

From Criminalisation to Marginalisation: Historical Injustices and Life Experiences of Women of Denotified Tribes engaged in Community-Based Prostitution

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Abstract

The issue of Intergenerational prostitution in India is an area that needs the attention of academicians and policymakers. Many ex-criminal tribes or Denotified Tribes (DNTs) engage in intergenerational prostitution that is community-based – most of the women from the community are coerced into this profession in the name of cultural traditions prevalent in their communities. Community-based prostitution can be considered a response to stigmatisation faced by the DNTs as a result of their ex-criminal status. Loss of traditional livelihood practices due to criminalisation associated with them, and contemporary changes in society, push them deep into destitution and marginalisation. Some of the DNTs adapt to these changes by changing professional skills in terms of the demands of the new society, while others take the path of community-based prostitution. These communities develop a subculture around the practice of community-based prostitution, which provides grounds for the perpetuation of this practice. The women from these communities face abuse in various forms and need to come out of the vicious cycle of intergenerational and community-based prostitution that engulfs their personal space and identities. This article is mainly based on the Perna of Delhi NCR, studied through empirical research, and triangulation approach.

Keywords: Criminal Tribes Act, Criminal tribes, DNTs, Habitual Offenders Act, Community-Based Prostitution

Introduction

During the colonial rule in India, the British government laid down the Criminal Tribes Act and created the category of ‘Criminal Tribes’ (CTs), under which selected nomadic tribes were branded as criminal. What happened to these tribes in the British colonial period has had severe implications for them in

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