



### STUDY OF PROSTITUTION IN ANCIENT INDIAN CULTURE

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#### INTRODUCTION

Indian women have played a dominant role in the development and modelling of Indian culture and traditions, and they shall continue to play a vital role even in future. According to the concept of femininity, the place of women in the society is greatly influenced by several factors such as economic, social, religious, political and cultural. The status of women as a daughter, wife and mother has been widely studied in ancient Indian literature. However, the contribution of women engaged in the supposedly immortal trade off Prostitution and the effect on privileging economic system has not been a subject of an analytical study. Although such women viewed with containment, they were and still are a part of the entire female component of the society.

#### OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to throw light on the unknown aspects of the exploited and neglected life and profession of Prostitutes.

#### METHODOLOGY

This study is based on Sanskrit prose, poetry, drama and epics (Sanskrit literature). For this paper, the period from Vedic era to the sixth century A D has considered.

#### DISCUSSION

It is clear that women entered into this profession for varied reasons. Traditionally girls of prostitutes also entered the profession of prostitution. Both Vimala and Shriman became prostitutes after being born to prostitutes.<sup>1</sup> On such occasions the woman had to enter the profession of prostitution against her wish to earn her livelihood. Women from good families were purchased from their parents to serve the king.<sup>2</sup> In rare cases women from rich families choose this profession by choice. In the Buddhist era Addhakashi, a woman from a respectable family voluntarily became a courtesan. Amrapali the daughter of a Minister of Vaishali was a beautiful, cultural and skilled singer and dancer. The women of lower castes and slave women usually treated as prostitutes.

#### MEANS OF SOLICITING ATTENTION

External beauty and seductive looks were professional needs. So courtesans exercised great care in selecting clothes and ornaments, which enhanced their beauty. Mahabharat mentions that courtesans wore red color clothes and ornaments during public functions. They wore different hairstyles and adorned their hair with flowers.<sup>3</sup>

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## RESIDENCE

Prostitutes mainly resided in cities. It was commonly believed that presence of a young and beautiful group of prostitutes adds to the wealth of the city and therefore the cities vied with each other to attract the maximum number of courtesans to their own City. Cities such as Patliputra, Vaishali, and Banaras etc. attained popularity due to the presence of prostitutes (Courtesans) in those cities. Prostitutes lived in the southern portion of the city and it is significant that these parts also had a large number of liquor and meat shops.

## INCOME OF PROSTITUTES

The income of a prostitute varied depending upon her beauty, status, place in the society and intelligence. Amrapali of Vaishali and Salvati of Rajriha charged a fee of 1000Kahapan for rendering service.<sup>4</sup> Ordinary prostitutes charged less in comparison with young and beautiful prostitutes. In addition, the prostitutes received gifts such as expensive clothes, gold and silver ornaments and other souvenirs from their clients. Rich and affluent prostitutes with benevolent attitude gave financial assistance for renovation of temples, creation of gardens and parks, replantation along highways and building of drinking water tanks.

## ORGANIZATIONS

Prostitutes had independent associations. Samana was one of the institutions where free love seems to have been encouraged.<sup>5</sup> They could, in a single voice seek assistance from the State for solving the problems and stopping their exploitation. Needy and poor prostitutes provided assistance from the association funds, as per their need. Sometimes the internal disputes between them were successfully resolved at the level of the association.

## ACCEPTANCE IN SOCIETY

In the Epic period, the Institution of prostitutes had a legal status. On occasions, they invited by people of high social status<sup>6</sup> The Kamasutra contains several passages describing the garden picnics attended by prostitutes with the indulgent rich people. As per maintains in the Mahabharata prostitutes participated in public celebrations and added color to the gaieties by their singing and dancing. People invited them to sing and dance on special occasions such as marriage or childbirth. In some cases, the new bride would wear the marital thread around her neck by the hands of the prostitute in the belief that she would enjoy the company of her husband until her death. We can find a mentoring in Valmiki's Ramayana that Ram was welcomed back into Ayodhya by courtesans after he completed his period of banishment. In Mauryan age, prostitutes were exclusively in the service of the king.<sup>7</sup> Prostitutes viewed as 'Nagarshobhika' (ornaments of the city) in civic life. Many Sanskrit plays describe the Vasantotsav (spring festival) and Kaumudi Utsav (companionship festival). During Vasantotsav, prostitutes often dance on the street along with the ordinary citizens. During the Kaumudi utsav the widowers participated with their favorite prostitutes in the festivities. However poor prostitutes and those of average beauty received neglect from society. They received contemptuous treatment.

## CONCLUSION

In the social system prevailing in ancient India, prostitutes and their profession enjoyed social acceptance. In addition to offering their body for service, they played an important role in political, social and religious life and therefore they were treated with respect. Of course, the contemporary administrative system imposed certain restrictions on them to preserve the health of the society. However, at the same time protection afforded to them as professionals. The Buddhist religion considered them with sympathy and opened the way for them to attend salvation. However, from then until now in the male dominated social system, they are viewed as an object of ravishment. Instead, the profession has been directly linked with sale of bodily pleasure; it helps in maintaining the moral health of the society and must not be forgotten.

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