



Bodies for Sale, Souls for Rent: A Marxist Perspective on the Commodification of Bodies and Souls. - A Study on “Sex Workers”

Sub-Theme: Sociological Approaches in Crime Prevention and Community Resilience.

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ABSTRACT:

CRIME AGAINST VULNERABLES AND THEIR VICTIMIZATION:

Sex workers are often criminalized and viewed as offenders rather than recognized as workers in need of protection and support. Trapped within societal constructs of virginity and chastity, they face significant physical and mental health risks, exacerbated by marginalization and inadequate access to healthcare. This research critically examines the exploitation and alienation of sex workers within capitalist society, drawing on Marx's theory of labor exploitation. The study utilizes autobiographical accounts, such as those of Nalini Jameela, a sex worker from Kerala, to uncover the vulnerabilities within this community. It also explores how occupational diseases, like PTSD, may contribute to criminal behavior, perpetuating a cycle of violence.

Through a newly developed framework based on primary data and a mixed-methods approach, this research compares sex workers to the labor class and mainstream society to capitalists, highlighting the systemic commodification and marginalization of sex work. Primary data were collected through surveys of the general public and college students to understand societal attitudes toward sex work. Secondary data were analyzed using the Taguchi sampling method, providing an in-depth examination of sex workers' experiences and optimizing data variation while minimizing case numbers. The study offers insights into prevention strategies to mitigate the health risks and social disadvantages faced by sex workers.

Keywords: occupational disease, chastity and virginity, exploitation and alienation theory by Marx, alienation theory of crime.

INTRODUCTION:

A woman's body is often perceived as her greatest weakness, making it a primary target for violence and oppression. This vulnerability transcends race and caste, yet societal hypocrisy is evident in **how marginalized women and transgender individuals are deemed polluted by day but paradoxically sought out and purified by night within mainstream society.** The patriarchal constructs of virginity and chastity glorify the female body while ultimately constraining women, limiting their freedom and autonomy.

Discussions surrounding virginity, chastity, or sex work are almost exclusively centre on women, reflecting deep-seated gender biases even in the so-called AI era. **Sex workers are often criminalized and viewed as offenders rather than recognized as workers who need protection and support.** While society proudly discusses Marxism, Leninism, and Stalinism, it often overlooks the struggles of sex workers, who continue to lack access to basic rights afforded to other laborers.

Karl Marx defined profit as the exploitation of labor; similarly, sex work can be seen as a form of labor exploitation. This study critically examines Marx's theory of alienation and compares it to our newly developed framework, which is based on primary data and studies on sex workers. Our research highlights how sex workers are alienated from accessing the resources enjoyed by mainstream capitalist society, drawing parallels between the “haves” (capitalists) and the “have-nots” (labor class) as described by Marx.

What is Occupational Risk?

The term "occupational risk" refers to the potential hazards and dangers that workers face in their specific jobs or industries, like overall safety. Our research focuses on the sex worker community, where the term "occupational risk" plays a reciprocal role: sex workers face occupational risks due to the capitalist society, while the capitalist society also faces risks associated with the occupation of sex work.¹

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The Hindu - May 25, 2022 - Supreme Court recognizes sex work as a 'profession': The Supreme Court states that the police should not get involved or take legal action against sex workers who are adults and have given their consent to the work. Here under the article 21 the SC says that sex workers are also have a fundamental rights which was been experienced by others.

Nalini Jameela's autobiography, "*The Autobiography of a Sex Worker*"², was originally published in Malayalam in 2005. As a sex worker turned activist, she openly discusses topics related to sex and the body. Her autobiography uses the female body as a form of resistance against patriarchy, challenging the notion that a woman's body is tied to the honor of her family.

The Hindu – April 15, 2020 – A fundraiser was launched to support male sex workers. When we talk about sex workers, we often think only of women, but not men. However, the reality is different, as more men are now working as sex workers. This article explains how members of the queer community use platforms like Tinder and Grindr to connect with this often-neglected section of society.

Reasons for alienation leading to anti-social and delinquent behavior among juveniles: The problem of alienation leading to anti-social and delinquent behavior among juveniles has not disappeared or diminished substantially in spite of heightened efforts to make it do so. This remains a topical matter that impinges not only on an individual's social dimension, but also on their physical and mental health.

June 07, 2021: Recognizing sex work as work: The pandemic has affected millions, but sex workers have suffered even more. Since their work is not officially recognized as "real work," they have been mostly left out of government support programs. This situation has highlighted the need to address an old request from sex workers in India: to make sex work legal and provide them with basic labor rights.

Alienation, in Marx's framework, refers to the disconnection and estrangement that workers experience in a capitalist society. This occurs when they become disconnected from the products of their labor, the labor process itself, their own essence, and their fellow workers.

Four Types of Alienation:

- **Alienation from the Product:** Workers do not own what they produce; instead, the products of their labor belong to the capitalist. This leads to a lack of fulfillment, as workers do not see their labor reflected in the fruits of their efforts.
- **Alienation from the Labor Process:** Workers have little control over how they work. The repetitive and mechanized nature of labor under capitalism reduces workers to mere cogs in the machine, stripping them of creativity and autonomy.
- **Alienation from Their Own Essence:** Marx argued that work is a fundamental aspect of human nature. Under capitalism, workers are alienated from their true selves because they cannot express their creativity and individuality through their labor.
- **Alienation from Other Workers:** Capitalism fosters competition among workers, leading to a sense of isolation and disconnection from one another, rather than community and solidarity.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

- ⇒ To analyze how Marx's concept is still relevant in various Indian contexts, with examples from the experiences of sex workers.
- ⇒ To explore the exploitation of sex workers through a new framework of alienation developed in our study.
- ⇒ To analyze prevention strategies that facilitates access to resources for sex workers.³

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The research methodology for this study involved a comprehensive experimental approach to collect and analyze primary data from two distinct groups of respondents.

1. ¹ The capitalist by Marx: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf>

²Sex as work: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/supreme-court-recognises-sex-work-as-a-profession/article65461331.ece>

³ Alienation: <http://pure.jgu.edu.in/id/eprint/2092/1/Karl%20Marx%E2%80%99s%20Theory%20of%20Alienation%202021.pdf> of

✚ "The Reality Behind Red Doors,"

The experiment, titled "**The Reality Behind Red Doors**," aimed to explore the hidden or unknown aspects of the sex work profession. Two groups were selected for the study: The "A" group comprised 200 individuals from the general public, including students, across four districts, while the "B" group included 100 sex workers from the same districts. The four districts—Kanchipuram & Chennai in the northern region, and Theni & Dindigul in the southern region of Tamil Nadu—were chosen through a selective random sampling method to provide a broader perspective of sex workers from both regions of Tamil Nadu.

- **100 sex workers** (4 districts × 25 sex workers)
- **200 individuals - General public** (4 districts × 50 individuals),

Therefore, the ratio of sex workers to the general public is **1:2**

The causes and effects of this experiment provided an opportunity to develop a new theoretical framework in the largely unknown profession of sex work. This theoretical framework has been titled "**Theory of Alienation of Sex Workers with Occupational Risk**." It was developed based on theories of Karl Marx, such as alienation and exploitation theory, and on statements from sex workers about their experiences, which were collected through interviews.

Ethical Considerations:

We assured them that their information would not be recorded on mobile devices, nor would any details about them be shared. Additionally, no payments were made to the respondents, and we ensured that the questions asked were respectful and within appropriate limits. Finally, we promised that all the information collected would be kept confidential.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS:-

The prostitution industry perpetuates a paradox where sex workers experience dual alienation: their bodies become marketable assets, and they are forced to "rent their souls" to live autonomously, symbolizing emotional and spiritual disconnection. This concept is explored in the "Theory of Quadruple Alienation in Sex Workers with Occupational Risk," developed through experimental findings.

Statement:

This theory-based framework was developed through descriptive theory-making, aiming to define and explain phenomena.

"THEORY OF QUADRUPLE ALIENATION IN SEX WORKERS WITH OCCUPATIONAL RISK:-"

Definition:

The theory-based framework posits that sex workers experience four (4) interconnected forms of alienation, which exacerbate occupational risks. These alienations were identified through the experimental study titled *The Reality Behind Red Doors*, and are explained with references to cases analyzed during the research.

Four Forms of Alienation:

- ✚ **Bodily Alienation:** Sex workers may feel disconnected from their own bodies and sexual desires, as their work involves commodifying their sexuality for others' pleasure.
- ✚ **Social Alienation:** Sex workers often experience social isolation, stigma, and marginalization, leading to feelings of disconnection from society and their community.
- ✚ **Humanitarian Alienation:** Sex workers may feel reduced to their sexual functions rather than being recognized as whole individuals with agency and autonomy.
- ✚ **Identity Alienation:** The objectification and exploitation inherent in sex work can lead to a disconnection from one's identity, autonomy, and self-worth.

ENCOUNTERING BY EYES, YET ELIMINATING BY MINDS:

In our daily lives, knowingly or unknowingly, we often encounter sex workers, yet at the same time, we mentally eliminate them from our consciousness. This elimination doesn't happen simply by changing our thoughts; rather, we label them as impure, treating them as foreign elements within society. In our research, we asked the general public whether they had encountered sex workers, and 26% and 24.3% responded affirmatively. However, the same percentage of people admitted that they do not speak to sex workers or, if they do, they avoid further interaction. This mental elimination creates a problem for sex workers, leading to their social alienation by society.

In a socialist society, this alienation is profound, but in a capitalist society, the dynamic shifts. While sex workers are often labeled impure during the day, they are treated as valuable at night, when money is exchanged for their services. The Constitution of India begins with the phrase "We the

people,” which implies that we are all equal, regardless of race, caste, or occupation. However, this phrase seems inapplicable to sex workers—prostitutes and brothel workers—who are treated as though they come from an alien world.

The phrase “We the people” should not only be written in the Constitution but also in our minds, applying to all individuals, including those like sex workers and Transgender. When transgender individuals approach us, we may or may not offer them help, often viewing them as a societal burden. Yet, many transgender individuals work in various sectors—government, private, and more—deserving the same respect as anyone else. In our study, 65.9% of respondents admitted to encountering sex workers without engaging in communication, although they witnessed them with their own eyes. Notably, 18.5% of respondents reported that they not only encountered but also communicated respectfully with sex workers. We must recognize that respect for others is essential, and failing to do so only perpetuates their alienation.⁴

LEGALISED FOR: PROFESSION???? OR BUSINESS!!!!!!:

The legalization of prostitution is often misunderstood. While prostitution is legalized in certain countries to protect the fundamental rights of individuals, it is important to remember that it is not legalized as a business. The original intent was simply to recognize sex work as a profession to safeguard individual rights. This raises the question: Is the operation of brothels legal in India? The answer is no, brothels are not legal. Yet, by legalizing the profession of sex work, the government indirectly allows the functioning of brothels.

In our experiment, we found that a temple priest from Kanchipuram had kept a Dalit family in bonded labor for many years. One girl was sent to work for the priest son, who later, due to economic hardship during the Zamindari Abolition Act, forced her into prostitution at the age of 10. The priest took advantage of her and used for his business of exploitation, making money to maintain his economic stability. Now, at the age of 70, her daughter, influenced by her Mother’s profession, entered the brothel industry at the age of 20.

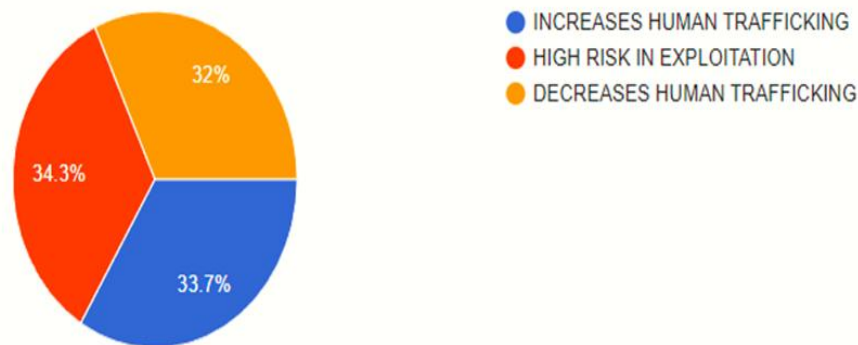


Fig 01: Legalizing Brothel

When asked if brothels should be legalized, 33.7% of the general public believed that it would lead to an increase in human trafficking. On the other hand, 34.3% of sex workers thought legalizing brothels might actually reduce human trafficking. However, when the focus shifted back to the brothel workers themselves, they expressed concerns that legalization could lead to greater exploitation. They warned that brothel owners, driven by profit, could exploit workers even further, similar to how they exploit labor for surplus value in capitalist systems.

HOME OF PURITY AND RED HOUSE OF IMPURITY:

The concept of "home" symbolizes a safe space for emotional, physical, and mental well-being, representing a desire for cleanliness and purity. Conversely, the term "red doors" historically signifies brothels and areas associated with prostitution, where "impurity" is often linked to societal judgments. In both cases, a common thread is self-respect, which should extend beyond ourselves to include respect for others. We resonate with Karl Marx's idea of the law of opposites in unity, which states that everything has its opposite, yet the unity within those opposites must always be respected and considered.

For example, the front of a currency Note featuring Gandhi is deemed pure, but we cannot label the back of the same note as impure. Instead, both sides as part of a single entity, should be recognized as opposites in unity.

⁴ Constitution of India: <https://indianembassyberlin.gov.in/pdf/Article-on-Constitution-of-india-250116.pdf>

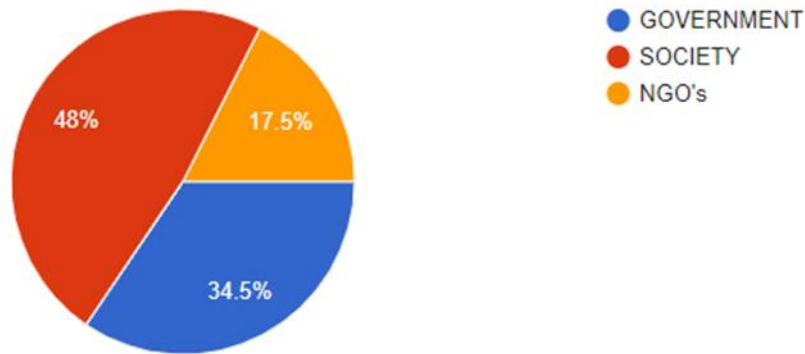


Fig 02: Who is responsible for providing protection of sex workers

This perspective is supported by our study of sex workers, where 48% indicated that societal responsibility should provide their protection. This encompasses not only individuals but also policymakers and politicians as a whole. In contrast, 34.5% of the general public believed that protection should come from the government, while 17.5% of sex workers felt that NGOs should provide support, which helped with healthcare and other services. We cannot blame any of the individuals mentioned above for the issue of providing protection for sex workers. About 30% of respondents believe sex workers do not deserve protection, while 60% feel they do need it, and 10% remain neutral.

OCCUPATIONAL RISK: FOR THEM OR BY THEM:

“Risk cannot be eliminated in any profession”. **Firstly**, in a capitalist society, sex workers face risks driven by profit motives. Karl Marx defined profit as the exploitation of labor, and in this context, capitalist society exploits sex workers through the repetitive use of individuals and extreme exploitation by brothel leaders. Sex workers encounter numerous occupational hazards, including the potential for contracting STDs and STIs from clients. Additionally, they often experience bodily alienation, feeling disconnected from their own bodies and sexual desires, as their work involves expressing sexuality primarily for others' pleasure.

Secondly, in a socialist society, risks arise for women as they are often mistaken for sex workers, especially during nighttime. This perception can alter how men view women in public spaces. In reality, even during the day, certain areas may lead men to perceive women as sex workers, creating fear and distress among women when engaging in society. For example, there have been reports of men engaging in inappropriate behavior in public transport. Consequently, women may develop a negative view of all men.

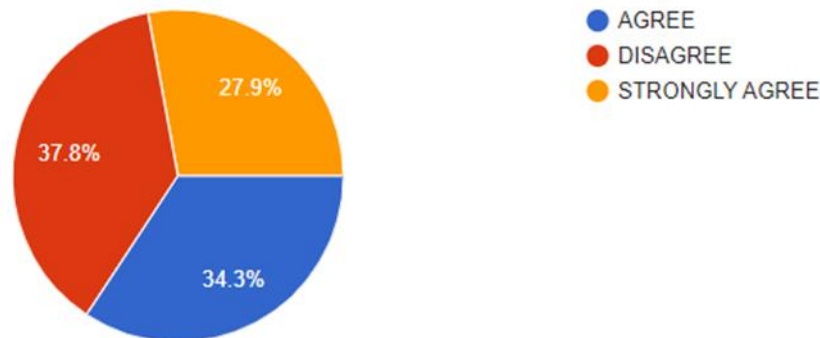


Fig 03: Does sex workers has impact in society

In our experiment, we surveyed the public about the impact of sex workers on society. While 34.3% of respondents believed sex workers have a negative impact due to associated occupational risks, 37.8% of sex workers disagreed. They cited reasons like: their presence helps reduce local sexual violence rates, Additionally, 27.9% of respondents strongly agreed with the negative view, citing concerns that this could increase rape rates.

RISK REDUCTION METHODS:

Clear Legal Frameworks: The government should take steps to reshape the legal framework for recognizing prostitution as a profession. Many individuals exploit sex workers for business purposes, so it is crucial for the government to establish clear legal guidelines to distinguish between legal and illegal activities within this profession

Strengthen Anti-Trafficking Measures: Strengthening anti-trafficking measures by the government will help reduce exploitation of sex workers by both brothel leaders and society at large.

Brothel Regulation: If brothels are indirectly allowed to operate under current laws, they should be brought under government regulation. This could help prevent exploitative practices, enforce safety standards, and provide a safer working environment for sex workers.

Workers' Union: Nowadays, most professions have unions that support their members in times of need and protest against injustices. Developing workers' unions among sex workers could empower them to stand up against exploitation and alienation.

Microfinance and Entrepreneurship: NGOs can play a key role by providing skill training and microfinance support, enabling sex workers to start new businesses and transition into other forms of employment.

Public Awareness: Public awareness about sex workers, including prostitutes and brothel workers, should be raised among young people, as they form the backbone of India's population. Educating young minds can prevent them from mentally eliminating or stigmatizing sex workers.

Respect for Agency and Identity: Social norms often label certain things as pure or impure, leading to the stigmatization of sex workers. Educational institutions should teach young people to challenge these stereotypes and treat others with dignity, helping to reduce the identity alienation of sex workers.

CONCLUSION:

Karl Marx's theory of alienation, proposed long ago, remains profoundly relevant in various fields today, from understanding crime and psychopathic killers to examining the experiences of victims of male sexual violence. Our study applied this timeless concept to contemporary society, focusing on sex workers. Through a research experiment involving sex workers and the general public in a 1:2 ratio (25 sex workers to 100 members of the general public), we developed a theoretical framework titled "The Theory of Alienation in Sex Workers with Occupational Risk." This framework holds significance in today's society and offers critical insights into how sex workers are still being exploited by capitalist structures—both directly and indirectly.

Moreover, our findings reveal that occupational risk is not one-sided. While sex workers face risks from the capitalist system, society, in turn, experiences occupational risks from sex workers. Respect is a reciprocal process, and in this fast-paced world, the way issues are approached determines the outcome. The preventive measures we suggest, based on the voices of sex workers and public opinion, aim to improve the lives of those involved in sex work, extending these recommendations to governments, NGOs, and society at large.

The conclusion is typically the final section of a research paper, but our study is not intended to be the end. Instead, it represents an attempt to explore the lives of sex workers through the lens of alienation and occupational risk. This study is not conclusive, as the theoretical framework we have developed may be expanded or built upon by future readers and researchers. In this sense, the study remains open-ended, encouraging further analysis and development.