

SOME QUESTIONS SOME ANSWERS ON SEX WORK

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Following are some of the questions cropping up in the minds of people who listen to the current debate going around the state. There is some relative clarity, which we are ready to share, so that a healthy interaction will ensue for the betterment of all concerned. If anyone can throw some light to the grey areas we are ready to accept and change.

1. Why prostitutes are called *sex workers* now?
2. Is sex work real work?
3. Is it morally right to organise sex workers?
4. Are the organisers trying to legalise sex working?
5. Why the move to de-criminalize sex working?
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7. Is there any human rights issue involved?
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❖ Why prostitutes are called sex workers now?

In the eighties, after the first phase of women's liberation movement was over, the debate about the differences existing among the women as a section got started. Like the Marxists, who use *class* as the basic division among community, the Feminists use *gender* for analysis and understanding. When we take one category for analysis it has the tendency to hide other factors, which are equally necessary and good for understanding the *present* situation. Class analysis will hide the differences originating from gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, and geography. Likewise, gender in turn will hide the other factors. To understand the present in its entirety all these factors and others, if any specific to the given situation, are necessary. Of course, one of them will remain the predominant factor, but the key to remember is that it shouldn't camouflage others.

So the differences hidden in the feminist movement surfaced after sometime. Thus the black feminist movement, followed by the sexual minority - lesbians, leather community etc, got separated. But the oppression faced by the prostitutes could not be aired in any of these sections because of morality. So the prostitutes who attended the feminist conferences got together as a group and started to voice their problems as a section. In turn some of the feminists, who got interested in the problems and life of the prostitutes, became prostitutes. Thus there arose prostitute feminists and feminist prostitutes. The exchange of ideas and the experience of life situations opened new vistas for struggle. The first trammel faced is the moral stigma



attached to prostitution. To overcome this they coined and conceptualised the word *sex worker* and promulgated it. Thus the word came into existence.

The main thing here is to gain dignity of those who are involved. It is like the shift from the slave and labourer to the *worker*. Though the slave does the same labour like the worker, it is a *duty* for him. Even though a worker's existence is expressed and known through his activity, it is not a duty. The labour is freed and is independent of the doer. Thus it can be sold. Before it was the slave who was being sold. This difference gave the worker freedom from work and a different existence. S/he could move around in the society, have leisure and make merry even with the employers. This freedom gives dignity to work as well as the worker. And that is why the prostitutes stopped being prostitutes and turned sex workers. It is the dignity of the *work* they are searching for.

❖ Is sex work real work?

Now the question arises whether sex work can be recognised or considered as *real* work. It is usually called selling the body or considered as exploitation of women who are *victims*. Nobody sells the body (a pun, of course) rather they sell their services. We have to distinguish *rape* and *trafficking* from sex work. Sex work is a conscious choice, while the other two is not. Of course the choices may be limited and you may not like it. So is janitorial work; it is work nevertheless. Some consider household jobs as degrading and they will look down upon those who are engaged in it. Every janitor will like to leave the job for a better one. But all this does not make the work of a janitor degrading. It is because of the derogatory attitude of a feudal society towards all the work done by the body as degrading.

Usually sex is equated with love and seen as an expression of love. Sex with love is beautiful and consummating, but sex is independent of love. If it is not, no husband and wife will engage in sexual intercourse. Love ends with marriage, even if there is, it will be in patches. Again the existence of sex workers proves it.

"It is unthinkable to sell sex for money." So were wisdom, patriotism, healing, compassion, parenting etc. But all these and many others are for sale that was unthinkable in the feudal set up. But the teachers (gurus) are paid handsomely and any inadequacy felt they will declare strike; reduce the pay and benefits and the 'brave' soldier won't die for his country; the doctors (healers) vie each other and find innovative ways to extract money from the patients; fund them and you get professional social workers to do anything done by a Christ or Buddha; nursery schools have mushroomed and you have to stand in queue to get the admission for your child but it is the money that determines in the end. All these *values* are the product of the feudal society. *It is the way of extracting labour without paying*. Men have wriggled out of this value mostly but the women still pay with their life. That is why their labour at home is not paid and remains undervalued and invisible. Their work is not recognised for the calculation of GDP of the nation. The funny thing about sex is that it was for sale even in Buddha's time and was called the *oldest profession*,



but remains still derided. It is because of the above reason of women's work not being recognised and *monogamic* value.

Because of monogamy a lot of people can't express their sexual needs. For example a blind or crippled person won't be able to fulfil his sexual need, then the need of a sex worker is a must. Think about the aged, invalid, ugly, imbecile, or sexual minorities who will find it hard to gain a sexual partner. Again, sex work needs expertise and sex workers usually are experts in sex. Sex is an art in itself; it is a cultural product like food and cloth. To reduce sex to procreation is like serving uncooked flesh to cuisine lovers. A debate on sexuality will bring the tastes, which are hidden and unexpressed now to open. Then the reality of sex work will be recognised.

❖ Is it morally right to organise sex workers?

This question stems from the idea that sex work is a criminal activity like killing and robbery and sex workers are criminals. So it is immoral to organise them. There is another angle to the question, i.e. the women are victims, and by organising them we are perpetuating a bane. If we take these two angles together we will find how contradictory they are. If women are *victims* then why should they be punished? Why should they be put behind bars for their own safety? If they are *criminals* who are the victims? Who suffers from her activity? Who is the complainant? Only by looking and trying to answer these questions can we understand the plight of these women.

Two adults after agreeing upon the terms and conditions set by themselves get involved in sexual activity. Neither is it an act of *rape* or an act of *trafficking*. We shouldn't confuse sex work with trafficking. Trafficking definitely is a crime, because it is not done with the consent of the women involved and it should remain punishable. Here we have to understand that in history, the Indian *Devadasies*, *Vesyas*, *Kuladas* were never punished like their counterparts in the west. Even in the west the attitude towards prostitutes were different in different times. Mostly they were harassed when there was an epidemic of sexual diseases. Then the proponents of race purity were also against them. Except for these two reasons they were an integral part of the society.

It is the institution of monogamous marriages, which created the existence of prostitutes. Human beings are polygamous animals and it is because of cultural and economic needs that we remain monogamous. It is against nature and we have to pay the price for it. It is like private property. Ownership excluded some from enjoying what is universal. And we created poor and landless in history. Thus thieves, robbers, thugs and the like were born from the laws protecting private property. As long as private property is there the thieves will be there. So it is the law of exclusion and ownership that creates criminals. This works with the case of sex workers also. (Here again we should remember the equation of sex workers with other criminals end with the reason of the origin but there is no victim or complainant).



As long as monogamy remains the norm, the existence of sex workers is assured.
No monogamy no sex workers.

If it is the case of sexual diseases we could forget about it by teaching people safe sex. For that reason the sex worker should not be punished and stigmatised. In fact the safest sex you can have now is from the sex workers. They look after their bodies and are more aware about the sexually transmitted diseases. This can be verified from the fact that from non-professional and casual sex people contract diseases more. Condoms not only liberated women from unwanted pregnancies but also from STDs. So the old fears and stigma thrust upon the sex workers can be relinquished and we could raise the issue of their human rights.

❖ **Are the organisers trying to legalise sex working?**

No, we are not. In fact we are against legalising sex work. There is a definite reason for this. By legalising we are shifting the problem from one quarter to the next. The police for not having a licence will harass the women and the issuing authority will have a merry time, just like the road transport offices. There are millions of agricultural labourers, construction workers, and handicraft workers in India and none is licensed to work. So why should sex workers. Now the exploiting parties are the police, brokers, pimps, lawyers, and court officials. If legalised the exploiting parties will be police, doctors, and the licensing authorities; from the frying pan to the fire.

❖ **Why the move to de-criminalize sex working?**

The sex workers, especially the street dwellers are in a fix now. As they are branded as criminals, when their basic human rights are violated they couldn't either complain to the police or the public. They will be gang raped by the goons or clients. When they go to the police station to complain, the attitude of police is that they deserve it. These women undergo physical and psychological violence unthinkable in a modern society. They become psychological wrecks and drunkards, all these add to the justification of violence perpetrated against them. As shown earlier, when you criminalize something you create a situation where violence is generated. Moreover lot of money will be transacted and all the anti-social elements will be drawn into it. Actually trafficking exists because of criminalization of sex work. If you decriminalise sex work the money involved will be very less and lot of women will be left alone. Then it will be an option for the women to choose; either to leave or to stay will be a choice for women.

❖ **Are the sex workers going to make a trade union?**

As long as sex workers are considered as criminals you can't make a trade union. So it is out of question. What we are trying to make is an organisation of sex workers to struggle for their basic human rights. An activity to bring them together to make them see that it is their common plight and interest to stick together. Sex workers are so alienated from each other that there is no chance for them to come together. There is no semblance of unity among them. The men divide them, rule them, and exploit them thoroughly.



❖ Is there any human rights issue involved?

Actually it is the only real issue that is involved here. Quite a lot of social workers get initiated into social work by beating up these hapless women. They feel morally superior and flaunt about it. They think they have saved the society or cleaned up a scourge that was affecting it. Also the 'right-minded' public who phone and complain always target these women. The 'letter writing club' of the newspapers remain alert on this subject. The 'conscientious' feature writers of the newspapers will draw graphic pictures of the 'dark alleys' where flesh trade flourishes under the 'very nose' of the police commissioner. The politicians who are rootless, wanting attention and having no other business will clamour about it. The policemen who are morally upright find it a pleasure to beat these women.

The police have to fill the quota of cases they have to charge monthly and they find these women 'sitting ducks'. There is no risk here; arresting a *goon* is a dangerous proposition. So they charge these women for trespassing and detain them, beat them up if they resist, let them loose if they bribe and finally produce before the magistrate. Then the lawyers, pimps, and brokers step in. They are bailed out for handsome money. There are 'bail workers' whose only job is to stand for bail for these women. They will charge something around 2000 to 5000 rupees. No money for bail, then they are remanded for weeks. The height of it is, then the magistrates punish them, in the words of a sex worker, 'without even raising his head to look at them'; yes, they also have quotas to fill. They punish them with a fine around 300 to 500 rupees or award imprisonment for one or two months. Seldom they are punished for prostitution. A woman may be punished for the same offence sometimes twice a week. This can reach up to five times a month. In fact, when there is a drain in the exchequer the Govt encourages the police to charge petty cases. So it is a happy ending for everyone except the sex worker. She has to make money for everyone, get beaten up for somebody's ego satisfaction and finally she has to live a stigmatised life.

If somebody beats up a woman in public, everybody gets into it to prevent it. No, not if you are a sex worker, you don't enjoy such luxuries. Anyone can rape you and go scot-free. Even the clients who queue up look down on her and any chance he will beat her up feeling morally right. She is in a trap of moral vacuum where there is none to help. Only by sensitising her and the public alike about her existence we can pull her out of it. That is exactly what we do.

❖ What is 'Prevention of Immoral Traffic Act' (PITA)?

This is a law made especially to protect women. Before it was known as 'Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act' (SITA). Prostitution is not made illegal in this country. But the circumstances leading to it is prevented. Mr. N.R. Madhava Menon, member, Law Commission, India puts it like this: "The Constitution of India prohibits traffic in human beings and makes trafficking a criminal offence. It further directs the State to prevent exploitation of women and restore equality and dignity to women. It imposes a fundamental duty on every citizen to avert practices derogatory to women.



Prostitution is considered a form of sexual exploitation or abuse of women for commercial purposes. Prostituted women are considered *victims* of this exploitative process. As such, the State felt its duty to prevent such process and rescue and rehabilitate those who are forced into it by circumstances or otherwise. *The assumption is that no women with self-respect would voluntarily choose to sell her body and it is the result of given circumstances she is so placed.* (Italics ours) It is this belief that has led to PITA."

From this we can see that it is a paternalistic law very much in common with the existing patriarchal values. Even though the law is to save the 'the damsel in distress' they are not very sure of it. As this can be seen in the 7 & 8 clauses of the self-same law. Yes, the assumption is that, *no women with self-respect would voluntarily choose to sell her body.* To quote his words again: "What about the victimised women? Well, her activity as such is not to be criminalized unless she becomes a threat to public order, morality, and health. As such she is to be considered not a mere *victim* if she solicits in public places or seduces other girls for prostitution. This is the intention of section 7 and 8 of PITA." Because of this attitude though the law is aimed to save the women, it is used for harassing them. This law is seldom used; it is the law of 'trespassing' of the Police Act that is being used constantly. By this the police can set free the client, and punish the women. "Logically, the customer should be deemed a criminal under the scheme of the Act. Since prostitution is not made a crime, he could be prosecuted for immoral trafficking interpreted as commodification of women or indulging in practices derogatory to women's dignity." What happens is that police harass these women using this law as the moral strength. In fact the whole law is a total failure. Again in the words of Mr. Madhava Menon: "The failure of PITA is not so much in prevention of immoral trafficking, but in rehabilitating women who are forced into the activity. The scheme of rescue home, protective home and correctional institutions has proved to be contributing to the victimisation than protecting and rehabilitating women. The police who are supposed to offer protection to prostituted women are themselves part of the exploitative machinery "living on the earnings of the prostitute." *Thus women are victimised again and again, denied basic rights and exploited and abused by a host of traffickers including law enforcement officials.*" (Italics ours)¹.

We are against trafficking and support the law excluding the 7 & 8 sections. Right now the women are put behind bars, fined and harassed to save them. We are living in a society of patriarchal values and the magistrates, police, and other authorities live it. So any law should be formulated keeping this in mind that it will be interpreted by the existing male values.

❖ **Why men are not arrested along with female sex workers (FSW)?**

Actually the answer to this question has been already answered spread out in the above sections. Men are supposed to be promiscuous and women are not. So the police (mostly men) let them off usually. Moreover the men bribe them profusely. But

¹ Paper presented in a debate on 'Is sex work a crime?' organised by Foundation for Integrated Research in Mental Health (FIRM) on 12th April 1999 at IMA Hall Thiruvananthapuram.



there is a tacit understanding like *class-consciousness* among men. The *wayward* women have to be punished and after all *men are like that*. This tacit understanding extends from the street to the courts. Even the women carry this value also. So there is no resistance. They will feel the discrimination but the ideology gnaws off the anger and they succumb to the pressure felt by it in all the levels. After sometime you will also feel that you are the only one in the wrong. To avoid arresting the men, the police usually use the police act instead of the PITA.

Chastity is the bygone burden of women. This value was formed during the first kings who wanted to ensure that their heir to the throne must be their child. They wanted the women to remain monogamous to ensure that the children born will be theirs. Before that the women's sexuality was not restricted. This was not forced upon on the women in the first place. Only those women willing to restrict her sexual needs became the queens. Lot of power, benefits, honour, and above all her son will become the next king came with this value and chastity got initiated in history. Even those kings who created this value had hundreds of wives. Women fell for this glamour status; little they knew what was in store for them in future. As rights to private property became socialised in the course of history, the value descended down to the general public. Thus all women irrespective whether it is their choice have to uphold this value, while men didn't have to.

This value got another twist in history. The women, thrown out of all types of ownership and their very survival depended on remaining in the good books of men, upheld this value. This enabled them to be a good commodity in the marriage market. The women's existence was made impossible by the society without a man's help. So to attract a man and to keep him as a partner the women needed this. She has nothing else to bargain with. If she has to keep her children and herself away from starvation she needed it. So it got ingrained as *the* value for women. Moreover all the stories and movies produced turn around this value and thus reinforcing it every day.

Now women's value resides in the *intact* hymen, irrespective of their ability in any other profession. This *ruling* value put those women who got out of the prescribed path into shame and isolation. And that *moral right* give the modern police man the right to abuse the sex worker and allow the man to go scot-free. If condoms were invented before private property came into existence, chastity as a value wouldn't be there and human history would have been totally different. Lot of violence could have been avoided. Think about it, the human society would have been free and loving. This duty bound existence where everyone suspects everyone and the envy and jealousy that go along with it won't be there. Life would have been much more beautiful to live.

❖ Is there any male sex workers (MSW)?

Yes, there is. In fact there are two types of male sex workers; one catering to the men and the other to the women clients. The male sex workers catering to men are not only homosexuals, but also may be bisexuals. Mind you it is not voluntary work,



but paid. There are thousands of male sex workers for men in Kerala alone. The male sex workers, catering to the women is called the *gigolos*. They are not very many in number in our country. They reside in big cities and in tourist spots. The women who are economically free are the clients, especially from the upper class. The existence of the gigolo proves that it is not an inherent value of women to be chaste. But the relationship of the gigolo and woman client is much better than the man and FSW because of the power relations.

❖ **If so, do they also suffer like female sex workers?**

No, they don't. Though it is totally illegal to have homosexual relationship in this country, nobody is booked on that charge. They remain completely hidden and work clandestinely. But if they come out claiming to be homosexuals they will be treated worse than the FSWs. As long as there is no declared relationship there is no problem for them. Anybody can sell sex or live together.

❖ **Is there any difference among sex workers, like rich and poor, upper and lower class?**

Yes, there is. In fact there are more divisions among the sex workers than the class divisions in the society. The lowest rung starts with the homeless variety that totally depends on the street. Then come the ones who have homes but are very poor. These two haunt the street in the night. Next comes the section that comes from home and stands on the street in the daytime. This group is the major group among sex workers. These three are the known sex workers who undergo all the harassment described above, among them the night dwellers suffer the most. These three groups will end up in brothels if there is any. They are the ones who are being organised now. Then comes the variety that is either based in home or lodge. They are relatively safe. But succumb in the police raids. It is a jackpot for the police; they fetch lot of money. The clients will find enough money to save them and themselves. In fact they will be substituted by the street dwellers in the cases charged in the raid. Then come the call girls who will visit the clients only on prior arrangements. They are sex workers out of *pure choice*. They make money more than any executive in the country and don't suffer any harassment or the stigma attached. In fact they move in the high society and are most sought after. Most of the celebrities, men or women, come under this category. This is the general picture, but you will find shades of differences in different states and locations.

Here we have to understand that the first three categories are the only ones we are concerned with. They need our help. They have to pay heavily for the so-called morality, which actually is a dead value.

❖ **Shouldn't we rehabilitate sex workers instead of organising them?**

This is the million-dollar question now. Whenever the question of human rights of the sex workers is raised, like a chimera the argument of rehabilitation will appear. There will be lot of activities around this position for a time being. Then it dies down and the women will go on suffering as they do now. Rehabilitation is a complex process. It is bound to fail as long as the proponents of this solution consider it as the *only* solution.



Secondly, economic reductionism rides high in their idea of rehabilitation. Thirdly, it stems from the idea of *morality* currently in vogue and highly *paternalistic*.

In the first place women are not children, even though they are treated likewise. To make plans for them as if they are not capable is a bad thing for a start. Have any of these protagonists of rehabilitation ever asked these women what they really want? The approach usually is like centralised planning, they know everything what is good for them, what they should do, and what not. In the end there is no takers. Then, that is another blemish for the sex worker to carry. The rehabilitation chorus group *knows* that sex work is a criminal activity and only *fallen* women are involved in it. So there is only one way to save them, rehabilitate them. This is far from truth. Of course, like everyone else the sex workers also need houses, jobs, good earnings, and a happy life. That doesn't mean that they have no choice. They have got their own plans and they would like some help to realise them. If only the chorus groups just has an ear to listen.

The rehabilitation package will have some menial jobs, which usually people shun now. But it will be flaunted as 'any way better than sex work'. There will be so much pressure on the women to accept it. Moreover the sex workers have a tendency to please, as they do with the clients, they will also act 'anything is okay'. But when it boils down to reality there won't be any takers. Why this happen? Simply because the whole approach is unreal and it starts from the premise that it is only the economic circumstances that drives the women to sex work and given a choice they will shun it. Economic necessity is one aspect not the whole. Rehabilitation should mean *social rehabilitation*. This can never be offered, because the protagonists can't control the society. So what happens is that the women will be forced to work for their mere existence and will have to lead a nun's life. Who will be there to love them, talk to them, and go with them to the movies or to share their life? Can the propagators spend their life with them, love them, marry them, and go for an outing? With their morality, never! Then what kind of rehabilitation are you going to give? These women are adult mature women don't treat them as kids. Now, with all the difficulty you make for them with your screwed up morality, they can go for a movie, eat whatever they like, drink to their hearts content, roam the nights which other women are afraid even to dream, scream and fight their stress out and have an upper hand even over men and make good money which is impossible by any other way. In fact they have experienced the freedom men have. Do you think you can replace it with a forced nun's life?

You should know that they were doing these, jobs you offer, before. But even to keep these jobs, they will be forced to have sex with the men in charge. That means they have to do sex work free and hard physical labour, which will be paid poorly for existence. Then in the end they will decide it is better to have sex work, which is more rewarding and little physical labour behind, as the better choice. It is the men who brought them to the streets. Those men are still there to bring them back. Can you give the assurance that no men will touch them again without their consent? To avoid these men, what will you do? Put the sex workers behind bars? Yes, exactly



you will put them behind moral bars. Why can't you just ask men not to have multi-partner sex? Impossible, isn't it!

Next is the suggestion to send them away from where they are known, so that the people won't know of their previous existence. Do you know that this is exile incognito? Nobody wants to leave his native place unless it is a self-choice. Not only that, you are punishing the victim for the wrong done to them.

If you place dignity in chastity, monogamy, and wifedom, how can you give it back to these ladies? Do you know that dignity once lost is never regained? *Unless you find dignity in their new existence, you can never give it back.* So what is in store for the sex workers in all the programmes of rehabilitation other than moral jail for the rest of their life, punished for hard labour and solitary confinement in a nunnery, to be treated with pity, without company, and derided and jeered at as 'a refined prostitute' in their behind?

If the present set up of the society continues, the moment you rehabilitate (!?) all the 10,000 odd sex workers on the street, excluding the upper strata, the men will bring another ten thousand out to the street within a week. How are you going to stop this inflow? By castrating all the men? Or would you go on rehabilitating the women by offering jobs? If you are going to offer jobs for sex workers continuously, we think all the poor women will turn a sex worker to fetch a job. We have caste Hindus changing their caste to get into reservation quotas. With this history, we think the protagonists of rehabilitation will transform every jobless woman into a sex worker. They will create millions trying to get rid of thousands. What a joke!

After all these arguments, we will still support all activities of rehabilitation for these women. Why one may ask? For the simple reason, any attention to sex workers will redeem their situation they are in. The lowest rung is so miserable whatever comes their way will be a boon. And so we welcome it. Moreover the rehabilitation group will come to understand the visor like grip of the society on these women and there is a possibility of change in their attitude. Lastly, we don't want to pose or be another saviour of these women. We are not here to block other's activities. Yes, they are anybody's *game*.

❖ **Shouldn't we at least rehabilitate their children?**

These women live for their children and family. If it is not for them they won't be on the road risking their life. There is a popular perception that the girl child of the sex workers will follow their trade. We can vouchsafe that ninety percent will not. For the sex workers, especially the last categories carry the same morality like the rest of the society and they fiercely guard and protect their children. They were given the best of education possible and usually well looked after. Only in a brothel situation where the women are trapped and have no independent existence their children fall into the same pit. As we mentioned earlier we are against trafficking and coerced sex work. The situation in Kerala is so different, if not for the police and the constant arrest and punishment, they would have led a relatively better life. They are forced to abandon their children when they were put in the jail. If not for that we are of the opinion that



they look after their children better than other poor sections of the society. We should remember that 90% of these women came from families of no history of sex work. In fact the family set up, what we have now definitely will produce sex workers in two ways. Firstly, through monogamy the need of sex workers will be perpetuated and secondly through the power relations where men have the upper hand.

Right now we have a very strange law, by which the state can take away the right of these women over their children, in the pretext of the welfare and morality. The rehabilitation group also will take away their children, put them in orphanages, feed them, teach them and in the process they will lose the custody of their children. The argument usually is that "we are giving them a good life, a hope for future, saving them from the obnoxious surroundings." What it actually means is that the sex workers should not have children and they should look at some rich people's children and feel satisfied. Will we be able to teach the child to love and respect their mothers? Will they ever be able to return to the old setting after your so-called education? Do you think a poor slum dweller's child is in a better position than the sex worker's does? If not, will you all take away forcefully their children also? It is their children, it is their right to have and own them. They know what is better for them. It is the knowledge that you are contributing to your child's growth makes you a parent and not by giving birth. So don't take them away; help them to grow their children. Always remember, somebody richer or higher in status than you, will like to teach your children better than what you are right now giving. Would you allow that person to take away your child? Don't feel so righteous, know-all being; be *human* at least.

❖ Is it a prelude to the expanding tourism industry?

Tourism is seen as the new face of imperialism. Any thing new, which does not fit into our copybook theories, is all attributed to imperialism. Can tourism explain the existence of *Devadasies* and *Vesyas* of the bygone era? Can the red streets of Mumbai and Delhi be explained? Can even the existence of sex workers of Kerala be explained? For the last two years, we have been working with the sex workers promoting safe sex practices; we have yet to come across a foreigner client for them. If we take internal tourism, may be yes. People from Tamil Nadu and some northern states have sex with them. But the bulk of the clients are from our own state. All the *sex-mafia* rackets exposed in the state has nothing to do with tourism either. It is the communist's phobia gripping the mind of Kerala that makes them think like this.

When the women's liberation movement got initiated in the eighties, the official communist movement saw it as a handy work of imperialism to split the working class movement. Then feminism and feminists were seen as the moles of the CIA infiltrating cadre groups of the communist movement. Now feminism is seen as the *in thing*, though still it is an anathema to be a proclaimed feminist. But now there is Women's Commission, Gender Sensitive Projects, Women's Reservation Bill, and everything with a feminist touch. Even the political parties have revamped women's wing. We have no idea what happened to imperialism in this aspect? Have they



already engulfed the political parties and their wings screwing up their minds in feminism? If this is how imperialism works and this is the product, we think it is better to stand along with imperialism.

Having red streets in all the big cities in India except Kerala, the moralists will point an accusing finger at Taiwan and say 'God, they don't know, what they do'. The difference between India and Taiwan is one of 'safe sex' only. There they do it safe guarding the interests of client's health, in that way they indirectly safeguard the sex worker's health also. But that does not mean it is an ideal or desirable situation. Definitely, it is an inhuman situation; women are kept like animals to choose. They have no control over the situation. It is a broiler chicken existence for the sex workers and a paradise for clients. True, but what have we in store for both the clients and the sex workers? The same chickens infected with deadly diseases and kept in filthy cages. Given only one choice, Taiwan is better.

❖ What are the aims and motives of the organisers?

We are talking neither to perpetrate Taiwan nor the Mumbai red streets but to empower the women to make choices to do what they want. Sexuality and sexual needs are varied and complex. Don't put *one norm* situation and make people criminals. Because of our screwed up morality, we are blind to the needs of the people. Even the progressive minded people are confused and are in a dilemma to take a stand. The ideal situation is not a selling market. But then socialism or any other system has not yet found out alternatives to market. But if market forces are the one determining, then it is laze-a-faire with minimum state regulations that are viable and desirable. This applies for Health to Sexuality and Sports to Necessities.

We believe that as long as sex work exists, whether we like it or not, the sex workers should unite for their rights and as a body should bargain, protest and struggle for a better existence. It is their life and they should ensure the quality of it. We, as human right and health activists will support and struggle along with them. We believe that the growth of democracy will reveal more and more areas of hidden exploitation and invisible aspects of life. The solutions may change in course of time, yes we learn from our experience. We don't have blue print solutions and we are open to suggestions and dialogue. Abuses and counter abuses won't take us anywhere. Let us work together for a more humanised, democratic, love filled world. As hippies said, " let us make love not war."