

LIFE OF CHILDREN IN BROTHELS (PARENTAGE OF CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND DISCRIMINATION)

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ABSTRACT

Prostitutes have always been an unrecognised and taboo social group. Their community is often stigmatised and they seldom receive any aids or that would benefit them and wholly improve their lives. Because of the widespread, negative stereotypes surrounding the brothel industry, this line of work receives very little attention from the rest of society, even though the profession is legally recognised in India. Children are also a part of this defenceless group, who end up therein, owing to a variety of circumstances. Some are born into such a life, while some are forced into human trafficking and others, due to lack of sense of identity. The life of children in brothels is a distressing and complex issue that demands urgent attention and intervention. This research paper attempts to shed light on the lives of children born and raised in India's red-light brothel districts, and examines three critical aspects of their existence, from a socio-legal point of view: parentage of children, education, and discrimination. To begin with, significant difficulties arise with determining the paternity of the children born in brothels. The paternity of these children is typically unclear or unknown, and their mothers are frequently exploited sex workers. There is a vicious cycle of vulnerability and social exclusion that is perpetuated when children do not have access to secure and supportive parental figures. Secondly, children who are raised in brothels often have their schooling seriously disrupted. Because of their marginalized status and the inherent stigma connected with their situation, these kids face considerable challenges in receiving formal education. The cycle of sex labour and poverty that these children are born into is only reinforced by the lack of education they receive. Lastly, the prejudice and discrimination that these children face is the final straw that pushes them over the edge. These kids are often treated harshly and excluded from mainstream society because of the stigma attached to them. They are frequently denied the opportunity to get healthcare, protection, and social inclusion. More often than not, they remain undiscovered and unacknowledged, since no one has ever visited there other than aid workers and government officials. They are already extremely vulnerable, and discrimination makes it much harder for them to stop the cycle of exploitation. It will take diversified strategies to improve the conditions under which children in brothels live. Protection and rehabilitation of these children must be top priorities, and they must have access to secure, nurturing environment. They need to have the opportunity to receive education so they may build the foundational skills and knowledge they'll need to succeed in the future. Also, awareness campaigns and advocacy work are needed to change the way people in general see these kids. The first step in securing the bright future of these children is acknowledging they exist. It is only by concerted effort and comprehensive strategies that we can hope to make a difference in the lives of these vulnerable children and end the vicious cycle of exploitation and exclusion from which they suffer.

INTRODUCTION

The occurrence of prostitution and human trafficking frequently fails to account for the reality that its victims come from all walks of life and span generations, even when the recent development in prevailing laws and social work practices has directed more attention to the human rights concerns associated with these issues. Insufficient consideration is given to the children living in brothels, by birth or as a result of trafficking. They are very likely to experience high levels of stigma and discrimination, and are vulnerable to the negative impacts of their surroundings.

Because they have never known better living standards, the children living in brothels have no concept of what "normal" means and only want to be heard and cared for. This group also has to deal with the societal problem of discrimination based on gender.¹¹⁷¹ Few children are able to attend school, and many more, especially females, are expected to join the workforce like their mothers. Keeping ties to their careers makes it difficult for mothers in brothels to care for their children full-time. As a result, more children are likely to be raised in a dysfunctional household and get involved in criminal activities as adults. Many of them develop a serious addiction to narcotics, which has far-reaching consequences. In the absence of proper parenting and schooling, these kids are more likely to engage in deceptive practices that put them at risk of becoming prostitutes or criminals.¹¹⁷²

The life of children in brothels is a heartbreaking and complex issue that raises profound concerns about their well-being, future prospects, and fundamental human rights. These children may be in a place where they do not know who their parents are. They have limited opportunities to get an education, and even when they do, they undergo a lot of struggle dealing with and navigating through a

world of discrimination and cruelty.¹¹⁷³ The interplay of parentage, education, and discrimination creates a web of challenges that impede the growth and snub any potential of these vulnerable children.

The "Indian Constitution" guarantees all the citizens of India the same set of fundamental rights without exception, and all citizens are equal before the law as per its 'Article 14'. While 'Article 21' of the "Indian Constitution" makes it very clear that every individual has the right to a life of dignity and freedom, there are several other provisions of the Constitution that are tailored specifically to children. Under 'Article 15(3)', the State may make special provisions for children. Furthermore, 'Article 23' seeks to safeguard children against human smuggling and abuse, while 'Article 24' forbids them from engaging in potentially hazardous jobs. Part IV of the "Indian Constitution" lays forth the Directive Principles, which mandate that the government ensure a safe and nurturing environment for children to grow up in. In addition, the Indian government has repeatedly established committees to oversee the implementation of numerous national programmes and legislation enacted for the benefit of children. Notably, none of these policies or legislation considered the rights and needs of children who were born in a brothel. However, the State has the authority to prevent children born in brothels from being subjected to prostitution and other forms of exploitation under 'Article 15(3)', not much has been done regarding the issue to date.

'Article 21A' of the "Indian Constitution" declares that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status, have the right to an education appropriate to their age. Despite this, the education of children residing in brothels is a crucial aspect that is significantly compromised. These children encounter multitude of challenges which hinder their access to formal education, thereby intensifying

¹¹⁷¹ Nieuwenhuys, Olga. "Is there an Indian childhood?" *Childhood* 16.2 (2009): 147-153.

¹¹⁷² Ibid.

¹¹⁷³ Sircar, Oishik, and Debolina Dutta. "Beyond compassion: Children of sex workers in Kolkata's Sonagachi." *Childhood* 18.3 (2011): 333-349.

their marginalization. The intrinsic social disapproval linked to their situation frequently results in their marginalization from conventional educational institutions. These children may be perceived as undesirable or disruptive by educational institutions, resulting in a cycle of discrimination and limited access to academic opportunities. Deprived of educational opportunities, such children are not likely to grow academically or foster any scholastic abilities and proficiencies that would enable them to liberate themselves from the pattern of prostitution.¹¹⁷⁴ The absence of formal education confines such children within a cycle of poverty and destitution, and sustains inter-generational disparity, thereby constraining their prospects for a bright future.

The dire circumstances faced by children in brothels are further exacerbated by the presence of discrimination. These children are often perceived as social pariahs by the rest of society, who subject them to stigmatization based on their parentage and the conditions surrounding their birth. The parentage or the lineage of children born within brothels is a crucial aspect that inherently shapes and influences their lives. The paternity of these children is sometimes unclear or unknown. Mothers engaged in prostitution often become absentee parents as they are themselves trapped in cycles of abuse and exploitation. Such circumstances significantly impact the mental, emotional, and social development of these children due to the absence of constant and supportive parental figures.¹¹⁷⁵ Those who don't feel like they fit in throughout their early years have a far harder time making friends and developing a positive self-image as adults.¹¹⁷⁶ In addition, these children are more likely to repeat the same exploitative actions as their parents since they are not receiving the attention and supervision they need and

thereby perpetuating the cycle of vulnerability and marginalization.

These children are frequently exposed to discriminatory attitudes, isolation, and limited access to social and communal resources. Due to the persisting stigma and discrimination, girl children in brothels are often deprived of a chance to experience normal relationships and families, once they have grown into adults. This discrimination can take on many forms, such as restricted availability of healthcare and basic amenities. The denial of fundamental rights and opportunities to these children further intensifies their vulnerability and cripples their capacity to break free from the cycle of exploitation. Discrimination worsens the negative impact on the self-esteem and self-worth of such a child, thereby perpetuating a feeling of despondency and hopelessness.¹¹⁷⁷

PARENTAGE AND THE LIVES OF CHILDREN IN BROTHELS

A child born into the bleak world of brothels faces a myriad of difficulties. Parental involvement, or lack thereof, is a major factor in the mental and emotional development of these children. Their emotional, psychological, and social development is profoundly impacted by the uncertainty or unknown identity of their dads and the circumstances surrounding their moms as sex workers.

Ideally, both parents are equally responsible for their children, but the sex trade industry appears to thrive on inequality and injustice at every turn. When children of the brothel try to inquire about their fathers, they are often silenced. Prostitution is a vicious cycle in which the mother is abused and exploited, and eventually, the mother is pretty much an absentee when it comes to caring for her own children. Children in brothels often experience emotional and psychological distress due to the lack of a stable and supportive parental figure in their lives. They typically feel rejected,

¹¹⁷⁴ Dalla, Rochelle L., Sarah Erwin, and Lee M. Kreimer. "Children of Mumbai's brothels: Investigating developmental prospects, primary relationships, and service provision." *Family Relations* 68.1 (2019): 104-118.

¹¹⁷⁵ Cornish, Flora. "Challenging the stigma of sex work in India: material context and symbolic change." *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 16.6 (2006): 462-471.

¹¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷⁷ Gezinski, Lindsay, and Sharvari Karandikar. "Exploring needs of sex workers from the Kamathipura red-light area of Mumbai, India." *Journal of Social Service Research* 39.4 (2013): 552-561.

confused, and have poor self-esteem as they develop because they lack a strong sense of who they are. Without a stable adult to rely on, they are more likely to be emotionally ignored, which can have lasting impacts on their mental health. They may have trouble trusting others, have trouble controlling their behaviour, and have mental health difficulties, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.¹¹⁷⁸ The emotional wounds caused by not knowing who one's biological parents are make it difficult for these children to flourish socially and personally.

Children raised in brothels face unimaginable amount of discrimination and shame because of their parents' backgrounds. Because their mothers are engaged in prostitution, they are often subjected to discrimination and stigma just because of where they were born. Because of the stigma connected with their parents' occupation, these children are often the target of bullying and prejudice. Peers, teachers, and people of the community may look down on them and label them social misfits. Because of the isolation they experience, they are far more vulnerable and have less access to resources than they would otherwise have, since they miss out on social integration, support networks, and a feeling of belonging.

Children in brothels have little or no access to positive role models and mentorship since there are no stable adult figures in their life. They miss out on learning important social norms, attitudes, and skills because they lack supportive adult influences. They lack the support they need to face the harsh realities of their world on their own. They may not have any examples of good relationships or positive alternatives to the lifestyle they are exposed to, both of which contribute to the cycle of exploitation. Without these opportunities, they are less likely to acquire vital social and emotional skills that are detrimental to their growth and future success.

Children raised in brothels often tend to make future decisions based on their unclear or unknown paternity. If they don't have a solid support system at home or positive role models, they may see sex work as their only option for making ends meet. The lack of educational and social prospects keeps them mired in the same cycle of exploitation as their parents. They don't think highly of themselves since they lacked supportive parents who could inculcate goals, drive, and self-respect. Because of this, poverty is passed down from generation to generation, and their prospects of escaping a life of prostitution are much diminished.

Children raised in brothels are severely impacted by their lack of parental guidance. Some of the difficulties young children encounter include negative emotional and psychological repercussions, social isolation and stigma, a lack of positive adult role models and guidance, and lasting impacts on their ability to make sound decisions as adults. An all-encompassing strategy centred on providing safe and supportive environment, high-standard of educational opportunities, and good role models is needed to solve these problems. These interventions should aid the children in overcoming their tough circumstances so that they can go on to have fulfilling and fruitful lives.

THE BARRIERS TO EDUCATION FACED BY CHILDREN LIVING IN BROTHELS

Every country in the world approves and acknowledges that providing its children with an education is essential to building a better future. Under Article 21A of the "Indian Constitution", all children in India between the ages of 6 and 14 are entitled to a free and compulsory education. This right was codified in the "Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act", also known as the "Right to Education Act (RTE)", which was enacted in the year 2009. However, even after having such provisions to encourage schooling in children, there are several obstacles that prevent children living in brothels from attending school.

¹¹⁷⁸ Cornish, Flora. "Challenging the stigma of sex work in India: material context and symbolic change." *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 16.6 (2006): 462-471.

Their stigma-prone living circumstances, lack of support networks, and negative cultural views are the primary causes of these obstacles. The obstacles are discussed in detail hereunder:-

i. Stigma and Discrimination:

The widespread stigma and discrimination that surround children living in brothels is one of the biggest obstacles they confront. They are subject to prejudice and treated as outcasts. They are more often excluded from formal education because schools and universities are reluctant to accept them due to their living circumstances. Their educational chances are limited, their marginalization is reinforced, and they are denied access to resources that are available to their peers just because they are born amidst the cycle of prostitution.¹¹⁷⁹

ii. Lack of Financial Resources:

Many of the children from brothels come from very poor families. They are unable to go to school because their family cannot afford it. They might not have enough money to pay for tuition, buy school clothes and supplies, and read the required textbooks. Because of the pervasive poverty in their life, they are unable to escape their exploiters and put any resources towards bettering themselves through education. The lack of money becomes a major hurdle that keeps these kids from breaking out of their cycle of marginalization.

iii. Limited Awareness and Advocacy:

The difficulty these children have getting an education is only made worse by the fact that no one seems to care about them or fight for them. The unique difficulties they confront are often overlooked by communities, teachers, and lawmakers who should know better, but do not. Therefore, there is a lack of personalized programmes and services that cater to their specific need. Their access to a high-quality education is hindered because of a lack of lobbying activities, which in turn leads to a shortage of resources, specialized educational

programmes, and policy frameworks supporting these children. Without public attention and support, the obstacles they face will never be eliminated, and their schooling will continue to suffer as a result.¹¹⁸⁰

iv. Disrupted Education and Transience:

Because of the instability of their living situation, children who live in brothels frequently have their schooling interrupted. Their families may be constantly on the move, making it difficult to keep them enrolled in the same schools from one year to the next. This breaks the flow of their education and leaves them with knowledge gaps that make it tough for them to make academic progress. Their educational difficulties are compounded by the fact that they frequently switch schools due to their unstable living situations. These kids can't grow and thrive to their full potential because they don't have a solid educational foundation to build on.

v. Limited Support Systems:

Unfortunately, many children who grow up in brothels lack the social and emotional resources they need to thrive in school. They may not have someone in their lives who can help them through the challenges of school with advice, motivation, and empathy. These children may struggle to overcome academic and social obstacles without a consistent and caring support structure, which can lead to higher dropout rates and worse educational attainment. They lack the resources to succeed in school because they lack interpersonal support system.

THE ISSUE OF DISCRIMINATION EXPERIENCED BY CHILDREN LIVING IN BROTHELS

Because of where they were born and raised, children raised in brothels face a heavy load of discrimination and prejudice. They are stigmatized and shunned because of the way society looks at them. These kids' self-esteem and mental health suffer as a result of the social

¹¹⁷⁹ Topno, Priya. "Education of the Children of Sex Workers In Alternative Care: Challenges And Prospects."

¹¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

stigma they face. They are unable to build healthy relationships or integrate into wider society because of the frequent labelling and prejudice they endure, which contributes to a sense of inferiority and worthlessness.¹¹⁸¹

Children in brothels face significant barriers to schooling due to discrimination. Their parental status or the stigma associated with that status may prevent them from being accepted to certain schools. This refusal to educate them keeps them on the outside looking in and prevents them from advancing in their careers and lives. They are especially vulnerable because they lack the tools to overcome the cycle of exploitation and poverty that keeps them there.

The Supreme Court of India's historic ruling in the matter of "*Gaurav Jain v. Union of India*"¹¹⁸² gave children who were born into prostitution the legal recognition they deserved. In this case, the Supreme Court ruled that children born in brothels to prostitutes have the right to be treated with dignity and given the care and protection they need, as well as to receive rehabilitation services that will help them feel like they belong in society and help remove the stigma that others have attached to them. Even after such a direction, when it comes to healthcare, safety, and legal aid, children in brothels are routinely left out in the cold. They face discrimination even when they demand their rights, which leaves them vulnerable, voiceless and makes them more susceptible to mistreatment. The biased views of society play a role in the systematic denial of fundamental rights to these children, and ultimately, they are almost never able to get out of this cycle of discrimination.

These children, time and again, are denied access to the legal protection and fundamental rights which apply to them. Authorities may be prejudiced towards them because of their origin, which further leads to inadequate

assistance and investigation, and their abusers are rarely convicted. These children are denied justice and a chance at healing due to the inherent inequality in the legal system, which only serves to prolong the cycle of exploitation.¹¹⁸³

Children in brothels are unable to build healthy support systems because of the prevailing discrimination and prejudice. People in the community might avoid these children because they are born in a promiscuous environment, and because of this, they are much more vulnerable and defenceless than they already are. They lack the direction, safety, and advocacy that might help them end their exploitation.¹¹⁸⁴ They don't have access to the people and programmes that would help them develop emotionally, socially, and physically since they don't have any ties to rely on.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF CHILDREN IN BROTHELS

The problems that children in brothels face are complex and deeply entrenched. But it is feasible to improve the lives of these vulnerable children and give them a shot at a brighter future by addressing the many challenges highlighted previously in this paper. There are several laws and rulings in place to ensure the safety of children in brothels, but there is still a need to explore better ways to improve their situation, particularly in the areas of education, support networks, legal changes, and societal attitudes.

i. Accessible Education:

Providing equal access to school is a crucial step towards bettering the lives of children living in brothels. Schools should implement policies that welcome and support all the children, regardless of their families' socioeconomic status or ethnicity. The families of these children may find it difficult to afford a quality education for their children due to poor

¹¹⁸¹ Segal, Uma A. "Child abuse in India: An empirical report on perceptions." *Child Abuse & Neglect* 16.6 (1992): 887-908.

¹¹⁸² [1997] 8 SCC 114

¹¹⁸³ Gezinski, Lindsay, and Sharvari Karandikar. "Exploring needs of sex workers from the Kamathipura red-light area of Mumbai, India." *Journal of Social Service Research* 39.4 (2013): 552-561.

¹¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

finances, but scholarships, financial aid, and free education programmes can help. In addition to providing a safe and supportive learning environment, schools should also offer services like counselling, special education, and social work to help these children.¹¹⁸⁵

ii. Awareness and Sensitization:

The best way to fight prejudice and stigma is to educate and sensitize the public about the plight of children from brothels. Campaigns aimed at schools, communities, and governments can help dispel myths and encourage compassion for these kids. Bringing attention to their dire circumstances, fighting for their rights, and combating discrimination in society are all crucial roles that media outlets, NGOs, and civil society organizations may play. Communities may become partners in assisting these children and fostering an inclusive culture by spreading awareness and acceptance.¹¹⁸⁶

iii. Support Systems:

The best way to help children living in brothels is to set up extensive support networks for them. Together, NGOs, government agencies, and community-based organizations may meet their physical, emotional, and psychological needs. This may include access to shelter, medical treatment, psychological support, and educational opportunities. These programmes can help children overcome their difficult situations and learn the skills they need to stop the cycle of exploitation by providing a safe and loving home.¹¹⁸⁷

iv. Legal Reforms:

Protecting the rights and safety of the children in brothels requires significant changes to the law. Governments should pass and strictly implement laws that outlaw all forms of discrimination on the basis of a person's family

or parental background. This involves providing victims of exploitation and abuse with access to justice, legal protection, and support services. Increasing the severity of punishments for those who violate child protection laws can serve as deterrents while also giving these children a feeling of justice and redress. The creation of an efficient legislative framework requires close cooperation between law enforcement, the courts, and child welfare organizations.¹¹⁸⁸

v. Empowering Alternatives:

The only way to end the exploitation loop is to provide real alternatives to for children who are left with no choice but to assume the occupation of prostitution. Children in brothels can be helped by vocational training programmes and skill development efforts. These programmes help people become economically self-sufficient and self-reliant by providing them with the tools they need to succeed. To ease the process of entering the workforce, it is crucial to partner with local companies and industries to develop training programmes and paid internships or employment.¹¹⁸⁹

vi. Changing Societal Attitudes:

Long-term cultural reform is needed to address the deeply rooted social views concerning children in brothels. Challenges to prejudice and bias can be fostered through media campaigns, community discussions, and educational programmes. Consent, healthy relationships, and the repercussions of exploitation should all be part of a comprehensive sex education curriculum taught in schools. In order to build a society in which the rights of all children are respected and protected, it is necessary to advance

¹¹⁸⁵ Topno, Priya. "Education of the Children of Sex Workers In Alternative Care: Challenges And Prospects."

¹¹⁸⁶ Rangan, Pooja. "Immaterial child labor: Media advocacy, autoethnography, and the case of Born into Brothels." *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 25.3 (2011): 143-177.

¹¹⁸⁷ Ghosh, Biswajit. "Trafficking in women and children in India: nature, dimensions and strategies for prevention." *The International Journal of Human Rights* 13.5 (2009): 716-738.

¹¹⁸⁸ Ghosh, Biswajit. "Trafficking in women and children in India: nature, dimensions and strategies for prevention." *The International Journal of Human Rights* 13.5 (2009): 716-738.

¹¹⁸⁹ Rangan, Pooja. "Immaterial child labor: Media advocacy, autoethnography, and the case of Born into Brothels." *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 25.3 (2011): 143-177.

gender equality and to question patriarchal practices.¹¹⁹⁰

CONCLUSION

Improving the lives of children in brothels requires a multi-faceted approach that tackles the root causes of discrimination and exploitation. By ensuring accessible education, raising awareness, establishing support systems, enacting legal reforms, empowering alternatives, and changing societal attitudes, we can make a significant difference in the lives of these vulnerable children. To tackle the challenges encountered by children residing in brothels and ensure their protection and rehabilitation, it is important for governments, social service institutions, and communities at large to collaborate. In such collaboration, the primary objective should be to establish secure and nurturing environment that facilitates the provision of adequate care and therapy to these children, thereby enabling them to recuperate and reconstruct their lives.¹¹⁹¹ Education must be made more accessible to these children, and policymakers, educators, communities, and civil society organizations must all work together to find solutions to the same. This entails the implementation of adaptable and all-inclusive educational initiatives that are tailored to the distinctive requirements of these children. Awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts must be intensified to bring a change in the public's perspective on the issues and plight of children of brothels and the discrimination they face. Laws must be implemented to prohibit the abuse and exploitation of these children. Interventions should concentrate on making others aware of the plight of these children, helping their families cope financially, making sure they have access to quality education, and setting up systems of support that will help them succeed in school. It is crucial to create

inclusive educational opportunities, strengthen legal protections, and establish support systems that empower and uplift these children.¹¹⁹² Only by dismantling systemic discrimination can we provide these vulnerable children with a chance to reclaim their dignity, rights, and a future free from exploitation and marginalisation. Together, we can overcome these obstacles and provide these at-risk children the opportunities they need so that they may rise above their current conditions and create a better future for themselves.

¹¹⁹⁰ Farley, Melissa, and Vanessa Kelly. "Prostitution: A critical review of the medical and social sciences literature." *Women & Criminal Justice* 11.4 (2000): 29-64.

¹¹⁹¹ Cornish, Flora. "Challenging the stigma of sex work in India: material context and symbolic change." *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 16.6 (2006): 462-471.

¹¹⁹² Ghosh, Biswajit. "Trafficking in women and children in India: nature, dimensions and strategies for prevention." *The International Journal of Human Rights* 13.5 (2009): 716-738.