



HISTORY OF PROSTITUTION IN KASHMIR - AN ENCOURAGED INSTITUTION

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Received : 26/09/2017

1st BPR : 05/10/2017

2nd BPR : 20/10/2017

Accepted : 11/11/2017

ABSTRACT

The present research is an attempt to provide a historical overview to understand the history and functioning of prostitution in Kashmir. The present research aims to understand the origin, functioning and structure of the prostitution in Kashmir. The area selected for the purpose of study includes Kashmir province from older times to present. The present research has made an attempt to study the health conditions of prostitutes, state sponsorship and the role of reformers in eradicating this menace from the Kashmirisociety. It also attempts to bring into light the social acceptance of these prostitutes

Keywords : Brothel, Flesh trade, Maisuma, Prostitution, scandal and Tashwan

Introduction

Prostitution like other societies of the world was an encouraged institution in Kashmir. Indian society right from the BC era encouraged this institution on state lines. Mauryans who claim to be welfare oriented encouraged this institution in India including Kashmir during their hold over here. This institution flourished day by day and ultimately Kashmiri kings began to register the prostitutes in order to earn revenues for the state. Kalhana in Rajtarangini rebuked so many Kashmiri kings for encouraging this institution; kings like kshemendra, Harsha and uccala are few among the many to be labelled by him as the ones. This institution during local Muslim rulers flourished as well. Rulers like Haider shah and Hassan shah did support this institution but rulers like sikander like other immoral practices banned prostitution as well. The Muslim missionaries also voiced against this institution and influenced state policy to put curbs upon the system to discourage it. But the institution flourished once again during sikh times. During Sikhs the institution remained as usual on top.

Need and justification of the study

Present study has been justified on the ground that no such exploratory work has been done on the attitude towards the origin of prostitution and its consequences

Statement of the problem:

The present study "History of prostitution in kashmir-an encouraged institution" is an endeavour to provide necessary information in the light of the given justification.

Objectives of the study

The aim of this paper is to;

1. Study the origin of prostitution in the kashmir
2. Study the state sponsorship to the institution
3. Study the role of reformers in eradicating it
4. Study the social acceptance of the prostitutes



Dogra sponsorship to the institution:-The institution during Dogra period after getting the official sanction emerged out to be the major source of income for the state. To Gulab Singh the primary job was to recover a sum of 75lac nanakshahee currency from the naked, starving and suffering kashmiris which he had paid to the British Govt in 1846 for Kashmir. That is why Gulab Singh charged tax on circumcision and a grave digger besides tax on prostitutes. The sale of young Muslim girls in Kashmir to established houses of ill-fame was both protected and encouraged by the Maharaja, because it cost only RS103 to obtain this license. The state encouragement to this institution was to sought money in the form of Kanjur tax. In 1880 the Maharaja received between 15 to 25% of the whole revenue of his state from the gains of his licensed prostitutes.

To legalize the institution the Dogra rulers passed the public prostitutes rules 1921; whereby a prostitute desirous of engaging in prostitution could do so by registering herself as public prostitute and if the prostitute didn't abide by the rules of 1921 she was given an easy punishment of Rs100 fine or one month imprisonment this is how state was encouraging flesh trade.

Prostitution and the poor classes:-According to Robert thorp during Ranbir Singh's time the license granting permission for the purchase of a girl for this purpose cost about 100 chilkee rupees only. This early western fighter for the cause of Kashmir lamented that such sales took place because the very poorest and lowest classes of the people sold their children. The registered prostitutes, it appears belonged to the lower sections of the society and a significant number of them actually came from the untouchable classes such as the bhangis(scavengers) and Hanjis (fisherman).

We came to know from the official British records that the prostitutes in Kashmir were usually sold at a tender age by their parents to brothel keepers for a price that varied from rupees 100 to 200.child trafficking was officially recognized by the state and the purchase of the girl child by pimps and brothel keepers was registered and sealed on stamped paper. The children sold for prostitution were usually fooled into believing that they would be married off. For most poor parents marriage was not an option because Dogras taxed marriages as well which was beyond the reach of the poor parents. The tax on marriage amounted to as much as Rs 3 to 864 while the registration fees for prostate was much less than that. The prostitutes were graded on the basis of age, income, looks and the caste then they were taxed accordingly. For class one prostitute Rs40 tax per annum, 20 and 10 respectively for second and third classes.

Reasons with special reference to illiteracy and no role from reformers

Other than the poverty and backwardness which were considered the basic push factors for the state encouraged prostitution system. Illiteracy and lack of education among the poor Kashmiris kept them behind in understanding this institution as an evil. For illiteracy both state and our social reformers are equally responsible. It is a sorry commentary on the leaders of the religious reform movements in Srinagar that the sad plight of the innocent young girls didn't engage their attention. Never did they raise any voice against the houses of ill fame and immoral trafficking in women located at Maisuma and tashwan in Srinagar. On the contrary they were more concerned about dividing the Muslim community of Kashmir on issues of lesser importance. Molvi ghulam Rasool shah and Molvi mohd Yusuf shah among the religious personalities Prem Nath Bazaz among the imminent writers didn't make a passing reference against this evil and didn't even mention about the achievements of those who withstood against this. The Dogra rulers never worked for providing education to the poor and backward people of rural and urban Kashmir. This educational backwardness of Kashmiris leads to their exploitation at the hands of the people possessing power and high social status the details of which has been presented by the Tyndale Biscoe in (Kashmir in sunlight and shade).Thus illiteracy became main force to guide the poor and backward people to throw their girls into prostitution.

Condition of the prostitutes

According to an official estimate, there were some18715 state prostitutes in Kashmir in 1880.The



Dogra state derived a lot of income from the prostitutes but no amount of money was spent for their benefit. Mr. Henvey, officer on special duty in Kashmir in 1880 writes that no care was taken of the sick prostitutes. In consequence syphilitic disease was spreading terribly throughout Kashmir. The Srinagar mission hospital report of 1877-79 says out of 12977 treated cases 2516 were having venereal diseases most of them were prostitutes.

There was yet one other misery to which these women were subjected to they couldn't marry and settle down as a respectable women. Further they were not accustomed to any profession therefore the only source for their livelihood was prostitution. The young girls once sold for prostitution had no hopes of release and were destined to work as sex slaves all their lives. It was of course almost impossible for them to save enough money to buy themselves back. These unfortunate girls were also denied permission to get married and settle down in life. Nor were they allowed to change the profession and to earn their livelihood through other means. On one instance a woman who approached the officers to be allowed to marry and lead a settled life was refused permission to do so. She attempted to flee with a man she wished to marry but was prevented from doing so and was forced to remain in prostitution. Arthur brinkman in his "wrongs in Kashmir" describes the sale of girls and the traffic in women in these words. The classes engaged in prostitution are owned as slaves and others who were formerly in their position. The authority of the latter is backed by the whole power of the Dogra Maharaja to whom reverts at their death all the wealth gathered by the prostitutes during their infamous life. Should one of their bond women or dancing girl attempt to leave her degrading profession she is driven back with the lash and the rod into her mistresses' power. Apathy to these hapless women was the support of the British government of Kashmir. The flesh trade came into the notice of British govt after the devastated famine of 1877-78. According to the Henvey's report the young English residents were involved in helping prostitution to flourish and the authorities made no efforts to suppress it, since it was the source of revenues for the state. Mohd isaq khan in the "History of Srinagar" mentions that in city there were two ill-famed centers of prostitution-Tashwan and Maisuma. The Kashmiri prostitutes were found in the brothels of other parts of India. According to 1921 census out of 2995 prostitutes in the brothels of Mumbai 41 were the natives of Kashmir.

Steps to eradicate this practice-Role of Subhan naid and church mission society

The sole fighter against this state sponsored evil was Mohamed subhan hajam, a reformer and a social activist. He couldn't bear the plight of ill-fated girls forced into this immoral trade. During day time he usually worked at his saloon near lalchowk Srinagar, but at night he along with his team of youngsters start picketing at the entrances of the brothels urging people not to go in or otherwise face mass condemnation. He wrote poems (hidayatnamas) full of sarcasm and satire directed against the pimps, flesh traders and the customers and would keep reciting them aloud. He would address the road side gatherings explaining to them the evils of prostitution and its social, moral and health hazards. The state govt in order to suppress the voice of Mohammad Subhan hajam filed several false cases against him. He was also attacked by the goons of rich and influential pimp known as (khizrgaan) khazr pimp. But this didn't break his courage. His continuous efforts paid him and a church mission society, TyndaleBiscoe, Molvi Mohammad Abdullah wakil and hundreds of kashmiri muslims, pundits and Sikhs stood by him, together they submitted a memorandum seeking a ban on prostitution to the then District Magistrate in Srinagar. Molvi Mohammad Abdullah wakil took the issue in praja sabha as well. Now the smell of something is cooking in Kashmir reached viceroy and he asked maharaja to provide him detailed information about the flesh trade in Kashmir. The selfless services of Subhan hajam ultimately bore fruit when in 1934 the state assembly passed an act suppressing immoral traffic in women. The assembly even ordered deputation of two police officers to find and repatriate Kashmiri girls from the red light areas of



Rawalpindi, Lahore, Peshawar, quetta, Delhi, Mumbai and lucknow. A police party led by Abdul karim recovered a large number of unfortunate girls from different areas. Fines were imposed upon the people who opened\operated brothels.

Social acceptance of prostitutes

Although the social acceptance of the prostitutes was difficult but not impossible the way was given vent by the independence of Kashmir from Dogra regime in 1947. Almost all brothels were seized and fines were imposed on people who opened or operated brothels. Police was given clear cut orders to put people under confinement who seem involved with the immoral practice. The prostitutes, who think prostitution as the sole source to earn their livelihood because of the fear of social implications, were now took to charka. They were provided arts and crafts for their sustenance. Some were absorbed in the silk factory at Srinagar while some others joined their old family professions. The social acceptance of these prostitutes although was not easy but slowly and gradually they were accepted by the society. Some among these prostitutes left the profession on a whole in totality while some others left it in official capacity but continued it under the veil.

Conclusion:-After the end of the Dogra rule in 1947 and the emergence of Muslim Govt in the state people now thought that the evils like prostitution will not bring out its ugly head in the society, but after few decades in 1980's two sex rackets one Pattan sex racket and another Chinar sex scandal shook Kashmir at its root. A VIP sex scandal surfaced in 2006 and the monalisa sex CDs issue of Anantnag once again proves substantial expansion of prostitution in Kashmir but in modern way.

If violence, poverty and broken families were considered solely responsible for driving an increasingly growing number of women to prostitution in modern times then that is an excuse, recent study shows that the most of the women involved in sex rackets were having good assets at home, some were married and some were from the respectable families.

The urge to become rich in just few nights, lures by the pimps, modernization and deviation from the religion were the basic factors which put women to adopt this practice in modern era. If prostitution was state sponsored institution during Dogra regime then one must think that the 2006 sex scandal in which bureaucrats, police officials and top businessmen were involved was also state sponsored.

Although the prostitution is banned in Kashmir but under the public prostitutes' registration rules of 1921 people involved in flesh trade seems it as a sort of protection.

Acknowledgement

The present paper is drafted on the basis of the data collection from different sources of primary importance. The paper is simple and lucid contains everything in simple terminology.

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