

CHAPTER - VII

CASE STUDIES

Introduction :

During the Researcher's earlier visits to plan her data collection the local police inspector suggested that she should first meet Meena who worked as a commercial sex worker in that area because Meena was an educated and relatively more enlightened girl than others. Also, if Meena is convinced first, other sex workers too, will positively respond to the researcher. It was also thought necessary to begin the survey work with her as the first respondent as she could orient the researcher with current business practices and local business terminology used by the sex workers, customers and brothel keepers.

CASE - 1

Meena Gawali was a fairly good looking woman in her early thirties. She was medium built, and had wheat brown complexion. Unlike other girls around, she did not wear heavy make up. She was dressed in a simple but costly Punjabi suit which gave her a sophisticated look.

She was introduced to the researcher by one of the senior and leading brothel keepers of Chaklabazar (named Leelabai). Meena had recently moved out of Leela's brothel and had rented a neighbouring property to run a brothel independently, but she continued to dine at Leela's kitchen. Researcher met Meena in Leela's kitchen.

Researcher introduced herself, explained the purpose of her visit and also told Meena that the police inspector had specially recommended her name to the researcher, because Meena was an educated and an enlightened girl and perhaps the most capable person to orient the researcher about the market trends. This soon removed Meena's initial suspicion and reluctance. She, however, requested the researcher to go to her own brothel, so that she could talk comfortably with the researcher and at the same time can keep an 'eye' on the girls working under her.

Meena's brothel house consisted of four small rooms out of which one was reserved for personal use. It was originally a garage, now converted in to a house with walls created in an unplanned way to divide the space in to several small cubicles just large enough to accommodate one cot. The room for personal use had a stove etc. in one corner and a 'chowkdy' (open bathing place) with a water tap and water outlet in another. Except the door in the main entrance, all rooms' openings had no doors but had curtains to maintain privacy.

Researcher was asked whether she would like to have tea or 'Thanda' i.e. cold drink, Meena insisted that Researcher must accept something as she was her guest.

She then began to reply to researcher's question. According to her, she was married but she preferred to be known by her maiden name. She was a Hindu Marathi girl from 'Gawali' caste. Her age was 32 years and she had studied upto 12th standard. She could speak Hindi and English over and above her mothertongue i.e. Marathi. She hailed from 'Mahad' taluka of Akola District of Maharashtra.

Her parental family consisted of herself, her father, mother and a son aged nine years. She had a brother who was married and stayed separately. He did not share economic responsibility of their family, her parents earlier worked as agricultural labourers and used to earn Rs.10 per day each. Now, because of old age, they were dependent on her. They owned a small house but had no other property.

Her's was a love marriage. When she was 17 years old, she was attracted to a Rajasthani man who was running a grocery shop in her neighbourhood. During her two years of married life she had one son. She did not know much about her husband's education but only knew that he was literate. He earned about Rs.100 per day. She never visited her in-laws. Her parents first objected to

her decision but after her son's birth accepted her. After two years of happy married life, her husband went to his hometown in Rajasthan. Despite Meena's requests, he did not allow her to accompany him.

To Meena's utter shock and surprise, when he came back, he was accompanied by a woman - his 'wife' ! He then told Meena that he was already married and that she can continue to stay with him as his kept, but expressed his inability to cut off relations with his legal wife.

Meena turned down his offer and went back to her parents. Her brother was not ready to keep her and bear her son's expense. He, infact, was not maintaining their elderly parents properly and soon moved out of the house with his wife.

Now, the responsibility of maintaining her child and her aged parents fell on Meena. For sometime, she tried to look for some respectable work in her own town but failed to get any. Some acquaintance got her a job in a famous biscuit factory as a daily wage earner at Bombay. Even when she worked overtime, her earnings were not enough to maintain four souls.

One elderly woman in her neighbourhood asked her if she was interested in a job where she could make more money. She took Meena to another lady and after some time left the place. It was only then that Meena realised that she was sold to a brothel keeper in Rs.2000/-. When she requested the lady to release her,

she was told in a clear and firm way that though she would not be physically forced to entertain a customer, she could not leave the premises until she paid them back Rs.2000/- which were paid by the brothel keeper while buying her. At the same time, she was constantly being 'counselled' and advised to accept fleshtrade as a way of life. She was 'brainwashed' by saying that this was the only way she could take revenge on the menfolk. She was also told that as a single woman she is not 'safe' outside, men were bound to exploit her sexually. Instead, why not exploit them and make them pay for it ? By this way she can earn a lot more and make her son's fortune. If she still did not like it, she could always pay back her 'price' of Rs.2000/- and go free.

Over and above the Mousi's brainwashing, other girls in the same brothel would now and then narrate the pathetic story of some girls who tried to escape from the brothel and who were either gangraped or were rejected by their own family members and ultimately forced to come back to the sex market.

Meena ultimately gave in and accepted to entertain a customer. Initially she felt guilty for what she was doing but the flow of easy money soon overshadowed her guilt. She could now send a handsome amount to her parents and son. She decided to accept sextrade as a way of life. Over and above the brothel based work, she frequently went out with customers to nearby places. This was how she happened to visit Surat. Smart and ambitious as she was, she could assess the

market trends and learnt that a girl of her calibre could earn a lot more in Surat. By this time she had already paid back her 'price' amount to the Mousi and hence she moved to Surat. She contacted the seniormost 'Mousi' in the red-light area of Surat, and started working through her. She earned a lot of money. In between, she tried her luck in the 'Rajkot' red-light area in the Saurashtra region, but she could not adjust there. According to her, customers in Rajkot paid well but were very rough in their behaviour and hence she again came back to Surat.

Out of her savings, she decided to buy the rights of running a brothel next to 'Bhuri bai's den. She now had several girls working under her. She had also bought a plot in a housing society across the river Tapi and planned to bring her parents and son to there after the house is ready.

According to Meena, now she had stopped entertaining customers and earned only through her 'girls'. However another brothel-keeper in the same area shared with the Researcher that Meena still worked as a sexworker. She only accepted customers who could afford her high rates and got more business through hotels for a 'fullday/night' contracts.

Meena had no health complaints. She read newspapers and magazines and also attended AIDS awareness programmes organised by the PSM department of Medical College. She was fully aware of the health risks involved in this business and infact helped the doctors to spread AIDS awareness among other sexworkers

in the area. According to her, most sexworkers in Surat now insisted that the customers use condom.

Meena, now had fully reconciled with her fate and did not express any desire to leave this business until her son grew up and supported her.

CASE - 2

Dipti More was a beautiful girl of 17 years. Her fresh looks and playful smile confirmed her tender age. She was dressed in a shiny punjabi suit and she wore heavy make-up on her face.

She had seen the researcher interviewing other inmates of the same brothel house and hence talked freely - ofcourse, after seeking her 'gharawali's' permission through an approving nod.

Dipti was a Hindu Maratha girl from a town of Maharashtra, was unmarried and had studied upto standard six in Marathi Medium. She hailed from a nuclear family of six persons and her father was a government employee, earning about Rs.3,500 p.m. He was a religious person and was very active in a 'Bhajan Mandali'. The family lived in a selfowned one room 'Kholi'.

According to Dipti, she was deeply in love with a college boy of her own town. She wanted to marry with that boy, but her parents did not approve this relationship. She used to have lots of arguments on this issue with her parents.

Once, when the boy whom she loved was not in town, she had a big quarrel with her parents and in a fit of anger, she left her house. A friend brought her to Surat when she was about sixteen years of age and since she wanted to earn lots of money, Dipti accepted to work in the red-light area. Initially she could not stand the touch of strangers but now had started liking the work.

Narrating her initial trauma, she shared that though she came here with full knowledge about the nature of work, she felt scared at the sight of men and when any customer tried to touch her she used to become hysterical. She was then taken to the near by Durgah and also other deities. A sacred 'Kada' (an arm ring to be worn above the elbow) and 'tavij' was tied and she was forbidden to eat nonvegetarian food for twelve days. Undergoing this ritual gave her courage and after that she started 'taking' customers without any problems. She had strong faith in religion and prayed god regularly.

She being young and fresh in business soon started receiving good number of customers. She preferred young or adult customers from rich or middle class and rejected poor or aged customers. In a day, she entertained 12 to 20 customers! When researcher glanced at her questioningly in disbelief she called out her colleague to come and confirm the number. Since the number of customers was such big, she admitted that it affected her health adversely. She often suffered from severe headaches and skin and venereal infection. Swelling and minor injuries

in her private parts was a daily matter. When it became unbearable she consulted private doctor and took allopathic medicines. Most of her customers always used condoms and asked for 'normal' services. Some did ask for other types of sex variations (eg. oral or anal sex) but she never accepted to offer such services. Though Dipti said that she never served anyone outside the brothel, in researcher's presence, a rickshaw driver came to collect his unpaid charges from her when she went out with a customer two days ago. Dipti flatly refused to make the payment and the matter was settled only when the brothelkeeper agreed to pay the dues on her behalf - possibly to avoid a big quarrel in researcher's presence !

Dipti's charges per customer ranged from Rs. 50 to 100 or even more. At times she earned Rs.1000/- per day. She shared with pride, 'I would ask for any price that I feel like asking if the customer tried to bargain, I would straight away say 'No' -- and drive him away. Now there is hardly any customer who would refuse to pay me my price'. One could see queen-like expressions on her face while she said this and she was truly treated like so by the 'gharwali' as Dipti was the hen laying golden eggs for her. The fact that she could dictate her terms as one of the highest paid girl raised her self esteem and inflated her ego greatly.

Dipti shared that her mother had somehow come to know about her whereabouts and infact came here to take Dipti back, but she refused to go with

her. She borrowed Rs.10,000 from a moneylender and gave to her mother. She was repaying the debt in instalments at Rs.150/- per day.

The brothel where she worked had a single room shared by five other women. Dipti paid Rs.100/- per day as rent and Rs.50/- per day for meals to her gharwali.

Dipti seemed to have adjusted well in her surroundings. She did not want to leave this work in near future and aspired to make lot of money. Her final aspiration, however was to settle down by having her own home and family and she hoped that her boyfriend would surely come to take her away. If forced to leave flesh trade, she preferred to work as baby-sitter.

CASE - 3

Chandni Magar was a stunningly beautiful Nepali girl in her twenties. She had fair complexion, round face and sparkling eyes. She was very modest and polite in her behaviour.

Sharing her social background, Chandani said she was of nepalese origin but her family had shifted to Darjiling in West Bengal. She was a Hindu unmarried girl and had not received formal education. Her mother tongue was 'Nepali' and she could understand and speak Hindi language too. Hers' was a family of four - her father, mother, herself and her younger sister. They had no

land or property of their own and lived in a rented 'kholi'. Her father worked as an agriculture labourer and barely earned Rs. 20/- per day. He was the only earning member in the family. The family could not even get two square meals a day.

Chandni was sick and tired of the scarcity in which she had to live. She saw some village girls frequently visiting Calcutta and staying there for days together. She could see that whenever they returned to the village, they had nice ornaments and clothes on and brought home money for their families. Chandni was sharp enough to understand that they were not employed in some straight forward jobs. But she was tempted by the interesting stories that her friends told her about the city life. As it was, she was fed up with the life of scarcity and deprivations. She could not resist her friends' tempting invitations, and decided to abscond from home.

She first went to Calcutta along with her friends and started her career as sex worker at the age of 20 years. She worked in the red-light area of Calcutta for two years. She had heard that in Gujarat and Bombay one could easily earn much more than what one could in Calcutta. She, therefore, came to Surat with some of her colleagues and had been working here for five years now.

While talking to her, researcher realized that she had a big scar on her arm. Researcher tried to inquire whether she got it after coming to the sex industry.

Chandni Magar explained smilingly that she had a big tattoo mark there. In her home town, tattooing was used to adorn the beauty of a girl. According to her, in Gujarat - especially in the Surat sex market, customers did not like such tattoos and therefore she applied lime paste to burn her skin. (Researcher could understand that the tattoo either revealed her true name or identification mark which she destroyed) She did not work under a 'gharawali' but had rented a room independently by paying Rs. 500/- per month. She shared the room with another girl. On an average she received three to four customers a day. She only entertained customers having 'normal' sex demands.

According to her, she had never conceived, and had no child - nor did she want to have one in future. On asking about her aspirations in life, she said she never gave it a thought : that she took life as it came and believed living only in present. She had no complaints for this life and had no intention of leaving sex work. She was well settled in Surat and had decided to stay there for ever.

CASE - 4

Reema Das came to the place of interview along with other sex workers living with her. She was slightly plump, in her early thirties or late twenties and not very fair in complexion. One could easily make out that she was from Bengal as her face had typical Bengali features. She wore a bindi on her forehead but

unlike her other colleagues, wore a decent and mild, make-up. She wore a Punjabee suit which was neither new, nor very costly. In spite of her ordinary looks, there was something that made her look different - perhaps more intelligent and wiser than an average sex worker around. She was courteous in her behaviour, and wore a mature, greeting smile constantly on her face. It was as if she was trying to measure up and understand what was going on. While waiting for her turn to be interviewed, she tried to glance through the blank interview schedules lying near the researcher.

When the researcher invited her for interview, she very politely asked, whether researcher would mind explaining her why she was interviewing so many sex workers by saying, 'Didi, Aap Itna Sara Kya Likhti Rahati ho - Kyon Likhti ho?'. Researcher patiently explained her the purpose of the research. She seemed to be convinced and began talking to the researcher. Since she was glancing through the interview schedules earlier, researcher had a feeling that she could read and understand English. Reema, however said that she was an illiterate person. With an intention to cross check, while filling up her schedule researcher purposely spelt the village name wrongly and Reema soon pointed out researchers' mistake and corrected the name.

Researcher gave her a questioning smile, and Reema, realizing the trick, smilingly admitted that she did know reading Bengali and on her own had tried to

learn a bit of English too, but maintained that she had not received any formal education.

According to her, she was twenty nine years old, was unmarried and she hailed from West Bengal. She belonged to the 'gwala' i.e. (milk man) community. She knew Hindi and broken English over and above her mother tongue i.e. Bengali. She did not possess a ration card, nor was registered for voters' list or census. She did not remember much about her father except that he was a milk man and her mother died when she was young. She only had one younger sister whom she had brought up. The sister was now married and had one son aged eight years. The family did not possess any immovable property. She was very much attached to her sister and her nephew was an apple of her eye. At the age of nineteen years she had accepted sex work because her sister and mother were dependent on her earnings. She had decided that she would never allow her sister to enter flesh trade. She regularly visited her sister atleast once a year and was always invited on social and religious occasions at her sisters' place. The nephew called her 'Badi Ma' i.e. elder mother and respected and loved her much.

She had been in flesh trade for ten years and had started her career as sex worker from Bombay. She did not want to spoil her name in her own home town i.e. Calcutta and hence had shifted to Bombay. She arrived at Surat only six months back. Before accepting sex work, she tried to work as a labourer, but that

did not give her earnings to support three souls i.e. herself, her mother and her younger sister. Poverty, lack of employment and her determination to protect her younger sister from any kind of exploitation compelled her to be in sex work.

Though she worshipped God regularly and even visited temple occasionally, her faith in God and religion was shaken as 'God gave us life of miseries, and never came to our rescue in times of need !'. 'I pray and worship because I am taught to do so since early childhood'.

Barring common fever, cough and cold, she did not suffer from major health problems. She preferred to consult a private medical practitioner. She was aware about sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS and hence did not accept customers who refused to use condom. On an average she received three to four customers a day. Reema said that she would not mind serving a handicapped or very old customer. Her customers demanded 'normal' sex service. She did come across customers demanding other types of sex variations i.e. oral or anal sex but she refused to serve them. She frequently had to encounter rude or violent customers but could confidently manage them on her own. On the other hand because of her pleasant nature, some customers proposed her for marriage but Reema felt that these were momentary emotions and she did not trust any of them. Normally she charged Rs. 15 to 20/- per customer but some customers hired her

services for a day long trip to Bombay or near by places for which she charged Rs. 500 to 600/-.

She lived in one room which she shared with three other sex workers and operated independently i.e. not under any brothel keeper. Each of them paid Rs. 500/- as rent to the land lord. The room had electric connection but the sanitation facilities were common for all the residents of her building. She had refrained from other vices like smoking or drinks so that she could save from her income and send her savings to her sister for her nephews study.

She said since the nephew called her 'Badi Ma' i.e. elder mother, he was as good as her son and hence she never felt the need to have her own child.

She felt she was a misfit for this kind of work and suffered from terrible guilt feeling in the initial period. She constantly felt monetary crisis as she had to provide for her sisters' family too. She was arrested during the police raids and could manage her release by bribing the police.

On asking about her aspirations, Reema said she was waiting for her sister's son to grow up and support them; till that time, she would have to continue this work. After leaving this work; she would go back to her hometown near Calcutta and live with her sisters' family.

Reema genuinely hoped that her miseries would end some day and she would be able to spend her later life peacefully in her homeland, with her family.

CASE - 5

Anisa Shaikh entered the underground basement hall while researcher was about to finish interviewing her room-mate.

Anisa was a short, thin lady clad in a shiny but worn out Punjabi suit. She was accompanied by her two sons - both completely naked. The boys' faces were stained with dust and fluid was coming out of their running noses. While awaiting her turn for the interview, Anisa caught a glimpse of two used bottles of 'soft drinks' lying around. She suddenly got up from her place, took the two bottles, and before researcher could understand what she was up to, she poured the leftover contents of the bottles in the little boy's mouth one after the other! Researcher told her to feed her children if they were hungry or thirsty and also asked her if she (researcher) should buy a packet of biscuits for the children. Anisa replied 'Aap ke biscuit se kya hoga - haram jadon ko to chaubis ghante bhookh lagi rahati hai' meaning - 'what good your biscuits will do, the little brats are hungry for all twenty four hours of a day' !

That was the time in the day when the 'aanganwadi' was working. Researcher asked her why she did not send her elder son to the 'aanganwadi' where they are given snacks regularly. She flatly refused. When she was asked whether she did not send them to Balwadi because they did not have clothes, she

again said she was sick and tired of the children and that she was not interested in running after them, to dress them up and to escort them to the aanganwadi.

Giving her personal history, she said she was presently aged 32 years and was hailing from Akola, Maharashtra. She was married twice. She never attended school but being a Muslim, she had taken some religious lessons in Urdu in a 'Madresa', and she spoke Hindi at home. She was second among four siblings and her father had expired many years ago. Her mother was working as domestic servant and was illiterate. They had no land or property of their own.

She was married at the age of twenty two years and had one son out of that relationship. Her first husband was doing labour work in a hotel. Within one year of her marriage, she received frequent beatings from her husband. Once she was beaten up so badly that she decided to leave her husband's home forever. She knew her mothers' inability to support her and had finally on her own landed up in the Surat red-light area.

Anisa had a fair complexion and a fragile figure. She gave an impression as if she must have been fairly good looking while she was young. Researcher saw a long scar on her cheek. It looked as though she had a big cut on her cheek and also several stitch marks. She revealed that after she started working as a sex worker, she visited her parental home at least once a year but could not find

permanant shelter there. On the contrary, her mother and younger siblings were partly dependent on her income. While still in business, she delivered another son.

An autorickshaw driver was her regular customer. She got emotionally attached to him and when he proposed for a 'Nikah' i.e. marriage, she readily agreed. She went to stay with him. For some time he kept her nicely. After few months, he started inviting friends at home and insisted that Anisa should sexually entertain them. When she resisted, she was beaten up badly. Anisa soon realized that he was making money by using her. He had stopped working himself and was forcing Anisa to entertain more and more customers. Anisa decided to come back to her old brothel keeper. According to her, in brothel, at least she got 50% share of her income, and her gharawali took care of all her basic needs. Her husband earned through her and did not even give her a penny!

Few days after she returned to her brothel life, her so called second husband came there and insisted that he would like to talk to her. As soon as she came near him, he took out a razor and in a slash, tore her cheek in to two. She bled profusely. Her gharawali came to her rescue and she was saved from further injury. Her husband escaped, she was immediately taken to a hospital and because she received timely treatment, she was saved. Her 'gharawali' helped her to file a police case against her second husband. Since her beauty was ruined, she now received very less number of clients and hence her income also decreased.

She entertained 3 to 4 customers every day and charged Rs. 30 to 40 per customer. She had to give 50% of her income to the gharawali. Majority of her customers demanded for 'normal' i.e. vaginal sex but some even demanded other types of sex variations - e.g. anal sex. Anisa however, usually refused to give such service. In case of harassment by violent customers, she took help from police. Though she had no major health complaint, she frequently suffered from general weakness. After the birth of her second son, she had undergone 'family planning' operation.

Anisa's mental state was very poor. She had given up all the hopes for a better life. She attempted to come out of her immoral life by getting married to the second man but had failed miserably. She was shocked to see men's insensitive, cruel and selfish attitude and had taken a vow never to trust any man. She felt guilty for not having trusted her colleagues who had warned her when she announced her decision to leave flesh trade and to marry a person who ultimately ditched and ruined her. She said, 'every one here now uses my example to demonstrate what happens to a sex worker when she dreams of a re-starting her life as a good woman'. ----- I feel more safe here in this one room that I share with my brothel keeper, six colleagues and children. There is no hypocrisy, no coercion, no exploitation, no beatings.....

On asking whether she would like to take up any other job, she flatly refused. She was convinced that it was her bad fate that made her suffer like this.

At times, she said, she was worried about her children but she consciously tried to detach herself emotionally from them as they reminded her of the 'men' who 'gave' them to her. "If their fathers had no responsibility towards them, why should I alone bear their responsibility ----- but the 'woman' in me does not permit me to throw them away ---- so they live with me. She was ready to put them in a hostel. She poured her heart out without stealing words.

Anisa was a typical example a woman who suffered at every stage of her life - because she was poor, because she was young and beautiful, because she was sensitive.... because she was a '**she**'. Every time she tried to escape from her ill-fate, she received a worse blow. She had reached to a stage where she had lost the courage to question any one - even to her 'khuda' whom she still worshipped. Perhaps one thin ray of hope was still hidden in some corner of her broken heart which guided her to the 'Durgah' where she offered her prayers every week without fail !

Comments :

The case studies provide insight in to the factors which are responsible for driving women in to prostitution.

Meena's and Dipti's cases explain different tactics applied by brothel keepers to induct a fresh girl in to accepting sex work. Anisa's case very clearly depicts the plight of women who strive to leave sex work but poorly fail to do so.

Reema's case shows how women struggle to protect the interest of other family members at the cost of their own happiness.

Chandani, on the other hand was a live example of poor village girls lured in to prostitution by peers.

Dipti's case also explains how a child / minor sex worker is encouraged to continue in sex trade at the cost of her health.