

EXPLOITATIVE NATURE OF PROSTITUTION IN SELECTED WORKS

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INTRODUCTION

Prostitution was not just a profession divided by gender; it was largely an illegal profession and one with exploitation, harassment, and violence against women. Sex trafficking, consensual rape, and prostitution. The existence of all three acts within the same situation was a serious issue that had plagued our world for centuries. However, until recently we have not had reason to pay attention to how these three acts are related. Noticeably, the way that we, as Americans, talk about each situation appears to be dramatically different. Rape was often framed as a male physically abusing a female because she solicits herself and provokes the attack. Prostitution is viewed as a profession. Through this lens, women are viewed as agents, choosing to be actors within the sex industry. Sex trafficking, on the other hand, is commonly thought of and described as someone else's problem, a situation that only happens overseas. This common misconception can lead to ignorance. It was important to introduce and examine some of the many views and beliefs that exist in regards to the prostitution of women. These views either tend to support this line of work, or they simply do not for ethical, moral and humane reasons. The researcher would now discuss and examine some of the pro-prostitution beliefs in regards to prostitution. There exist pro-prostitution arguments which claim to find in "prostitution a practice of women's resistance to and sexual liberation from norms and traditional moral precepts of sexuality that had served to control and subordinate women". Henry Mayhew mentions its origins in the year 1802, when immorality had spread more or less all over Europe, owing to the demoralizing effects of the French Revolution.¹ By the mid nineteenth century it was becoming more and more difficult for women to find work in more desirable professions, and this led to a rise in the number of women holding jobs with long hours and little pay, such as agricultural gangs, shop girls, domestic servants, needle-trades and factory workers. Subsequently these women sought other means of supplementing their incomes, and increasingly turned to prostitution as a way to do so. With the passing of the

legalised prostitution but entailed legislation enabling the police to arrest women suspected of being prostitutes and the subsequent examination of them for signs of venereal disease, it became a matter of public controversy and the era of The Great Social Evil was born.²

LONDON

In 17th century, when *London* was growing through industrial revolution, it was just not the problem of working class and middle class people, as they had to suffer and struggle a lot during the revolution period. Blake was an orthodox Christian of the dissenting tradition, who felt that the state was abandoning those in need. The poem reflects Blake's extreme disillusionment with the suffering he saw in *London*. The poem is sixteen lines long, yet it symbolizes the deep, despair of a human being. In the city the narrator saw three depressing things which was spreading everywhere. He saw the city full of death, despair and diseases.

As the topic deals with the exploitation of the prostitution, the grief and sorrow they faced, the cruelty of society they suffered. The diseases they suffer and had to take it all their life, until death. In this poem *London*, the attention was being drawn to the last paragraph where Blake writes that in the midnight streets he hear the young harlots or in simple language 'a prostitutes' curse and cry. If we wait for a moment and think of a curse. A harlot-giving curse? But why? Harlots were the one who are into this profession by their own choice, so why were they cursing? So many questions might revolve around our mind while thinking about sex workers, because we have never tried looking at the positive and grieving side of theirs but had always thought negative about them and always declined them in society.

They Curse the society who do not want to understand the consequences of theirs but always had been deceived and demoralized them, kept them away from society excluded them saying to be the evil donors to society instead of helping such women to come out of this hell, they pushed them more and more into it where they were dumped into the darkness where no hope of coming back was to be found. The darkness in which they were pushed was not created by them but was dug by some of the hypocrite people of the society. The men whom we adore as the pillars of the society, they were the one destroying the innocent heart of harlots. These men during the day light walk as a gentleman but as the dark falls, they become the knight of the darkness. They visited these harlots not for moral purpose but for a selfish reason, they use them, exploit them and destroy their soul. Whether they want it or not they are helpless once they get into this profession and had to satisfy the needs of these hypocrites.

*And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls*

The unlucky Soldier sighs, possibly his last breath whose blood would run down the walls of government. The sigh was a softer sound than the sounds that were heard elsewhere in the poem. The sigh was faint, because the dying *Soldier* was far away in foreign lands, sacrificing his youth for the monarchical state. This image ties *London* with the whole world, like this small poem letting its ideas break beyond its immediate scope of *London's* darkness, and shows it had no bounds. And even so the sigh was still powerful enough that it manifests its presence in the Palace as blood running down a wall, suggesting the biblical image "the writing was on the wall," - the poet was a prophet foretelling the government's eventual fall. This sign like the crying and clanking previously, was also a sound that had no iambic tenor, thus showing again how these sounds cannot be contained with a traditional song.

Blasts the new-born Infants tear

The newborn infants of the harlot brought in no such lovely fate either for them nor for their mother. These are the cursed infants who were not supposed to be born with dark fate, as their father unknown! Mother! A devastated woman of society with no money and no future. Born to die on streets, the diseases spread on their body which kills them each moment with despair.

But most thro' midnight streets I hear

How the youthful Harlots curse

Blasts the new-born Infants tear

And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse

The image of marriage hearse, a vehicle in which love and desire was combined with death and destruction.

On analyzing this poem the researcher thought to revert and think about the condition of *London* and the future of the prostitutes and their infants. The poor infants born in poverty when grown up, work as the chimney-sweepers. They work because they need to earn living, no guidance no education no proper living leads them to work as child worker. Among the cries which the narrator heard were the cries of those children who were enslaved. The idea was reinforced by the suggestion that the chimney sweepers were crying as mostly were often children. The poem suggests that the church was complicit in this enslavement or exploitation of children. It shows the image of blackening or covered in the soot of their labor. The blackness also suggests some kind of sin or corruption.

THE HARLOT'S HOUSE

In Oscar Wilde's poem '*The harlot's house*' he appears to dehumanize the subjects of his poem, he portrays prostitutes as strange mechanical grotesques who were just empty and artificial shadows. Their existence seems almost tenuous, drifting like black leaves wheeling in the wind. To Wilde, these prostitutes were just horrible marionette that were hollow, emotionless imitations of real human beings. Prostitution was widely frowned upon and referred to as the Great Social Evil in the mid-nineteenth century; it was also a taboo topic for which the liberty of the subject was very jealously guarded in England. In fact, the subject was taboo to the point where even legislators refused and were unable to handle the issue the magistracy or the police were not allowed to enter improper or disorderly houses, unless to suppress disturbances they did not even have the capacity to make arrests of those distributing pornographic materials. Imagining for a moment give me a sense of pity for the poor sex workers. When the topic was been regarded as taboo in the society then how cruelly would they had been treated in the society, their condition would be more poor then the untouchables. During day light, they would be treated cruelly by the society and in the night again they would be treated and abused by the same pillars of the society. In the lines of the poem as Wilde describes the harlots physical appearance to be ghostly, they had been so much suppressed that they appeared to be like a ghost and their behaviour showed no acquaintance nor happiness to meet and be around the people they were with thus they stayed quiet and wait for the moment to get abused. They possessed no perfect ability with them hence they know little of playing piano or singing just a simple song. This show us that the women were taught nothing neither they knew anything better with which they could earn their living from a better source. The researcher felt if the people of society could have helped these women to get out of the hell then they might have hoped for a normal and better life but instead they made them and their topic to be a taboo. Wilde refers to them variously as mechanical grotesques, automatons, skeletons, puppets, marionettes and ultimately the dead. He could hardly find more synonyms for manipulated, lifeless dolls. One may be inclined to argue that he was not expressing personal opinion, and was, by definition, creating Art for Art's sake, yet this utter disrespect for and lifeless depiction of prostitutes was also evident, if to a lesser degree, in his poem.

Prostitution, professionally resorted to, belongs to the latter class obtaining a living by seducing the more industrious or thrifty to part with a portion of their gains, and consists, when adopted as a means of subsistence without labour, in inducing others, by the performance of some immoral act, to render up a portion of their possessions. Literally construed, prostitutions was the putting of anything to a vile use. Specially so called, was the using of her charms by a woman for immoral purposes. With a general consensus that the act of prostitution consists in the base perversion of a woman's charms, the surrendering of her virtue to criminal indulgence. These were actually relatively well-decorated venues that were among the finest places to house prostitutes. Typically,

sexual intercourse did not even take place at these sites. Instead, the majority of the better class went merely to while away an idle hour where, while chatting with friends they could hear good music and see pretty faces. Though there were those that were there with vicious propensities, the majority went for reasons less explicit than sex.

Where there were men and women in a society there were always be, to some extent, by some definition, prostitution; it was as an act old as time itself (indeed, there was evidence in the Code of Hammurabi of the Mesopotamian society to suggest that it existed in the eighteenth century BC). However, with its increasing number of social problems and rise in the middle class domestic morality it was the nineteenth century that saw prostitution become a social evil of epic proportions. In 1862 publication, *London Labour and the London Poor*, in the middle of the nineteenth century circumstances were becoming difficult for women more and more as they were not able to find work in their desirable fields and where they work would provide little wages with long working hours, such as agricultural gangs, shop girls, domestic servants, needle-trades and factory workers. Subsequently these women sought other means of supplementing their incomes, and increasingly turned to prostitution as a way to do so. With the passing of the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864, 1866 and 1869, which legalised prostitution but entailed legislation enabling the police to arrest women suspected of being prostitutes and the subsequent examination of them for signs of venereal disease, it became a matter of public controversy and the era of The Great Social Evil took its first breathe in the midst of humanism.

The narrator explains *The harlot's house* was a place for the dead and dead alone. And yet the house captivates his lover, and she decides to enter it. This was the point where love passed into the house of lust. Wilde draws a contrast with the experience of being in the proximity and not entering *The harlot's house*, implying a relationship both romantic and sexual, and the experience of actually entering *The harlot's house*, in which there are only the sexual elements remaining. This was why then suddenly the tune went false. The balance of the relationship deteriorates, and was therefore no longer true.

Wilde personifies the dawn and leaves the reader with a somewhat ambiguous image. That the dawn crept shows that a new day had finally arrived, which was altogether appropriate considering everything else that had happened. However, Wilde chooses the image of a frightened girl with silver-sandaled feet as his method for conveying this information, which appears to be a deliberate and pointed choice. The narrator bitterly implies that his former lover's future was to creep down the long and silent street as a frightened girl.

The prostitutes try to dance but can only sidle (creep or slither). They laugh but their laughter comes out thin and shrill. They even try to sing, but fail. Their male partners, described as phantoms, have no true passion within them either. They seem only motivated by sexual desire. Sexuality and death repeatedly appear together. Despite the narrator's opposition to the grotesque scene before him, the poem also presents these women as fascinating. He describes them as strange and fantastic and watches them from night until dawn. The narrator's absorption suggests that though he finds their treatment and situation appalling, something about them entices him.

But, right after she walks through the door, The tune went false. Perhaps, the scene of seduction viewed through the veil of blinds from the outside was attractive but inside, only the loss of innocence and death wait. From afar, Wilde implies, lust was more seductive than love but once inside, it loses its appeal as the dancers wearied of the waltz. The only human-like character in the poem was the dawn, which, unlike the couple who were transfixed by the brothel, filters slowly through the street like a frightened girl.

BAZAR-E-HUSSN (SEVASADAN)

Sevasadan or Bazar-e-husn written by Premchand shows us the true faces of our society a little time ago when India was still going through many changes. In his novel we study about a girl Suman and will analyze that how circumstances went against her when she demanded a little freedom for herself and this desire of freedom landed her in the brothel house in a very bad situation. A house, which was forbidden in the dignified society, the people of such houses were not looked upon as a respectful people but were looked with a lustful eyes with the intensions of being use only. From the beginning of the universe, we find in our history as women have always struggle for their rights and sole freedom. Why men do not face such problems? When a man was not looked upon as a cruel or out of sight person who visit brothel houses rather, they were regarded of showing their masculinity. If however a woman was found to keep any relation from such kind of woman they the pious and pure woman was also counted as one of the brothels. For men it's the matter of masculinity and for women it was disgraced, what kind of justification does this society show us? Was it necessary that the struggle of identity always had to be in the part of woman but not for a man? Why woman had to be explanatory for everything they do or desire? Ain't a man should also be equally struggling for various things as a woman did?

In the work of research, it was found that the society played a vital role in the fall and rise of a person, specially a woman. The character of woman was affected so easily because they were not strong enough to stand for their own rights and truths. From a very long time we had been seeing women being suppressed, they are not allowed to express their feelings as men do neither they were held any kind of strong responsibility with which they could

be trusted with. They were thus treated just as a show piece kept at home who were just used to entertain men and satisfy their necessary needs.

Sevasadan was the story of a girl Suman, who tends to create her identity though she had to go through lots of hardships but finally land in to work out her wish and will. Such women tend to bring change in our society. On first step they had to go through lots of hardships and were even treated cruelly such as they were been mocked, treated indifferent, tortured, harassed but their will was appreciated once they were able to create a landmark for themselves.

Suman was a simple girl with no high hopes, all she desired was a good family with a loving husband who could love her abundantly and fulfil her wishes but a corrupted society ruined an honest police officer who was her father. All his life he was loyal to his duty and did all his works with honesty that too always denying bribes but later when the time came for him to get his daughters married he found no enough funds and dowry to fulfil the cruel customs and traditions of the society. This ruthless customs of marriages in society brought an honest man to commit dishonesty with his profession and ultimately he had to face failure for his immature and inexperienced new way of working and eventually ends up going to jail.

With not enough money, Suman was married in a low class family than hers, where her living style was totally changed but still she tried keeping her husband happy but unfortunately, her husband Gajadhar was not able to keep his wife happy. A poor woman with not enough domestic work wanted to admire the beauty of the new world. Like every immature adolescence, Suman would admire her physical beauty and like to enjoy the teasing comments passed by the naughty school boys who use to pass her house. This was all a part of her life when she noticed a brothel who lived in front of her house. Suman compared her class with the brothel and wondered that even being the outcast, she received all the good facilities of the society and Suman being the pure woman was wasting and rotting her life inside the four walls of the house where she was not even allowed to sit in the lawn and pass her evening. Suman's husband was not much literate but was a hardworking man who tried enough to earn money. In the pressure of earning more money he never realized that he was ignoring Suman and her happiness, though he was much dominating at times but usually was out on his work. He stopped almost all activities of suman whether it would be standing in the lawn or talking to the brothel Bholi or hanging around with the neighbor ladies all these were stopped by Gajadhar because he didn't like suman to get out of the way. Suman was slowly and slowly was torn apart from life, a life where she was not allowed to do her will and were her husband didn't had much time for her or neither ever allowed any happy things to her.

When she got befriended with a new lady Subhadra, a wife of reputed lawyer Padmashree that too was problematic for Gajadhar but this time she didn't allowed his dominating nature to rule over her as she knew she was not committing any crime by getting friendly to such a good woman then why did Gajadhar or any such typical man wanted their wife's freedom to be terminated? Did the desire was so big that they are unable to afford it or it's just that they couldn't see anyone happy enough. Just a wish of little punishment became a big punishment for her. She by mistake happened to lingered her stay in subhadra's house and forgot the time to return and when she gained the sense of time then she got terribly scared because she knew her husband would scold her for no reason hence she got scared to confront him. If wondered that though they were husband and wife but they did not share any kind of healthy and friendly relationship with each other or else Suman would not had scared on such a small reason. On returning Suman chose to lie to escape herself when she found things getting out of control and off track then she apologized for her mistake but instead her husband threw her out of the house that too ion the middle of the night. Not even thinking that was the poor woman would land up at this hour.

Somehow Suman had the hope that her friend would help her and she did but the people starting spreading false rumors against the lawyer and Suman for which she was asked to leave the place immediately hence after coming out from her house she finally landed in Bholi's house, a brothel house where she found a way of living a life that too being the master of her own life and to living her own passion of singing and dancing. Suman was clean from her heart and character though she chose the way to earn the money through brothel house but for this she never bargained her soul. But whose going to believe a lady once she's inside the brothel house? Whose going to see her purity when the veil of lust was covered in front of the eyes.

Soon after realizing the mistake the lawyer and Subhadra wanted to get Suman out of the hell. They asked help many big dignitaries of the society but none was ready to get Suman out of it because they were one of the hypocrite who wanted to enjoy Suman in that situation and wanted themselves to be entertained by her. Suman's husband had left her and now she had become Sumanbai, but not for long after much of the hardship she was able to get out of the ditch but her dark past won't leave her so easily. Her sister's marriage was fixed in one of her former lover Sadan, who loved Suman a lot but due to some consequences had to leave her or may say couldn't face her. As soon Sudan's family people came to knew that the bride's sister was a brothel they were about to break the marriage. There was an endless list of Suman's hardship but finally by the help of Padamashree she was able to set up a school where she could educate the girls like her and the children of the brothels so that in future they won't suffer much as she had to did.

The main persecutors who exploited Suman was the society. Society was the reason she was forced to get in this hell and due to some jackal she was unable to get out of this hell and once she was out and wanted to live a normal life then her dark past didn't helped her live peacefully. Due to few good people Suman was able to get out her persecutions and was able to understand the real pain of the brothels. How they became like this, and why couldn't they get out of this ditch and once they are out then the society instead of helping them to recover back to a normal life keeps on poking them and reminding them of the horrible past they had gone through and want to get rid of its memories.

There are few questions in my mind. What was suman's mistake? All she wanted was little freedom, were that so big that it was not affordable? Who had given right to the society to decide the fate of an individual? Was any of the person was out to help her when she needed help? Where were these people when she was crying wanted to get away from the persecutions of life? None had come forward to embrace her but the only door which was opened for her and the only people who embraced her was the brothel Bholi and her brothel house. Hence this experience helped Suman to know the brothels more closely and was able to feel the pain they go through and thus she end up setting a school for them naming it as *Sevasadan*.

ELEVEN MINUTES

What does the image of a prostitute signify in the modern literature? Was she a criminal or a fallen angel? What circumstances forced her to lose her honour and practice prostitution? Was society responsible for propagating prostitution or was it solely the prostitute's fault? We can find many images in world literature and the answer to these questions vary depending on which point of view we adopt in looking at this phenomenon. All the heroes of the social novels as we will see, the prostitute was a complex character in the novels and the factors which led a female to prostitution cannot be sufficiently explained by poverty. In the researcher's opinion, the poverty in the discussed novels was only background information what creates extreme situations for the characters. The second type of prostitute was the seduced-and-abandoned. After losing her virginity, such a character was doomed to become a prostitute.

The saved prostitute is represented in *Eleven Minutes* as another type of prostitute. Maria was a person who was redeemed from her profession. This type of prostitutes was very rare in world literature. Even if the prostitute gets a chance to honourably earn her living or someone risks his reputation to save her, she eventually goes back to her old profession (old and normal life). Maria was a woman who uses her seductive power not only to earn money but also to gain social redemption of her clients. This type of prostitutes don't suffer much but was able to satisfy

the needs of her clients. This was the case shown through Maria's life in the novel, the type of prostitution was practiced was a prostitute who could turn her profession into profitable business but actually money don't buy everything and hence when she find a man who sees the real SHE in her and enlighten her with what she is, she encountered the real love of her life.

Although Maria shows the unfortunate circumstances which forced her to work and the desire for marriage as prompting her to have sexual intercourse with several men exploring more about sexual desires, it was ultimately her desire to get back to her land and in this desire for earning easy money she throws herself into prostitution. She was portrayed as thinking that earning money was a good pretext for her immoral actions. Despite all these she remained loyal, proud, and anxious about her family and its honor.³

In *Eleven Minutes* no where we find Maria was been forced to accept the sex trade but it's the time and situation which left her helpless. She was a good samba dancer and to some extent she could sing as well but here we find time cheating on her, making a way for her exploitation. All her life till her age of twenty two, she had longed for love. First her parents didn't give much concern over her, though she was their daughter but concerning nothing to them. At age of eleven she found the first love of her life, a boy whom she dejected due to her foolishness, but unfortunately there was no one with whom she could share her grief and form rules of her own life. Thinking of the boy she lost, she made rules of life of accepting and experiencing what came to her life. This decision was what led her to the way of her exploitation.

On her vacation when she met the Swiss person who offered her job as samba dancer in other country, he did offered everything to be sparkling but no one knew the consequences when she reaches there.

"Everything tells me that I am about to make a wrong decision, but making mistakes is just part of life. What does the world want of me? Does it want me to take no risks, to go back to where I came from because I didn't have the courage to say "yes" to life?"

"Sometimes, you get no second chance and that its best to accept the gifts the world offers you."

This was where she was unable to make right decision and on the basis of her first experience she agreed to what was offered to her. The fear of not getting the second chance made her accept the dark future as a gift. However she was brave enough to handle the situation intellectually and turned her dark working days into desire of working hard to get back to her land quickly in the measured time.

"You can either be a victim of the world or an adventurer in search of treasure. It all depends on how you view your life."

We find Maria here to be a very positive girl towards life, who very boldly accepted and compromised her soul. Though she struggled a lot with her second thought of going back but her future would then be dark, and then returning without getting enough money would have brought her parents into grief. This situation or thought of despair lead her to exploit her and bargained her body for soul. Maria didn't held out to be the victim of exploitation though she was but she viewed life differently as an adventure where she desire to search treasures. In this search or adventure she experiences what comes to her way.

"I've learned that waiting is the most difficult bit, and I want to get used to the feeling, knowing that you're with me, even when you're not by my side."

The life of Maria teaches a good deal of experiences to the reader. Maria didn't stop hoping neither stopped loving. She waited. Patiently she waited and one day the day came when she was free to fly off her bondage and though having a year of dark life as a prostitute she found the love of her life.

Maria hid her identity from family and from the people she was among during the day light. She showed to be a scholar who was into books always but in actual she was preparing herself for a bright future for her and her family once she was gone and leave the dark world of loneliness.

We encounter here various types of her clients here who always didn't want her to get stripped but just wanted someone beside them to talk. Talk about their fears, their stands, their class and their monster. We encounter Terrance who gain pleasure through pain and punishment. But we also come across a beautiful man Ralf Hart who said on her asking as what made him fall in love with a prostitute?

"knowing that your body would never be mine alone, I had to concentrate on conquering your soul."

SOLD

Life Histories and Survival Strategies Amongst Sexually Trafficked Girls in Nepal, many women become involved in sex trafficking because of their economic status and women who are already in the sex trade and have graduated to the level of brothel-keepers, managers or even owners travel through their own and neighbouring districts in search of young girls. Why would women who have been through the worst submit others to the same torture? Are the economic freedoms that great? As women who had been silenced and marginalized, why would

they force that experience on others? *Sold* was the story of such a girl Lakshmi who was being trafficked to other places of India where she was *Sold* and had to undergo hell before being rescued by the team.

The story line of *Sold* was far too common in the world: girl grows up in rural society, girl gets manipulated into the human trafficking industry by someone she knows, girl ends up in a brothel in another country where she was exploited until she escapes, except the escape part doesn't always happen in real life.

What was missing from this super-short version: how and why it happens, and the effects of human trafficking on one individual. A slightly longer version can fill in some of these gaps:

Lakshmi had lived twelve of her years in a small village on a mountaintop in Nepal. She had a goat, Tali, a baby brother, a mother (Ama) whom she loves dearly, and a stepfather whom she thought was a good-for-nothing waste of space because he does no work and gambles all the time. Lakshmi had hopes and dreams for her future: she wants to continue to be the number one girl in her class at school, and she wanted to earn money as a maid in the city like her friend Gita so her family won't be so poor.

But disaster strikes. The rains wash all the rice away, which means that Lakshmi and her family are hungrier and poorer than ever. As a result of their poverty her stepfather tells Lakshmi that she would go work in the city and he arranges for a relative stranger (Auntie Bimla) to take her there. Money was exchanged between the stepfather and Auntie Bimla, and the two women set out on their journey.

While traveling, Lakshmi saw a world she never comprehended when she was living on her mountaintop in Nepal. Even though she saw debilitating poverty, she was still filled with excitement for her future. Eventually Lakshmi and Bimla meet Uncle Husband, who takes Lakshmi across the border and to a place called Happiness House. Once there, Uncle Husband and a woman named Mumtaz exchange money, and Lakshmi was taken to a small room.

Confused and with instincts screaming, Lakshmi was taken to a room where a man tries to rape her; finally, she realizes what kind of "work" she was expected to do. Although Lakshmi flees her attacker, Mumtaz corners her in the small room and explains the new world order: Lakshmi had been *Sold* to Happiness House, a brothel which Mumtaz runs. Now she must have sex with men to pay off the money Mumtaz used to buy her. When Lakshmi refuses, Mumtaz locks her in the small room, beats her daily, and starves her. And when Lakshmi still refuses, Mumtaz drugs her and had a man rape her.

After that initial violation, Lakshmi remains in the small room for an indeterminate time. Each night, she was drugged to service the brothel's customers. Finally, Mumtaz tells her that she can join the rest of the girls in the house.

Lakshmi tries to adjust to her life at Happiness House, but she was desperately homesick and struggles to cope. Shahanna, also from Nepal, takes Lakshmi under her wing. In bits and pieces, Lakshmi learns about the other girls at the house.

Shilpa grew up in the sex trade industry; she serves as Mumtaz's right hand and spies for the cruel brothel owner. Monica was the most aggressive of the girls in the house. Anita tried to escape but was caught and beaten so badly that her face was disfigured. Pushpa was an older woman whose husband died she had two young children, Harish and Jeena, who also live in the house. When Harish catches Lakshmi looking at his school book one day and offers to teach her Hindi, a cautious friendship blossoms between the two. Life slowly becomes less awful.

The tentative equilibrium Lakshmi builds for herself crumbles when her newfound friends gradually leave the brothel. Now Lakshmi had only Anita and Harish's storybook to keep her balanced, and she sank into despair.

After Shilpa reveals to Lakshmi that none of the money Lakshmi makes was sent to her family in Nepal, Lakshmi snaps. She gave an American's business card to a street boy who had always been kind to her, and waits for another American to appear. When one does show up at the brothel, the two make plans for Lakshmi's escape.

After Lakshmi waited for days, the American comes with non-corrupt policemen. Lakshmi, who was fourteen years old, leaves her friend Anita, walks to the American man, and tells him her name and age.

At the beginning of *Sold*, Ama explains that women are meant to endure their lives to Lakshmi, and that's what we saw throughout the novel women enduring. But despite their lower social status in the novel, we see women namely Mumtaz, Auntie Bimla, and BajaiSita who seek power in whatever ways possible, even though that power means that they degrade and enslave other women.

And the roles of men are complicated too. There were men who sold Lakshmi, but also men and boys who are kind, who taught her, and who helped her escape slavery. So on both sides of the gender lines, it's hard to make definite associations with *good* or *evil*.

The setting of the novel *Sold* introduces readers to a culture and social world they might not be familiar with. Nepal and India were fairly patriarchal, with rituals and actions that reinforce the differences of power between men and women. Does this mean that *Sold* was a commentary on gender inequality? Not really. Many societies have a power structure based on gender within them.

And the social customs around gender within *Sold* was only one of the factors that permit Lakshmi's story to take place. In some ways characters defy gender expectations being female doesn't necessarily make a character sympathetic, and being male doesn't necessarily make a character evil. Gender was much more complicated than that both in the novel and in real life.

The lies and deceit that occur in *Sold* was underhanded and often lies of omission. In fact, the lies were often found in what was unsaid. For instance, Lakshmi's never really told what work she will do until she was in not in a position to say no.

But the lies don't end there. At Happiness House, deception becomes more complicated. There was Mumtaz's lies to Lakshmi about her debt and to Anita about the nature of Americans; and there are the ways in which Lakshmi and the other girls (and Harish) deceive themselves to make their situations more livable. We're stuck wondering what lies were unforgivable and what lies help the girls in the house survive, because one thing's for certain: not all lies were created equal in this book.

It's the classic chicken-or-the-egg issue: does power corrupt characters, or were characters already corrupt and therefore seek power in the book *Sold*? It's hard to tell because power was generally sought and used for different ends.

Some characters like Mumtaz, Uncle Husband, and Auntie Bimla use the power they had over others for financial gain. Other characters like the stepfather and the men who visit Happiness House use power granted to them by social norms and values to take advantage of women. In this novel, then, power was tied closely to manipulation, social values, control, and violence. So we need to keep our eyes open for how Lakshmi regains enough power to orchestrate her rescue.

Slavery in *Sold* was most likely different than what Americans think of when they hear the word *slavery*. Many of the girls in Happiness House are victims of human sex trafficking. They were stuck at the brothel either by force or by lack of other choices their families reject them or they have no other place to go or other options. And many of the girls had been manipulated to fear the outside world and the very people who could save them.⁴

The psychological and physical torment the girls endure was downright brutal, so much so that at least one unnamed girl commits suicide. So slavery was integrally tied to force, fear, manipulation, abuse, and most of all the removal of choice from one's life.

The novel was not only meant to illustrate the extent of suffering brought about by enslavement in Happiness House, but also how sex slavery was perpetuated. Though we follow Lakshmi's story intimately, we caught glimpses of the larger pictures of sex trafficking in that part of the world: the supply chain, the monetization of a human being, the demand for girls, the options that were available to brothel workers. Because of the other characters' story lines, we come to believe that Lakshmi's move toward freedom was the exception, not the norm. And that was heartbreaking.

In *Sold* sex was a violation of self, a physical representation of power with serious and long-lasting physical and psychological effects on its victims. Above all, sex was monetized. It and the women in the novel was bought and *Sold*, and this brought a whole host of repercussions with it. The role sex plays in the novel affects how women view the act of sex, their own sexuality, themselves, their worth as humans, and perhaps most heartbreakingly how others see them.

The budding adolescence and tentative sexual hopes that Lakshmi experiences in Nepal was cruelly ripped from her at Happiness House. Sex becomes humiliating and shameful. The most intimate encounter Lakshmi had with a man involves simple human touch, not sex. In fact, she tried to desensitize herself to sex that she was helpless to prevent.⁵

The whole point of the novel centring around sexual slavery seems to be twofold. It seeks to tell the stories of human trafficking victims in realistic ways, and it seeks to outrage us enough to act. Because this book isn't just a novel it's a call to action.

There are two major settings in *Sold*, and Lakshmi experiences suffering in each one. Life for Lakshmi on her mountain in Nepal is not easy, and struggles are a part of daily life but in Nepal, Lakshmi can rely on Ama and her community to help her cope with her difficulties. So this type of physical and emotional suffering seems much more palatable than the suffering Lakshmi experiences at Happiness House because on the mountain Lakshmi's suffering was balanced with joys.

At Happiness House though, no such joy exists. Lakshmi experiences physical and emotional suffering, and it's easy to see how her systematic abuse could destroy her spirit and her health.

But Lakshmi's strong-willed, and she decides to try to find her own way out of this suffering. She does this by submitting, to some extent, to Mumtaz's will, and she also finds what joy she can in learning from Harish. Maintaining her hope though, was difficult because of what her life was like in the brothel. Even though she tries to form a community around her to help her deal with her suffering, one by one these friends disappear from her life. In the end, Lakshmi was left to save herself from her suffering and pain. It's definitely not fair, but it also seems incredibly realistic.

But this simplistic view of innocence vanishes when Lakshmi leaves her village on her journey to the city and, unknowingly, a brothel in India. In the brothel, we see Lakshmi's sexual innocence forcibly and brutally ripped from her and yet despite her sexual experiences, Lakshmi seems to maintain some semblance of spiritual innocence. How can this be? So we have to ask ourselves some major questions as we read about Lakshmi: What, exactly, was innocence? Was it possible to maintain innocence after sexual entry into adulthood, and in what ways? And can we ever regain innocence that we have lost? None of these questions are easy to answer, but all are important to understanding Lakshmi's psyche.

Throughout the novel, Lakshmi was been torn between conflicted views of morality. In Nepal, Lakshmi's sense of morality was been fairly fixed. When her stepfather steals her cucumbers, she felt self-righteous, indignant and sad:

I shut my eyes tight, letting the tears that had been gathering there finally spill down my cheeks, where they could hide inside the rain.

If we consider innocence as being naïve of the cruel injustices and workings of the world, then Lakshmi leaves her innocence behind as she learns how to live in Happiness House.

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