



FORCED PROSTITUTION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE BROTHELS: A SOCIO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED FILMS

Vidya N S¹ , Dr. Balakrishnan K²

¹Post Graduate student, Department of English Language and Literature, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi campus, Kerala, India.

²Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi campus, Kerala, India.

Abstract

Human Trafficking is a significant issue in the country and people are trafficked illegally through the country for the purpose of sexual exploitation. It is a contemporary issue which still prevails in the society. Trafficking of women often paves the way for prostitution. Prostitution is considered as a filthy, immoral lifestyle and prostitutes are treated as inferior and marginalized who cannot access good facilities. Due to their gender and status, sex workers are often the victims of abuse, violence and sexual exploitation from the men. When a woman is coerced into engaging in sexual activity by a third party, it is referred to as forced prostitution or compulsory prostitution. Regardless of the 'oldest profession', it is the site of the oldest type of gender-based violence, exploitation, and slavery that men have invented to enslave women and keep them at their sexual whim. Throwing light on the plight and helplessness of the sex workers, this study aims to highlight the violence raised against the sex workers and how they are forced to carry out this work in the brothels of India. The study analyzes the instances of forced prostitution in the films *Lakshmi* (2014) and *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (2022). Additionally, the problem is examined through the lens of hegemonic masculinity with a view to understand the power dynamics involved in it.

Key words: prostitution, sex workers, trafficking, hegemonic masculinity, gender, power, *Lakshmi*, *Gangubai Kathiawadi*.

Introduction

Films are the mirrors of reality. Similar to some early theaters, cinema shows society's harsh realities and vices. It presents the details we were unaware of. Additionally, some crucial issues are raised through the films. It frequently assumes responsibility for addressing significant societal challenges. A movie can have an impact on society that is both beneficial and harmful. So, it can be said that a film influences society and vice-versa.

Article 23 of Indian Constitution "Right against Exploitation" is a provision that makes buying and selling human beings as a commodity, illegal. It also forbids hiring of women or girls for immoral purposes. Human trafficking always entails the recruitment or transportation of a person by coercion or deception, followed by their exploitation and eventual commercialization. To finance the prostitution industry is currently one of the most common reasons for trafficking in women. Prostitution is the act of engaging in sexual activity for compensation or as a business, and a prostitute is someone who is paid for engaging in sexual activity. An example of forced prostitution is when people, mostly women and children, are coaxed, tricked, or forced into performing commercial sex acts against their will. Victims of forced prostitution may be trafficked domestically or internationally, and are often subjected to physical and emotional abuse, sexual violence, and exploitation. They may be forced to work in brothels, strip clubs, or on the streets, and may be held in debt bondage or threatened with violence or harm to themselves or their families if they try to escape. Forced prostitution is a serious violation of human rights and is recognized as a form of gender-based violence. Police abuse, sexual assault, rape, battering, harassment, extortion, abuse from customers and agents are among the forms of violence that sex workers encounter. Many prostitutes are exposed to other types of violence in addition to societal acts of violence against women. The majority of the woman's earnings may be taken from her by pimps, who frequently employ prostitutes. Pimps may also use physical violence as a form of control. As a result of dysfunction, animosity, humiliation, or guilt, clients frequently turn violent towards prostitutes. Functions that the client plays in prostitution is ignored, safeguarded, and minimized whenever it is acknowledged. Violence has a significant impact on how susceptible sex workers are to contracting HIV and other STDs.

One of the key factors that drive helpless women to the doors of prostitution is poverty. A woman who is struggling financially, is frequently mistreated by her parents, deceived by a man who later revealed himself to be a pimp or procurer, and lastly lacks schooling or has a very poor level of education, rarely finds any other ways to support herself than prostitution. There are other societal variables that lower a woman's status. One such aspect is the ubiquitous notion that women are a commodity in India's popular cultural expressions. The unfortunate truth is that women who have had sexual adventures are viewed as "used goods" or "characterless," making them unlikely to ever find love or settle down. She degenerates

into a destitute social outcast. Rapes, child prostitutes, religious sanctions, and the inability to marry are also factors that contribute to the woman's descent, from which she cannot recover. Poor parental treatment, association with the family of prostitutes, social mores, lack of sex education, prior rape and incest, young marriage and abandonment, lack of leisure and opportunities, being uninformed, all make women end up in prostitution. Poverty and economic suffering are examples of economic causes. The desire for sensual pleasure, greed, and dejection are psychological factors.

Prostitution in India has complex social, economic, and legal consequences. One of the most serious consequences of prostitution in India is the exploitation and trafficking of women and children. Many individuals, including minors, are lured or coerced into prostitution and subjected to physical and sexual abuse, violence, and exploitation by pimps, traffickers, and customers. Prostitution in India also poses significant health risks for those involved. Sexually transmitted illnesses (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, are frequently acquired by sex workers, due to lack of access to proper healthcare and safe sex practices. The risk of drug addiction and substance abuse is also high among sex workers, as they may use drugs as a coping mechanism or to deal with the harsh realities of their lives. Sex workers in India often face social stigma, discrimination, and ostracism from mainstream society. They are often marginalized and excluded, facing discrimination in housing, employment, education, and other areas of life. This can lead to social isolation, mental health issues, and reduced access to basic services and opportunities.

Prostitution in India is also a complex legal issue. Although prostitution itself is not prohibited, many related acts, such as soliciting and running brothels, and pimping, are criminalized under various laws. This legal ambiguity creates challenges for sex workers, making them vulnerable to police harassment, extortion, and abuse. It also hampers their access to justice and protection of their rights. Prostitution is often seen as a means of economic survival for many women and transgender individuals in India who face limited economic opportunities and poverty. However, sex work is often characterized by low pay, irregular income, and lack of job security, leaving sex workers economically vulnerable. This can perpetuate a cycle of poverty and limited mobility, making it difficult for them to exit the trade and pursue alternative livelihoods. Prostitution can have a significant impact on the families of those involved. Many sex workers face social ostracism and rejection from their families, leading to strained relationships, abandonment, and loss of support networks. Children of sex workers may also face discrimination and marginalization, resulting in limited access to education, healthcare, and other basic services. In conclusion, prostitution in India has significant consequences on various aspects of individuals' lives, including their physical and mental health, social status, economic well-being, and human rights. Addressing the complex issues surrounding prostitution requires a multifaceted approach that includes addressing social attitudes, improving access to healthcare and support

services, addressing poverty and economic vulnerabilities, and protecting the human rights of all individuals involved, including sex workers, trafficked individuals, and vulnerable populations.

Sociologist Raewyn Connell's (1987, 1995) and Messer Schmidt's (2005) research helped to popularize the idea of hegemonic masculinity as a term to describe how masculinity is created and preserved within a particular society. As the term suggests, it is the dominant or hegemonic form of masculinity. The majority of men consider the muscular body type to be most manly of all male body types, and they connect it to traits like power, tenacity, competency, sexual potency, independence, domination, self-assurance, and aggression. Hegemonic masculinity is the term used to connect these characteristics. The idea of hegemony is having the capacity to create or destroy other individuals or social groups while also gaining and maintaining power within a social structure. As an interdisciplinary approach, Connell came up with the concept in response to the desires of numerous researchers who wanted to give priority to the study of masculinity within a framework of gender relations. The most dominating and socially desired type of masculinity that is available to men is represented by Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity. The idea of hegemony as an intellectual practise that sustains and legitimises the interests of the dominant in society during particular historical times is heavily influenced by Italian Marxist critic Antonio Gramsci (1971). A "position of cultural authority and leadership" is bestowed onto this representation of manhood (Connell, 2001, p. 17). It is the notion that there is a particular set of characteristics that define what it means to be a "real man," and that these qualities are admired and rewarded in society. Just like Gramsci's hegemony, it has close association with power and dominance. Connell contends that hegemonic masculinity encompasses not just the characteristics and actions that define being a male. Instead, he asserts that hegemonic masculinity includes both the power dynamics; involving men's dominance over women and the power of some men over other men (typically minority groups of men). Hegemonic masculinity was separated from other masculinities, especially marginalised masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not seen to be the norm in terms of statistics; only a tiny proportion of men might display it.

Lakshmi (2014) written and directed by Nagesh Kukunoor deals with the horrible realities of human trafficking and child prostitution. The film portrays the real life story of Lakshmi, a fourteen year old girl who hails from a small village in Andhra Pradesh, and was forced into the world of prostitution and ultimately testified in court against her traffickers. She is repeatedly beaten and violently harmed. Lakshmi overcame all the obstacles and managed to escape herself from the grip of the cruel and callous men. *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (2022) directed by the renowned Indian filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali is based on a chapter "Gangubai Kothewadi" from *Mafia Queens of Mumbai : Stories of Women from Gangland* (2011) written by Hussain Zaidi. The story is set in the 1960s and portrays the real life story

of Ganga Harjeevandas, daughter of an aristocratic lawyer. Despite her toils and sufferings in the brothel she was transformed from Ganga to Gangu, established strong underworld connections and demanded the empowerment of sex workers and finally emerged as the honorable Madam of Kamathipura.

Objective

The paper attempts to analyze the violence and brutalities committed in the name of prostitution, as portrayed in the select films. It focuses on the questions of women's agency and vulnerability in human trafficking and prostitution. The paper aims to examine how a woman is trapped and forced to choose prostitution for their survival. Additionally, the paper attempts to make the people aware of the miserable condition of the sex workers with a view to alter the society's perception about them.

Methodology

The method of analysis adopted is qualitative. The films are analyzed from a socio-cultural point of view. This article examines prostitution from a gender perspective- the social and cultural context of gender. The information provided in this paper was compiled from movies, books, web sites and journal articles. **Analysis**

The central character in the film Lakshmi is a fourteen year old girl and is a victim of child prostitution and trafficking. She was sold by her father Bangaru Raju to corporate Radha for 30000 rupees, and Radha for 50000 rupees to Chinna and his brother Ram Reddy. Here, Lakshmi's father, Radha, Chinna and Reddy are the pimps, agents or recruiters of human trafficking who have only selfish intentions. Lakshmi was first taken by Reddy whose intention was to molest Lakshmi in the name of providing her a shelter. After she was raped by Reddy, she was taken to Dharamvilas, a brothel house run by Chinna and Reddy. In the Dharamvilas, she was forced into compulsory prostitution. She was unwilling to stay there. Jyoti, the brothel madam, who is much like a sisterly figure to the inmates draped Lakshmi with a saree to start her work as a prostitute. Lakshmi unwillingly obeyed as she had no other choice. A wound developed, after Reddy raped her and worsen after her encounter with each men.

Following her first encounter with a man she tries to escape and files a complaint against Chinna and Reddy. Feared, the policeman refused to do that and Lakshmi was taken back to the brothel by Chinna. This demonstrates how the police play such a significant role in the trafficking system that a victim essentially never gets the opportunity to confront the organised crime of trafficking on her own. It is seen in the film that Jyoti and Lakshmi's roommate Suvarna was battered by Chinna for the reason that Lakshmi ran away. They received the punishment for which they are not guilty of. It clearly depicts how sex workers have to face abuse and ill-treatment from the pimps as well. Chinna's treatment of Lakshmi are other instances of abuse. As a punishment Chinna ordered Jyoti, "Sent her all the customers that you can. If there's five send her five, if there are seven send her seven". This

statement is a clear indication where Lakshmi is forced for prostitution. Lakshmi gradually adapted to the new surroundings. Another youngster, Chotu, buys alcohol and other supplies for the brothel inmates because they are confined behind a wall. Scenes where Chotu occasionally throws things over the wall imply a jail or prison where the prisoners are housed. Meanwhile, Lakshmi got a chance to visit Suberu's farmhouse in the city to please that old man so that they would get some money in return without the knowledge of Chinna. The group was accompanied by Chinna. Lakshmi's attempt to run away from there failed when Chinna chased and caught her. He hit her down and abused her with a stick that he usually carries everywhere. The stick has some iron nails on the end and Chinna got wounded her leg by piercing it on her leg. Chinna forcefully took Lakshmi back to the brothel. Her wound later developed to an infection and a high fever. Chinna's cruel and stone-hearted nature is revealed through the following scenes. Her illness was never a matter to Chinna. Chinna was neither allowed to consult a doctor nor took her to hospital. Instead, he told Jyoti to just bandage it up so that the customers wouldn't get nauseous. She is so tired and unwell that she couldn't even walk or dress her up. Even in this condition, Chinna wakes her up for work. He sent many customers to Lakshmi on a single night. Lakshmi was rescued by a social worker Mohan who was disguised as a customer and placed a camera inside the room with the help of Jyoti. Lakshmi was forced to live there for six months. With the exception of Lakshmi, all the girls eventually return to the brothel willingly. The terrible reality of the oppression towards sex workers is revealed by Swarna's statements in a particular scene. She explains to her that she has been unable to get any other job but has been harassed everywhere she goes. As she says, "Our home does not want us to adopt, our friends refuse to recognize, and if the world has its way we will have to bury ourselves in some corner of the world. This statement further illustrates the traumatizing state and resentments towards the prostitute community.

The difficulty of finding a lawyer to represent her in court is highlighted in the film's concluding scene. The victim is re-traumatized in the movie as a result of the cross-examination in the courts. The adversary's attorney essentially accuses the victim of engaging in sexual activity at a tender age. His interchangeable use of the terms "sex" and "rape," which gave the impression that the victim was a woman with "bad character," contributed to this. They moved legally against Chinna and Reddy by consulting a lawyer Avinash with the help of Mohan. The trial scene in the film clearly depicts forced prostitution and how brutally Lakshmi was abused. From the trial scene in the court, Avinash revealed that how Lakshmi was raped seven times on a single night through the visuals of hidden camera. From the trial of Dr. Muralidhar, the family doctor of Reddy it is revealed that Lakshmi has given estrogen injection in the name of nourishing her. It was given in order to transform her from a girl to woman. The Doctor's trial further revealed that Reddy carries HIV. He had done such a cruel deed to Lakshmi under the superstition that

AIDS can be cured with the intercourse with a small virgin girl. In the end, Lakshmi has won the legal battle and has successfully prosecuted everyone involved in her trafficking.

Chinna is a man who possesses the traits of hegemonic masculinity. Here in the context of the film, the man finds himself dominant over woman. The film opens with Chinna along with a few girls including Lakshmi. His sense of supremacy over them made him hit Lakshmi with a stick when Lakshmi stares at him. When she asked him for water, he gave a jar containing his urine. He always carries his weapon which is a wooden stick that has some iron nails inserted on its tip. He carries that not to ensure his protection but to maltreat women whenever he gets irritated. He claims himself powerful, "now you know how powerful we are", as he tells Lakshmi on the way back to Dharamvilas after Lakshmi's failed attempt to escape. We can also see Chinna's absolute authority over the denizens of the brothel. It was Jyoti and Suvarna who got battered by Chinna when Lakshmi tried to flee for the first time, for no particular reason. He often threatens Jyoti to cut her salary. Towards the end of the film, just before his death Chinna mercilessly abused Jyoti with cigarettes. She was also beaten several times due to his suspicion that Jyoti helped Lakshmi to get out of the brothel that later took them to court causing trouble. He believes himself powerful and ensures his domination by harassing his opposite gender.

The film *Gangubai Kathiawadi* presents trafficking of young girls and forced prostitution and the violence faced by them. The movie opens with a sixteen year old girl Madhu to who is forcefully made up for the job. The brothel owner Rasmibai and other inmates pushed a cloth inside her mouth so that her screaming out of pain could not be heard. Next, they pierced her nose in order to put a nose pin. Blood oozed from her nose as she cried. They forced her to prostitute with a man named Jagan Seth. Jagan molested her. Madhu was starving, unwilling to be a prostitute and showed her disobedience. Gangubai, a well respected former prostitute of Kamathipura, was called by Rasmibai to resolve the problem and convince Madhu. She reveals to Gangubai that she was trafficked by her husband Jameel. Then Gangu narrates her story of how she became a prostitute. She reveals that she was once Ganga Jagjivandas Kathiawadi born as the daughter of a barrister to an aristocratic family. She aspires to be a film actress and her boyfriend Ramnik Lal gave her fake promises that could make her an actress which attracted her to elope with him to Bombay. He promised to take her to a film producer in the care of his aunt but Ramnik betrayed her taking her to a brothel in Kamathipura run by Sheela Masi. She was trafficked for thousand rupees and pushed into a dark dingy room in that brothel. They crumbled her hopes and dreams in that room. Ganga was starving and weak, and was put in chains. Sheela Masi ordered her to get into the work within two days. With no other options and couldn't get out of that hell, she entered into the work unwillingly. Other brothel inmates taught her how to stand in front of the brothel, call and entice the customers. Govind Seth, her first customer called her Gangu for the first time. She was inspired by his words that she will rule

Kamathipura one day. The fact that prostitution is illegal makes it simple for anything to happen, which leaves young girls and women susceptible to predators. The story is shared by Gangubai and Madhu. They were both misled by males, and at the age of just sixteen, they were both sold into brothels for money. After that, both the 'madams' and the customers who went to the brothels tortured them terribly. Gradually, she got adjusted with the circumstances, her work and built friendships with other inmates. The film is quintessentially about Gangu's life. Even in the midst of struggles and tough times in the brothel, her journey from Ganga to Gangu, then to Gangubai and finally to the 'Madam' of Kamathipura is exciting. She is brave and courageous and possesses a pure and kind heart, which is the reason behind her success.

The film also explicates the stigma associated with the prostitution. In the beginning of the conversation between Gangubai and Madhu, Gangubai mentions a girl who wanted to return to her parents after being sold into prostitution. She was executed by hanging as an act of honor, nonetheless. The movie revealed an intriguing message when an attempt to close down Kamathipura, which is near the local school because, according to the literates, the culture of the brothel was encouraging immoral behavior in the students. The homelessness and marginalization of these hapless women are nobody's concern. Neither the government, nor the society and its potential institutions do not appear to be bothered about prostitution as a serious problem involving human rights-a scenario in which inhumanity, immorality and violence are institutionalized in the most miserable manner. It is quite daunting that the very conception of society professedly at its most advanced stages of development in terms of noble principles and sublime ideals is rendered quite ambiguous vis-à-vis entrenched practices like prostitution. Undoubtedly upsetting is the fact that these sex workers' offspring face the same discrimination as the sex workers themselves. There are specific incidents that deal with this in the movie. The school authorities were initially hesitant to give admission to the children as they are from Kamathipura and children of prostitutes. On their first day in the school the teacher slapped the small children before sending them out of the classroom. Hence they are denied their basic right of education. The pitiful side of a mother's existence as a prostitute is shown in particular. In order to prevent her daughter Roshni from being seen by the lustful customers, Kusum, a colleague of Gangu, is seen enclosing Roshni in a cage and placing it in the damaged corner of the terrace. The reason is that Kusum would be rejected and Roshni would be used for the business if Roshni were to catch the clients' attention. Although our culture does not provide sex workers with a decent and dignified existence, a prostitute mother always wishes her daughter to lead such a life. Another is how Afsaan's family first rejects Roshni since she is the daughter of a prostitute. Later, when Gangu arranges Roshni's marriage to her beloved Afsaan Razzaq, Afsaan's mother is first reluctant to approve the union because Roshni is the daughter of a prostitute. However, after that, when Gangu presented the family with priceless gifts and gold necklaces, the marriage proposal was accepted without hesitation. Another incident that shows the extent to which

sex workers are neglected is the death of Gangubai's longtime friend Kamli, after her delivery because of the medical complications. This is the indication of their inability to access better healthcare and treatment. Such discrimination from the society towards the sex workers forces them to remain in this profession itself.

The character who possesses the traits of hegemonic masculinity is Shaukath Abbas Khan, a Pathan. He works for Rahim Lala, a don. Pathan is a notorious criminal who is accused of four murders and three rape cases. One dawn, he arrives in the brothel of Sheela Masi and in need of Gangu. He ruthlessly raped Gangu. Gangu was hospitalized and had fifteen stitches on her belly and four stitches on her lips. Her condition is so pathetic that, her face is severely wounded and there is also a long stitch from her shoulder to hip which occurred as the result of Pathan's violence towards her. On his next visit to the brothel, he again attempts to abuse her. He tells Gangu, "This time it will hurt more, that will be fun". It is clear from these words about his cruel and sadistic nature. On that day, he exerted complete authority over her. His perception of men as predominant in the society, has persuaded him to commit murders and rape. He reasserts his domination by his second visit to the brothel in order to encounter Gangu again. It was done in a sense that Gangu and women inhabitants in the brothel could not do anything against him as they have no voice over their customers. Hence, he establishes his sovereignty towards Gangu as well as other women.

Conclusion

The films analyzed here portray the plight of sex workers living in the brothel. The fact that the two films are based on true events and both aim to raise consciousness about the problem of sex trafficking, which is a growing social ill in Indian society. As a result, the substance of the movies is more realistic, increasing the impact. The protagonists of both the movies have similar fates. They are illegally trafficked, molested, subjected to violence, unwillingly and forcefully became a prostitute. Both the women, Lakshmi and Gangubai are the symbol of courage and resistance. They are survivors who fought against all their odds and struggles. A few male characters are analyzed according to their characteristic traits and identified to possess some traits of hegemonic masculinity. Despite the fact that many governmental and human rights organizations agree that it is a serious human rights violation that must be combated, the complexity and pervasiveness of human trafficking operations often make it nearly impossible to prosecute and punish traffickers. They are unable to improve their situation for a number of reasons, including poverty, exploitation by pimps, severe discrimination, and social stigma. Prostitution is a serious and malicious blot in our culture at this advanced stage. The rights of sex workers would be protected if necessary checks and controls were imposed by law or else they have to be properly rehabilitated. Society in general and governments in particular should think loudly as to how to tackle this social menace.

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