heads with no power. The Kings who would patronise courtesans could no longer do so, which pushed many courtesans towards prostitution to earn their keep. Feldman and Gordon (2006) comment on the shift away from courtesans, “[t]he increasing shift of feudal patronage to the locale of the salon was paralleled by the rise of mercantile wealth as well as the powerful impetus of reform and the rise of nationalism” (318). *The Woman of Basrur* begins by telling the reader that they did not have kings anymore, instead wealthy merchants from Basrur or other towns would patronize the courtesans (Karanth 2). The fall of the kingdoms coupled with national reform movements brought about multiple changes in the system.

The dancers of the Indian courts were called *nautch* by the British. Nautch is the distortion of the word *naach* meaning dance. They could not differentiate between different Indian dances and considered all of them as nautch, not particularly segregating dances associated with courtesans. Similarly by the nineteenth century they conveniently tagged all women belonging in the public realm as tawaif, which was the generic term for a whole range of women ranging from dancers, singers, entertainers and prostitutes (Bano 261). Everyone was put together irrespective of their specific function. Sarah Waheed (2014) seconds this by adding that “the female entertainer, now understood as a prostitute, was no longer a person with a trade or craft, but a commodified body” (995). The British did not attempt to understand the Indian culture and wanted to white wash everything. They wanted to make it convenient

for them by clubbing all women and Indian dances under a single category. Instead of understanding the nuances of the nation, they preferred to bulldoze over the culture and replace it with their own.

Indian literature has expressed their anger at their cultural ignorance. Lata Singh (2007) writes about the play *Azizun Nisa San Sattavan Ka Kissa (A Courtesan and 1857 Revolt)* written by Tripurari Sharma, the protagonist Azizun is a courtesan, who stresses that one has to undergo rigorous training to become a courtesan and just leaving your home is not enough (1678). She is humiliated when the British call her house a brothel, "I am not a prostitute. I am a dancer. I am an artist... I am not in the flesh trade" (Lata Singh 1678). The British categorising courtesans as sex workers devalued their artistic skills and degraded their status.

The British looked down upon courtesans and equated them to prostitutes, they also tagged men who visited courtesans as backward and uncultured. They tried to defame the courtesans, their quarters, culture and eventually get rid of them. Lata Singh (2007) seconds this by stating that the British ignored the artistic and creative quality of the *kothas* (quarters) and strictly equated them to brothels (1679). Ironically the British were not against prostitution, they encouraged that so the British men away from their families would have access to sex. They would pick healthy and beautiful women from the *kothas* and put them into garrisons for the European soldiers; this further "dehumanized the profession, stripping it off its cultural function" (Sengupta 134). This also marked the shift in the colonizers attitude towards the prostitutes in India;

The prostitute had to be simultaneously alienated and tolerated, abused and accommodated, as part of the maintenance of colonial order...These inherent contradictions have become a part of how prostitution functions in India. (Shankar and Sahni 126)

The British introduced their Victorian moral values and religion. The image of female entertainers who were desired by men but also culturally rooted did not fit into their social structure, so they wanted to replace that with virtuous women who would get married and settle into their homely duties. In *Courtesan's Quarter* Padam Singh, an educated lawyer and councilman, described the courtesan's quarter as "a reflection of our blemished culture, it's the living picture of our demonic depravity" (159). The Indian middle class was influenced by these ideas of morality and society and organized Anti-Nautch movements that threatened the patronage and livelihood of courtesans (Qureshi 360).

It was no longer considered respectable for women to perform in public, those who still dared to do so were labelled as prostitutes. Ideal Indian womanhood described marriage as virtue and prostitution as vice and all the women who did not marry were looked down upon by society (Waheed 1008). Bithal Das accuses Saman of disgracing Hindus by becoming a courtesan; he describes the qualities of Hindu women, "It is their love of virtue and self respect that brighten the face of the Hindu nations" (Premchand 66). Manjula's grandniece Chandri was educated and did not want to join her family's hereditary profession. Instead, she wanted to become a teacher, "I shall run away from home or jump into a well. But I shall never feed on leftovers like a dog" (Karanth 27). This denotes social changes that were happening in India.

By the nineteenth century, India witnessed social movements like the anti-dance and anti-nautch movements that associated all courtesans with loose morals, low culture and prostitution (Chakravorthy 117). *Courtesan's Quarter* describes the movements against courtesans in great detail. Bithal Das, a prominent member of the society had set up a reformist association to rid the society of prostitutes and their dance/music performances, Padam Singh was also a part of this association.

The twentieth century witnessed a movement to remove prostitutes from city spaces as they were considered a threat to moral order and marriages (Waheed 995). Premchand situates

his novel around this movement, "Instead of keeping temptation out of sight we adorn and display them...where there ought to be libraries and centers for improvement of character, we allow instead these beauty marts" (93).

Padam Singh, a member of the Benaras municipal board puts forth an Anti-Nautch proposal to the board's eighteen members. The proposal recommended heavy taxation of dance functions; denying permission to conduct such functions in public spaces; denying entry to courtesans and prostitutes in public parks and gardens and lastly to remove them from city spaces and rehabilitating them in the outskirts of the city (Premchand 194). One of the board members Syed Shafqat Ali strongly suggested an amendment to this proposal which would have a provision for courtesans to continue living in the city if within nine months they would either get married or learn a new skill to earn a living instead of prostitution (Premchand 194). Indian society no longer had a place for courtesans if they remained unmarried or continued their profession.

It is interesting to note that while Syed Shafat Ali considered letting courtesans continue living in the city, some board members thought that the courtesans would misuse this amendment by using a different trade like sewing or a shop as a cover to continue courtesanship. The distrust associated with courtesans by these men is a direct outcome of the Britisher's attitude towards them, which percolated to educated Indian men.

Sethji makes a valid point where he believed that there has to be a long time solution for courtesanship instead of asking them to stop and move out overnight, he believed that "the cure for the disease lies in its treatment and not its death...can be reformed through education, civility and tact" (Premchand 135). Similarly, Padam Singh felt that they would lose their capacity to change if they were treated with austerity and giving them a fair chance was required for their betterment. Considering all sides of the argument, Padam Singh submits the proposal with the amendment. Three months after its acceptance, no new shops were seen in

the Courtesan's quarter; neither did most of them show any inclination to marry, and most left their salons to move to the outskirts of the city. This indicates how the courtesans were not ready or prepared to give up their hereditary profession very easily. This also shows how courtesans were not deceptive as some perceived them to be and did not lie to continue living in their old quarters, nor were they open to marriage. The novel ends with a hope for a brighter future for the courtesans, Indian women and India.

Colonizers significantly affected the lives of courtesans; while some may believe that these changes had their best interest in mind, others will not take the interference kindly. However, it cannot be denied that the British spearheaded laws to prevent prostitution and exploitation in India. Another movement to gain momentum post-independence was the introduction of music and dance into middle-class homes through schools and public performances (Qureshi 360); this caused a shift in focus from courtesans as the sole producers of art and further reduced their significance in the social fabric.

3.4 Custodians of Culture and Contributions

Music and art were an integral part of the courtesan's life. They were trained to entertain patrons with their singing, dancing and poetry. Manjula and Saman were trained singers. Manjula, who belonged to a family of courtesans, was trained since she was a small child, while Saman received training for a few months after she decided to become a courtesan. Both of them used their talents to entertain patrons. For the courtesans, art is not an extracurricular activity that they would do to pass their time, but it "permeates their lives" (ed Feldman and Gordon 8).

The courtesans were considered as the human manifestations of dance and music. They have contributed towards the development and subsequent preservation of their art forms. Smita Surebaker (2012) adds how they continued to pursue their art in spite of societal stigma

and condemnation (370). The courtesan's *kotha* (quarter or salon) serves as the hub of music and dance and perfectly epitomises female-led musical production.

While the courtesans performed at the kothas/salons, they also performed at several private events. Premchand wrote about courtesans performing during religious functions at the temple, wedding ceremonies and private functions at people's houses, like Bholi at Padam Singh's house during holi. Manjula's mother and she herself performed during the annual car festival at Mahalingeshwar temple. Courtesans from Basrur were invited to sing and dance for weddings of importance in the neighbourhood villages. The courtesans monetarily benefited from this while the patrons gained social standing. Manjula writes about the role of courtesans in society in her autobiography, "People from our profession cannot cut ourselves away from the society. We have to be seen and heard, go where we are invited. It is society that gives us our fame and money. It is society that makes us the objects of covetous eyes" (Karanth 54).

Courtesans would learn music and dance from their mothers from a very young age. Manjula inherited the same from her mother, who taught her Karnatak compositions and hymns. Her male music teacher Radhakrishna Buwa supplemented this by training her in Hindustani music. Male musicians play an important role in training and also arranging their performances. Padmanabha studied under Buwa with Manjula and later played the tambura for Manjula's performances. Sometimes he would arrange for places where Manjula could perform and manage her musical career. Feldman and Gordon (2006) comments on the role of male musicians, "[f]ar more than mere accompanists, these men were in fact indispensable as co-producers of the tawa'if's performance, both in an immediate and in a more global sense" (322). The musicians were not mere trainers or accompanists but like a team member and also a manager of sorts.

Apart from entertaining the patrons through music and probably sex, courtesans were sought after for their intelligent companionship. While the wives would be occupied at home

with their household duties and the family, they seldom found the time to groom themselves or give their undivided attention to their husband. This made the beautiful and intelligent courtesan a fitting companion to male patrons. Manjula's patron Ulloor tells her that his wife does not give any thought or effort to beauty and appearances and hence he got acquainted with Manjula who was considered an embodiment of beauty and grace. Courtesans would also sing for their patrons, and their voice was considered as conflicted as themselves, "was she "Madonna or a whore, lady or harlot"?" (Feldman 105). Men would also visit the courtesans to train themselves in manners and etiquettes. At the meeting to discuss the removal of courtesans from city spaces, Kanwar Singh made a stand on the same topic, "It is my belief that unless a man has served his apprenticeship in the school of Beauty he cannot acquire elegance. In the olden days people learned suavity, eloquence, and charm in the same school" (Premchand 134). In the words of Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (2006) the courtesans provided their patrons with "sensual gendered cultural experience" (322). They not only entertained the men but would also have intelligent conversations with them and trained them in mannerisms and etiquettes.

Apart from their contribution to art, courtesans played a big role in furthering the Indian economy. They were connoisseurs of luxurious items, home decor, clothing and jewellery. These were either gifted to them by their patrons or bought by themselves to adorn their houses or enhance their personal beauty. Saman was amazed at the adornments in Bholi's house, like carpets, chandeliers and other elaborate embellishments. Manjula and Bholi both possessed expensive jewellery, clothes, painting, and music instruments, which contributed to the Indian economy.

The courtesans cannot only be related with "sensuality and materialism; they would often partake in philanthropy (Surebankar 370). In her will Manjula gave half her property to her adopted daughter Shari and another half to the Shiva Temple. The mere act of giving half

of her property to the temple highlights the philanthropic nature of Manjula. In Premchand's novel, after the courtesans had vacated their quarters in the city, Mehboob Jan, one of the old prostitutes, donated most of her assets to the orphanage built for courtesan's children to provide them with a better life. Saman dedicated herself towards the same orphanage 'Seva Sadan' and helped many girls improve their lives. The courtesans were indeed good-natured citizens of India.

The courtesans have kept the musical tradition alive and significantly contributed to the development of Indian music and dance. The courtesans developed several forms of music like *gazals*, *thumri* and free verse (Sengupta 127). In addition to this their dance forms beautifully and aptly symbolised the texts and music. The courtesans conceived the dance form of kathak, this was later modified to suit the Hindu masses post-independence.

In royal courts Kathak performance began with a salami or thatha and the performance included Muslim style headgear with Thumri and Ghazal music... the performance is brahminized. The history and identity of Kathak is changed post independence and is separated from its original connection with Muslim courtesans (Chakravorty 119).

The courtesans invented several music and dance forms and attempted to further them for as long as they could. They have been recognised as "preservers and performers of the high culture of the court but actively shaped the developments in Hindustani music and kathak dance styles" (Singh 1678). Premchand's character Sethji puts forth an essential argument to others in the committee, "it is the very community...who are the guardians of this heavenly blessing (Indian music). Do you want to lose this precious heritage by destroying that community?" (Premchand 135). The community of courtesans are valuable members of the society who have contributed culturally and even economically to the development of India.

3.5 Aspirations and Ambitions

Courtesans are often viewed through the narrow lens of sex work, seldom considering their life, dreams and ambitions beyond that. It is assumed that every courtesan and the next of their kin will dedicate herself to entertain her patron and her own aspirations were never considered. Both the texts shed light on this untapped and undiscussed aspect of their lives;

You'd be surprised to learn how much their aspirations are governed by love of religion, distaste for the repulsive life that they lead, and longing for an improvement in their lifestyle...All they need is some support to cling to, while they pull themselves out of the dark recesses of the underground. (Premchand 224)

Bholi wanted a happy and independent life; hence she left her wealthy husband of six months and became a courtesan. She liked singing and wanted to do that for a living instead of being stuck in an unhappy marriage. Saman's husband asked her to leave his house and she moved to the courtesan's quarter to support herself with her singing. Even though initially Saman was lured by the wealth and glamour associated with this life, she became a courtesan as a last resort. Saman never went beyond singing and was never sexually involved with her patrons. She managed to maintain her celibacy till the very end, proving that she did not want a life filled with carnal pleasures. When she was provided with an alternate option of earning her keep, she quit courtesan-ship and eventually began looking after 'Seva Sadan' an orphanage for the courtesans' daughters.

On the other hand, all that Manjula desired was to become a great musician, "my overpowering ambition was to earn a name as a musician and not on making a mark in the trade of my caste" (Karanth 49). Manjula had no way to pursue her singing without continuing as a courtesan, hence she took pleasure in her singing while also pursuing courtesan-ship. Her adopted daughter, Shari's ambition was to be a theatre actor. Shari was able to chase her dreams

without worrying about financial stability as Manjula had provided for her. However she had to return when things didn't work out for her. Shari's daughter Chandri abhorred her family profession and had no intention of joining it. She wanted to become a teacher instead. After reading Manjula's autobiography, Chandri was even more determined not to become a courtesan. Manjula's family showcases varied aspirations and while Manjula and Shari could somewhat act on their desires, Chandri may not be able to do so. The society still attached stigma to courtesan's families and societal pressure might prevent Chandri from entering a different profession than she was born into.

This section has uncovered how the courtesans in the texts were unhappy with their role in society. While some could take matters into their own hands and decide their future, some had to go by the flow. The question of their own dreams is seldom addressed as it is assumed that they would not aspire outside their tradition, and yet they do. Their lives are a culmination of societal norms and patriarchal power more than their personal choice.

3.6 Yokes of Patriarchal Power

Courtesans were educated, independent and strong women, and one would consider them not affected by patriarchy, but the truth is far from it. Patriarchal power has been at play from the beginning, from joining the profession; to pleasing men and eventually forced to give it up to suit the modern and educated man. Men and their ideals have dominated courtesans and their lives in several ways. This section will study the influence of patriarchy in their lives and also draw parallels between the wife and a courtesan.

3.6.1 Clout of Patriarchy

The courtesans paved the way for women to achieve financial independence by being “the first paid working women and the nascent start of female empowerment in society”

(Sengupta 125). While they are the very first working women documented in the world, they are also the first example of commodification of women. Courtesans were viewed as a product that was consumed by men and something they could purchase for their own entertainment. Hagman (1977) describes the image of the courtesans, “[s]he is portrayed ambiguously as a socially inferior creature and as a woman evoking respect and fear. Her sin is her power and independence, fertile strength unharnessed by man” (31).

The courtesan's life was very different from that of the usual Indian woman and the Indian society reacted differently to them. The courtesans had a dual image in society; while they were publicly condemned for their loose morals, at the same time, they were also privately admired. The men who visit them in private sometimes despise them in public. Saman was smitten by Saman but could never publicly accept that he visited her or admired her because he feared societal judgement. Men from reputed families felt shame to publicly acknowledge their interactions with courtesans. Nevertheless, at the same time, patronizing courtesans was a matter of prestige. Karanth's novel elaborates that “[h]aving a mistress from this class was itself a mark of distinction and rated above wealth measured in gold or landed property” (2). This further layers the image of courtesans who were revered and wanted as well as ignored and rejected.

In the ancient times Indian women were not put under a single tag, but their identities and qualities were heterogeneous. After the arrival of the British, a single image of an ideal Indian woman was projected. This woman stood for honour, chastity, obedience and represented her family, community and also the nation. This woman was morally regulated and hence the sexually free courtesan could not fit into this new image. The British and Indian men started to reject the courtesan. Bithal Das, a character from *Courtesan's Quarter* convinced Saman to leave her new-found profession behind by telling her that she has brought shame

upon the nation. Bithal Das was also a founding member of a reformist association that wanted to bring a stop to the courtesan culture.

Patriarchy also sought to control their reproduction to protect male interests. Manjula's patron Ulloor told her that it was better for her figure that she did not have any children or she would also have sagging breasts and creased waists like the wives. The children born to courtesans were not given their father's name or identity but shared their mother's and could not claim their father's property or fortune. While the courtesans did have a certain level of independence, they could never fully be independent as they could not take all their decisions and were still dependent on the men.

The courtesan was dependent on men, but never on one man like her father, husband or son; she was not dependent on one constant man, but her male patrons. Pala was Manjula's father, but she did not depend on him as she did on her mother. Saman depended on her father and then her husband, but after becoming a courtesan, she did not rely on one man. The social identity of the courtesans was constructed with their association with the patrons, even if it was only temporary, unlike the wives who were permanently invested in their husband's social identity (Feldman and Gordon 317). Manjula's first patron was Vasudeva Pai; after his bankruptcy, she formed a bond with Sabraya Ulloor followed by Subha Rao, Nanjappa, Sheena and Ananda Tirtha as she was not bound by monogamy. Saman had several patrons as well and was not dependent on just one. Manjula was in the search of a man who gave her sexual pleasure and happiness, and in this process she matured as a woman and a courtesan.

The Kāmasūtra required the courtesans to “set up a narrative of love before it is followed by sex” (Gautam 14) as *kāma* denoted pleasure and love. The courtesan was expected to mould herself as a wife to show her loyalty towards her patron (Gautam 18), yet not behave entirely like a wife. Manjula's mother was not married to Pala, but she was monogamous and had a child with him. She was called 'garati' (housewife) a sought-after title by courtesans, "My

mother, by her faithfulness to Pala, had earned it" (Karanth 35). The courtesans are also expected to tell their patron that she wants to have his child as a gesture of their love and loyalty, even though the child will not get the father's name or any rights. Pala acknowledged Manjula and was fond of her but did not give her his name, but later after her mother's death, she got possession of some land that he had made in her mother's name. Feldman and Gordon (2006) reiterate how her children would not get their father's acknowledgement and would share her name and fate (317). Courtesan-ship is passed on through matrilineal lines and not through the usual patrilineality, which shows that the patriarchal society can modify rules to benefit them.

A tawa'if could share her patron's social life but nothing beyond that. The courtesans could not share a home, name or food with their patrons. Saman and Manjula had lives separate from their patrons. They lived in their own accommodations and did not share anything beyond a few moments together. Courtesans were equated to the furniture of the royal palace whose only purpose is beautification and entertainment. Adiga (2014) further adds about women's predicament, "Women are perceived as plaything by the men, their views are immaterial... the attitude towards the courtesan is of benign tolerance" (201). Manjula had expectations of an intellectual and emotional relationship with her first patron Pai. However, the relationship was predominantly physical, and she realized that the mind had no place in a courtesan's life. Manjula felt that she could exist only when she combined her mind and body, but that was impossible for her as her patrons only wanted her body and not her mind. The courtesans were only considered worthy for entertaining their patrons, and no one was interested in their minds as much as their bodies. Bhavani taught her daughter Manjula that her primary purpose was to sell her body and "when that body is sold nothing of me is left" (Karanth 37). Saman was celebrated for her youth, beauty and melodious voice and nothing else mattered to the men who visited her. The patrons were only interested in their bodies and their talent, they were not

interested in having an equal relationship or deep intellectual conversations with them. The courtesans were treated as moveable property and control over their sexuality was a way of controlling their labour power required for urban development and keeping vigilance over them (Roy 128). Several men were regular at the courtesan's quarter, yet the bill to remove the courtesans from the city limits was passed and attempts to stop the courtesans from performing at functions and weddings had also been started. The Indian men thought that courtesans were a hindrance to the image and growth of India.

Courtesans often lack the opportunity to take matters into their own hands. They are not given the agency to make their own decisions in the matter of their patrons or their life. Could Manjula and Saman make their own choices, or were they manipulated? Manjula could choose her patrons at all stages of her life, but she did not have any control over the relationship she would have with them. Manjula was also obliged to perform at functions and the temple, even if it was not her own choice. Manjula has shown agency and ownership in her life choices, but everything was not in her control. Saman lacked agency when she was married off and also when her husband asked her to leave the house. She always envied the courtesan's decadent lifestyle, and while one could say that she chose to become a courtesan; however, it was not her willingness but a path she desperately picked because her husband left her and she had no home to return. Saman was also persuaded into quitting and living in the widow's ashram and later she was made to leave that as well. She was made to leave Shanta's house and finally, she managed the orphanage. Saman lacked agency and she could not make any choices or decisions in her life.

Courtesans challenging and breaking gender roles have made them victims of men's violence, fear and abuse (ed Feldman and Gordon 11). Oppression can be of different types: physical, emotional, sexual and “men are usually able to secure the apparent consent of the very women they oppress” (Sultana 3). Manjula would meekly follow Pai upstairs even if she

were not interested in sex at that moment, but she thought that it was the only way she pays for the things he gave her. Pai gathered her unwilling consent as he was her provider. Saman had to entertain all the men who visited her even though she was not interested because that is how she could sustain herself.

Both texts reflect the mindset of Indian society at that time and their treatment of women and courtesans. This mindset then gets presented as Indian culture, which is practised even now. In the words of Bahleida (2015) culture is a culmination of ideology and patriarchy, reflecting society's mindset (22).

Saman was ill-treated as a wife, gains admiration as a courtesan, and is not accepted as a widow but is accepted once she adopts Gandhian ideologies and runs the orphanage (Shandilya 275-285). The unkind treatment of women by society is seen clearly through Saman's life; she was punished for her mistakes and not accepted until she dedicated herself to the cause of the nation. Saman could not be accepted back into society as she did not fit into the image of an Indian woman after her transgressions; instead, she was kept in the periphery at the orphanage and was given respect but still not included in the mainstream society, "Saman suffers and evolves from a wife to courtesan to widow, each were considered false ideals for womanhood which she discards before becoming a nationalist subject" (Shandilya 282). Shandilya (2016) further adds how Saman only became a nationalist subject towards the end when she detached herself from material objects and sensory pleasures to achieve salvation and self-realization (282).

Courtesans constantly challenge the social structures and gain power, but at the same time the same social structures do not give them access to privileges that the upper castes have and continue to "stand at the margins of power" (ed Feldman and Gordon 6). The courtesans assumed many so-called upper caste styles and habits, differentiates them from common prostitutes. Manjula's mother adopted upper caste behavior with Pala, she would not talk a lot

in his presence, neither would she laugh and was devoid of individuality in his presence. This was similar to how upper caste wives behaved around their husbands and hence Bhavani was called a "garati" and alienated from other courtesans. In spite of all her efforts Bhavani remained in the margin of power as she was never acknowledged as Pala's wife and neither could share a home with him like his wife did. Manjula's patrons would not consume food cooked in her house unless she hired a Brahmin cook to cook for them because they may lose their caste. Some men still did not eat cooked food at her house as it was feared that courtesans might mix strange drugs into the food. Saman on the other hand was an upper-caste woman who became a courtesan. Bithal Das made Saman feel guilty for turning into a courtesan and disgracing the Brahmins and the Hindu nation. He tells her that Brahmin women tolerate cruelty and brutality for the sake of their caste, while she brought shame upon her caste by becoming a courtesan. Society could not accept an upper caste courtesan amongst them as it went against the image of a Brahmin woman. The Mughal state would punish women with prostitution when they ran around in bazaars and lanes of the town unveiled or if they quarrelled with their husbands (Bano 257). Becoming a courtesan was considered a punishment, and social shame, so when Saman became a courtesan she was shamed by the Hindu society and forced to make amends.

Manjula and Saman sang not only for their patrons and for their upkeep but also for self-promotion and self-preservation within the patriarchal society. Their singing helped them network and find new patrons which can be clearly seen in the case of both the characters. They also sang for themselves as singing brought joy and the feeling of independence.

During the ancient times, the courtesans would be shy, submissive and fearful but later they transformed into assertive, independent, educated and immensely proud women (Feldman and Gordon 173). This can be seen in Manjula's family as her mother Bhavani was shy, fearful and submissive, but Manjula had a solid and confident personality who tried to take her own

life's decisions and solely did not rely on her patrons. Feldman and Gordon (2006) recognize that the courtesan's power lies in their self-worth and self-confidence (173). In the orphanage, Saman teaches the daughters of courtesans to reject earthly Gods (husbands) and embrace the lord of the universe instead. This shift is due to Saman's rejection of her previous roles (Shandilya 285) and embracing her independence and self-worth.

Hagman (1977) writes how the courtesan's sexual freedom was seen as a threat to the social structure that demanded loyalty and commitment from women (36). Society could not digest that the courtesans could lead a life of independence and not have to marry and dedicate their lives to family. The patriarchal society bound the courtesans and yet also managed to live their life on their own terms. They chose independence over marriage and chose to be their own queens instead of being bound by household duties. They attempted to build their own future and not depend on others unlike the traditional wife whom her husband and household duties bound.

3.6.2 Courtesans v/s Wives

The new society could not control the courtesan's financial independence, education and sexuality unlike that of the wives, hence the former were looked down upon. In spite of being women, the courtesans were not involved with domestic duties or had to bear children, instead they were financially independent and not compelled to marry. The courtesan has always been pitted against the wife. Was the wife morally superior? Or the courtesan more independent? In Shadilya's (2016) words, the uneducated, modest and veiled wife is contrasted with the unveiled, immodest and most talented courtesan (278). While they are not as different as chalk and cheese, neither are they similar, but they do share some common traits. The *Kamasutra* writes that the wife and courtesan are "neither sharply dichotomous nor similar.

The broader picture that emerges is the complex grid of behavioral patterns and hierarchies and relationships between and amongst wives and courtesans” (Gaur 166).

Courtesans undergo intensive training and education in reading, writing, literature, music and art. Married women cannot be trained similarly as they are busy with domestic duties, and hence the courtesans are more skilled and educated than wives. Men flock to the courtesans to have conversations which they cannot have with their wives and also to get entertained with their musical talent which their wives lacked. Manjula and Saman would sing to their patrons to entertain them. However in the twentieth century, women started getting educated and could provide cultured companionship to men, reducing the need for courtesans. The wives were now educated and could have intellectual conversations with their husbands which they couldn't do earlier.

Wives were believed to be chaste and pure while the courtesan was considered the opposite. They were shamed for having freedom which the wives could not even dream of (Aditi Singh 99). The only time society respected courtesans was when they became lawfully wedded wives. Manjula's grandmother Chandri was a married woman and was very well respected, her mother was not married but lived like Pala's wife and gathered the same respect. Saman was hailed as honourable and respectable when she was Gujadhara's loyal pious wife and the moment she became a courtesan the society shamed her. Premchand's novel highlights that marriage was the only way a Hindu woman would gain respect. While Karanth also upholds the sanctity of marriage in his novel, he pictures the wives to be a sacrifice to their husbands. They would do as they were told without expecting anything in return, and continue to serve the family while the husbands would be busy with the courtesans. Both the novels give respect to the wives and look down upon the courtesans, but the wives lack agency or admiration, which the courtesans would easily obtain.

Wives were expected to bear the consequences of their husbands' actions and should sacrifice themselves and their ornaments for their husbands (Aditi Singh 105). In contrast, the courtesans possessed many ornaments and did not sacrifice themselves for their patrons. When Manjula's patron Pai became bankrupt, she did not give up her ornaments to save him, while Pai had tried to take her ornaments on the pretext of resetting them, but Manjula had held on to them and not given them to Pai. Saman left when her husband asked her to leave and became a courtesan to fend for herself instead of suffering due to her husband's mistakes. Bithal Das reprimands her for her actions; "a Brahmin woman tolerates all this for the sake of her family and her caste. To bear misfortune with fortitude is the obligation of a Brahmin woman" (Premchand 66). Manjula's and Saman's behaviour can be contrasted with those of wives. Wifely devotion is not supposed to decrease even if the husband is unjust to his wife, and she must always remain devoted to him. Shandilya (2016) quotes Premchand's essay 'The Divorce Bill of Harsingh Gaud' criticising the society which forgives the husband's faults and cruelty to his wife and he is still able to assert his right over his wife or get married again (277). The double standards in the treatment of men as compared to women can be seen clearly.

Wives depended on their husbands economically while the courtesans earned through their labour and ensured that their patrons paid for their upkeep. Suppose one views the courtesans through an economic lens. In that case, their body can be considered a form of currency and is comparable to a married woman who also trades her body for a home and family with her husband. Regarding Pai, Manjula justifies her having sex with him even when she is unwilling because that was her way of paying him for the food he gave her (Karanth 64). Saman, as a wife, was expected to follow her husband's commands because he provided her with shelter and food. The predicament of the courtesan and the wife are similar when it comes to the exchange of their body whether sexually or by toiling for the house in exchange for food,

shelter, clothes etc by the men. In a way the wife and courtesan is similar as both trade their bodies for security, but the wife does it once with one man and a courtesan has several patrons.

It is considered that the courtesan has failed in her trade if she has fallen in love and gotten married (Roy 130). Karanth contests this belief as Manjula's grandmother was not considered a failure for being married but instead, she was respected. Manjula on the other hand did not wish to be married. A courtesan is considered independent yet discouraging her to marry is going against the very independence of choice she should possess (Roy 130). Saman and Bholi could lead independent lives after they left their husbands and became courtesans, as the shackles of marriage did not tie them to their husbands anymore.

A remarried woman is compared to a courtesan as she falls in between them as a man marries her for pleasure and not to bear children. The man's relationship with his wife was never about pleasure but childbearing to carry the family's lineage (Gautam 12-13). Hence they went to courtesans for pleasure while their wives tended to their families and children at home. On the other hand, wives who were not tied to their marriage and could practice the sixty-four arts to earn their living after separation from their husbands (Gaur 165). Saman was not formally taught the sixty-four arts, but she learnt singing and practiced that to earn her living.

The courtesan's independence was contrasted with the wife's suffering under male oppression. Binodini Dasi blames "economic and circumstantial inequalities between women" behind the difference of life between wife and courtesan (ed Feldman and Gordon 175). Manjula's patrons' wives suffered at home while their husbands enjoyed courtesans. Karanth makes references of the wives' hands being rough as tough hide due to the washing and scrubbing; having sagging chests and creased waists due to child bearing; not being well dressed or groomed ; often starved and toiled like a beast without the husband showing any consideration for his wife. The courtesans were economically independent to spend money on themselves as well as their patrons regularly showered them with gifts. The unkept Saman

under her husband bloomed like a beautiful flower once she had money and resources to spend on herself. Das is right to say that a wife is economically and circumstantially different to the courtesan, which is the only thing that changes their fate drastically. Saman realized that societal restrictions on being a wife restricted her ability to live life to the fullest while Bholi Bai did not have to adhere to any rules and could live life on her own terms.

Premchand questions the importance of *purdah* in his novel. For Saman the *purdah* was like shackles on her feet and the constant surveillance was suffocating her and forcing her to be devoted to her husband even though her husband was undeserving of it. She remained tied to her husband due to the fear of public opinion and not due to her personal choice. She felt free after she left his house and carved her own identity. Nonetheless, the fear of public opinion is what made her leave her trade and shift to a widow's ashram' "How well respected you were, people looked at you with reverence; but now it is sinful to look at you" (Premchand 66). Saman was greatly affected by society's opinion of her and made her decisions keeping that in mind, and it was not always her own choice.

Manjula realized that courtesans robbed and defrauded the wife who should have had full right to her husband's love instead of sharing it with her husband's courtesans. The courtesan's and wife's paths met as the husband would visit courtesans and the latter knew that their patron was married but it was acceptable. The courtesan could not get jealous or lay claims on her patron, who sometimes visited many courtesans, just as the wife could not stop her husband from going to other women.

The fate of wives and courtesans are as intertwined as they are separated, and one cannot view one without considering the other. The question of moral superiority and purity will always be there but both suffer under patriarchy and male dominance.

3.7 Representing the Community

The community of courtesans is one of the oldest, but there is barely any literature written on them or by them. As the community dwindles, their stories will get lost in the abyss. Taniya Roy (2012) makes an important point by stating how silence is not an absence of voice or story but is a voice of its own as it can be linked to suppression (Roy 130). The courtesans were not given the power to tell their story to the world and what we know of them is mainly through histories written by men. Their portrayal can be compared to that of the women of the *Jātakas*, which were written by men.

The educated Indian men were influenced by Victorian values and considered courtesans as the 'fallen woman' and subsequent anti-nauch discourses were dominating Indian literature for a long time. Urdu literature tried to counter these and portray courtesans as innocent victims, showing a different side to their lives. However the courtesans were written about from a detached point of view, usually serving the interest of the male patrons. Hence the language and plot was suited for the male gaze and was written using the male assumptions and beliefs. In recent times there has been a shift in writing where courtesans are seen from positions of solidarity, independent identity and agency; and challenge the “moralist bourgeois condemnation of courtesans” (ed Feldman and Gordon 320). This shift in writing opens up the world of the courtesans and they can be viewed beyond beautiful women who captured the heart of men. Such writing will expose their true selves, discuss their ambitions and feelings.

The Kannada title of Karanth's work can be translated into "In The Whirlpool of Body and Mind", which captures the essence of Manjula's life and writing at the heart of the novel (Naikar 393). When Chandri read Manjula's autobiography, she was impressed by her honest, bold and confessional writing. Chandri understood the life of Manjula and courtesans in general. Manjula did not write to be published or even for her future generation as she did not

have any biological children, but she wrote for herself and to assert her agency and voice. The act of writing and the act of reading are significant in Karanth's work. Frantz Fanon believed that when one writes about the past, one must do so to open up the future for action and better opportunities (187). Manjula's writing benefits Chandri, and her resolve not to join her family trade becomes stronger after reading about Manjula's life. Her writing has helped the future generation to take a knowledgeable decision about family trade instead of believing hearsay or making baseless assumptions.

Saman, Manjula and all the courtesans represented in the two texts were misunderstood, unheard and severely judged. They never got the opportunity for the world to hear about their lives, their difficulties, aspirations and so on. Manjula managed to write about herself but did not publish it to the world so she still remained in the shadows and had her words immortalized in her autobiography. Several other courtesans never got the opportunity even to do that.

Post-independence only those courtesans who transformed themselves into modern-day concert performers had the agency and voice to take their legacy and story ahead; alternatively, those who could not mould themselves remained in the shadows (ed Feldman and Gordon 320). This is why literature written on them, by them or from their perspective, is essential in ensuring the courtesans are not misunderstood or forgotten, especially in the twenty-first century, where the number of courtesans is dwindling.

3.8 Fall of the Courtesans

There occurred a shift in perspective regarding courtesans by the tenth century from tolerance to hostility (Adiga 202). Furthermore, the last decade of the nineteenth century went through a drastic change as the British were preoccupied with the question of women's status in India, which led to formulations of laws against sati, in favour of remarriage, female education and also anti-nautch laws. Modern educated Indian men abhorred the immoral

courtesan and wanted to rid society of them. *Courtesan's Quarter* demonstrates the process of forming the bill banning courtesans from living inside the city limits and performing for public events, to the passing of the bill and the execution. The lives of the courtesans does not remain the same after the bill gets passed.

Emancipation of the immoral courtesans was only through spiritual redemption of the “whore” to give them a better shot at life; there are examples like Mary Magdalene in the Christian tradition, Ambapali in Buddhism, and Piro who is a Muslim but takes asylum under Guru Gulab Das (Malhotra 1507). Saman’s redemption happens after she becomes a widow, serves her sister and brother-in-law and then serves the orphanage. Then, she was considered worthy and pure, yet not good enough to be reintroduced to mainstream society.

What happened to the courtesans after they were banned from performing at salons and not allowed to practice their profession? All India Radio, theatre and cinema provided opportunities to some courtesans ready to reinvent themselves to suit the modern entertainment market (Chakravorty 117). Peter Manuel (1988) writes how talented and famous courtesans could support themselves through concert performances as "concert halls replaced courtesan's salons as the home of the fine arts" (101). Gazal has evolved from courtesan salons to concerts and popular movie songs as it has been adapted and changed to suit the current market. Eventually courtesans were slowly pushed out of the socio-cultural platforms as new India did not want to accommodate scandalous women with immoral pasts. Apart from meagre representations in movies or literature, the courtesans became a thing of the past.

Some women belonging to families that traditionally earned their livelihood by sexual labour or entertainment had started performing in the dance bars in Mumbai, "they redeploy these hereditary skills to suit the new market of dance bars provided by globalization" (Dalwai 131). They utilized their skills in a modern, legally acceptable environment to help them be financially independent and have a better life for themselves and their families. The problem

arose when dance bars were banned in Maharashtra in 2005, as these women lost their only source of livelihood. Dalwai (2013) writes how dance bars, alcohol or even prostitution was not banned; only dance was banned, which pushed a lot of these dancing women into prostitution (132). The practice of dancing for entertainment was prohibited once again, leading to the decline of courtesan-ship.

The immoral, corrupt, greedy courtesans were identified as “struggling against an unjust order and the moral tyranny” of the society by the third decade of the twentieth century (Waheed 988). The courtesans have suffered through the hands of the society and are continuing to do so. Over time with changes in the laws and society the community of courtesans have either given up on courtesan-ship or are a part of the sex trade in order to survive. However, the era of courtesans has come to an end.

3.9 Conclusion

Manjula and Saman became courtesans in different circumstances and belonged to different states and eras, yet both of their lives were controlled by society and influenced heavily by patriarchy. Manjula was bold enough to make her own choices and lead life on her own terms, Saman was forced to make choices as per her circumstances. Strangely Manjula was respected after her death in spite of being a courtesan all her life, while Saman had to scamper for her share of respect in spite of her sacrifices and attempt at redemption. Those were still different times, the later courtesans have suffered even more.

The changes in forms of prostitution are contingent social responses emerging from the grassroots(...)When did a devadasi become less of a devadasi or a *tawaif* (courtesan) less of a *tawaif*? These are longer transitions. (Shankar and Sahni 116)

The boundaries between courtesans and prostitutes seemed fluid and shifty but over time these boundaries have fused together and the distinctions between them don't seem that apparent. Courtesans shared the same public space as the common prostitute and over time there was homogenization which ignored the differences between all the categories and termed everyone as prostitute. This itself was the death of courtesans when they were put in the same boat as the common prostitute without considering their differences.

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Chapter 4

Sold for Sex

*The sky fell on me, and a father's exhausted wile.
Long and lean, her years were cold as rubber.
She opened her wormy legs wide. I felt the hunger there,
the other one, the fish slithering, turning inside.*

—Jayanta Mahapatra

4.1 Introduction

Human trafficking, with its roots tracing back to ancient times and intertwined with the historical slave trade, persists as a global issue despite being illegal. This illicit practice entails the coercion, sale and procurement of individuals through various means, such as force or deception, for purposes including labour or sexual exploitation. Given its parallels to historical slavery, contemporary human trafficking can aptly be described as a modern-day iteration of the slave.

One can draw parallels between migration and trafficking, particularly as people in need of migration are more vulnerable to trafficking. It has been noted that when people are seeking to migrate for better prospects, they often fall prey to false promises which lead to trafficking. To further differentiate;

trafficking, as currently understood, involves some element of involuntariness through deception, or force, whereas illegal migration often occurs with the free cooperation of the illegal migrant. (George et al. 68)

People migrate for better prospects and work opportunities. Since the flow of migration is high, it becomes easier to conceal illegal trafficking. *Human Trafficking : The Complexities*

of Exploitation points out how, “women’s inability to access regulated migration and their propensity to work in unregulated unskilled sectors leaves them more vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation” (201).

There are several types of victims, one who agrees to get trafficked, another who is accidentally trafficked, one who is deceived and lastly who is forced and trafficked. Another debate surrounding trafficking in India revolves around the girl's caste. While the so-called "lower caste" may be more vulnerable due to their poor socio-economic condition, the “higher caste” is also vulnerable to trafficking. Traffickers do not live as outliers but as a part of society. They are as much a part of society as the victim; this makes it difficult to identify them. Traffickers either work individually or as a team while they move the victim from one place to another.

Significant trafficking occurs in developing nations, and women are the poorest of the poor and more susceptible to trafficking. India and subsequently Indian women are more vulnerable to trafficking owing to the high level of poverty and population. Valarmathy (2017) comments on the trafficking situation in India, “India has become an origin, transit and destination country and also is ranked along with other nations in the major trafficking affected countries” (106). South Asian countries are dominated by organised crime who run brothels and arrange for trafficked girls. Trafficking in Mumbai is professionally organised by the mafia, where the police and politicians are hand in glove and aid the process. While the Western countries profit greatly from drug trade, Asia makes more through human trafficking.

Trafficking for prostitution differs from trafficking for most other purposes, because in most other industries the trafficked person generates a saleable good. In reality prostitutes provide a service, but to a customer a prostitute may be objectified to the extent that she becomes the “good”. (Newman 33)

Trafficking can happen within the country or between the sending and receiving country. Koirala (2014) writes that in South Asia more than 200,000 women and girls are trafficked every year for the purpose of sexual exploitation (224). In 1993 the Nepal National Coordination committee estimated that two lakh Nepalese girls between eight to twenty-five years were working in Indian brothels (Barry 173). Lakshmi, the protagonist of *Sold* was sent to India from Nepal.

Human trafficking or human smuggling is the fastest growing transnational crime due to the increased demand which leads to a heightened supply. The ease and convenience of travel makes it easier for trafficking victims, as well as simpler for the men to access brothels.

This chapter is based on two fictional texts Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2008) and *The Blue Note Book* (2009) by James A. Levine. Both texts are about girls being trafficked, while McCormick's Lakshmi is trafficked from Nepal to Calcutta, India; Levine's Batuk is brought to Mumbai from Madhya Pradesh. The texts show trafficking from one country to another and within the country.

The two primary texts are written in the voice of the trafficked girls, and this gives them the agency to have their voices heard. Both authors let the girls create spaces to assert their individuality. It is challenging to write about trafficking experiences as there isn't a definite literary structure which can effectively represent their stories. Their experiences are unique and incomparable to others, making it difficult to judge them using the same lens.

4.2 Legal Framework

Trafficking cannot be discussed without keeping in mind the concept of migration; people move in order to seek a better livelihood. Trafficking is often compared with legal or illegal migration. While some people move with legal documents and permissions, some move illegally without any visas or permits. These movements bring to light "the porosity of borders,

the transnational reality of women's migration and the questionable foundations of the laws regulating cross-border movements" (Newman 9). Illegal migration into India is not difficult which makes it easier for traffickers to transport girls across borders. Lakshmi's entry into India was easy and undocumented which further endangered her as legally she did not exist in the country and hence could not be protected.

Over time several international and national laws have been put in place to prevent human trafficking; these laws have evolved and have been amended and changed as the need for change arose. *The International Law of Human Trafficking* states that "trafficking" was used in the twentieth century in relation to white slavery (Gallegher 13). She continues that The League of Nations put in place The Suppression of Traffic in Women and Children in 1921, which was only about white women and children. This law was followed by The Suppression of the Traffic in Women of Full Age (1933); this law also applied to women of colour but was limited only to women and excluded the men. These two laws by The League of Nations was limited only to the process of recruitment and did not have anything in place for after the child/woman was trafficked (Gallegher 14). In 1949 The United Nations adopted the Convention for The Suppression of Traffic In persons and Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. D. Valarmathy (2017) sheds light on this law by stating that, "this convention has confined itself to the prostitution as the only purpose for which people are trafficked and subjected to exploitation and completely ignored other forms of exploitation involved in the process" (92). In 2000, The United Nations formulated The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children; this included people from all genders and age group. This protocol was also more inclusive as it also included trafficking for organ harvesting, forced labour migration and slavery (D. 94). The objective of the above protocol was prevention, identification and also rehabilitation. These are just some of the international laws on trafficking.

Indian laws also prevent and protect Indians from trafficking. The Article 23 of the Indian Constitution prohibits trafficking; additionally, Article 39 (e) protects the right of women and children from abuse of forced labour. The Indian Penal Code (1860) punishes kidnapping, abducting, forced marriage, buying/selling of minors and women for prostitution. The Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act in 1956 ensures the prevention, protection, rescue and eradication of trafficking in women and girls. In 2006 the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs established Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUS) which analyse data, identify causes and keeps a tab on the state agencies dealing with human trafficking (George et al. 70).

The governments are unable to differentiate between voluntary migration, clandestine movements and forced trafficking; “the result is that international trafficking initiatives have had a particularly adverse impact on women and their families” (Newman 9).

Trafficking in human beings is a worldwide phenomenon, however despite several national and international laws, there has not been much change in the crime rates. Valarmathy D. (2017) writes that despite the number of laws in place to prevent trafficking, the Indian government has not been successful in preventing it. He reasons that “the main cause for failure is there is no cooperation and coordination among the law enforcement agencies, welfare agencies or the NGOs who are striving hard in this field” (141).

4.3 Drivers of Sex Trafficking

Traffickers exploit people's social, economic and cultural weaknesses in order to traffic them. This section identifies the various drivers or factors that target the vulnerabilities of potential victims.

4.3.1 Poverty

One of the first and biggest reasons to fall prey to trafficking is poverty; a poor person in need of money is more vulnerable to getting trafficked. Poverty is one of the leading factors in trafficking. Lakshmi belonged to a low-income family in Nepal; in her village the absence of a tin roof implied poverty, and she wished to earn money to get a tin roof for her house. Her stepfather did not work and instead gambled heavily, and that year they had a bad crop due to the terrible monsoon. Lakshmi's stepfather decided that Lakshmi would go to the city to earn money after they ran out of options. Lakshmi was not disappointed but instead pleased that she could help her family, "If I go, you will have money enough for rice and curds, milk and sugar. Enough for a coat for the baby and a sweater for you" (McCormick 55). Lakshmi felt honoured that she would be able to contribute to her family as jobs were rarely found for young girls.

Batuk lived with her family in Dleepah Jill, a village in Madhya Pradesh. She was her father's favourite, and she paid heavily for his mistakes. Her father lost money and sold his daughter to pay his debt. Earlier Batuk's family was not poor but her father's debt pushed them towards poverty which forced him to give his daughter away. He regretted it when he left her at Master Gahil's house, but it was too late. Batuk's father decided to sell his daughter without considering the repercussions of his action. His lack of options and the desperate situation might have forced him to take action. Batuk's father weighed his options and must have concluded that selling Batuk would mean one mouth less to feed as well as a bonus source of money, neither would he have to spend money for her wedding in the future. Lakshmi and Batuk were the source which would bring in additional income while also reducing the cost of the family.

The goal of those who get trafficked due to poverty is to make their way out of it and be able to leave and have their old life back. While Lakshmi's stepfather used deception to traffic Lakshmi, he showed no remorse and continued with his life after getting rid of her.

Batuk's father showed guilt and regret when Batuk had to take the fall for his mistakes. Even though both fathers had different relationships with their daughters, Lakshmi's was aloof and did not love her and Batuk's was extremely fond of her; both of them eventually sold their daughters for their own gain. While poverty was the driving force in both the cases, the role of parents is very significant.

4.3.2 Role of Parents

The second significant driver is the role of parents; one cannot challenge the role played by the parents in their child getting trafficked. An unstable household or unusual family situations often push the parents to traffic their child in exchange for money in order to improve their home condition.

In the case of *Sold*, Lakshmi's stepfather sold her to a woman he found at the village shop in exchange for eight hundred rupees. Lakshmi's stepfather would not contribute to the house monetarily, instead spending all their money drinking and gambling. Lakshmi belonged to a dysfunctional family which caused her step father to sell her for his gain. While Lakshmi's mother was under the impression that she would be working in the city as a housemaid, her stepfather was aware of the reality. Lakshmi was talked into migrating for work by her step father who was aware that she would be sent to a brothel and they would never see her again. Newman (2008) supplicates this by citing a study on Nepalese girls who were trafficked into prostitution through their parents who "gave silent consent or were somehow involved in the trafficking of their daughters" (24). While her mother was not a party to this, her step father was fully aware of the situation and knowingly pushed her towards sex work.

In *The Blue Note Book*, Batuk's father took her to Mumbai and sold her to Master Gahil in exchange for a hefty sum of money. In both cases the fathers sold the daughters due to their

incapability, knowing full well that the consequence of their action will be the loss of their daughter forever.

Kathleen Barry (1995) believes that the act of selling the daughters is not a case of backwardness but a showcase of feudal power where daughters and wives are considered as the man's property that can be bought or sold, "the husbands and land owning aristocracy gain economic advantage from trafficking that they participate in" (184). Trafficking minor children becomes easier for the parent who has full control over them. Asian countries are feudal in nature with the male head of the family having absolute control. India and Nepal are patriarchal countries where the fathers are in full control of their children's lives. This makes it easier and convenient for the fathers to take the decision to sell their daughters as they would not be questioned. Similarly the choice of giving away the daughter instead of the son also stems from the belief that the daughters are disposable but sons are valuable assets.

4.3.3 Gender

This brings to light the third driver to trafficking, gender. Girls and subsequently women are the most targeted victims owing to their gender. They are often denied education or any economic and political rights making them far more vulnerable to trafficking due to their low social status. The birth of a girl is unfavoured as they are considered a dead weight that requires money to be raised and then married and sent off; while the son would remain with the parents and carry their name ahead. Women lack power and resources in comparison to the men and remain in subaltern positions making them more vulnerable to trafficking or illegal migration.

The divide between the two genders is prominent in their socio-economic status. The employment opportunities available for a man and a woman differ, with women having fewer options, it makes them more vulnerable to trafficking. Lakshmi was asked to go to the city to earn, and she was happy to get the opportunity to help her family. This shows that it was rare

for young girls to find jobs and hence she was ready to move far away so she could economically support her family. Lakshmi's stepfather believes that sons are superior to daughters and hence he did not have second thoughts while selling Lakshmi, "A son will always be a son, they say. But a girl is like a goat. Good as long as she gives you milk and butter. But not worth crying over when it's time to make a stew" (McCormick 14). One would wonder how a parent sells his daughter willingly, but for families that cannot afford to feed several mouths, giving up one of their children helps feed the others at home. The combination of extreme poverty coupled with lack of other options and the belief that daughters are not good enough enable the parents to make this choice.

There are several factors at play that make the victims susceptible to trafficking, however, the above three are most prominent and significant and can be evidently seen in the primary texts.

4.4 Role of Power and Patriarchy

Power dynamics and patriarchal structures significantly influence both the perpetuation of trafficking and the maintenance of female subjugation within brothels. Patriarchal systems frequently serve as the underlying cause for women's initial involvement in the sex trade, their participation, and their lack of agency within it.

Women are time and again associated with sex, seduction and procreation while men are considered to be intellectual and are hailed as superior beings. This assumption of the male being superior gives them the authority to dominate women. Patriarchy is nothing but male dominance over society and women. Men seek to control women to show their superiority and demonstrate their power over them; this is how power is interconnected with patriarchy.

4.4.1 Power

With patriarchal dominance comes power, power arms the man to exercise control over women in spite of their resistance or opposition. Hierro and Marquez (2014) trust that the configuration of power shapes the society and not gender; "gender is a system of social hierarchy. It is an inequality of power imposed on sex and constitutes the sexualization of power" (175). Power is relational as it affects the oppressor and the oppressed; in this case it is between the brothel owners and the trafficked girl.

Violence is often used as a manifestation of power to control and subjugate. Barry (1995) adds that power successfully makes the oppressor superior and the oppressed inferior and is relegated to the subordinate "other" status. Sexual exploitation of women harms them and is gainful for the man, this in turn forces women into backwardness, "thwarting women's ability to achieve, to move forward, to grow and to develop" (Barry 79). Victims of sex trafficking continue to be trapped in the system and are unable to escape. Batuk had a bright future ahead of her, but her future was erased when her father sold her. Unfortunately she could never leave the brothel and achieve her full potential.

The demand for small girls is higher "as customers seek to avoid AIDS, and much Asian sex tourism features children and minors of both sexes" (Louise 143). This is why Lakshmi and Batuk, both minor girls and virgins, were in demand. It did not matter to the men that they were involved with young girls, they did not care about their development but only their own pleasure.

Human trafficking can be symbolic of conquest and power over women by men as it shows the dominance of men over helpless female victims. Lakshmi and Batuk had no choice and were powerless, while their fathers, who sold them, wielded power at home and on them, their daughters. Stark and Whisnant (2005) write that the traffickers look for people deemed powerless and have a victim profile, "they focus on young people coming out of families that

are abusive, disorganized, or non-existent” (11). A city woman finds Lakshmi in front of a shop and asks her to work for her in the city, where the girls wear pretty dresses and eat good food. The woman knows Lakshmi is from a low-income family with a stepfather who does not work and gambles away the money and a small baby brother to look after at home. The traffickers try to identify abused, neglected, and needy children and extend their friendship. Her poor socio-economic background, uninvolved stepfather and relatively occupied mother made Lakshmi more vulnerable to trafficking. Most of the time the girls are promised one kind of work and then they realise that they are placed in a brothel instead. In most cases the girls are deceived about the nature of the work, living conditions, abuse and unpaid wages. Lakshmi was promised a job as a house help and instead was sold to a brothel.

When the trafficked girls reach their destination city or country, they are delivered to their employers. Batuk went from master Ghalil to the Yazaks to Mamaki Briila; while Lakshmi went from Auntie to Auntie Mumtaz. They had no say in their employers or choice of work, they had to silently do what they were asked to or they were beaten or drugged or even killed. The girls lacked agency and could not make their own decisions.

Power coupled with violence and sexual aggression is used in breaking in the girl into the sex trade, “she is terrorized, tortured, and gang-raped. She is threatened with her own death and that of anyone she loves. Once she is convinced that her only chance of survival is to do exactly as she is told, she is ‘turned out’” (Stark and Whisnant 11). She is tortured in all ways possible throughout her life in the brothel.

Lakshmi bites the tongue of the old man, the first man who tries to have sex with her at the brothel and tells Mumtaz that she is going home. Mumtaz shaves Lakshmi’s head to humiliate her and to ensure that she will be shamed and brought back to the brothel if she tries to run away. Mumtaz also used physical force to make Lakshmi comply, “each morning and evening Mumtaz comes, beats me with a leather strap, and locks the door behind her”

(McCormick 115). She does not give Lakshmi food or water for a few days, but Lakshmi does not give in, "Mumtaz...does not know the match she's met in me" (117). When nothing works on her, she is offered lassi with a sedative that makes her too weak to fight the men that come to her bed. Here rape was not only sexual but also a way to showcase their power and show her her place. Mumtaz used a combination of physical violence, sexual assault and trickery to break Lakshmi. This was her way of showing Lakshmi that she was dominant and had power, while Lakshmi was submissive and powerless. Master Gahil auctions Batuk's virginity, one Uncle Nir "wins" and tries to bed her. When Batuk realizes what is happening she begins resisting, "I scream and claw and kick against him" (Levine 56) so the old woman restrains her. Batuk continues to try and free herself so she is slapped and choked until Uncle Nir manages to penetrate her. De Angelis (2016) explains how "distinguishing mark of a trafficked woman is her "raw physical suffering"" (44), as all of them are tortured to make them comply. Batuk is then sent to an orphanage run by Yazaks. The Yazak's sexually adopted the girls as their temporary wives till they were sent to the brothels. After her first time with Uncle Nir Batuk says that she has been rewired, which is why she did not fight hard against the Yazak who forced himself on her. They valued unquestioned obedience and punished girls who ran away from the orphanage by stoning, and the sexual offenders by slicing their clitoris or sewing their vaginas. The girls far away from their homes are at the mercy of the Yazaks, so they take advantage of their helplessness and exert dominance over them by punishing them even for the slightest digression. *Women's Oppression Today* discusses how sexual abuse goes beyond sex, "it is symptomatic of a wider oppression and control of women by men" (Barrett 44). The sexual abuse of Lakshmi and Batuk was a way to control, subdue or "tame" them.

The sex industry will not sustain without the help of johns, the men who buy sex. The steady demand is responsible for the supply of girls to brothels. Globalisation has eased the process of migration which ensures steady supply of victims, "when one source dries up,

traffickers are able to find new victims”(Newman 29). This has ensured the continuity of trafficking.

Plenty of adults have consenting sex within marriage and even outside marriage, so what makes men buy sex when free consenting sex is available? Christine Stark and Rebecca Whisnant (2005) point towards the unwillingness of some men to want an equal relationship pleasurable to both the partners, where the man will have to be nice to the woman. They analyze the man's need to feel powerful which is possible when he buys sex and makes the girl do anything (3). Prostitution also supports fantasies where the john can be who he wants to be and do what he wants to do; in an equal consensual relationship the man would not have the absolute power as he does when he buys sex.

Men feel “male sexual entitlement- the false conviction that men have a right to sex, a right they can coercively enforce” (Srinivasan 95). Amia Srinivasan (2021) quotes Rebecca Solnit’s views on sex, “Sex is a commodity, accumulation of this commodity enhances a man’s status...but women are in some mysterious way obstacles to this, and they are therefore the enemy as well as the commodity.” (119). Women who resist sexual advances and do not wish to participate in prostitution are considered a hindrance and are often subjected to violence in order for the men to get their way. Lakshmi was beaten with a leather strap, starved, and her head was shaved to force her into submission. When nothing worked, she was given lassis spiked with sleeping medicine and raped by men until her will was broken. Violence towards women is a part of the ideology and permitted when they can justify it. Violence is repeatedly used against prostitutes to force them to comply with society's or their patrons' demands. This violence was never questioned and permitted to 'mould' or 'break' them into their trade.

The idea of having sex with a helpless girl to showcase their dominance and power not only over that girl but also towards women, can be viewed as one of the main principles of prostitution. The older man used force to rape Mukta right after her ceremony and laughed

while she was in pain. Lakshmi was sedated so Habib could have sex with an unwilling, helpless girl. Batuk resisted Uncle Nir's advances, clawed and kicked him; hence the old woman came to restrain her so Nir could easily rape her. Their first encounters with men showed their bravado and manhood on helpless, young girls.

A man using a woman's body for his sexual gratification in exchange for money is nothing but objectification. Not only is the body used for sex, but it is also used as an outlet for violence. All of this dehumanizes the prostitute even in her own eyes. Prostitution is a form of male sexual violence. Since the act of sex is paid for, the John feels entitled to violence. One of Mukta's customers banged her head on the wall repeatedly after sex and told her that all whores deserved violence. Her customer felt that he had a right to hurt her or even kill her because he paid for her.

The power distribution in a sexual relationship is unequal. The very act of sex is the demonstration of dominance, and this can be seen in both texts where the man wields power over the girls. Lakshmi's bones are crushed under the weight of the men, they split her open (McCormick 129), "I am hurt. I am torn and bleeding where the men have been" (McCormick 131). Shahanna tells Lakshmi that she must do all that the customer asks her to do, or he would beat her up. The girls have no power in the sexual relationship; they are just a medium for the men to satisfy themselves. The power entirely lies with the men; if Lakshmi does not comply, they use physical force to get their way. Batuk is taken from the brothel to the Royal Imperial Hotel for Iftikhar. His father wanted him to be acquainted with sex and thought getting Batuk for him would aid his sexual awakening. When Batuk was performing fellatio on him, he ejaculated early; he responded by kicking Batuk because she smiled at his sexual inability. The second time he had an early ejaculation, he grabbed her by her hair and threw her away. Iftikhar could not bear the power dynamics in his sexual relationship being with the Batuk instead of him. He used physical force to show his dominance and try to reclaim his power. Hoffman

(2017) resonates the same, “[s]exual pleasure as an ethical substance continues to be governed by relations of force- the force against which one must struggle and over which the subject is expected to establish his domination” (85).

The offenders, like the brothel keepers and traffickers, used a combination of social and physical elements to showcase their power or domination over the victims. This way, the victims were kept under their thumb and did what was expected, “[t]he prostitute, however, sometimes feels for her man only hostility and resentment; but she remains under his power through fear, because he keeps a grip on her” (Beauvoir 574). The sex worker does not participate due to her willingness or personal interest but out of fear or as a consequence of domination. Domination plays a vital role in the process of trafficking as well as brothel keeping.

4.4.2 Patriarchy

Patriarchy has its roots in the past and is not a contemporary phenomenon. Women were considered the weaker sex, and hence had to be controlled by men. Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* elucidates the brief history of patriarchy;

The Laws of Manu define woman as a vile being who should be held in slavery. Leviticus likens her to the beasts of burden owned by the patriarch. The laws of Solon give her no rights. The Roman code puts her under guardianship and asserts her ‘imbecility’. Canon law regards her as ‘the devil’s doorway’. The Koran treats woman with utter scorn. (112)

Households are usually patriarchal where the head of the family is the father and he lays the rules for everyone to follow. The father decides for the house and the members, even if it is about selling the girls to a brothel. Lakshmi’s stepfather lied to them and sold Lakshmi

to the city woman for eight hundred rupees. He did not consult Lakshmi or her mother and the women did not have any say in the decision. Batuk's father lost money and sold his daughter for a fat envelope of money; while her mother was not kept in the dark, Batuk was not told that she would be sold to a brothel and would never see her family again. In both cases, the father decided while the daughters bore the brunt of their actions. 'Traffic in Women' supplicates this view by emphasizing the concept of familial ownership, "[t]hey are sold and trafficked into prostitution is an extension of the original, patriarchal ownership of women in marriage" (184). According to that the women and children belong to the man and he is in complete control of them, even if he wishes to sell them. The foundation of prostitution is that a girl is the property of her father and later her husband, and they could do whatever they want with her, without securing her consent. This further makes girls economically disadvantaged and marginalized making them more vulnerable to trafficking.

It is not only men who facilitate the process of trafficking, but women are also a part of the system. Patriarchy is so ingrained in their system that they go with the flow and do not realise the harm they are causing to other girls or women. Mamaki Briila ran the brothel which housed Batuk, similarly Auntie Mumtaz's brothel kept Lakshmi. Both did not think twice before using violence against the brothel girls or forcing men on them. Hita who prepares Batuk for Iftikhar, often concealing Batuk's wounds and scars, was also part of the system.

Patriarchy is also responsible for reducing women to sex that makes women an easier target for sexual exploitation. Kathleen Barry (1995) supplements this view, "women are sexual property of men, any sexual act outside of their marriage, including rape and forced prostitution, is usually considered infidelity and the victims are severely punished" (51). Sex outside marriage was only the man's prerogative while women were punished for sexual transgressions. *The Blue Notebook* contains a passage about the girls in the orphanages headed

by the Yazaks; the girls were used by the Yazaks for their own sexual pleasure but were not allowed to copulate for their own pleasure or their vaginas were sewn shut as punishment.

Prostitution can be viewed as the institutionalized reduction of girls/women to sex. The young girls are bought on the basis of their sexual worth. When Lakshmi's stepfather was haggling about her price, the city woman tells him how Lakshmi has no hips and is "plain as porridge" (McCormick 59). Siddharth Kara (2007) writes how men told him they preferred Nepalese girls as they are smaller, thinner and more demure than Indian girls (51). Master Gahil auctions the young virgin Batuk in a room full of men by asking them, "Who is going to enjoy our little princess fresh from the country?" (Levine 50). The whole process of auctioning is the reduction of Batuk to sex where the highest bidder gets to bed the virgin girl against her will. While the auction is highly disturbing for the girl, this might not be the worst part of the entire trafficking journey, what follows later is far worse.

Shulamith Firestone (1979) considers patriarchy as male supremacy that enables a man to have control over women's fertility, without any reasoning or justification as to how men acquired this control. The men who have sexual relations with prostitutes believe that they have complete control over the girl's fertility or in this case the body; but no one has in fact given them this control, they have assumed it owing to their gender.

The sex industry is gendered as the services are for men and bought by men so one can conclude that male domination is the main culprit behind sex work. Simone de Beauvoir (1997) draws our attention to the duplicity of the male towards prostitution. Men look down upon prostitutes, but it is the male demand that results in the supply of prostitutes, and the Johns are never looked down upon by the society (625). It is not only the trafficked girls who face the brunt of this sexual slavery, but the entire community of women suffer;

All of society suffers from such victimization. Other casualties include the principles of a democratic society, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.

The degradation of women in full view of the public deals a direct blow to the rights of women and to gender equality. (Louise 3)

This leads the research to compare the plight of sex workers with wives. The construction of femininity has twin images of women, "on the other hand, the sexual property of men and, on the other, the chaste mothers of their children" (Barrett 45). While patriarchy is quick to separate the two, there also lie similarities between the two. While the sex worker sells her body for a short duration in exchange for money, the wife gives herself to her husband for life in exchange for a house and respect. Marro endorses Engles' view in *La Puberté* where he writes that the only difference between a wife and a prostitute is the duration of the contract. The prostitute spends a limited time with a man while the wife is bound to a husband for the rest of her life, "the one is hired for life by one man; the other has several clients who pay her by the piece" (Beauvoir 569). He adds that the wife is respected in the society while a prostitute is not. The wife has only one patron or master, the sex worker has multiple and is not entirely dependent on one. Prostitutes earn money as opposed to wives in a traditional set-up (Beauvoir 581), which makes them financially independent, and challenge the patriarchal economical set up. Kathleen Barry (1995) believes that marriage in the previous centuries is replaced by sexual relationships or coupling now, "as women are no longer necessarily identified as wives, they are expected to be known through their sexual connection to another" (56). The wife is respected as she is in a monogamous relationship with one man and a sex worker is considered promiscuous due to her multiple relationships.

Beauvoir (1997) emphasizes that the personal is interconnected with the political because "the personal is political" (43). The political situation of a woman reflects in her private life which is why political oppression and gender inequality results in submission in private. Is any woman's private life only her own? No, it represents the private life of others as well. This chapter may only include the stories of Lakshmi and Batuk, but they also represent the stories

of many other girls who are trafficked and find themselves in brothels in India. Beauvoir insists that the politicization of personal lives will eradicate women's oppression (61). The only way forward for women is to take matters into their own hands and politicise their life and their problems in order to move ahead in life.

4.5 Loss of Home

Trafficking heavily relies on displacing the victims far away from their hometowns so they are alienated from known geographical location, people and even language. Trafficking can occur within the country like Batuk or from one country to another like Lakshmi. This tactic ensures that the victim is left helpless and would have no means to escape. When Lakshmi announced that she was going home, Mumtaz asked her if she knew her way home or had the money to travel back, if she knew the local language or even knew which part of the world she was in right now. Lakshmi did not have the answers to any of those questions and over time, lost the will to escape home. As per Siddharth Kara (2017) men preferred Nepalese sex workers, as they were more timid since they were far away from their homes and could barely speak Hindi (51).

Most of the time they do not manage to return to their homes, and they yearn for their home all their life; hence loss of home is a recurring theme in both texts. Lakshmi would periodically unwrap her bundle of clothes from home and bury her face inside it “drinking in the scent of mountain sunshine, a warmth that smells of freshly turned soil and clean laundry baking in the sun...” (McCormick 132). Lakshmi did not overdo it because she wanted to preserve the smell of her home for as long as she could. She found comfort and strength from the smell of her home. Batuk had not shed a single tear since she was left at Master Gahil's, but the familiar "smell of river on Hita's clothes released the flood of tears" (Levine 114). For Lakshmi and Batuk home seemed like a distant dream, a different life they had left behind and

yet were clutching on to very strongly. The loss of the home is significant, not only have they lost the physical house and are separated from their families; but they also miss their village and the life they left behind.

The brothel keepers hang the dagger of "debt" over the girls, they are supposed to clear their debt before they can return home. This debt consists of the money paid to their family, their clothes, lodging-boarding and even medicines. Shilpa, another girl working with Lakshmi tells her that she will never be able to clear her debt to Mumtaz as the calculations are flawed. Shilpa adds, "Mumtaz will work you until you are too sick to make money for her. And then she will throw you out on the street" (McCormick 244). Lehti and Aromaa (2006) write about how debt is a standard practice used to have control over the girls;

This debt is passed from one trafficker to the next ...Combined with inflated housing and living expenses charged to victims, repayment usually takes months, even years, and in many cases becomes impossible to handle. The earnings of the victims are directed to the pockets of the exploiters, and the women have no financial means to escape. (158)

The debt amount is constantly recalculated and inflated to make it impossible for the girls to escape. The girls are scrutinized and overworked until their supposed debt is paid off. The conditions of debt bondage in prostitution are similar to that in slavery. Victims of trafficking themselves "recognised "slavery-like practices" of not being paid for their labour, having little say in decision making, having their movements curtailed, and generally lacking control over their own lives" (De Angelis 59). Same was the case with Batuk and Lakshmi, they had no way to return home and were stuck in the web of bondage for the rest of her lives.

4.6 Loss of Identity

Another poignant loss is the loss of their identity. Over the course of time the girls gradually lose connection with their former selves and relinquish their past lives. Their identity and their name becomes irrelevant, also their attire undergoes significant transformation. The shifts in identity and appearance mark the transition from girlhood to womanhood, shaped by the adversities they faced. In Lakshmi's words, "Sometimes I see a girl who is growing into womanhood. Other days I see a girl growing old before her time" (McCormick 184).

4.6.1 Disappearance of the Childhood Name

In considering Shakespeare's assertion, "What is in a name?" one is prompted to question the true significance of a name. A name serves not only as a means of reference but also as a substantial component of an individual's identity. The girls brought into brothels lose their names instantly; either they are given another name or not referred to with any name. This dehumanizes them and reduces them to their function, calling out to them by their name would make them real people and not just sex objects. The Johns do not want any relationship or interaction with them; for them the girls are a medium to satisfy their lust. Hence they did not need to know their name.

In *Sold* Lakshmi who is named after the Hindu goddess of wealth is sold in exchange for a trivial amount of money. Mumtaz the brothel keeper called her an "ignorant girl" (109) and "ignorant hill girl" (112), almost never using her name while talking to her. One of the first sentences she learns in Hindi is about her name, "My name is Lakshmi" (171). After Harish, the boy who used to teach her Hindi left the brothel, no one else took her name. This shows that Mumtaz, the other girls and the customers did not refer to her using her name. Lakshmi would often say her name to herself to remind herself who she was and where she came from.

The pink American man was the first to ask for her name, but she was afraid to respond to him. Another American man who visited her was the second man to ask her name, once again, she did not respond. For Lakshmi her name was something private, something she had to guard to hide her vulnerabilities. When the police along with American and Indian men and women raid the brothel to rescue her, she runs towards them saying "My name is Lakshmi, I am from Nepal. I am fourteen years old" (269). She breaks the shackles of bondage and finally feels free by saying her name aloud. This time she is not only reminding herself about her identity but is also making it known to others.

During Batuk's journey to Mumbai with her father, the bus driver mocks her "Batuk Rat-Bag, what sort of name is that?" (Levine 19). Her father disliked his daughter's name being mocked and threatened the driver to stop teasing her. This act of her father showcases the importance of her name and the connection between her identity and respect with her name. Master Gihal who bought Batuk refers to her using her name, so does Uncle Nir the man who wins her at the auction. Mamaki Briila the brothel keeper, calls her "little Batuk" (1) so do the other inmates, but her customers do not use her name. Mr. Bent Nose the man who suggests her for a private party, did not know her name, he explained to his bosses to get the "girl with the green curtain over her...room" (104). Though Batuk was called by her name by others, she remained nameless for her customers. At the private party hosted by Iftikhar the others were introduced by their names but she and the other sex workers were not introduced by their names. The men in that party refer to her as "your toy, your dolly, the little bitch" (177) and not once use her name. The only time Iftikhar uses her name is when he shoves a sword inside her vagina to punish her. Batuk observes, "I had become an anonymous unit without any function; who names a broom or a table? The girls and I were objects and as such unnamed" (176). Prostitutes are dehumanized and hence remain unnamed and unidentified. The doctor at the hospital asks her name, and after she responds, he compliments her name. This show of

kindness humanizes the dehumanized Batuk. The name mocked by the bus driver, the name that remained unused for years, is acknowledged and praised towards the end of her life.

Loss of name makes Lakshmi and Batuk feel anonymous, lost in the sea of nameless girls having no unique identity unique of their own. In the words of Bickford (2012), “[i]n the face of treatment which de-individualizes and dehumanizes them, turning them into objects and receptacles, one of the ways the girls assert agency is by insistently claiming their identity” (2). The loss of name also signifies the loss of respect that the world has for them and reclaiming their name towards the end of the novel is reclamation of the lost respect and identity. Lakshmi reclaims her name and identity when running towards freedom, but Batuk and her name die towards the end.

4.6.2 Shedding their old life through clothes and make-up

Outward appearances like clothes and make up have a deeper meaning as they are remnants of their old life where they were free, happy and safe. Sex workers are forced to change their dressing to suit their new profession and also expected to wear makeup. The change of clothes is not only about shedding their old life, but as Beauvoir (1997) points out clothes are also used to change the girls into erotic objects, she is offered “as prey to male desires” (543). The innocent childlike clothes are replaced by clothes which make them look older and the makeup which makes them more attractive. The make-up forces the girls to leave their childishness behind and mature into women.

Her clothes are changed when Lakshmi changes hands from the city woman to a man who was taking her across the border. The city woman asks her to take off her filthy hill clothes, this can be seen as a metaphor for her life-changing from that of a hill girl to a city girl. Lakshmi is made to wear "a pink dress of cloud fabric" (McCormick 78). Lakshmi does not understand how to wear these new clothes and has to be helped into them. She was also given shoes to

wear. At the brothel, her face is covered with make up; her eyes, lips and nails are lathered with make-up;

I see my face reflected in a silver glass on the wall. Another Lakshmi looks back at me. She has black-rimmed tiger eyes, a mouth red as a pomegranate, and flowing hair like the tiny gold-pants woman in the TV. (McCormick 107)

In an instant, she forgets to recognize herself and calls herself New Lakshmi, New Lakshmi leading a new life from now on.

Batuk was scrubbed and cleaned at Master Gahil's house and then wrapped in a sari. Sari is associated with womanhood and the act of draping a sari indicates Batuk's initiation in womanhood. She also applied make-up on her eyes and lips, and painted henna on her palms. Batuk could not recognize herself "under the façade" (Levine 45). For Batuk her make-up was a façade to hide her reality and make her seem like someone else. After her makeover was complete she gazed at the mirror, she could not recognise herself. Such was her change that she could not believe that it was that same Batuk who lived in her village moments ago. When she accompanied the man to the hotel, she wore a red chiffon dress, she associates that with prostitution. At the hotel Hita changed her clothes to be better suited for Iftikhar, a long red dress and pearls. In changing her clothes and appearance this time, Batuk leaves behind her life on Common Street and becomes the private property of Iftikhar, dressing according to his liking to please him. Hita also uses make-up on Batuk's face to hide the scars from being raped by Dr. Prathi and the violence by Iftikhar. For Batuk make-up was not only about making her look beautiful but also hiding the violence she has faced in the hands of other men.

Clothes and make-up play an important role in the lives of trafficked girls. Outer appearance is the first thing changed about them, signifying the change in their life. Clothes and make-up can be considered metaphors for initiation into the sex trade and pushing them to grow up before their time.

4.7 Trauma and Coping Mechanisms

Sex workers forced into the trade are traumatized using physical and sexual violence. *Is This a Culture of Trauma?* discusses how intense pain inflicted on the victims by the brothel keepers, customers and others unmakes their sense of the world, disintegrates their consciousness, and shatters their belief system (22). They are unable to comprehend their new situation or understand their condition. They face unexplainable horrors which they often try to repress and forget.

The memory of their first rape in the brothel changes them. Batuk was auctioned off and presented to the highest bidder. She remembers being tied and gagged while Uncle raped her. She was in a lot of pain and bleeding post the act and could barely move. The trauma of her first time remained with her, but as time passed she said she got used to it and learnt the tricks. Lakshmi was drugged and raped by Habib leaving her stiff, sore and crying. She was drugged and raped several times before she agreed to sleep with men.

Very often the community of sex workers accept violence as part of their lives and do not counter it. They silently accept their fate and expect others to follow suit. When Lakshmi resists sleeping with men, Shahanna asks her to cooperate, so they are easier on her. She tells her that it is not very bad there and living in the brothel is better than living in the world where girls are treated worse than a dog. Shahanna had internalised that women would face violence and that the world only treats women badly, they have to learn to get used to it.

Their lack of acceptance or attempt to forget their past without proper addressal harms them. Lakshmi and Batuk have no one to talk about their experience, the other girls who have faced the same thing are not interested in speaking about it either. Their trauma remains bottled up within them. The trauma continues to remain with them for a long time and manifests itself as constant panic or alertness. Trauma when left hidden or undiscussed hinders healing and

obstructs them from moving forward. The girls adopt coping strategies to help them adjust to adversities and find some solace. Lakshmi and Batuk have also used coping mechanisms to help them like dissociation and reading/writing.

Dissociation is when a person disconnects with the surroundings. Brickel (2020) writes how “dissociation can happen during an experience which is overwhelming and which you can’t escape (causing trauma)”. Lakshmi tries to ignore the sounds of the men who come to her and the surrounding noises, "if you work hard at it, you hear nothing" (McCormick 133). She also pretends to not be in her current situation, that the customers are not doing anything to her but that it is a TV show instead, “I pretend I have a button I press to make everything go quiet. And another one that makes me disappear” (McCormick163). She also pretends that she is back at her school with her teacher and her friend Gita. Lakshmi tries hard to disconnect with her surroundings and the sexual acts done by her customers in order to protect herself from her reality. Bickford (2010) adds to this;

[s]he demonstrates resistance in other ways as well – refusing to cry when she is beaten, staying focused on her goal of paying off her alleged debt and returning home, not knowing that the goal is made unattainable. (4)

Batuk also practices dissociation using her imagination. The entire novel is filled with stories, poems, dreams and personifications. She coined the expression “making sweet cake” (Levine 36) to describe what the customer did to her as a form of dissociation. During her first time with Uncle Nir she does not describe the pain in detail but instead says that it felt like “seeing a wave crash onto the riverbank” (Levine 57). Batuk creates an imaginary world for her with a talking tree and a talking Tiger to stay disconnected from her reality. Batuk tells her readers about her mental state, “I am not deranged, but on countless days I wish I were” (Levine 13). She does not shed tears either, except on her first day at Master Gahil's and then her first

day at the Tiger Suite. She was so disconnected from her reality that she did not feel the need to cry.

Sold and *The Blue Note Book* do not name the customers that come to Lakshmi and Batuk respectively. Keeping the customers unnamed is a form of distancing. This way, the girls did not acknowledge or accept their customers; if they had remembered and used their names, then it would be too real for them; keeping the customers unnamed let them distant from their trade and current reality.

Lakshmi who used to go to school in Nepal continues to learn English and Hindi in the brothel. The little boy Harish teaches her to read and speak; the colourful books are her windows to happiness. Learning the new languages helped her forget her problems for a little while and in turn helped her escape the brothel later. Harish gifted her a pencil, which she says smelt of possibility, a possibility for a better life for herself. While leaving he also gifts her his English storybook, which she treasures greatly. Batuk learnt to read and write at the missionary's medical clinic and so she decided to write the story of her journey from her village to Mumbai. Her blue notebook had anecdotes from her home, Master Gahil's house, the orphanage, the brothel and then the hotel. When others read her writings at the private party about Iftikhar, he kills her to avenge himself. Her writing caused her downfall. When she asks Hita for some paper and pen, she is asked if she has been writing stories since she came to Mumbai, Batuk lies and disagrees. Batuk makes an observation about Hita and society on the whole when it comes to sex workers and their stories; "What I failed to appreciate was that one of Hita's responsibilities was to ensure that girls like me disappear off the face of the earth without a trace" (Levine 123). Reading and writing was not only a coping mechanism for the girls but also a way to make people aware of them and their stories, so they do not remain hidden.

Trafficked girls employ a variety of coping mechanisms to keep themselves sane and

so they can work hard to pay their debt and leave. If they felt too much or thought too much, they would not have survived at the brothels so these coping mechanisms were necessary to keep them going.

4.8 Agency and Voice

Trafficking is involuntary, often forced upon the girls. While Lakshmi agreed to go to the city and do household chores for money, she did not consent to sex work. Some of them who agree to migrate for work and then find themselves trafficked cannot be blamed or said to have agreed to sex trade; instead this highlights the use of deceit in trafficking them. Lakshmi was tricked in a similar manner and could not believe her change of faith, “There is a mistake...I am here to work as a maid for a rich lady” (McCormick 111). Batuk on the other hand realized she is going to Mumbai during her going away party. Her mother told her she was going to Mumbai but did not reveal the place or reason. Hence Batuk assumed it must be to a hospital to receive treatment and worried that she might be terminally ill. Batuk did not consent to work in a brothel either. In most cases the girls do not have a say, therefore discussing ‘agency’ feels rather funny. But agency does exist, “agency exists in a linear and timeless discourse of disempowerment where all agency is removed whatever a woman’s economic, cultural, sexual, or social context” (De Angelis 2). The lack of agency or rather the power to take decisions about their life is an important aspect in trafficking. In a patriarchal set up women lack agency while the men do not, further curtailing the former’s freedom.

The inability to make their own choices led Batuk into Mumtaz’s brothel; and Batuk was shifted from Master Gahil to the Yazaks to Mamaki Briila and eventually Iftikhar. One of the poems written by Batuk says, “[e]verything is foretold, Yet in all we have a choice” (Levine 206). Her words are ironic because she never had a choice. Both could not decide their fate and

remained trapped in unfortunate circumstances. Their future was decided by their fathers, the dominant men in their lives. They used their daughters to improve their lives at the cost of their daughters' ruin. Trafficked girls who were denied agency and are perpetually identified as victims risk being stuck in the same position and remain "inherently passive, action-less and incapable of making choices" (De Angelis 44). They are unable to move forward in life and control the reigns of their lives. Batuk remains a victim throughout her life, but Lakshmi takes the plunge towards her freedom.

The girls were denied agency but they tried hard to hold on to their voice. Batuk wrote about her experiences and journey in her blue notebook. She wrote so her story could reach others, and girls like her would not be forgotten. Even while she lays in the hospital she writes her story, she believes "I must write. All that is left of me is ink" (Levine 191). Lakshmi only understood her native language and no Indian languages, so she started learning Hindi from Harish. One of the first things she learnt was to say her name, age and from where she came from. She wanted to have a voice in this new country where she was left speechless without the knowledge of the local tongue. She was expected not to speak and express herself while living in the brothel, especially during police raids where all the girls would hide silently. When the American Man came to rescue Lakshmi, she could not find her voice, "I try to answer, but nothing comes out of my mouth" (McCormick 269). Eventually she reclaims her life by running to the rescue team while taking her name, "My name is Lakshmi, I am from Nepal, I am fourteen years old" (McCormick 269). Her voice rescued her from the clutches of her traffickers.

Agency and voice has been snatched away from trafficking victims which makes them vulnerable. This is an important motif in both the texts and one of the key aspects of trafficking.

4.9 Conclusion

Batuk tells her readers about the philosophy of the prostitute, “I am who I am only at this moment in time; my past does not hang from my shoulders and my future is indefinable and so cannot be a concern. I am nothing else and there is nothing else” (Levine 134). The past of these trafficked girls is inconsequential and the future was undecided, what would remain is their present.

Sold at a young age by their fathers, Lakshmi and Batuk left their past behind; their past no longer shaped them, and their future remained uncertain but what mattered to them was their present and they learnt to take each day as it came; that was the only way to survive. They faced violence and were victims of patriarchy and power play. They lost not only their home, but also their names and identities and their appearance were modified with new clothes and make-up. Lakshmi and Batuk were forced to grow up and mature well before their time because they were paying for their father’s mistakes.

Lakshmi took a leap of faith and trusted the American man to give her freedom and take her away from her dreadful life. Batuk, on the other hand, paid for her agency. Her writing became her undoing, and she paid heavily with her life. While *Sold* ends on a hopeful note with Lakshmi exiting the sex trade, *The Blue Notebook* ends with Batuk’s death at the hospital. Girls trafficked for prostitution have varied endings; while some escape, others are only freed when they die.

Human trafficking is the culmination of illegal immigration and prostitution which can be eliminated by identifying the criminals involved and rescuing the victims like Lakshmi and Batuk. While the media does showcase some aspects of human trafficking, yet the depth of socio-economic and psychological impact remains undiscussed. Hence literature encompassing their lives is relevant and significant to the society. Novels like these primary

texts are significant to shed light on the conditions of trafficking in India in literary and research circles, as the issue is of utmost importance and still very relevant.

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63.

Chapter 5

Wielding Culture and Writing His(Her)story

*I stand
on the sacrifices
of a million women before me
thinking
What can I do
to make this mountain taller
so the women after me
can see farther
—Rupi Kaur*

5.1 Introduction

The lives of courtesans, devadasis and trafficked girls are often marginalized in public spaces and academic discourses perpetuating a veil of ignorance among the broader populace. While the practices seem archaic and belonging to the yesteryears, some of them are still prevalent in modern India under the guise of culture or exploitation. Since the relevance of these practices is not lost, it is imperative to create awareness and engage in critical discourse surrounding their lives and issues.

Over time some movies have touched upon these topics and created a general buzz. Movies like *Mughal-e-Azam*, *Umrao Jaan* on courtesans; *Chameli*, *Chandni Bar*, *Gangubai Kathiyawadi* on trafficked girls; *Shyam Singh Roy*, *Pranali* on devadasis being the prominent ones. While the widespread reach of movies is undeniable, the reach and readership of novels addressing similar themes does not achieve the same engagement.

Novels are an important literary tool to document and understand the history of people and society. Literary texts are not directly produced by history, yet they are unwilling participants in the “historical process of mediating and consolidating dominant discourses and ideologies of its time” (Bhat 37). Wordsworth believed that poetry was the powerful overflow of emotions, so is the case with literature. Authors centre their work on characters or situations which have evoked strong feelings and personal connection, and are motivated to foster social awareness through readership. The writers are influenced by the society they live in, the current times and the people they have interacted with. Hence the novels cannot be isolated from culture. This chapter will undertake an in-depth exploration of the role of culture and foreground the importance of rewriting the narratives of prostitutes in India with an aim to integrate their stories into the literary canon.

5.2 The Burden of Culture

Culture is not limited to festivals and ceremonies but seeps in the mundane lives of people dictating their actions. Cultural studies describe how lives are articulated by and with culture either empowering or disempowering people. The study of culture unravels how dominant ideology stems from culture. Anthony Easthope argues that “Society is not to be thought of as a democracy but rather as an oligarchy with concentric circles of the elite” (4). The society’s elite decides the culture and then forces everyone to follow. The upper caste and upper class in India are known to be the rule makers and their word is taken as the norm.

Culture and traditions exert a profound influence on people and their behaviour to the extent that the prevailing cultural norms become synonymous with historical narratives and identity. This often leads to the subjugation of the non-elite, non-dominant class and caste of people rendering their cultural practices and traditions obsolete. Not only does their culture get erased, their stories and voices are also silenced. The rich upper caste men continued the

devadasi system under the guise of tradition and superstition, thereby perpetuating the exploitation of helpless young girls. The villagers would force unwilling girls to get dedicated. This can be seen in the case of Mukta whose mother was against her daughter becoming a devadasi but the cultural norm enforced by the upper caste men envelope the families in superstitions and made Sakubai dedicate Mukta. Culture was also the reason Rajayi and then Kalyani were dedicated in spite of laws prohibiting it. Prof. Jenny Bourne Taylor's opinion as quoted by Bhat (2023) is that "Cultural forms should never be seen as isolated texts but as embedded within the historical and material relationship and processes which formed them" (35). Culture cannot and should not be viewed as isolated from people, society, traditions but intertwined with everything. Culture has the power to make or break people and nations.

The British arrived in India ushered with their own culture and religion, they could not comprehend the diverse Indian culture and traditions which they viewed with scepticism and contempt. The courtesans who were custodians of art were equated with dancing girls and the devadasi who were the wives of God were called sex workers. The British wanted to impose cultural hegemony by promoting their own cultural values as moral and superior. Sutcliffe calls the devadasis whores like the dancing girls of London. Any sexual act outside marriage was considered immoral hence they encouraged devadasis and courtesans to get married. The colonisers took moral cleaning upon themselves by introducing laws which banned dedicating young girls as devadasis and shut down the kothas where courtesans would perform. English education was another technique to create an army of Indian men who thought like them. Padam Singh called the kothas a blemish on Indian culture as it was a sign of demonic depravity. The 'purification of Indian culture' was a part of the white man's burden. Their laws and education transformed the course of indigenous Indian cultural norms and practices.

Raymond William's theories state how culture is not static but a process which keeps evolving making it dynamic. Dr. Bhat compares culture to a river which continuously changes

its course and direction (21). Indian culture has indeed been dynamic with the varied rulers influencing the culture and society at a given time. India's robust cultural history is exemplified through literature;

Literature is the supreme representation of culture. The greatness of a nation's culture is reflected through its great literature...therefore a serious engagement with literature takes us to the heart of culture. (Bhat 135)

Literature gives the readers a peek into the lives of people and taste of the history. The critics of cultural materialism and new historicism uphold the text as a historical construct, and therefore it cannot be separated from its historical location. The text cannot be viewed in isolation from the time it is written about. Art constantly evolves with changing times and historical events. Literature is fluidic in nature and its content varies depending on the times. Novels like the primary texts used in this research are significant not only for the pleasure of reading but as valuable texts of culture and history.

5.3 Revisiting and Rewriting

Literature goes beyond the act of writing and reading, it can be seen as a vehicle of ideology and power but also as a site of struggle and resistance. Writers do not write for mere pleasure but to show their socio-political stand and bring forth their world views. Literature has the power to make the readers ponder, question and act. Luce Irigaray rightfully states in *Towards a Feminist Poetics of narrative Voice*, "to find a voice (voix) is to find a way (voie)" (Lanser 3).

Manjula wrote her autobiography to assert her agency and use her voice. Her act of writing was more for herself than for her readers. She wrote to feel empowered. Batuk wrote about her life so that girls like her who remain unnamed and forgotten will be heard and her story would make people uncomfortable enough to act. Batuk writes till the very end of her

life, till all that is left of her is her writing. There is not much written by trafficked girls about their lives so Batuk wanted to bridge that gap and represent herself and countless other girls like her. Batuk hoped her autobiography would make an impact in the world. Kalyani begins writing about her ancestors to represent not only her life but the trajectory of devadasis from her native village. She represented her ancestors as she herself did not lead the life of a devadasi, she wanted her family to become a part of history. The analysis of the texts reveal how the writers write when they do not accept their current lives. Writing is a way of questioning as well as protesting.

5.3.1 Reorienting and Rewriting

Discord with societal norms has led to many pieces of literature where the writer expresses his dissent in his work and in turn to their socio-political surroundings. The act of writing and publishing is a significant stride towards shattering their silence and asserting their agency.

On the other hand, sometimes the absence of literature is not due to the absence of resources, but a statement of refusal. Their silence and refusal to write their story is another way to indicate dominance (Wyss 122). Choosing to remain silent is not a passive act but an active stance. People and communities that remain silent are actively fighting their battle and are not passively awaiting their fate.

The theory of narratology predominant focuses on the significance of narration while overlooking the role of characters. However characters play an important role in shaping the narrative structure. The plot may be the heart of the text but characters are the soul. Dismissing the importance of characters while analysing the text is akin to undervaluing the importance of the sun in farming and solely focussing on the rain.

Robin Silbergleid (2010) draws attention to the power dynamic between the subject ‘I’ kept away from literary establishments versus the ‘you’ who holds the power (331). This dynamic laid the foundation for anti-narratives which “explores and undermines narrative convention” (332). These narratives bring focus upon subjects or themes which were seldom written about. The primary texts with courtesans, devadasis and trafficked sex workers are anti-narratives which explore the lives of girls “I” who were kept away from literary establishments. These novels force the readers to question and openly discuss the lives of prostitutes in India.

Narrative forms incorporating real elements are categorized as realistic writing. These novels which portray the lives of courtesans of the yesteryears, devadasi then and now and girls stuck in brothels are fictionalised renditions of real-life accounts. Realistic writing relies on the psyche of the individual and proposes a change in the society and self (Garg 181). Mukta hopes for a better future for her daughter and not become a devadasi like all the girls in her family. Batuk and Lakshmi demand a change in the society so trafficking and forced sex work comes to an end. These characters hope for a better world and propose changes in the society through the text. Literature is not only a literary contribution but also a social contribution. The text makes a mark in history and aides in furthering culture.

5.3.2 Who should write?

The confusion of who is the most appropriate writer for a story is debatable. Should it be the person with the same experiences, someone possessing the gender or socio-economic background or anyone passionate about narrating the tale? The writer’s contribution to the canon of literature and history is immense, after all “there is no tale without a teller, there is no teller without a tale” (Lanser 4). The narrator’s primary duty is to bring the text into existence and nothing more.

Women's writing in India has come a long way. 'Women's Writing and Women's Identity' chart the development of Indian women's writing. The nineteenth century writers were preoccupied with romantic tales, perhaps influenced by the perception that women's experiences were constrained, limiting the scope of their writing. Gradually they started writing about individual conflicts with reality. The themes would represent the conflict between traditional restrictions and their quest for modernity. Subsequently women writers began writing about characters who represented groups and causes (186). Elaine Showalter (2009) believed that women were writing about their search for identity and their self-discovery since the early nineteenth century (13). The evolution of Indian women's writing marks the evolution of the growth as a community of women. Writers who started off writing about romance began exploring serious and heavier subjects which struck a chord with the readers. Their writing was not only meant for entertainment but to make the readers think, question and probably act.

Twentieth century saw women writers focus on their own experiences and their identity. They frequently demonstrated parallels and disparities between their own experiences and of other women. These writers wanted to replace the patriarchal canons through collective activism (Garg 184). They focused on themes of exploitation, suppression and injury inflicted upon them by men. Women writers moved away from these themes by the late twentieth century and explored women's psyche and role in society (Garg 184). Modern women writers write for female and male readers as compared to before where their assumed readership was only female. Having a neutral readership assures reduced censorship and covers wider themes. Earlier women writers were expected only to write about themselves because of their lack of knowledge of the world, and then these writers were called vain; while male writers writing about women were not judged harshly (Lanser 19).

Narratology helps to differentiate between structures of text written by male and female writers, which aids in developing gendered discourse. Since men and women have different

experiences, their writing and perspectives are varied. The essence of a woman will be more effectively captured by a female author who has first-hand experience, rather than a male writer writing about womanly experiences he has never experienced himself.

When male writers depict female experiences in their writing, the portrayal of the protagonist's feelings may lack the nuanced depth as compared to a female writer addressing the same. Shivarama Karanth's expressions about Manjula's first sexual experience does not indicate any inner feelings or show the turmoil of emotions she must have felt. Instead he uses words like "his steel embrace", "roving bull"; which are masculine words used to describe her patron's masculinity instead of focussing on her inner feelings. While Patricia McCormick's writing about Lakshmi's first sexual encounter focuses largely on her emotions "muffled sounds of crying", "my heart throbs", "I stand on shaky legs". A male writer's focus was more towards the patron's description than the female's feelings, while a female writer described the sexual experience using emotions and feelings.

Munshi Premchand's outlook of Saman was built through the opinion of men from the society; Saman was viewed as a lazy, ungrateful wife by Gujadar, an immoral courtesan by Padam Singh and Bithal Das and then as a pious social worker by men in the society. Saman's identity was constructed by the male gaze and societal expectations set upon her. Premchand's focal point was the opinions and emotions of the male characters. However James Levine gives attention to Batuk's emotions and provides detailed description of her experiences; Batuk herself constructs her self-image without relying on male opinions. She realises that her clients do not care to use her name or want to listen to her opinions so she takes matters in her own hand by writing about herself. The writings of Premchand and Levine, both male writers, are contrasting in nature. Claire Scobie recount's Maya's emotions with details but falls short while expressing male sentiments. Scobie's description of Thomas' yearning for Maya feels surface level with no focus on his emotions but just his need to strip her and have her. The gender of

the writer does play a role in representing the passion of characters, a female writer best describes female ordeals but lacks expertise in man's expressions.

While reading fiction written by women, the readers should not only analyse the surface text which is obvious and clear, but also the sub text which is hidden and cryptic. The latter provides richer insights into the plot and characterisation. The woman's voice is stereotyped as polite, feminine and emotional while the man's voice is considered strong, powerful and rational (Lanser 348). Sometimes the surface voice could be feminine but a powerful voice also emerges from the sub text. The readers need to consider both the voices to appreciate the text in the true essence. The double text reaffirms Bakhtin's belief that a narrative voice is never singular (Lanser 349).

E. P. Thompson does not consider the working class as oppressed and inert but as "dynamic and complex mixture of oppression and agency" (99). He believes that individuals are active agents capable of bringing about changes in history and not passive beings who have no active role in creating history. So should the subject be the writer? Or should be an impartial writer who has not been oppressed write about the struggles of the subject?

The critics of cultural materialism and new historicism view the author as a product of his or her history...both schools of criticism uphold the "constructedness of culture" (Bhat 42). The author's background plays a significant role in the process of writing. Gayatri Spivak comments on literature written by western authors about India based on their understanding and may not accurately represent the real India (Bhat 59). Rao tells Maya how the English write about themselves while the Indians do not. He adds that the English also write books about Indians despite not knowing much about them. As the Indians themselves do not write their stories, their side of the story will never be known. This makes such literature unreliable and a one-sided opinion rather than the truth. In such a case the "constructedness of culture" would be based on sensibility of the white writer, which does not ensure reliable or unerring

representation. Mukta was not educated and did not have the opportunity to write about her experiences, but journalist Andrew Colt wrote about her and her family as per his understanding, using his words. Colt's authenticity of writing can be questioned as he has not experienced a similar life as Mukta, yet has written about it from a place of authority. Would such literature be considered as re-writing or this can be seen as another act of white man's burden? Coincidentally three of the primary texts are written by non-Indian writers. British Claire Scobie has written about devadasi Maya's struggle post colonization; James Levine also a Britisher has represented the trafficked Batuk; Patricia McCormick an American has written about Lakshmi's life in the brothel. These writers are not Indian and have not spent enough time in India and yet have based their novels on India on experiences they haven't been through.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak questions the impulse of the dominant group to represent the subaltern, which ends up silencing them and glossing over their concerns as the west learns about the subaltern through the western lens. Would the western writers truly understand the predicament of these Indian devadasis and trafficked girls and what was readership were they aiming towards? Scobie exposes the hypocrisy of the British and does not defend them but she also over-explains native concepts and history which indicates her aim towards a global audience. McCormick pictures the American man as a messiah who rescues Lakshmi, elevating the image of her fellow Americans. In her website she mentions that her target audience was Americans and she wanted to provide them with an American character who fights the crime. The target audience and intent of the writer can be gauged through the writing. The authenticity of writing will be skewed if the author writes with an aim to make one party emerge as a hero.

Spivak's point of view gives paramount importance to the question of who will speak rather than who would listen, owing to the fact that the speaker is not unidimensional and has multiple facets of personality. These will undoubtedly interfere in the writing process and the

text produced. The supreme question remains if the writer has the authority to represent the subject belonging to another culture.

Srividya, a Bharatnatyam dancer herself, was awarded her doctorate in representation of devadasis. Her artistic background and extensive research merged is evident in her novel. In spite of not being a devadasi herself, the other factors may justify her authorship on devadasis. Levine, a 'white man' with no direct connections with the life he has represented, based his novel on reports and observations of the field workers working in Mumbai's red light area. This unidimensional research may not justify his right to represent Batuk's story. McCormick travelled to Nepal and India to interview sex workers, tracing Lakshmi's route and researching for a long time before writing her novel. Scobie's trip to Tanjore's temples inspired her to write her novel set there, she researched about the place and devadasis before writing her novel. Does research give writers a right to write about characters or places which have no direct connection with them? Such works will be meticulously researched but lack personal connection. Premchand belonged to Varanasi where he observed the courtesan's quarters and wrote about it. Karanth also based his novel in his native state of Karnataka. These writers could describe the setting with personalised attention as they belonged to the places, however they lacked connection with their protagonists. Their expertise on courtesans came from observations more than personal connections. The authenticity of work and the prerogative of the author to write about certain topics is debatable when the author does not belong to the same community as the protagonist.

The narrator of a novel either uses a personal voice which is authorial to tell their own story or a communal voice which represents the story of a community. Lanser (2018) gives importance to communal voices which give voice to the voiceless marginalised communities (21). It has been noticed that authorial voice is mostly used by men and communal is mostly used by women. Shen (2005) writes how men rarely write to represent a community but mostly

focus on individual stories. However Munshi Premchand's *Courtesan's Quarters* is not only about Saman but represents the courtesans of North India. Karanth does not only write about Manjula but about the courtesans of the bygone era. Jamie Levine speaks for trafficked girls through Batuk. In reference to the primary texts, it shows that male writers write more personal stories than communal tales, while the strong suit of women writers is the communal voice.

5.3.3 Fact or Fiction?

Realistic fiction closely mirrors reality to the extent that it borders factual representation. Historical places and characters often mentioned in pieces of fiction makes one question how much of fact lies in fiction. Real life heavily influences literature blurring the boundary between fiction and facts. This prompts the question, can fictional narratives evolve towards non-fictional accounts?

Historical facts found in history books or textbooks are not free of prejudice, they are influenced by the historian's own subjectivity. If fiction is considered biased and subjective, historical facts are not different. In Natanson's (1961) words "if history is the study of the past, historicity is about the historian's experience of the past" (81). History is not pure facts but tinted with subjectivity and bias, which further blurs the lines between history and fiction.

The de-fictionalization of texts relies on the reader, "The idea of defictionalization involves the possibility of the reader's movement between different interpretative communities and contexts" (Mikkonen 292). The reader's ability to connect fiction to facts from history books, inscriptions and oral tales aids the movement of a fictional text to become factual. Factual texts are not dry and devoid of creativity, they also use narrative devices and figures of speech like fiction. Individual's understanding of other people interacting with them is comparable to a reader's understanding of characters from books (Mikkonen 293). The

parallelism between fact and fiction is not lost to the readers and hence the verdict of de-fictionalizing a text lies with the readers.

Fictional narratives serve as a means to elucidate the complexities of the real world. They transcend imaginary characters and instead offer a creative configuration of the real world. Fiction plays a pivotal role in shaping historical narratives and factual understanding, providing vivid illustration of the real world.

5.4 Conclusion

Roland Barthes compartmentalised texts into readerly texts and writerly texts. Classics are readerly texts who have a fixed meaning and there isn't much scope for the reader's interpretation. But writerly texts empower the readers to create their own meaning, freeing them from pre-decided interpretations. Writerly texts allow readers to participate and involve themselves with the interpretations and meanings turning a mere reader into a writer. Such texts enable the reader to assume a subject position and showcase resistance and authority. McFee (1980) questions the importance of interpretation over historicity as the readers derive changing meaning of the text as per its relevance (308). The text will change its meaning depending on the reader and the time. Each reader will have their own connections to the art which might change as per their phase of life.

Literature might not bring a big active change in the society, but it does change people's perspective of themselves by exposing them to protagonists who reject predetermined social norms (Garg 182). Protagonists from the primary texts who take matters in their own hand and actively decide their future, positively influence the readers to take charge of their lives and carve their own paths.

Literature or any art form is not limited to the artist's expression but it is much more than that. Art is the origination of culture and facilitation of history. Anti-narratives are

beneficial elements of literature which further the cause of marginalized and silenced communities. Anti-narratives or narratives with uncommon protagonists are important not just to tell their stories and break their silence but to help the members of their community learn and grow. As Rupi Kaur's poem indicates, the sacrifices make the mountain taller so the generation of women after them can see further. The sacrifices of the previous generations and literature which depicts their struggles assist the newer generation to have bigger and brighter futures. The power of literature is not only limited to literary canons but touches lives and shapes the future.

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Chapter 6

End of the Beginning

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*
—Robert Frost

6.1 Connecting the Dots

This research has analyzed literature on courtesans, devadasis, and trafficked girls in separate chapters, as well as investigated narratology in another core chapter. This section will briefly reveal the key findings from these chapters.

“Knot of Doom ” discusses the devadasi system. Theogamy the practice of dedicating girls to a God or Goddess is prevalent all over the world. It is also referred to as temple prostitution as these young girls were expected to be sexually involved with men of power. This oppression is conducted through family, society and religion. Theogamy is called the devadasi system in India and can be traced back to the ninth century in South India. Young girls are married to God with an elaborate ceremony and thereby forbidden to marry any mortal man. There are several reasons for dedication: belonging to a family of devadasis, superstitions, to show gratitude to God and also out of choice. The devadasis did not belong to one single caste but could belong to any caste hence forming a class of devadasis among themselves. This chapter focuses on the devadasi system in India through *The Pagoda Tree*, *The Undoing Dance* and *The Colour of Our Sky*. The system is explained in detail emphasizing on the etymology

of the name, the variations of the name and duties in different Indian states and the superstitions, customs and traditions in place.

The devadasis were expected to be sexually available to powerful men in the village. The man who penetrates is considered superior and powerful, the men who sleep with devadasis were men of better social standing in the village. Sex in such cases is sanctioned by God, as God makes the rules on who gets to have sex with the devadasis. Devadasis were greatly respected as wives of God in ancient India but that changed after the arrival of the British. The British could not understand the socio-religious significance of devadasis, the English society had public dancers and sex workers but there were no wives of God and hence they equated devadasis to common prostitutes. Sutcliffe (*The Pagoda Tree*) could not differentiate between temple dancers and public dancers. The dedication ceremony of young girls was considered as trafficking and laws were formed to stop the devadasi system. Maya was dedicated as a devadasi and was preparing to join the King's court, but the arrival of the British forced her to move away from her destined future and join a dance troop instead. Kalyani's ancestors were dedicated to God and performed in the king's court but the new laws were already in place during her mother's and her time. This cause was propelled by the educated Indian men who introduced more laws and encouraged the devadasi girls to get married. Kalyani was married to Balan in order to move with the times and to secure her future. However the twentieth century still witnessed dedication ceremonies performed in secret and so the girls could be sent to brothels in the city. Mukta was dedicated in secret by her grandmother and then sold to a brothel in Mumbai. The laws reduced the number of dedications but did not stop them completely.

This chapter foregrounds the contributions of devadasis in music and dance. India had a connection between religious devotion and dance, hence the devadasis as the wives of God sang and danced for him. In turn they contributed to the development and preservation of Indian

music and dance. Maya's life revolved around her dance, and *The Pagoda Tree* illustrates the impact of dance in devadasis' lives. However, the colonial influence combined with English education could not accommodate the devadasi or her art. Their dance and music was changed to suit the modern Indian society. *The Undoing Dance* charts the evolution of their art post colonisation. Dance forms by Kalyani's mother were considered vulgar and outdated while Padmasini's brahminized dance form was learnt and celebrated. Lastly this chapter emphasizes the need to celebrate literatures written on devadasis so their voices could be heard and their stories could be discussed to help them progress in life. The voices of devadasis have been silenced for a long time and it is important for literature to address that gap. Kalyani writes of her ancestors as she wanted their story to be heard and their history to be preserved.

"Metamorphosis of the Maven" highlights the lives of courtesans. Courtesan culture has its roots in many regions across the world. Courtesans are an integral part of Indian art and culture. The courtesans paved the way for women to achieve financial independence by being the first paid working women in society. The courtesans had a dual image in society; where they were publicly condemned for their loose morals and at the same time, they were also privately admired. The courtesans chose to lead a life of resistance, resisting patriarchy and stereotypes. The lives of courtesans is discussed through *Courtesans's Quarters* and *The Woman of Basrur* in this chapter.

This chapter draws parallels between ancient India where Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra* systematized and regulated courtesan-ship to the post-colonial period where the lack of laws and absence of passage for redressal threw them into chaos. The laws protected the courtesans and safeguarded their interests as opposed to an unstructured and unrecognized practice where the courtesans did not have any rights and lacked a forum. The Rajas would patronize courtesans but after their downfall they had to resort to other means to sustain themselves. *The Woman of Basrur* begins by telling the reader that they did not have kings anymore, instead

wealthy merchants from Basrur or other towns would patronize the courtesans. The fall of the kingdoms coupled with national reform movements brought about multiple changes in the system. In the nineteenth century survey report the British used the term *tawaif* as the generic term for a whole range of women ranging from dancers, singers, entertainers and sex workers; equating all of them as one irrespective of their differences. The image of the Indian woman as an entertainer and centre of male desires did not serve the interest of the British anymore and they wanted to replace it with the virtuous woman. Subsequently the Indian middle class was influenced by Victorian ideas of morality and society and organized Anti-Nautch movements.

Since the modern Indian woman was pitched as a virtuous woman, the nation could not accommodate the promiscuous courtesan. Both the primary texts are set in the post-colonial era and this chapter dwells deeper into the impact of new ideology and laws on their lives. The chapter sheds light on Saman's life as an estranged wife who was forced to become a courtesan to sustain herself. She did not belong to any hereditary family of courtesans but her circumstances forced her to use her singing to support herself. When she was given an option to leave this life and move into an ashram, she accepted it and dedicated herself to the service of society.

This chapter highlights the significance of music and dance in their lives. Manjula was a passionate singer and she truly wanted to pursue professional singing, similarly her adopted daughter Shari attempted to pursue acting. However the limited scope and absence of support stopped them from achieving their dreams. The downfall of courtesan-ship reinvented their art to suit the radio, theatre, cinemas or dance bars. While some could reinvent themselves, most joined sex work. As they started sharing the same public space as the common prostitutes, it led to homogenization. This itself was the death of courtesans as they were put in the same boat as the common prostitute without acknowledging their uniqueness. The courtesan was not considered as a person with craft, but a commodified body. Finally the chapter addresses the

shift in writing about courtesans from the fallen woman serving the male interest to recognising them from positions of solidarity, independent identity and agency. Manjula decides to write her own autobiography to narrate her story, this is an empowering move as she wanted to tell her story herself instead of relying on a stranger writing about her or courtesans of Basrur. But not all courtesans were given the power to narrate their own story.

“Sold for Sex” elaborates on human trafficking. Human trafficking has existed for several years and has its foundations in the slave trade. Women from developing nations are the most susceptible to trafficking. Girls are usually trafficked to a new place to break their will and make it difficult for them to escape as the area and language would be foreign to them. Over time several international and national laws have been put in place to prevent human trafficking nevertheless trafficking is still raging. This chapter studies trafficking through *Sold* and *The Blue Notebook*.

The chapter discusses the three significant drivers to human trafficking as poverty, gender and the role of parents. Lakshmi and Batuk belonged to poor families and their fathers sold them to improve their economic conditions. The chapter identifies patriarchy behind the act of selling one’s daughter and also behind high demand for sex workers. Kathleen Barry (1995) believes that the act of selling the daughters is a showcase of feudal power where daughters and wives are considered as the man’s property that can be bought or sold. Women lack power and resources in comparison to the men and remain in subaltern positions making them more vulnerable. The unwillingness of some men to want an equal relationship which makes them seek sex workers who can be dominated and hurt. Violence and sexual exploitation pushes the girls into backwardness while the men benefit from it. This chapter unravels the changes brought into the lives of trafficked girls, their coping mechanisms and the role of their agency. Over time, the girls forget who they used to be and leave their old life behind. Their name holds no significance anymore, and how they dress also changes significantly. All those

changes have evolved them from a mere girl to a woman who has faced hardships in life. Batuk creates an imaginary world for herself to disconnect from her reality, while Lakshmi would make herself believe that what was happening to her is in fact a show on the television and not her reality.

One of the poems written by Batuk says, “[e]verything is foretold, Yet in all we have a choice” (Levine 2006). Her words are ironic because she never had a choice. Neither Batuk nor Lakshmi could not decide their fate and remained trapped in unfortunate circumstances. Their future was decided by their fathers, the dominant men in their lives. Trafficked girls who were denied agency and are perpetually identified as victims risk being stuck in the same position. They are unable to move forward in life and control the reigns of their lives. The stories of Lakshmi and Batuk are not two personal stories but stories of countless women stuck in trafficking. Lakshmi writes her story to honour countless unnamed girls like herself who are not part of the mainstream history or literature, so seeks to create a niche for trafficked girls.

“Wielding Culture and Writing His(Her)story” sheds light on the significance of culture and literature. The study of culture unravels the dominant ideology which stems from culture. The upper caste and upper class in India are known to be the rule makers and their word is taken as the norm. The British arrived in India ushered with their own culture and religion, they could not comprehend the diverse Indian culture and traditions which they viewed with scepticism and contempt. This chapter identifies novels as an important literary tool to document and understand the history and culture of people and society. Literature can be seen as a vehicle of ideology and also as a site of struggles and resistance. It has the power to make the readers ponder, question and act.

Manjula wrote her autobiography to assert her agency and use her voice. Her act of writing was more for herself than for her readers. Batuk wrote about her life so that girls like

her who remain unnamed and forgotten will be heard and her story would make people uncomfortable enough to act. There is not much written by trafficked girls about their lives so Batuk wanted to bridge that gap and hoped her autobiography would make an impact in the world. Kalyani begins writing about her ancestors to represent not only her life but the trajectory of devadasis from her native village. She represented her ancestors as she herself did not lead the life of a devadasi, she wanted her family to become a part of history. Writing is a way of questioning, protesting and indignation. Discord with societal norms has led to many pieces of literature where the writer expresses his dissent in his work and in turn to their socio-political surroundings. This chapter employs methodology to differentiate between structures of text written by male and female writers. It also identifies that the author's background plays a significant role in the process of writing. An Indian writing about Indian characters will not be the same as a western writer writing about Indians. Lastly this chapter highlights the role of the reader in defictionalizing by drawing parallels between fact and fiction. The reader's ability to connect fiction to facts from history books, inscriptions and oral tales aids the movement of a fictional text to become factual. The parallelism between fact and fiction is not lost to the readers and hence the verdict of de-fictionalizing a text lies with the readers.

This research connects the dots to show the interconnectedness of protagonists. The links between devadasis, courtesans and girls in brothels is highlighted. Mukta, the protagonist of *The Colour of Our Sky*, was dedicated as a devadasi by her grandmother, rescued by her biological father and taken far away from her village, but the brothel owner who she was sold to, kidnapped her and took her away. The faith of this devadasi girl was the same as countless girls in the brothel, some of whom were trafficked. Maya was dedicated as a devadasi by her mother in *The Pagoda Tree*, but she was receiving training under Palani in the hope of being a courtesan in the king's court in the future. However, the empire's fall due to the British's arrival disrupted those plans, and she went from being a dancer in the troop to a mistress to men like

the other devadasis. Kalyani from *The Undoing Dance* belonged to the thirteenth generation of devadasis. Some of her ancestors danced in the King's court like a courtesan, and all of them served the temple, while she was encouraged to get married and exit the cycle of devadasis. The courtesans in *The Courtesan's Quarter* faced the brunt of colonization, with the modern Indian man shunning their art and equating them to common prostitutes. This novel shows the fall of the courtesans once Victorian morality set in India, which also forced some courtesans to resort to sex work. Manjula does not explicitly mention a dedication ceremony but writes about the compulsion to dance in the temple once a year in *The Woman of Basrur*. A strong-willed woman who was a respected, successful musician and sort after courtesan, did not inspire her grand-niece to join their hereditary profession, in fact she chose to leave her behind and embrace the modern Indian image of a respected woman. *Sold* charts the story of Lakshmi, whom her step-father sold to a brothel in India, and *The Blue Notebook* narrates the faith of Batuk whom her father also sold. Both of these novels highlight the life they lead and others in Indian brothels.

All seven primary texts are connected in some or the other form. Mukta shared the faith of Lakshmi and Batuk in a brothel. Maya and Manjula were mistresses of men, while Manjula might have also been dedicated as a devadasi like Mukta and Maya. Kalyani was dedicated as a devadasi and some of her ancestors danced in the court as a courtesan. Maya, Kalyani and Saman were affected by the British. Apart from this, all of them were undoubtedly subjected to patriarchal power. Patriarchy significantly influenced their lives, whether to keep those older traditions alive or to change their lives overnight with laws. The faith of these women lay in the hands of various men. This research could undertake a comparative analysis of the plight experienced by devadasis, courtesans, and trafficked girls, elucidating parallels and distinctions in their lived experiences.

6.2 Findings of the Research

Textual research elucidates the following findings. This research was able to unveil the changes in the social, cultural and economic standing of prostitutes in India from ancient to contemporary times. In ancient times the courtesans and devadasis were well respected and had laws safeguarding their interests; but the arrival of the British and increased patriarchal power led to the decline of their cultural and social standing with everyone reduced to common prostitutes (sex workers) in spite of their differentiation. Left without any option courtesans and devadasi were pushed towards sex work to sustain themselves. High demand for sex workers subsequently increased human trafficking too. Manjula led a fairly comfortable and secure life as an independent courtesan, but the British influenced Indians shamed Saman and uprooted her from the courtesan's quarters and left her helpless. Maya was training to dance in the king's court but when the British captured Tanjore she had to flee and resort to being a mistress. Kalyani's ancestors were treated like deities themselves but with the arrival of the British and their laws the position of devadasis were reduced to sex workers and dedicating their daughters was equated to human trafficking. Mukta's situation in the twenty-first century was far worse as she was sold to a brothel after her dedication ceremony. Over the years, trafficking was on the rise and the twenty-first century saw Lakshmi and Batuk sold to brothels. While courtesans and devadasis were respected in the earlier years, the arrival of the British and patriarchal power led to the decline of their cultural and social standing and everyone was reduced to sex workers in spite of their differentiation.

Through the previous chapters, the research has shown how society is fuelled by patriarchy, masculine power, and dominance. Women are often associated with sex, seduction and procreation, while men are considered to be intellectual. The men and patriarchal society have tried to reduce these girls/women to sex and not let them rise beyond that. Hence men have ensured that even today, women provide them with sex, may it be religious (devadasis),

cultural (courtesans), or commercial (sex work). The position of prostitutes has indeed deteriorated over the years, but the number of prostitutes has not and hence there is a need for associations and movements that will protect them and uplift them.

Some protagonists of the primary texts realized that they were puppets of patriarchy; some accepted their fate while others tried to fight against society. Maya was pushed into adversity after the fall of the king and her mother's death. She followed Uma's lead for a while but managed to break away and use her dance to support her as an artist in England towards the end of the novel (*The Pagoda Tree*). Mukta's mother resisted her daughter's dedication as she knew what her future would hold. Mukta managed to get away from the village, but her past caught up with her, and she reached the brothel; she could not change her destiny but hoped to help her daughter. The cycle of dedication and sex work ended when her daughter was rescued and adopted by Tara (*The Colour of the Sky*). Kalyani did not have a say in her dedication and neither did she have a say in her marriage. Her mother decided for her, and later her husband took decisions for her (*The Undoing Dance*). Manjula followed her heart and did not let the patriarchal society dictate her life. She had sexual relations for pleasure, did not stick to one patron and mainly carved her path. Her grand-niece Chandri, who read Manjula's autobiography, realized that her bold grand-aunt was still dependent on men to some extent, and she decided not to become a courtesan herself but instead study hard and become a teacher (*The Woman of Basrur*). Saman was married to a man she did not choose; she lived a simple life dependent on her husband, making her unhappy. When her husband threw her out of the house because of a misunderstanding, she took matters in her hand and became a courtesan. She left her trade after being coerced by Bithal Das and continued to suffer at the hands of her sister and brother-in-law until she began running the orphanage. Men dictated Saman's entire life and she barely had any control or autonomy over it. Even though she decided to become a courtesan, she was forced to feel shame and quit. Saman was like a puppet in the hands of

society (Courtesan's Quarter). Lakshmi was sold to a brothel by her stepfather under the guise of working for a house. She tried hard not to comply, but violence and sedatives forced her into it. While working in the brothel for many years, she grabbed her freedom by trusting the American man and choosing to get rescued during a police raid (Sold). Batuk was sold by her father and used her writing and imagination as a medium to free herself. However, she accepted her faith and did not fight to move away from her life, and eventually passed away, still tied to the shackles of patriarchy (The Blue Notebook). While they all realized that the society wronged them, only some had the courage to try and break free. Some of them managed to snatch their freedom while some could not.

The research has examined reforms and legal frameworks that have impacted their lives. The Britisher's lack of recognition of devadasis led to laws prohibiting dedication ceremonies equating them to trafficking. These laws were continued and added to post-independence by ending courtesan-ship. By the end of twentieth century more laws were introduced against human trafficking and sex work; however the laws have not been successful in preventing trafficking, instead the clandestine nature of sex work further endangers the victims. Abolitionists and anti-prostitution equate prostitution to slavery and believe that outlawing prostitution will lead to eradication, however, it is seen that sex work has thrived under legal regimes with sex workers having legal rights and the support of law enforcement agencies. On the other hand criminalization of sex work will not stop prostitution but instead increase chances of rape, trafficking and other illegalities. The position of prostitutes has indeed deteriorated over the years, but the number of prostitutes has not and hence there is a need for associations and movements that will protect them and uplift them. Lastly the thesis gives visibility to the unheard voices of devadasis, courtesans and trafficked girls which are absent in mainstream society.

This research makes a significant contribution to the academic discourse by filling a gap in the literature and research regarding prostitution in the Indian context. It plays a pivotal role in elucidating the interconnectedness among courtesans, devadasis, and trafficked sex workers, a linkage that has been largely overlooked in scholarly discussions. By studying the three aspects of prostitution separately as well as together, the research delves deeper in the role of patriarchy, power and sexuality in their lives. This research further foregrounds the significance of writing and literature in creating history and culture by challenging the mainstream history which has not been inclusive. This research seeks to address this gap and deconstruct mainstream history by providing alternate points of view and an array of previously silenced voices.

6.3 Contemporary Associations and Movements

The world's oldest profession has seen many ups and downs. Some rulers and governments protected them, while some mistreated them. Over time, sex workers have felt a growing need to protect themselves and fight for their cause. This has led to the birth of several associations and movements to secure their cause worldwide.

Australia can be considered a pioneer in sex worker association with the formation of Scarlet Alliance in 1989. The association has been working towards advancing their rights and achieving equality and justice. Their purpose also includes protection against violence and the advancement of health (*Scarlet Alliance Australian Sex Workers Association*). Dutch sex workers formed a union named Dutch Union of Sex Workers (PROUD) in 2001 a year after the government legalized brothels. They formally belonged to the National Trade Union Federation to protect their interests (Palmer). Sealeer Cooperative was formed in Ibiza, Spain in 2014, and it helped sex workers who were cheated by their clients or abused by them (Pattnaik). Britain's General Trade Union (GMB) launched Scotland's first sex workers union

in 2019 to take the sex out of sex work and be protected as workers (BBC news). Maggie, Canadian sex work organization, was made a part of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) in 2021. This will enable the sex workers to get maternity leave, paid time off and meaningful ways to address their concerns (WION Web Team).

There are over fifteen million sex workers in India, constantly increasing. They are riddled with issues and seldom find their voices heard; hence sex workers of India have felt the need to organize themselves into associations to protect their interests and secure their rights. India is home to many such associations on the state and national levels.

West Bengal's Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (1995) is working towards recognising sex work as labour, and overseeing the development of sex workers in West Bengal (DURBAR). Karnataka has a Sex Workers Union to end the stigma around sex work, prevent discrimination and advocate the rights of sex workers in Karnataka. There are more associations in India which form the 'National Network of Sex Work' like: Kerala Network of Sex Workers, Mahila Jagrut Sevabhavi Sanstha (Maharashtra), Me and My World (Andhra Pradesh), Nirangal federation (Tamil Nadu) and many others (NNSW India).

Formed in 2011, All India Network of Sex Workers (AINSW) is one of the largest associations of sex workers in India, consisting of over five million sex workers from the country. Their vision is to live in a world where sex work is considered as any other work and where sex work and sex workers are not criminalized. Their goal is to ensure that the voices of sex workers are heard and their concerns are addressed (AINSW). It is a membership-based network where everyone has equal rights and voting power; it follows democratic practices for communication, representation and participation (AINSW). Their activities also include HIV intervention programs, ending violence against sex workers and ensuring people are not forced into trafficking along with many others.

These associations have been fighting to better the conditions of sex workers, to have them recognized as labour and end the stigma surrounding sex work. The analysis of sex work as labour is not new, even Marx wrote in 1844 that prostitution is only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the labourer and contemporary feminist scholars have challenged the views that sex workers are criminals or deviants (Vijyakumar et al). One of their demands worldwide has been the formation of labour unions to regulate the sex industry. Unionizing sex work will also put sex work in the same category as any other work and will reduce the stigma surrounding their profession.

While Third-Wave Feminists are calling sex work as work, which needs legal protection, the allocation of work to men and women is also gendered and depends on the "political formation of male desire" (Srinivasan 83). "To say that sex work is 'just work' is to forget that all work- men's work women's work- is never just work: it is also sexed" (Srinivasan 83). Higher number of female sex workers as compared to male indicate that the profession of sex work is sexed.

Abolitionists and anti-prostitution equate prostitution with slavery and believe that outlawing prostitution will lead to eradication, however, it is seen that sex work has thrived under legal regimes with sex workers having legal rights and the support of law enforcement agencies (Srinivasan 154). Srinivasan (2021) highlights the views of Juno Mac and Molly Smith who support this, "strengthening the labour power of sex workers wouldn't make their lives more liveable; it would give them more power to demand a restructuring of economic and social relations" (158). On the other hand criminalization of sex work will not save the prostitutes but instead increase chance of rape, trafficking and other illegalities. When sex work is illegal, the Johns will demand privacy for their transaction, putting the women at greater risk of making some money and deprive them of rights of redressal. Mac and Smith insist that the

choice is between punishing the John and empowering the sex workers but punishing the men will be at the cost of the women (Srinivasan 153).

While sex work or exchanging money for sex is not illegal in India, other acts surrounding the profession are: soliciting in a public place, living off the earnings of a sex worker, and brothels. This makes it difficult for sex workers to operate efficiently without the interference of the police. Marxist Feminist Silvia Federici states how “calling something “work” is the first step towards refusing to do it” (Srinivasan 156). With a standard labour union, there would be set rules and guidelines that will facilitate the profession while providing better working conditions and health care. They will also have a true identity, come out of the shadows, and help will be more accessible for them in case of cheating, violence or bad working conditions. With changing times and governments, the legal system and society should make a legitimate place for sex workers and an inclusive environment for them to thrive.

6.4 Conclusion

While women have lived in a world governed by men's rules, men have also witnessed women who have contested those rules. Women's dissent was often private or unsystematic, but recently it has become public and more organized by forming associations and joining movements. Nevertheless, men have chosen to ignore the revolts to continue to have their pleasure as a priority and secure their interests (Srinivasan 21). However, several girls and women are riding on the wave of change and demanding for a brighter future.

Mukta's mother died protecting her daughter from getting dedicated as a devadasi; unfortunately, she failed. Nevertheless, Mukta's dream for her daughter to have a better future away from her family traditions did come true when Tara adopted her (*The Colour of Our Sky*). Towards the novel's end, when Maya goes to England in search of her daughter, she uses her dance skills to earn money and believes that that will be her way out, "The end of one tradition

and the beginning of another" (Scobie 364). Maya broke away from being a devadasi dependent on men for her upkeep to be economically independent in a foreign country (The Pagoda Tree). Kalyani got married to escape from her past, but in turn had to sacrifice on her dance and music to live an honourable life, towards the end of the novel she could live a blended life as a respectable wife as well as continue practicing her hereditary dance and music (The Undoing Dance). Manjula's grand-niece, Chandri did not want to follow her lineage and instead study to become a teacher (The Woman of Basrur). Lakshmi wanted to study further and took matters into her hand when she carved her way out of the brothel (Sold). These women have tried to revolt, change their fate and break free from the shackles of society. Frantz Fanon (2001) rightfully points out how the world is not homogenous and that some people are still enslaved, some have achieved phoney independence, some have complete independence, and others are still fighting for it (9). The sex workers in India are also a heterogenous group at various stages of their life and independence.

The Supreme Court of India passed a landmark judgement in May 2022 "recognizing sex work as a "profession" whose practitioners are entitled to dignity and equal protection under law" (Rajagopal). The police were instructed not to interfere or take criminal action against consenting adult sex workers. The Court also prevents children of sex workers from being separated from their mothers owing to their profession. The police are also not supposed to discriminate against sex workers who want to lodge a criminal case and acknowledge the possibility of their sexual assault and encourage them to receive immediate medical care. Lastly, the Center and State will be required to have representation of Sex Workers while reforming laws on sex work. The Supreme Court has realized the importance of protecting the sex workers of India and not just formulating laws to prevent trafficking and other illegal sexual activities. This landmark judgement will help sex workers in India lead well-protected lives and come out of the shadows. Frantz Fanon (2001) believes that one must continuously renew

and deepen culture in a nation; one must ensure their culture will open the door of creation (197). The nation will progress if it is open to new learnings from around the world and willing to re-establish a few notions. The Supreme Court of India has imbibed Fanon's belief and has taken one step ahead in re-establishing norms and moving towards the future.

In the words of Winston Churchill, "This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

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