

CASE HISTORIES OF CHILDREN OF SEX WORKERS

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The life of sex workers and their children are mystified in a society where they are stigmatised and socially isolated from the so-called mainstream society. Other people interpret the life of these people according to the preconceived notions. In all patriarchal societies women are divided as 'good' and 'bad' by the moral values of its carriers for their convenience. Hence 'whores' are not accepted in the modern societies where monogamous patriarchal family is the rule. Kerala also follows the same. In addition to this, there are certain specificities to Kerala society. Historically, prostitution was not a tradition, but multipartner sex was not a prohibited way of life. After the transformation of the society into a 'reformed' one in the last century, multipartner sex became a taboo for the society. Hence all multipartner sexual activity prevails as hidden and is considered as immoral. Hence commercial sexual activity also is invisible. There are no open brothels or red street area. Only shifting brothels exists.

Sex trade came into existence in all strata of society, but the sociological process was very complex. We cannot draw a simple connection between social determinants and entry of women in sex trade. There is a belief that women from low social status, Dalit etc are prone to prostitution, which is not true. There are women from all social class, caste and religion. Tracing out the reasons in a simplistic manner is not worthy. But the process can be understood as phenomena in a world of patriarchal values, marginalisation of women from economically productive activity and under valuation of reproductive role of women. Hence, there is too much diversity in the life of women in prostitution. They are isolated in space because there are no brothels where they work together. They are individuated through the predominant culture, because it does not allow them to become subjects and form an identity. They have varied life experiences. So the experiences of their children also are of varied nature.

In Kerala, there are women from different social status doing sex work. There is social mobility even after entering into this profession. Many of them have houses, but some of them do not have. Some women have husbands with them, where as others do not have. Some of them send their children to school, but many children could not continue or start education because of circumstances. Some women are staying in colonies so that they develop a community feeling. But since it is not a typical red street, there are many conflicts also. Women in prostitution live in villages, suburbs, or urban area. In the cities the estimated number varies from 300-2000. Near pilgrim centres prostitution is more. Women from low social class are more visible and vulnerable to police and legal action. Others either protect women from the higher classes or they can afford to hide their work.

In this background a study is done to understand the life of children of sex workers. Usually people have the belief that children of sex workers are more prone to sexual exploitation, they have a low self-esteem, they have no opportunity for education and so on. There is partial truth in this. But it will be a fallacy if we put the sex worker's children with all the problems on the one side and other children having a better life on the other side. The life of the children are determined by many interwoven cultural factors, social environment, physical facilities, opportunities for socialization etc. Sometimes children facing many difficulties in their situation develop better survival skills and they may have more reflexive capability. On the contrary many overprotected schooled children may have less coping skills. But the specific problems of children of sex workers like the shame they feel when others despise them, ostracisation from the other community etc should not be overlooked.

Since the observation and analysis is done by an outsider there can be bias from the researcher's side. Hence the information is collected after trying to reduce the preconceived notions as much as possible. Since there is much variation in the life style of children from different geographical areas the sample is selected from different regions of the state. There can be difference

in the life experiences of female and male children. This factor is considered in this study. Children living with their mother and those who are growing away may have different experiences.

Sometimes the needs of the children may be different from what we have conceived for them. That has to be tested before planning any programme for them. So, this attempt will be relevant for those who want to do some programmes for the children of sex workers. For any children their early experiences with relatives, experiences from school, physical environment, acceptance from others, health etc is important. In addition to this these children will have their own reflections upon their mother's lifestyle. It is worthy to note these aspects in a study like this. First and foremost thing done in this study is to acknowledge their own perspective about their life.

PROCESS OF INTERVIEW

SELECTION OF CHILDREN

The children of sex workers in Kerala have different life experiences according to their mother's social and physical environment. Hence children were selected from different types of communities. Two children are from Kozhikode, which is located in the northern part of Kerala. They are from a colony where number of sex workers is living. The colony is known as Bangladesh colony. People are of low socioeconomic status. They belong to different religions. People are involved in different sort of economic activities. But the area is branded as that of prostitutes. Two other children were selected from Thiruvananthapuram, which is the southern part of Kerala. One is married and living in a slum area. Another one is residing in a rural area of Thiruvananthapuram. Another child was selected from Cochin, which is a city towards the middle of Kerala. The age varies from 11 to 22. There were three girls and two boys. The children were selected purposive.

RAPPORT BUILDING

The mothers of the children were contacted first to make them understand about the process. In one case the mother was in the prison. So another sex worker residing in the neighborhood took the responsibility. A primary visit was done to all these areas to make acquaintance with the community, family and the children. People in the neighborhood were curious about the visit, because it is rare that somebody from outside visit their houses. So one or two more visits were also conducted for familiarity with the children and for setting a natural environment. Some time was spent with children and a period was fixed for a detailed interview.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW

It was decided to make the interview as much informal as possible. Initially few minutes were spent with them in a comfortable place either inside the house or outside. The conversation was started in a natural way. When it seemed that the children are relaxed and they can open for themselves they were encouraged to perform any skills they have like singing. The interviewer also participated in some entertainments. In some of the houses the family members entertained with refreshments. In other cases the child was taken out in a restaurant for refreshment. After building very good rapport the children were asked to narrate their life story. It was semi-structured. A guideline was prepared based on different aspects of life. Under each aspect a few questions were prepared. Keeping these in mind the child was facilitated and guided for narration. The expressions of the face and differences in the tone etc were noted, when the interviewee became emotional. A recorder was used after noting that it did not become a hindrance for them to talk openly. A series of similar interviews were conducted. Since the children were asked to talk freely, there was no structure in the data collected. Care was taken to avoid bias. If there were some missing points, the child was visited again and more information was gathered. The data was organised and arranged based on the themes. But care was taken not to interfere with the natural sequence of the narration. An introduction about the



background of the child is given in the beginning. This information is collected from observation and interviewing other family members. A comment is given in the end after analyzing the data gathered.

QUESTIONS AND AREAS OF ENQUIRY

Social environment

Family

1. How would you describe your parents and grand parents?
2. What do you like about them?
3. How would you describe your mother's personality and emotional qualities?
4. How do you remember about your growing up with your brothers/sisters?
5. Do you get along with your family members?
6. Do your parents spend enough time with you?

Culture

7. What cultural tradition or rituals are important in your life?
8. Is religion important to your life?

Schooling

9. How much you have studied?
10. If drop out, reason for it.
11. What do you remember about your school life?
12. Do you remember any friends or teachers in school?
13. Did you enjoy school?
14. What do you remember about school?
15. What is your most important lesson in your life?
16. What is your view of the role of education in a person's life?

Socialization

17. Do you have friends?
18. What relationship in your life is the most important?
19. Describe positive relationships
20. Describe negative experiences
21. How did you experience the change in environment, if any?

Self-esteem

22. What is your general feeling about yourself?
23. Did you feel nurtured as a child?
24. What was the saddest time for you?
25. What is the most significant event in your life?
26. How do you feel about the relationship with your friends?
27. How do you feel about the relationship with your friends?
28. What is your status in society?
29. What do you think about your close relatives?
30. What do others think about you?
31. What are some of your struggles?
32. What do others think about your close relatives?
33. What special people have you known in life?
34. What do you feel about your love relationships?
35. How do you describe your love relationship?
36. What does intimacy mean to you?
37. How do you see married life and marital relationship?
38. What is your experience of married life?
39. Are you comfortable to talk about your sexual relations?



40. Is the sense of community important to you? Why?
41. Did you have any turning point in your life?
42. How do you handle disappointment?

Economic status and physical environment

43. What do you feel about your housing condition?
44. How do you assess your economic status and quality of life?

Health

45. Are you suffering from any illness at present?
46. Have you ever been hospitalized?
47. Is any one of your family members suffering from any serious illness?
48. What are the availability, accessibility and affordability of health care services?
49. What is the quality of food you are taking?
50. What is the source of water?
51. Do you have sanitation facilities at your residence?
52. Do you think that you have mental disturbances?
53. What are your entertainments?

Finance

54. How much income your family have and what is the mode of earning in the family?
55. Do you have enough clothes you desire?
56. How do you feel about your financial situation?

Expectations

57. What is your expectation about economic security and employment?
58. What shaped and influenced your life the most?
59. Who are the heroes, heroines' guides and helpers in your life?
60. What were the desires in your childhood?
61. Did you achieve anything you desired?
62. What are your needs identified by you at present?
63. What are your expectations for future?
64. Do you think that all of them could be fulfilled in future?
65. What are your plans for future?
66. Are you active in any organisations/clubs?
67. What is your expectation regarding fulfilling your responsibilities in life?
68. Do you think that you have a happy life?
69. Do you expect a happy life in future?
70. What is your biggest worry now?
71. Do you think that this can be solved in future?
72. What gives you the most hope?
73. Is your life fulfilled yet?
74. What would you like to achieve so that your life will seem fulfilled?

CASE HISTORIES

Anu-11 years. Pappanankodu. Thiruvananthapuram

We have visited Anu on a Diwali day. She was little disappointed because, she did not have Diwali crackers and poothiri in her hand. But she smiled and had luster of hope in her eyes. She talked like a mature girl with an understanding tone, defending her mother. She does not have any complaint against her mother for not buying Diwali crackers for her. She understands that her mother does not have enough money.



Anu is the eldest daughter of Sobha, a sex worker living in the outskirts of Thiruvananthapuram city. She lives in a rented house with three rooms. The side of a paddy field, which brings fresh air through the gentle breeze, locates the house. Anu said that there are number of snakes in the area. But she loves walking around with friends, which is restrained after stopping the school. She always dreams of her lost school days. She reminded us about her denial to school in between our conversation.

Anu is a lovable child. She completed eleven years. She has got two younger sisters whom she loves. She likes to be loved by others especially friends, neighbours and close relatives. She has her grand mother living with them. There are two aunts. she complaints that one of them does not show any affection towards her. This aunt loved her very much before. Anu cannot understand the reason for which she scolds her recently. It gives her pain. At the same time she is happy that she has another loving aunt. Her mother's friend also stays with them. She considers her also as her mother. In fact, she enjoys the love from the two mothers. In general she is happy that she is loved by a number of people. But this young one had some bitter experiences as well. She remembers those days she spent with her friends when she used to go to school. But now she is worried that she cannot play with her friends. "How can a worthless girl like me waste their time? They have responsibilities of studies." She herself takes the responsibility of not ruining her friend's life though it is painful to her. Another painful event occurred in her life when one of the women in the neighborhood who had a warm relation with her suddenly withdrew the relationship. This happened when the woman's husband came from Gulf. She said, "Aunt, I don't understand why that uncle hates me?" Now this detachment is one of the worries of Anu.

Her greatest desire in life is to get educated. She was forced to stop education while studying in the third standard. The reason was that her mother got ill and was admitted in hospital. So she had to look after the younger ones. She thinks that she can read the boards in front of buses, can count money and write letters herself, if she gets educated. Recently, she started learning by herself by private tuition. This again gets often broken because of shortage of money to give the fees. More over, the other family members knows that she is doing some help in the housework, which is possible only because she is not going to school now. She learned cooking. She can make rice and curries. She goes outside to buy fish and other things from the market. She was proud to say that she knew how to prepare fish. Now she is getting ready to get into a boarding school with the help of a social organisation. Her aunt's response to this was a little hesitant. She said, "Now she goes to market and fetches water. If she goes for studies I can do marketing. But fetching water will be a problem for us."

They do not have their own well. Water is fetched from the neighborhood. The house has enough ventilation. There is no smokeless chulha in the house. They have sanitary latrine in the house. Availability of water is a difficulty for them. They are thinking of changing the house.

Anu knows that her mother is making money with great difficulty. She loves her mother and is determined to live with her forever. She does not know much about her father. The only thing she knows is that it is difficult to answer to others when they ask about her father. Now she has an answer that her father died in an accident and rest of them were saved at that time. She does not remember when she started saying like this and who taught her this.

The earning member in the family is her mother. She demands many home cooked delicious food items to her mother, and her mother cooks these things for her and other family members during evenings. Her mother goes out for work and do not come back some of the days. She likes the company of her mother's friend who stays with them. She thinks that it is good to have her in the family. There is no problem for food, if her mother works regularly. She likes pazhanjy (The cooked food of previous day preserved in water), which is available most of the days. The problem arises when her mother cannot go for work, because of illness. In these days she they lacked food, especially fish and meat. Otherwise they have nutritious food.



She likes nice velvet frocks. Though she expressed this to her mother many times, she had not given much attention to this. For this, she is little annoyed. She also thinks that one of her aunt does not like her where as she pets her younger sisters. Any way she feels that her mother loves all three equally.

Anu is fond of all gods. There are pictures of all Hindu Gods, Jesus, and Maria. She spends her solitary days by talking to these gods. She said, "I question Jesus whenever I have some difficulties. I like all Gods but Jesus is the favorite, because he is the only one who died for us." She has been suffering from different problems of body. She often has headache, chest pain, stomachache etc. This was started when she was nine, after stopping school. For this usually she prays to God. She still has hope that it will get cured, if she takes some medicine for this. She cannot take treatment because it is expensive to them. She said that they have to pay to the doctor for getting treatment, which is not affordable to her mother.

She likes singing. She started singing at the moment we asked for it. She knew folk songs, prayers and songs in the textbook. She brought a book she is using to learn language now.

Anu-11 years.

Anu is an 11-year-old girl residing with her family in a suburb of Thiruvananthapuram. Her mother is young and still working. Anu is the eldest daughter. She has two younger sisters. We had visited her on a Diwali day (a religious festival) She was little disappointed because, because she did not have Diwali crackers and poothiri (a sort of cracker which children like) in her hands. But she smiled and had luster of hope in her eyes. She talked like a mature girl with an understanding tone, defending her mother. She does not have any complaint against her mother for not buying Diwali crackers for her. She understands that her mother does not have enough money. They are living in a rented house with three rooms. It is located by the side of a paddy field. Anu is not going to school and is worried about it. She always dreams of her lost school days. Her greatest desire is to get educated. Now she is going for private tuition. But this often breaks, because of shortage of money to give the fee. Other family members think that there will not be anybody to do the housework if she is sent to school. There were her grand mother, aunt and her mother's friend in the house when we visited her home. They are secular in religious belief. There are pictures of Hindu Gods as well as that of Maria and Jesus. She is fond of singing folk songs, prayers and songs in textbook.

Anu did not have much hesitation for singing a song when we sat one day in her house. All of us sat in a mattress in the drawing room. The scenery through the window was beautiful. There was nice breeze from the paddy field. It was a bright day. She sang a prayer song. I asked her whether somebody taught her song. She started talking in response to it. "No body taught me singing. I am singing after listening to one of my relative girl. Now I am not going to school. (Sadness in her eyes and tone) But mother sends me for private tuition. This girl I mentioned before gave me her textbooks. I am using those for my private tuition. I am reading the texts of second standard. I can read, but in between there will be some mistakes". (She started reading; does not have flow)

"My desire is that all people must say good opinion about me. They must say that Anu can read well. I am trying to learn. My greatest desire is to go to school. But now I am not able to go to school. I studied till third standard. But when my mother was hospitalized, I was forced to stop. There was nobody to take me to school. And also I had to look after my younger ones. While I was studying I was worried because I did not want to go to school. But when my study was broken I got more worried. Now I strongly feel that I have to study. When others go to school, I also want to go. I feel sad when my sister comes for vacation and reads lessons. I can read the name board of bus count money and write letters for myself, if I get educated. Any way people have good opinion about me.

My mother loves all three of us. But one of my aunts hates me. But she has favoritism for my younger sister. Before, it was not like this. She loved me only. If my mother came to beat me she prevented



and advised her not to do. I have my grand mother with me. She is good. Now she has loss of memory. I have three cousins staying with us. There is one girl who is of my age. She has got two younger brothers as well. But she is short. She is lean also. It seems that her younger brother is elder than her. I have some other friends also who are related to my mother. I have a number of cousins both elder and younger. My mother's friend also is staying with us. I consider her also as my mother. So I have two mothers. My mother does not come back to house on certain days.

There was a woman in the neighborhood. She was very close to me. Her husband was in Gulf. When he returned, the woman cut our relation. Now she will not even smile back if I smile to her. We were like members of one family. Any thing I had, I shared with her. If she did not have rice in the house we gave to her. She even invited me for dinner during Onam festival. She told me that she would make something special for me. But she did not call me after her husband had come back. Now both of us do not relate each other. I felt very bad. If we come face to face she turns her face back.

I had friends in the neighborhood. But when I stopped my schooling, I lost my friends also. We, friends used to arrange some programmes during special days like Vishu. We made an idol of Siva and put a box for devotees to put money. We made ponkal (a special food made as an offering to God) using that money. I also put money for that. I could not maintain those relations, because now a gap was developed between me and the school going children. They cannot waste time like me because they have to be responsible to school. Now I lost all friends. My sister also is in the boarding school. So I play alone. I dress up with my mother's sari. Now I have become naughty. I get scolding from my grand mother for taking her thambool etc. When I get scolding, I go away from there. Sometimes she asks me to cut vegetables and I may spoil it. I learned to cut, clean and fry fish. I learned cooking. I know how to make rice and dishes. When mom is not here I cook for myself. Making fish curry is difficult for me. I do not touch mixer if mom is not here, because I do not know how to operate it. I do grinding with hand.

There was another lady in the neighborhood with whom I had company. My mother gave her a sari to make skirt for me. But she made it for herself. So we got annoyed. Now I do not talk to her. My mother also told me not to do. Then my mother told that she would get another one for me. We lost the friendship with the lady. Before we used to visit her house. She came here also. Now she does not talk with me. I like nice dresses like silk churidars and frocks. I demanded my mother a velvet churuidar and frock. She denied it because she thinks that these will get spoiled soon.

I hope for studying and getting a job. I like all jobs. Let it be office work or domestic work. I do not want to separate from my mother. But I can compromise if it is for studying. I am praying to God for giving me an opportunity for learning.

Sometimes I accuse Gods for not sending me to school. I ask them, Gods, why are you doing this to me? I have more affinity to female Gods. But Jesus is the most important to me. He died for us only. No other God died for us. My cousins told the stories about him. There was a programme in the television on Jesus. It was cut in between. I got angry about it. When Jesus carried the cross and cried, I was very upset. I could not continue watching it.

I have many illnesses. I had some injuries long back. Now I have recurrent stomachache. There are a few tumors in my hands. I have all problems like headache, chest pain, and stomachache. It comes and goes. It started when I was nine. Usually I cannot see doctor because my mother may not have money to take me there. Sometimes I will not tell her because I know that she does not have money. I get relief spontaneously after sometime. There is a private clinic in this locality. We have to pay the doctor for consultation and medicines. I think that my disease will be cured by my death only. Death can come at young age also. There was a beautiful girl in this area. She died at the age of fifteen. If God calls me early I am not bothered. The decision is God's only. I hope that my mother will take me to hospital when she has money.



My favorite food is pazhanji (Residue of food items kept for the next day and mixed together). Sometimes mother makes fresh food in the morning. But I like previous night's food kept for morning. Sometimes we have tapioca and fish, poori and meat etc. There is meat once in a week. Mom also cooks leafy vegetables. Sometimes we experienced lack of food also. If my mother is not well, there will be shortage of money. Then we will have tapioca with chili. Or mom gives us rice and she drinks water. I will be hungrier, when there is no food in the house. If there is money I force my mother to make different items. My mother's friend also joins with me for it. Both of us together demand mother to make all the items.

I get worried when my aunt scolds me. She does not stay here permanently. I love all my family members. I want all of them with me even if I die. I know very little about my father. I have never seen him. People say that I look like him. He has the same height of me. If somebody asks about my father I would lie. I would say that he had died in a motor accident. All of us were traveling in a vehicle and all others were saved except my father. I used to lie about my education also. I told some people that I was studying in sixth standard. But one day one respectable woman whom I met in the hospital told me that it is not good to lie. She convinced me about the danger of it. She asked me that what would I do if somebody asks you to show the textbooks. You try to tell truth. Then I also agreed. She changed my habits also. I had laziness to take bath. Now I take bath in the morning itself. I pray in the beginning of the day only if I feel like that. But most often I get punishment for that. Sometimes I get scolding from mom. Then I say sorry to all gods. Often I feel that there is presence of God in my mother and friends.

We are living in this house since last three years. Before that we were in another village. I enjoyed life there. I was going to school. I never told the correct timings of school to my mother. Because I wanted to play in the school during lunch break. I had a close friend called Devu in the school. She was the one whom I loved very much. I brought food from home and we shared our food. She only helped me to dress the injury happened to my lips one day. She was from a rich family. She brought expensive food like horlicks. She gave everything to me also. I had full freedom in her house. I entered all rooms and we spent time in the terrace. That time I had more dresses. My mother gave her saris for stitching skirts for me, because I was going to school. When mad people came to us I never harmed them. I will give them whatever I have. Jesus also wandered like this. When some people invited him for a feast he went in disguise. Then those people chased him out. Later only they realised that it was Jesus. How can we know that these people are not somebody like him?

We do not have a well. So I go to the house in neighborhood to collect water. Most of the people in the locality like me. Whatever I ask they give to me. If there is tears in my eyes, definitely they will give anything I want. I feel sorry if we change the house. But in another way it is good to change the house. Because there are number of snakes here. That is one problem. I go for shopping. To bring water my mom's friend also helps me. If I am asked to go to the shop when it becomes dark, I get angry. There are some people in the shops who tease me. One uncle calls me veeppa (a big vessel), because I express anger in my face. Sometimes he calls me mad girl. Then I call him back the same. Here most of the people know me. My mother gives me money to take rickshaw to go to the neighboring town. But I walk, save the money and buy bangles and other articles for that money. If we walk it is good for our health also.

I feel very bad when my mother doubts me for taking money. Then I cry. I never want some body brand me as a thief. If I cause pain to mother, I feel sorry after some time. Another incident that caused me pain was the illness of my grandmother. When others reject her, I feel pain. If my mother scolds me for making quarrels with others and if the justice is on my part, I feel very bad. Then I think that it is better to die. I will ask her, why cannot you kill me? I will be playing for myself. If somebody comes and disturbs me I get irritated. I do not curse any body. I do not harm or hate anybody. I want others to do the same to me. I want love from others. Now my workload is reduced because my aunt is here. So I am thankful to her. I do not want others to accuse me. See! Now I tried to sing songs though I do not know well. But if somebody teases me for that I get disappointed. If somebody finds faults with me I lose my tolerance. Some people purposefully do it. They tell that he is a dirty girl. They may be joking.



But I cannot tolerate it. So I request them not to repeat it. Then I decide not to go outside. My mother come and pacifies me.

I save the little money that my mother gives me occasionally. I think that it can be used when my mother become ill. Sometimes I steal from her. But if she asks for it I cannot hide it and give her back. If some body asks about my dad, I feel pain. But now I cannot leave my mother even if my dad come and call me. I love my mother more. But when she beats me, I tell her that I will go with my father. Then she gets upset and asks me whether I may leave her. Then I feel sad for causing pain to my mother. The aunt staying with us is a loving one. She does not allow me to do much work. She cares me very well. Occasionally she scolds me. Then I do not talk to her. She comes and compromise. She even fed me when I had injury in my hand. She sings well.

They do not have a well in the compound. Water is fetched from neighborhood. It is a difficulty for them. The house has sufficient ventilation. They have sanitary latrine. There is no smokeless chulha. The house is rented for Rs.750 per month. Now they are thinking of changing the house.

Comment

Anu has a positive attitude towards life in spite of her circumstances. But he is much worried about her discontinued education. This has created much agony in the child's mind. She has recurrent and more than one illnesses. Probably it is due to her psychic pain. The reason for not studying is the same as that of any girl in a poor family. If the mother becomes sick the elderly girl child has to do the housework and her education is neglected. But here the additional difficulty is that when her mother wants to join her again in a school, it is problematic because they change the residence frequently. And also if school authorities come to know about the mother's background they do not give admission. Her relatives are not very keen about her studies, because if she goes to school there should not anybody to fetch water.

The child is very sensitive about social acceptance and acceptance by other family members. She loves her family members, friends and other human beings. She has a feeling of loss of friendship and other pleasures of childhood. She has developed her own values during the course of her life. But she has value conflict in case of her father since she has been forced to say lies, which she does not like. Though she has worries about education and illnesses, she has hope and confidence in life at this point of time.

Shaji-16 years-Kochi

Shaji is the only one son of a sex worker who happened to be so after rejection from her lover. She was too young at that time. She did not get any family support after that. She had tremendous difficulties to look after her son during his childhood. She left him with other women while she went for work. For this she had to pay heavily. Finally she decided to send him with a priest. So he was brought up in a childcare centre under the guidance of a priest. Now he wants to be free. He has left the centre, but comes to her mother occasionally only. He has been suffering from leprosy since last eight months. There is no social support system to help him in developing his faculties. On the contrary, he is exposed to dangerous situations among mafia groups. He is vulnerable to torture from the powerful gang. It was difficult to get him for a few hours for the interview. We had to wait for hours in the rented house where his mother lives. Now the mother is working as a peer educator in an HIV/AIDS prevention project.

He was happy to spend some time with us. He performed some items like monoact and in between he narrated his life experiences as quoted below. "I did not have many problems till last year when somebody found that I was a sick person. Doctor and mother told me that I have got leprosy. Now I am worried about my hands, which became disfigured. When everybody has got pretty hands, I have ugly ones. If medicines cure me, I will be happy.



I was grown up under the care of a priest. While I was in the boarding school, the priest cared me as his own child. I went there at the age of five and stayed there till 14. I attended school till 6th standard. After that I have got chicken pox. Then I could not continue my study. I became lazy after the illness. I did not feel like studying. Mathematics was difficult for me. But I liked languages. Now I can read and write Malayalam. I know a little English also. It is good that I need not seek the help from anybody to read the name board in a bus. I would have become ashamed, if I had to ask somebody to read for me. It is good for us to learn. If we get a letter, we can read it for ourselves.

After dropping out from school, the priest encouraged me to sell lottery and earn for myself. I enjoyed the work and earned for myself. The money was saved in bank. First I did not have any experience in selling lottery. I just shouted lottery...lottery...or asked people in an amateurish way. 'Do you want lottery?' There was no response. Later I learned some strategies. I started talking with customers. I would establish a relationship with them. Then I would ask for help. They feel sympathy for me. I did not get any training for this. Everything came from my mind and brain. One day I just started my experiments. It clicked. Then I got confidence. The business started with a friendly talk. I might start, Brother, how is life? They might respond, Son, what are you doing here? During conversation I would ask, 'why cannot you take a lottery? Then they would take. I enjoyed sharing my life with people.

After 14 years, we were transferred to annex. In annex we have shelter only during evening and night. We have to go out and find our own work during daytime. There is a prayer during evening. We should pay Rs. 60 per month. Food is taken from outside. The place can be used to take bath, rest and sleep. After some time I left the place. When I left the place, mother gave me money. I also earned for myself by selling lottery and so on. I do not like the new priest. He is not good as the previous one. So I get angry. Usually I will not respond. I suffered everything silently. One day I told my mother that I did not want to go back to that place. She agreed and asked me to live with her. She asked me many times. 'Why cannot you stay with me'?

In school we did not have much opportunity to play. But when the father went out, we played. We were three. We were supposed to learn in the evening. Then there will be prayer. Group prayer. After that we would watch television. Again there is another prayer. Then we had dinner followed by Caroms play. After that we go to sleep. That time I had desire to go out and play with other boys, which was not allowed. In between I went to see my mother. She would buy something for me. Keeping it in the bag, I came back within a short time.

I could not enjoy the boarding life. I was happier when I visited the residence colonies of my friends. We played cricket there. Now I often visit this place. There are friends who studied with me. There is a club where we gather. I have a membership too. I work whenever I get an opportunity. When others work, I also join with them. But now I am unable to do hard work because of the illness. Now I can work with one hand only. Hence the work is limited to certain types like picking grass. I cannot lift heavy weight with this hand. I get severe pain if I do so.

I have many friends. Sometimes we quarrel each other. They hurt me. I hurt them. But the very next day, we again become friends. I love them. My close friend is Sibi. His mother considers me as her own son. I also love her equally.

I have respect and love for the priests who looked after me. I spent my childhood with Father M. Initially I did not like to go with him, because I loved cinema. I used to go to all cinemas with my mother. I got angry with my mother when she left me in the school and came back with her to see cinema. Again mother took me to the same place. This was repeated for many times. I was staying in Snehabhavan (a centre for destitute children) for many years. Once my hand was broken. Then my mother brought me here. Now I do not want to continue in that place. One problem is freedom. Another thing is that my mother also says, " I have taken a house. Why can not you stay with me?" My mother also needs company. Now my desire is to get a job, save some money, buy a piece of land and build my own house. I love my mother very much. She is the most important to me.



I like Cricket and cricket stars like Robin. I enjoy break dance though never learned it from professionals. But I watch cinemas and other performances and just try out the steps. I listen to others' singing and learn the songs. Watching cinema is another entertainment. I like Mohanlal's cinema. Playing cards is another hobby. I like travelling and have traveled in different parts of Kerala with the priest.

I have done many works like selling lottery tickets. Then I tried selling nuts. I worked for corporation also. There I had to collect waste from each house. For this we get 15-20 rupees per month from each house. It was a good work. We had to work only for two hours. Recently I was working in a hotel. Since I had weakness in my hand, the plates fell down. So they sent me from there. If I get a good job, I will go for it. Good job means courier service, collecting waste for the corporation etc. I would like to live as a good person.

I respect my mother. She used to punish me during my childhood. Still I consider her words with respect. She gave me beatings for many reasons. For example for using abusive words upon others. Then I did not repeat it. I had a satisfactory life, when I looked back. I do not mind my mother's work. If she is involved in organizational activities, that also does not bother me much. I feel bad, only when she uses abusive words in television. That feeling also lasts only for a few moments. I advise her not to do this again.

If somebody asked about my father I would tell that he had died. Then they cannot ask further questions. Sometimes my mother talks about him. But I do not like it. I do not listen, when she talks about him. Then she understands that I do not like it. She stops the conversation. I do not have any worry for the reason that my father has left me. Why should I? My mother looked after me. Let him go. My mother cared me so much that I did not feel anything lacking.

When sisters asked me about my expectations during my school time, I told that I would like to become a social worker. Actually I did not mean it. I just wanted to please them and get their acceptance. But really I wished to learn more. At the same time I was infatuated by cinema.

When there was a vacancy in the corporation for waste collection, I joined in that. I got jaundice and had to stop my work. Thus I lost that job. Then I started working in a hotel. Initially I thought that it would be too heavy for me. But it was not. It was just to clean a few tables, wash vessels etc. I could return to home in the evening. But one day the owner sent me back. May be because of my illness. Another boy was appointed in my place. Now I am trying for a job. If I do not get one, I will restart the lottery business. Mother will buy a set for me when she gets payment. Of all these work, I like lottery business. The reason is that we have freedom and can interact with many people". Shaji is looking forward with hope.

Shaji is taking treatment from Government hospital. It seems that he takes medicine regularly. They need money for it. He likes all sorts of food. He had hepatitis a few months back. So, there is certain restriction in diet. His mother is living in a rented room. She is trying to build a small house with the help of others. She thinks that she can live with her son.

Shaji is worried about his illness. He has difficulty to cope with the disfigurement and the social stigma attached to the disease. Still he has hope to get cured. He developed self-confidence from education and work experiences. He is willing to work, but unable to do because of the illness.

Now his mother wants him with her. She is trying to build a family, which she has missed in her life. But he visits her occasionally and spends most of his time with friends. He has love and respect for his mother. But it seems that he cannot fulfill his mother's expectations. He has made his own world. His personality is conditioned by his life experiences.



Bindu-18 years. Kozhikode

Bindu is staying in Bangladesh colony with her aunt and grandmother. Her parents are in prison in association with a drug trafficking case. She is eighteen years old and is taking the responsibility of her family. She is looking after her younger sister. Many women in this area do sex work and people have a bad impression about this area. Bindu does not like to stay back in this place.

"I am staying with my aunt and sister. Both of my parents are in the prison. Do you know my aunt, my mother's sister?" Bindu introduced her aunt Seema to us. "Now my hope is that my aunt may get a job in Gulf. She managed to get a passport and visa. She is the dearest to me and is just like my mother. My mother's trial is going on. If my aunt get an opportunity to go to Gulf, we will be lucky. But the problem is that then there will not be anybody to look after us. Living in this place is very difficult. We need protection. If my mother comes back from prison before she goes it is all right. We cannot stay here without the support of others. There is one nephew. But even if there is somebody for protection, something is lacking.

Now I am just looking after my aunt's baby. I am thinking of learning tailoring. I have done it in Coimbatore years back. Then I could not continue because I came back here. From here I could not go. Aunt has a small kid. And also my sister is learning. She is in ninth. So I have to help her. Now I stitch some pieces at home and make some money. I can stitch undergarments and garments for children.

I was in Coimbatore with my aunt for sometime. I went there at the year of 15. My mother was anxious about my future. She wanted to change my residence. My aunt was staying in Coimbatore with her husband. For some period my family also stayed in Coimbatore. I was with my aunt and others were staying together in another house. My mother was working there in a school. But when my mother's verdict came and she was put in the jail others also came to stay with my aunt. Later it became a burden to my uncle. Our family returned to Kozhikode and my sister continued her school in Kozhikode.

I enjoyed life in Coimbatore. First I was little worried, because of separation from my mother. But later I liked the place. In between there was some problem in the relationship between aunt and uncle. Uncle demanded for the daughter and aunt resisted. They got separated. He did not allow her to live there with the children. So all of us moved to Kozhikode.

I liked the atmosphere of that house, because there was no quarrel in the neighborhood and no police harassment. Uncle had business and he made money. There were no economic problems also. This residential area is very bad. One thing is police harassment. But that is not the only problem. People gossip each other. Each one talk against other. A girl cannot live alone in this place.

It is very difficult to get a job also. My aunt lost many job opportunities just because she gave the address of this place. (Bangladesh colony). Finally she got a job in a laundry, after giving a false address. Later they found out the correct address and she had to leave that job. In another shop many people came for interview along with my aunt. All people said that she had a better chance comparing to others. But finally she was refused because of the residential address. This happened a number of times. Even if we go for some other work from this area people think that we are going for some bad work. It is a pity. People in the colony themselves tell, " She is going for some other business."

But there is one thing positive about this place. If there is some danger to any one others will help. There was an incident. Our grand mother was lying in the front room. We could not lock the back door. Aunt was lying with children. When I opened my eyes in the night, one person was lying by my side. It was some body who stayed nearby. But we could not find out. Other than this, there was no other bad incidents happened to me. People do not harm. But we have to hear bad comments while going outside. We always feel scared to stay alone. In Coimbatore I did not have to fear anyone.



My aunt is my best friend. I can tell her anything I feel. I do not have such friendship with my mother and father. My father is in the jail for years. Before going to jail, I was very close with my father. That time I was more attached to father than to my mother. When he went to jail I became very close to my grand mother. My grand mother died six months back. I have nice memories about my father. He loved me. He bought everything for me. Grandmother was much interested in my schooling. My mother attempted suicide during my childhood. Father was in jail at that time. She took some poison. I had to take her to hospital. She had epilepsy. All of our family members had good relations each other. Anybody could talk anything to the other one. But I was little embarrassed to talk every thing to my mother. Then my mother had illness. She had police case. All these worried me. When all girls went for cinema, I could not. I feel unhappy when I did not get chance to go for outing. But I did not show it outwards.

We are only two. My mother had a stillbirth before my birth. We sisters are friendly to each other. I dress up her. Now we developed different tastes and sometimes have dispute. Now I am spending most of my time with my aunt's kid. We cannot separate each other, though I want to work. After settling the job of my aunt, I will think of a job for me.

My mother is a Tamil Brahmin. Her family is in Thrissinappally in Tamilnadu. I have been to there many times. My aunt was with us during my childhood. She left us early. She was in a hostel for some time. I actually forgot her face after some time. I met her after a few years incidentally. One day when I went to a hospital, I saw her. One girl told me that she looked like my aunt. Then I realised that she was no one else, but my aunt. She came to our house. Then my mother told her to take me also along with her. When we lived together we shared each other and became friends.

I studied till 5th standard. When I think about school, I remember one Surendran master. He wanted me to learn dancing. He visited my house also. I started learning dance. Then it was discontinued because of economic problem. I performed outside and inside home occasionally. Another memory related to school is about a house we frequently visited during that period. I liked those people in the house. I could not go to school every day mainly because of shortage of money for bus fare. There was nobody to dress up me and give tiffin. I have only vague memories about friends in school. I stopped studies because of my father's case. Everybody told that he would be punished for many years. He wanted to escape. So we went to Tamilnadu to save my father from the case. After sometime we were left with our grand mother living there and parents returned to Kerala. But later he was caught. We heard that father was arrested. Then my mother got ill. Later mother also got punished. When we came back we decided to send my sister to school. Then I had to look after domestic work. Now she is in ninth standard.

I have many friends. Two close friends. I have belief in God, but do not follow rituals. I pray in silence. Sometimes I go to temples. Ganesh is my favorite God. I have pen friends too. I like to dance and learn many things. I learned cycling and riding scooter. I want to ride bike as well. I do not know whether I get a chance for it. One of my desires is to travel in a car listening music. It is good if all family members can travel together. We enjoyed life in Coimbatore. We went for tours. We went to many temples like Trichy, Malankotta, Pollachi, Maruthammala etc.

This is our own house. But it is not safe. I wish to construct a new house. There is no electricity in this colony. It is a problem. Nobody tried for it. There is shortage of water. We lost all the pots because we changed the residence many times. So it has become difficult to store water. Everyday we do not get water. We use well also. There is a latrine. Now we are in economic crisis. My aunt is working. We are depending her. I also do some work and earn something for me. I saved some money to buy small things like chapel, dress etc. But if money is needed to buy some household items, I will spend it for it. I do not have many clothes. I like to have some more dresses. But I can adjust with whatever I have. I do not have gold ornaments. My mother has got some.



One positive aspect about this colony is that all people have unity when there is some danger. When people get more money they do not care for others. Here we do not have any religious distinctions. All of us celebrate all festivals. People have become money oriented in recent times. Children do not have opportunities to play. In my childhood we children used to play together. Now people are hesitant to send their children to neighborhood.

I am scared of police action. During childhood I did not know much about this. Police used to come here. Now I am so scared and anxious about it. In addition to this, sometimes people come from outside and make disputes.

I was very sad at the time when my mother was arrested for drug business. Now I feel that there should be an end to this drug business. It should come down. I think that she has done the wrong thing. I felt very bad in those days when I saw my mother standing in the city talking with other men. She did not take my sister or grand parents outside. But my mother does not want us to do the same. She tells that you have to suffer a lot in this path. You will not get any recognition from society. Now she sends money from the jail. They get payment for working in the prison. Father also sends money like Rs. 300, 400 etc.

My mother actually does not want to do this type of work. Anyway people never improve. They want easy money. Now women started a co-operative society in this colony. It is good. They can avoid sex work and do some other work. Now nuns also come here for social reform.

All the boys in the neighborhood are friendly to me. Most of them are small boys. Others see it in a bad way. Before I did not have anybody to share with. That time I used to suffer all my agonies silently. I would not express it. Even now I do not share my worries with every body.

We have to find a fine person for my aunt. She should get remarried. But there is not much hope. Even if some body comes they need only a temporary arrangement. Now she is facing harassment in this colony because she is a divorcee.

My sister studies well. She is the first rank holder in school. She involves in extra curricular activities also like painting, dance, music etc. We expect that she will become a doctor. We try our best to teach her. She has many difficulties because our mother is not here. People gossip about all of us. So we feel insecure. If mother was with us many problems might have solved.

Now I have a boyfriend who is staying in Cannanore. But it is not a love relation. Just friendship. Before, I had a love affair. He was working in a company. Actually others fixed the relation during our childhood. It developed because, others had told about it since my childhood. So it happened just like that without my conscious knowledge. Others told that I was lucky. Then I also felt like that. But later it was broken. Then I got worried. Here I am friendly with many people including boys and girls. So he developed doubt in me. And also he thought that I became bad in Coimbatore. He told it to some other people and they told us. Then my aunt called him and talked. He told that many people were coming here during night and so on. I felt very bad. It was not only that he had left. But his mother abused my mother and aunt. She came here and quarreled with them. We could not move around because of shame. He told that we were bad. I wept that time. Then I understood that this was the experience of many girls. First, I thought of ending my life. But I loved my mother and sister. So I could not do it. When I exposed myself to my aunt, she consoled me. She told that you should be careful in relationships. I accepted that.

Now I have great desire for life. Even if there is hardship in life, I like to live. I will not go for any bad work. When I stay here I have tension. I develop doubt about myself that whether I may go wrong. Here girls like me are under such circumstances. We are forced to go to police station or court to take bail for our close relatives. Then we are forced to do some bad work. My mother has tension about it. In all the letters, she insists that you must not go like that, even if you are starved. Since she went like that



she did not want her children to do the same. Now I do not want to take the risk of love. I will marry somebody who is selected by my aunt. But I do not think that my parents have the capacity to take a decision. If they had, they might not have gone to this state.

I like to hear music during leisure time. I read stories, newspaper etc. I like Madhavikutty, Retnamma, and children's magazines like balarama, balamangalam and so on. I have the habit of reading poems. Some of the lines I do not understand. Then I ask others for the meaning. My friend explains everything to me. "

Bindu had repeated abdominal pain during her childhood. Now she has occasional cough. They go to private clinics and beech hospital for treatment. The fee is not much. But they have to buy medicines from outside. They feel that there is no care and concern in the government hospital. Bindu prefers vegetarian food. But sometimes she eats meat. Generally they have nutritious food.

Bindu is under stress that can happen to a girl, if her parents are in prison. She is coping with the situation by maintaining good relation with others. She has intimate relation with her aunt and has many good friends in neighborhood. She is not negative towards life. She has hope. She has her own opinion about the community. She has opinion about the positive and negative aspects of the community. She understands the vulnerability to a woman in such circumstances and learned many things from her own experiences. She has formed certain values with which she judges the society and her parents. Even in the worst situation, Bindu is practical minded and determined. There is poetry in her mind.

Ani. 22 years .Trivandrum

Ani is the son of a street based sex worker. He was grown up in a juvenile home. After returning from home he was forced by circumstances to find his own livelihood. He was exposed to dangerous situations of the street. He had bitter experiences throughout his life. Now he is married and has a baby. Ani felt that he did not get love and care from his mother. He is ashamed of his mother's profession. He got humiliated by others. Still he has expectations for future.

I have memory from 4 years of age. I spent my childhood with my grand mother. She was looking after me. My mother was going out of the way. She did not have love for me. She did not give me the love a mother should have given to a son. My grandmother could not look after me because she had to go for work. Then she put me in another house. She was working as a domestic servant. The whole burden of family was taken by her. Even though I had a father, he did not care me. He married another woman. My grandmother looked after me till the age of 8. Then I was a burden for her. I had to bear the abuses of others from different houses. Others abused her also for my mistakes. So to avoid the nuisance, she placed me in a juvenile home. The main office was in Quilon. But I was admitted in the remand home in Poojappura. There was no case charged against me. The complaint was that I was making nuisance in the house, not studying, not obeying etc. Then I felt that I should study well. I used my little intelligence. So they sent me to Quilon. I stayed in Quilon for 8years. My grandmother used to come in between. She brought something for me. She took me home during vacation. That time my grandmother was staying with my mother's sister. The vacation period was good. I was happy to spend time with them during holidays.

In the juvenile home they allowed boys only upto 16. There were only boys. Then I wrote to my house to take me back. But there was no reply, because the address was incorrect. Then the family members of one of my friends came there. So I requested the authorities to leave me with them. So they got a signature from me and left me with them. They left me in Trivandrum. Then I did not know where to go. Even though I was 16, I did not know anything. I was like a mentally retarded. Since I left the place very early, I did not know my house and the premises well. So I wandered in the city. I joined in a small goon's gang in Chenkalchoola. Then I had many acquaintances. One among them helped me to get a job in the city. It was in a hotel. But I did not go regularly. If I went two days then I took leave for



another two days and wandered in the city. I got food from the temple. I used to go for marriage ceremonies for lunch. I slept in the verandas of shops, which closed the earliest.

One day I met my aunt. She was going here and there. I told her that I had come back. I was wandering because nobody came to call me. She told me that I should go with her. I was staying in Mudavanmugal. (a suburb of Thiruvananthapuram) So I went and stayed with her. Within one week there arose some difficulties. The difficulty was nothing but the way of life of my aunt. Every day strangers came to our house. Since I was a grown up man it created problems to me. My friends or others would ask me, "Who was that"? I would reply uncle or brother. When there were too many uncles, I got ashamed. Then I thought that there should be some change in life. This would not work. I made quarrels and left the house. Again I came to city and wandered. I used to spend night in one of my friends in Chenkalchoola. Then I was again trapped among goons.

I was involved in some mafia action. One fellow caught me and slashed my hands. A case was charged upon me. One person with whom I had acquaintance saved me from the case. He took bail for me. Then he told that he helped me because I was an orphan. He was a broker. He offered me a job in a hotel. I went there. I earned myself. I spent the money for cinema, food and other entertainments. I did not have the burden of family. So I started gambling, taking alcohol and all sorts of pleasures a man can have. There was nobody to advise me, tell that you went in the wrong way, and correct me. My life went like whatever I felt each day. Then I developed a desire for money. I had stolen for the first time in my life. My friend and myself together stole a v-guard motor from the hotel. We carried it in a cycle covered by waste materials. On the way police caught us. They asked what it was. We replied that it was waste. They stroke with lathi and found that there was something else. So they asked me to spread it on the floor. They found the motor. Nobody gave them any information. They have done it casually. My friend was shivering. They asked, "From where did you get it?" We replied." It is from hotel amrutha." Then they beat me and took me to the police station. There was nobody to enquire about me. The other boy's family members came and blamed me. They told me that it was because of me he behaved like that. I should take the responsibility. I felt very bad and thought that it was just because there was nobody for me; I had to suffer all these. They told me like this. "If both of you are in the jail, it is difficult to take bail. So you please agree that you have done it". I agreed it. I was put in the jail for one week and tortured like anything. They beat me in the sole. They continued it even after agreeing the charge. They wanted me to accuse for many other unproved cases also.

Then they brought me to the court. I was crying through out. I asked them whether they would give bail for me. Nobody was there to listen my prayer. I just wanted to get free. Even if there was a God he did not listen to me. May be because I have done the crime. When I cried again and again police brought some food for me. I could not eat it because of agony. Any way, luckily police did not charged for theft. They put it as doubtful. The punishment was under section 48 for imprisonment for one month. I was sent to the sub jail. There were seniors. They harmed us. There was a teacher from my old juvenile home. He asked me what the case was. I replied that when we came back from cinema, police caught me. I did not want to inform him that I had stolen. Then he left. Another warden came and beat me.

So I was in the jail. The other boy came in between. Each time he brought one soap and went back. I became free after one month and came back to the city. Again I was wandering. Finally I became an escort to a 'prostitute'. It was like a mama (pimp). We would pretend like husband and wife. I took her back to her house in the night and accompanied in morning. While I was staying with her people around came and questioned her about me. She told that I was her husband. They doubted and responded like I was too young for her. She replied that there was no age bar for her profession. So she made a point. For her job age was not important. They did not have any answer for that. The people went away. But we thought that it was not safe to stay back there. We decided to take a rented house. She knew my aunt. One day she introduced me to her. My aunt got agitated against using me like that. She beat her and warned against taking me with her.



Again I started living with my aunt. She also had a caretaker (husband). Another girl Lilly was also staying with her. One day she was disappeared. I went in search of her. I found that a gang of boys whom I knew took her. They told me that they wanted her for one night. I knew that she had some money with her and they would snatch it. So I told them that I just wanted to see her. After that they could do whatever they want. So I took the money from her and gave 100 rupees to the gang for buying food for her. Then I was waiting outside for her. You can imagine how humiliating the situation is. They caught her to take revenge. Though she was a 'prostitute' this was without her consent. Usually they snatch all the money and beat up after sex. That is the nature of these people.

They did not leave her till morning. Then I humbly requested them to leave her with me. I offered them a bottle of liquor. This incident caused to develop affection towards her and I decided to live with her. But my aunt protested. She might have considered my future. Or sometimes she might have thought that I would interfere with her free movement. But I knew about her life very early. I requested Lilly to live with me. I was ready to earn for her. My aunt did not like it. She drank and made a lot of fuss in the house. She abused me a lot. She behaved very cheap. At last I also gave a blow to her and left the house.

Then I came to the city again and learned autorikshaw driving. I started driving in Beema pally(part of Thiruvananthapuram city). I developed friendship with a lady. She invited me to her house. She had some vested interest. She wanted me to involve in her drug business. She offered me money. But her friendship was unconditional. She offered love and care to me. I agreed for the business. I got more money out of it. But I could not save because I was taking alcohol. Then I fell in love with a girl related to that lady. I got more attached to that house. I could not go for work. I was always roaming around her house. I get up early, dress up, eat and wander around. I wanted to see her always.

Again the lady encouraged me to continue in the business. I agreed but police caught me. But the lady did not help me. That time my aunt came and saved me out of the case after paying money. Then I was taken to her house and she arranged a rickshaw for me. I called my girlfriend and she came along with me. She lived there for two days. But we did not have any physical relation. She controlled herself. Even if a man approaches a girl she will take care of herself. After two days her relatives came in a car with police. People around told me that you should try for a compromise before a case was charged. Police beat me up. He might have taken money from them (sighed). He abused me verbally also. They have taken the girl. I drank too much.

Then I used to go to another house. They had sac business. I went there to collect sacs. One day I told the housewife that I had decided to marry and to have a settled life. I was drunk. They got astonished. I had all vices. But then I wanted to begin a new life. I asserted it again and again and asked for her help. I wanted a family for me. I did not want a temporary arrangement. She consoled me. She asked me to go and sleep and said that next morning there would be a girl for me. In the morning they showed me a girl. She was a relative of that family. She asked whether I liked the girl and if so to bring my relatives. This girl was living in Veli, another village.

Then I had to think about marriage arrangements. The only relation I had was with my aunt and her husband. There was no one else to me. I was never in good terms with my mother. But when I told this issue to my aunt and uncle, both of them disagreed. They got drunk and told me that they would not participate. I told them that I would do it even if they do not agree. I would have friends to support me. Later they agreed.

We made a formal proposal. There was an agreement on dowry. They gave me Rs. 3000. There was no ring exchange. They were not economically capable of it. According to their custom, they wanted to exchange dresses. My aunt did not like it. She thought that it was a shame. She asked, are we beggars? She insisted that we should give a ring. My aunt gave me a ring to put on the girl's finger. I said okay. Ring exchange was over. Date was fixed for marriage.



Then I had to buy sari for my relatives and bride. It would cost around 2000 Rs. I was puzzled. When I went to the city I met some women whom I knew before. They gave some money to me. Each one gave Rs. 100. One woman gave me a shirt and they blessed me. We spent the money they gave for marriage expenditure. We had arranged a feast. There was lot of tension. In the night just before marriage there was lot of problems in the house. Aunt and uncle were fighting each other. Aunt put kerosene over her body and she left the house. Uncle and aunt started fighting in the road. I got upset. I was worried, what would others say? I called them back. They came with me. I pacified them and waited. I had much tension thinking about next day's function. I thought, if the marriage broke, it would be the end of my life.

In the morning I borrowed some money from somebody and arranged a taxi. Then my aunt went somewhere. Time was passing. She did not come back. I did not know what to do. I was feeling like committing suicide at that time, though I lived for this many years. Then in the last moment I went alone. They scolded me for coming late. I said a lie. I told them that one baby got ill. So everybody went to hospital. They said that even if a death occurred priority should have been given to marriage. Because of shortage money I bought an imitation chain and thali. (symbol for a married woman, put on the neck of the bride by the bridegroom at the time of marriage) They were asking about my people. For the ritual there should be somebody from the bridegroom's party. Nobody was there. At that moment I thought that it was better to die. I was so ashamed. Then I told the truth. Somehow the marriage was over. I came back with the girl. People from the bride's house came for a visit on the same day. Then they asked my aunt why she did not come for the marriage. She did not respond well. I pleaded her for not giving a bad impression about the family to the bride's people. Irrespective of caste and religion, people should behave decently during such occasions. I told my aunt that, we were ready to move out if she did not like us to live in that house.

In the first night itself there was much tension in my house. Aunt and uncle were fighting silently. They wanted to kill each other. One tried to cut the other with blade. They were not thinking of the bride. However we spent one month there. I did not go for work. We were enjoying the days. Though they fed us these days, they used to abuse also. They asked, "Are you not ashamed to eat without doing any work? In addition, a woman also is brought". We looked each other in helplessness. Sometimes my wife would ask me, "What sin I had done in the past to undergo all these sufferings? Because of hunger I had to eat. Then I told her that, okay, we would move to your house. Actually it was shameful. There is a proverb like wife house and a dump are the same. For a few days they give feast to the son-in-law. Then they will ask to get lost. Anyway we went to her house for a festival. After two weeks, I asked them to find a job for me. They arranged a work in railway. It was hard work i.e. loading. I did not have any experience in such work. Sometimes I felt like crying, when others teased me. They asked. What is the use of this flesh? If you cannot do this work, go and hang. I could not withstand the comments. I also felt like cutting my flesh. Any way I got 100 rupees per day. I decided to continue in the job. It is a pleasure to work hard, earn something, provide for family, bathe using soap and oil bought by myself and to eat the food cooked by my wife in the family. Then I developed a desire to have my own house.

In between there was a tension between my father in law and myself. He was a womanizer. One day I was cleaning the house. I found a sex book. I asked my wife who brought it. She said that my friend might have brought it. I showed the pictures to my wife. She did not like it. Then I burnt it. After two days my father in law started searching something. Actually he wanted the book. Then I told that we did not take it. He did not believe. That day he took alcohol and started quarreling with me. He asked me, "Are you a son-in-law? You only took the book and read". I did not say anything because others were listening. I got nervous. Then he abused my mother. I beat him and pushed down. He blew me back. My brother-in-law separated us.

He started beating his wife and accusing for arranging our marriage. Then we left that house. I thought of constructing a house of my own. I saved some money and bought some wood. I had become a member of our worker's union. We built a small hut. By that time I had an address in that area. I had



many friends. They helped me to build a house. So I developed confidence. In the beginning people used to abuse me without any reason. They would ask. "Who are you?" I answered politely. 'I am X's son-in-law'. They would command, Okay, Go home. I went back to home silently. Now it is not the case. I will also give back. After a few weeks there happened fights with some outsiders in my uncle's house. We were not involved, but I collected two swords for self-defence. One day my father-in-law sold the cow and told that it was for giving me the balance of dowry. I gave it to my wife's hand for keeping. The currencies were that of 500 rupees. Mistaking it as 100 rupees, my wife gave 5 notes to somebody. So we lost 2000 rupees. My father in law thought that I had spent it. Again there was quarrel and father -in-law beat his wife. Finally police came and they found my sword. I told them that it was for cutting coconuts. They beat me. It was a shame for me. I had to go to the police station. I was depicted as a goon in front of my wife's family members. They did not come to see me. My wife alone tried to release me. So we again kept a distance from her house for sometime. But now we have again joined. It happened when my wife got pregnant.

At present my aim is to buy some land and construct a small house. My daughter should never suffer like me. We need not depend on others. My daughter should not beg in front of anybody till the end of my life. Even if there is starvation she should not do this. I will take a life insurance policy for her. Even if some difficulties arise in future, others should not degrade her. I want a place of my own to sleep. Now people may say that I am living upon my wife's property including the wedding chain. So I have to give back whatever I have taken from her.

I have a good relation with my wife. When my daughter become 2 year old I will think of the second one. I want two children. My greatest difficulty is that I have not learned a skill. I have to learn it now. Sometimes there will be dispute between my wife and myself. I express all my anger towards my wife, which I really have towards her family. I would tell her, "because of your family I am suffering'. Sometimes it will end in beating her. She would also say, "Because of my bad luck only I married you. You were forced upon me as a burden". Our quarrel will last only for half an hour. After a few moments we will become one. She really loves me. She is worried to send me for night duties. She cares me like a wife, mother and sister. She loves me more than that my mother loves me. If I get sick, she will do whatever she can. But not out of the way.

I do not have any feeling for my mother. The reason is that a mother should never reject a son, which my mother has done. A mother always forgives the mistakes of a son. But my mother was different. A son cannot correct a mother, because she is older than him. How can a son direct a mother? But the mother can say, "Look son, you must not do this. I have done this much for you. I have such expectations about you. I will do this for you etc". But my mother does not have any communication with me. If we met somewhere, she would ask, why you are standing here? Finished.

She does not have a home. Her home is the city. For sometime she stayed with my aunt. That time I introduced my wife to her. Now my wife alone knows about her way of life. I do not want her family members know about this. When people ask about my relatives, Usually I tell lies. I tell that my aunt is working in a firm; my mother is working as a weaver and so on. People want to know everything happening about us. They will ask why they do not come here etc. I cannot answer some questions they ask. For example they will ask about my aunt's co-workers. When they travel together and live together people will ask, who is the other lady? We cannot answer. They may be having some doubts. Sometimes I weep because I cannot answer. I cannot bring my mother here. I have desire for that. But because of circumstances I cannot do it. My mother does not have a determination to live with a family, with children and grand children. A worm will not lie in a bed even if we try for it. She has her own pleasures. Just wants to lie somewhere. So if she does not want me I also do not want her. She never had a thought for her son. Even when I had difficulties she did not help me. Now I hate her because, she does not stay with us. If she stays with me there will be quarrel on the fifth day. She would go outside and come back as drunken. Then how can I live? But any way my mother is my mother. I cannot negate it even if she is lying in sewage. If she is in danger I will go and help. Though



my mother delivered me, my grandmother only brought me up. If my mother looked after me well, I would not have become like this. But she bothered her pleasures only. (sigh)

My school life was as in a prison. Even if we provide food and water a bird in a cage will be suffocating. Though I had friends, it was like a jail. I desired freedom. Whenever I had to go back after vacation, I was sad. I had opportunities to learn some skill from the school. But I did not have interest at that time. I had difficulties to study. Anyway it was good that I could study till eighth. Now I can read at least the board in front of bus. I had desire to study more and get a job. During childhood I wanted to become a collector, police, advocate or someone like that. When I came back all the hopes were lost. I saw my mother after coming back. Initially I could not recognise her. When we recognised each other she did not show much affection. She would ask, when did you come? Your grandmother is there. Have tea. Then finished. So I also developed coldness. Only if there is love from both sides, it will develop. I also did not depend her.

This is a curse on our family. We had a good family. The sister of my grandmother made all the mistakes. She only made these women do this dirty work. She took them to do house work somewhere and later put into this work. Once somebody enters into this field, there is no return. Then my mother married my father. But because of the curse she again indulged in sin. My father left her. Actually I do not know who my father is.

Now my daughter and wife are the most significant in my life. I am living for them. I have friends. But sometimes they may tease or accuse me for my family issues. When the same people with whom we are friendly talk like this I feel bad. Then I would tell them. Please do not repeat it. Sometimes I also talk some dirty jokes regarding their relative women. I got many times hurt when they talked about my mother and my aunt.

My wife is the only one with whom I can share my feelings. God is my final place for dependence. I go to the church and spend about half an hour if I am worried. Then I become peaceful. There may be problems within our family or between husband and wife. But if we tell all these things to others they will use it for their interest.

Usually I do not go to temple. But I go to church and temples during festivals. Though I was born as a Hindu, I have Christian belief. This developed because we had infertility for sometime. Then we have taken some offerings. Thus the trust was developed. Our first baby got aborted. Now we have peace because of the belief.

Ani has very little savings. He has got a healthy body. He eats from outside also. Fish is a common food in the family. They utilize the government health care system for minor illnesses like fever, backache etc. If the illness is severe they go to medical college hospital. During emergency situations, they go to private hospitals also. His wife was hospitalized for delivery and they spent about 700 rupees for it. There were other expenses like travel and food for by standers. He said that his wife's mother took major part of the expense. They collect drinking water from common pipe. For other uses there is a well in the compound. They do not have latrine. It is difficult to construct latrine because it is the coastal area and water will be rising.

Ani is a young man who had the misfortune to spend his childhood in a juvenile home. He had bitter feelings because nobody cared him when he came back to his native place. He could not accept his mother and aunt because they were involved in prostitution. Though he tried to keep a relation with his aunt, it often resulted in conflict. He reflects upon his past with guilt and shame. He was ill-treated by police and other people. He has confusion in moral values. On one side he knows that society is not just to victims like him. At the same time he accuses other victims, taking the side of dominant values of society. He desired love and care from his mother. He felt that it was denied to him. He was angry towards his mother because, he thought that she had rejected him purposefully. Still he had a desire to be loved. So he decided to get married. There was nobody to support him. He wants love and care from



wife, which has been fulfilled to a certain extent. His value conflicts make his life miserable. Now he has many expectations like constructing a house, looking after his daughter and leading a peaceful family life.

Tintu -Kozhikode-13 years.

Tintu is the fourth daughter of Sarojini who has two younger sisters also. Her residence is Bangladesh colony in Kozhikode. She is a happy child. She loves her mother and has much concern for her family. She is studying in the school and enjoys school life. She has number of friends in the neighborhood and school. Tintu is not much bothered about her mother's profession. She wants to support her mother and her family in future. There were difficult circumstances in her life, but she withstands all these.

She opened herself after making acquaintance with the interviewer. "I have one elder brother and two elder sisters. Two other sisters are younger to me. I am studying in eighth standard in Nadakkavu School. My mother placed me in Malayalam medium section. I have failed in eighth standard. It happened because I was not well. My sister also fell sick. Both of us were in a boarding school. So I missed some of the school days and this resulted in my failure in the annual examination. Both of us were studying in a convent school in Thrissur. My sister had illness due to change of food. She was hospitalized for many days. Then my mother told that she could not afford to treatment and boarding education. So we had to take leave for many days. Then we changed the school.

I learn Malayalam in school. I can recite poems (singing). I can write malayalam without much mistakes. I have many friends. I had friends in Thrissur also. Still I have contact with five friends in Thrissur. I write to them. They send reply to me also. Three of them are in one place and another two in another place. I was in Ampakkat (a town) for some time. I got the two friends from there. We were sad when we departed. Now I have new friends here. I joined in this new school when this school year commenced. Teachers are same in both places. The important thing regarding teachers is that whether they teach well or not. Usually they do not beat me because I study well. I have good relation with teachers. If we do not study well, they will beat us. But I am not afraid of them. My favorite subject is chemistry. Mathematics is a little difficult for me. I can read English well. But when I write, there will be spelling mistakes. I get good marks for social studies and chemistry.

I like my brother. My younger sisters are Sangeetha and Nirosha. My mother only put all names. We, sisters' play together and sometimes quarrel each other. I had another name as 'Sulochana' put by my other mother, Chandrikamma who looked after me for sometime. But when this name was given in school during admission, the headmistress told that this name was too lengthy for the small girl. So I was named Tintu by my mother. I like my name.

My eldest sister is married and she has got two children. My mother is the most beloved for me. But I do not feel much pain when we get separated for the boarding school, because school education is important to me. I have been used to separation from my mother from early childhood. I had done my early schooling with my aunt in Kallayi (another town). I was there till my sixth standard. My second elder sister gets upset when she gets separated from our mother. None of others has this problem. I was satisfied because, my mother visited us in between. Sometimes every month. Otherwise once in three months.

I have desire to become a teacher. I will be a good teacher. Even now I am taking tuition for two children. One of them is in the sixth standard and the other is in the fifth. Both of them are my cousin's children. They are staying nearby. They come here. Since their mother does not have much education, she cannot take tuition for the children. So they asked me to do so. If they do not perform well, I will give dictation for them. I do not take any fees for it. Why do I take money for this service? It is only a help that someone can do for others.



My mother cares for me. I had a desire to learn dance. My mother agreed to it also. But she could not do it. For this I am a little disappointed. I like to watch others dancing. In school also I give attention to others who dance. I like dance from my childhood onwards. I perform in school also. I do not participate for competition items. This time I joined for oppana, a traditional form of dance. I play shuttle in school and home. I never joined for any competition in sports. I sing in school; may be light music or film songs. When nun sisters doing social work in this residential area organise some functions, I give welcome speech and vote of thanks. I do not have stage fright.

Usually we do not go to cinema theatre, but watch films in television. Sometimes we go out for cinema. My sister and brother in law take me. I like Divya Unni, Kunchacko Boban and Mohanlal as actors. I enjoy festivals. I feel happy during these occasions. I go for festivals in temples. This year I could not go. I wished to go for it. We get new dresses and toys during this time. My mother buys dresses for me. I am satisfied with those. She presented me a pair of ear studs and a chain. Now my brother uses the chain. Though I like new dresses, if my mother does not have money, I will tell her that I do not need anything now. But my sisters demand.

I do not have any serious illnesses. I have a problem with my right eye, since birth onwards. There is difficulty to read with this eye. But I am adjusting with the other eye. Sometimes I go for eye check-up. Once I had an injury with a glass piece. That time I have taken injection. That is all about my illhealth. Usually we go to a private doctor when we become sick. Some times we go to the Government hospital in the beach also. In government hospitals also we have to pay large amount of money. It is to buy medicine and also as doctor's fees.

My mother has backache. In between she gets bed ridden. That time she can not work. That will affect us also. I do not have much idea about my father. If somebody asks about my father, I will say that I do not have father. In the school also we say that there is nobody as father. We have never seen him. Then how can I make sure about my father?

I used to visit my friends' houses, while I was in Thrissur. But this year, I could not visit anybody. Here, also I have friends. I have a friend named Rasiya. She is in the tenth standard. I often visit her house. I had friends in Kallayi also. I lost the addresses of some of my friends. But there are some of the old friends who still study with me in the new school. They came from Kallayi. I liked the school in Kallayi very much. Because it was the school where I spent my early childhood. I was worried when I had to leave that school. There I was staying with my aunt. I had nice days with my cousins. There were three cousins with me. Now all of them are here. Two of them got married. I am giving tuition for the children of one of them.

When I was in the boarding school I was feeling sad. Sometimes I wept alone. I would be thinking of my home. I was worried of the situation here. I did not know whether they were happy or there was some problem. I got more worried, while I was sick. I will be very happy when I come back from the boarding school. I know that my mother get arrested by police. Police never came to our house. But whenever my mother comes late, I get worried of it. If our mother did not come back, everybody in the family told that nothing happened and she would come back soon. But I came to know the truth from others. I felt scared and became sad. Some times she would be missed for one day or some other times for three or four days. Then any one of the family members would go and bring her back. If somebody asks about our mother's profession, I will say that she does not have any job.

My brother is working in a workshop. I am more or less satisfied with our present economic status. But sometimes I will not be able to meet the requirement in school. That time I will take the permission of the schoolteacher to wait for some more days. I feel sad when there is no money. When other children pay fees in time, I get a little upset.

I have belief in God. We go to the church as well as to the temple. I pray to God everyday, when I get up. My prayer is to protect us from any danger on that day. And I give thanks to God when I go to bed.



I do not like the surroundings of this place. So I do not mind if we change the residence. Here people are addicted to drugs and alcohol. Police often come here. There is no electricity here. That is another problem. I wished if there was electricity. Then I could have read easily. Now we use kerosene lamp for reading.

My eldest sister learned till ninth and then stopped. I do not know the reason why she stopped. May be she did not like. She got married. The second one is still in eighth. She lost three years, because she was ill for sometime. She had jaundice while she was in the fourth standard. That time she missed two years and last year also she could not attend because of stomach complaints.

I never thought of my marriage. Now it is the time to study. I am concentrating on it. If there is fate to marry, it will happen. I am not much bothered about it. Our main aim is to study and try for some job. Our mother could not learn. So now we have to study. My mother never went to school. Now we teach her to read and write. She attended literacy classes also. Now she can write. But there will be mistakes because she did not have the formal education. I feel sad for her. She could not learn. She said that in their time they did not feel like learning.

Now my aim is to gain a job. If I do not get a job, I will take private tuition. Or I will learn some other skills. I like computer. I had attended computer for two years in school. But still I have to learn more. It is costly. In the other school it was free. One of my friends is learning after paying 6000 rupees. We cannot afford it. I like type writing also. Let me try that.

I have sweet memories about my childhood. While I was in Kallayi, I played some mischief. I was a small kid then. I used to go out to play and came late. I played with my cousin sisters and small children around. My aunt had beaten me rarely only, when I did some mischief. Even if she did, she apologized for it. I would be telling all stories from the school to my cousin sister. Now she is married. She was much elder to me. We put nicknames for teachers. I would run when my aunt came after me to beat. That aunt is not in home now. She is in the jail. In Thrissur also we had great fun during festival times. We would be doing decorations. I used to dance also. Frightening others was a hobby for us. We told others that police had come. We teased each other and played April fool. Here I have a number of friends in the neighborhood. We play many games like running after the other one, play with film names, anthakshari (a sort of game) with film songs, names of places, animals and institutions. When we have free hours in school, we play all these games.

I have two close friends with whom I can share everything. One is in Thrissur and other one is here. I like to share the problems with friends only. They also open to me, if they have some problems. We quarrel each other especially while playing. But we get over it very fast. Only one of my friends kept away from me for some silly reasons. Later she herself came to talk with me.

I think that most of my friends like me. I do not think much about love and relations. If we think more then it will become problematic. Some times I feel that there is nobody to us. I am alone. If I think more over this, I get worried. I feel bad when younger children make some mischief for which teachers and mother scold me. They accuse me for not taking care of them. Then I feel that why shall I hear all these while I have not done any mistake.

My mother does not have much connection with her family because she has left her family as per her decision. We have never seen her relatives. When we asked our mother to take us there, she would say that it was unnecessary. We also did not feel much for them, because we never saw them. We are also apprehensive about their approach. Only one aunt who is a distant relative helped us. I spent my childhood with her.

People may be talking many things about us. But any way they do not tell anything in front of us. I am quite friendly with my friends. I do not involve in gossiping about others. So others also behave



decently with me. Teachers were always nice to me. I do not mind the small defect in my eye. My mother also sees it as a fortune. I did not have much difficulty in my life so far.

My family is a big one. I have four sisters and one brother. We have a happy family and we support each other. So I like this big family. I have a desire to look after my mother after getting a job. I want to study well and gain a job. I want to look after my sisters. I like to learn dance. These are my dreams. I have good hope regarding job.

I hope that we will get electricity in the house so that I can read and write easily. I have expectations from my brother also. So far I did not demand anything from him. But I hope that he will help me if there is a need. We have a loving brother. But I do not demand anything. My mother buys everything essential for me. I do not feel like having unnecessary fancy items. I try to adjust to my life situations. My elder sister is not like this. She demands many things. If she needs something, she creates lots of problems in the house. She quarrels with me also for simple things. Even if I keep quiet, she comes to quarrel with me. Then we fight each other. Then my mother beats both of us. If she beats her alone, she makes more fuss. She argues with my mother. She tells that mother has partiality and does not have affection for her.

I read stories when I get free time. Sometimes I watch television and listen radio songs. Every Sunday I see cinema. On other days it is not possible. I write short stories and poems and tear it off after some time. I do not show it anybody; read it myself. If it seems good I keep it. On Sundays I am busy. I press clothes; cook; prepare rice and curries. I learned all these by myself.

Sometimes, we children pool money for ourselves, buy groceries and cook for ourselves. We prepare rice and curries and eat together. We make a hut for it by ourselves. We cook fish, prawns and other seafood. Each one will be giving the money according to their ability. We distribute the balance to those who have poverty in house. We collect the money from our parents. We cultivate vegetables for ourselves. We have a kitchen garden with tomato, chili, tapioca, sugarcane etc. We use our land for it. We have flowering plants also. Sometimes chicken and ducks ruin all these. Another sort of entertainment is telling puzzle stories. Sometimes we make it by ourselves. E.g. Nadayude munnil perumpada. (Means that 'big army in front of temple'.) The answer is chapel. Now we are preparing for the children's day celebrations. We have to go for practice. My mother asked me to participate in it. But I do not like. I can perform whatever I can. But I am afraid that others may tease us. They may be doing it just for a joke. I cannot bear it. I feel bad. In schools, only girls were there. Here there are boys and grown up people. If we react to them, it will end in violence. I want to avoid it also." Tintu was talking like a grown up girl.

They are living in their own house. There are four rooms and one kitchen. There is a well. But they take water from the public tap for drinking purpose. The well water is salty. There is latrine in the house. Usually they eat rice three times. For morning they keep the rice of the previous day. Sometimes there will be some other breakfast items along with tea. Usually they do not have any difficulty for food. They take both vegetarian and non-vegetarian food. Tintu does not have any special preference. She likes vegetables, fish, chicken, beef curry etc. Her mother does not eat beef. She cooks mutton. They take spinach and other leafy vegetables every week. Tintu does not like milk. She takes black tea and coffee. Though Tintu is the daughter of a sex worker residing in the Bangladesh colony, she has attained self-confidence and a vision in her life. She has responsibility to life even in this younger age. She is willing to do service for others, keeps values and socializes well. But it is doubtful that whether society is doing justice to such a girl.

She keeps aside her agonies like the arrest of her mother, shortage of money on occasions, absence of father etc. She is finding hope for future. She has self-discipline in spending money. She reflects upon her status in society. She loves her family members and friends. She keeps herself creative by writing poetry, organizing children and making programs with friends. She developed self-identity and does not allow others to tease her. She is expecting a dignified future life.

