

CHAPTER VI

WELFARE MISSIONS FOR PROSTITUTES

Benevolent efforts for the sake of Prostitutes :

‘Instead of trying to reform them (the sex workers), we must reform social attitudes which treat social victims as criminals.’ - Madhu Kishwar.¹

prostitution had to be raised on a pedestal not much lower than that of the respectable matron. It is relevant in this context to refer that the state even in the days of *Kautilya* could not remain indifferent towards prostitutes. We get reference to *Adhyaksha* (govt. official) for the welfare of this class of women. *Kautilya* mentioned about their rehabilitation in his valuable treatise on Hindu polity, ‘*Arthashastra*’, even he did not forget to mention the posts a retiring prostitute could be appointed to in a royal household. She could be engaged as a midwife or a nurse, a cook or even as a queen’s maid of honour.² She also adopted the profession of a weaver.

It must have been a long and tortuous process for women of this profession to congregate in a red light area, away from the village and later also from towns, where men could go and seek their company. Social ostracism on the one hand and professional solidarity of the guild type association on the other, ensured their security and prosperity.

Gautam Buddha founded the female organization namely ‘*Sangha*’. Women as *Gurakeshi*, *Amrapali*, *Avaymata* all of whom baring *Amrapali* came from the community of the prostitutes joined *Sangha*. In order to follow and help the progress of the society, the liberal religion of *Buddha* accepted the so-called outcasts where transformation of character also set examples for other.

Noti Bionodini was one of the beloved of *Sri Ramkrishna*. After the death of *Sri Ramkrishna*, one disciple complained *Swami Vivekananda* regarding the entrance of prostitutes in the temple of *Dakshineswar*. He appealed to ban their entry. But *Swamiji*

did not agree with him rather he said : 'I pray to God a lot of prostitutes come to visit Dakshineswar. And if the *bhadrolok* stop their visit for this reason, it would be done.'³

Michel Madhusudan Dutta first time introduced a female actress in Bengal Theatre. She was *Sukumari Dutta*, popularly known as *Golap Sundari* who came from the prohibited zone. Later *Jagattarini Devi*, *Elokeshi Devi*, *Shyma Sundori* all those women from red light area became famous actresses. Though it is astonishing that *Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar* did not support their access in the world of theatre.⁴

It may be said that the efforts for the rehabilitation is going on from the age of *Gautam Buddha* and *Swami Vivekananda* to till date. Let it be discussed in detail.

Fallen Women in Vaishnava Ankhras⁵ :

Vaishnava (devoted to the god *Vishnu*) *Ankhras* played an important role for the rehabilitation of prostitutes who left their business but could not get access in their family. The fallen women took a secured shelter in *Vaishnava Ankhras*. Padri Ward had written - the prostitutes of Kolkata obtained the funeral right to burn their bodies after death. And for having that right they adopted *vaishnavism*.⁶ They used to donate all their savings to their spiritual guide or *guru* before leaving for pilgrimage.⁷ A prostitute namely Maa gossain (*vaishnava* nun) from Simla in North Kolkata became famous. Her actual name was Madhumukhi Devi. In later, the *vaishnava* devotees propagated *harinam* (song of *Vaishnavism*) in red light areas.⁸

Role of Charitable Missionaries :

The problems of the prostitutes was felt deeply by the evangelists in Britain as well as by the *Brahmo bhadroloks* in Bengal. The Evangelical reformers started to think about the reclamation of prostitutes from their concern at the pre-Victorian era. In the year of 1839, the *Religious Tract Society* had issued five million tracts which directed at the rescue of 'fallen women'. A lot of rehabilitation centres for those distressed women established during 1850s. For example - some High Church sisterhoods started houses of refuge for prostitutes, and Evangelical Organizations founded the Rescue Society, the London Female Preventive and Reformatory Institute, and the Home of Hope. A series

of similar organizations followed throughout the century. From 1869 to 1883, the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts enforcing regular medical inspection of prostitutes for venereal disease was a major moral reform issue. Josephine Butler, the famous feminist led the campaign against the acts. The main thrust of the campaign was an attack on double standards of morality.⁹

The Role Played by *Brahmo Samaj* :

In Bengal prostitution was an accepted social institution. The *Brahmo Samaj* of Bengal, was highly inspired by the ethics of British Evangelicals. They imbibed the puritanical morality of the Evangelicals and take an interest in the reclamation of prostitutes. In 1863 Keshub Chandra Sen wrote to Frances Power Cobbe that “there is another department of female improvement to which our attention has been directed of late - how we may counteract the progress of prostitution and reclaim fallen women. I purpose to write to the Secretary of the London Female Preventive and Reformatory Institution by this mail, to give me information as to what amount of progress has been made in England in this matter.”¹⁰

Finally the issue was pursued. After few years, some sporadic attempts were made by individual *Brahmos* to control the problem of prostitution. But here is the twist, while the *Brahmos* did not always direct their efforts toward reclamation or rehabilitation of the prostitutes. For instance we should mention Krishna Kumar Mitter. When Krishna Kumar Mitter joined *Brahmo Samaj*, he tried to have the prostitutes banished from their quarter in his home town of Baghil, in Tangail district. He was very much concerned about the youth rather than those fallen women. He showed his interest to saving ‘ruined youths’ than ‘fallen women’, and he threatened the owners of the *bazars* (market) where the prostitutes lived that if their tenants were not turned out all the house would be destroyed. Some prostitutes also lived in Binnaphoir bazar, as tenants of *zamindar* Janhabi Chaudhirani. As it is said only a woman can realize the problem of other woman; she (the *zamindar*) did not agree to eradicate prostitution from there. She realized that there was nowhere else for those ladies to go and that banishment or eradication was not sensible solution to the problem. On the other hand, we can’t deny that, the presence of those ladies in that market was financially lucrative to her.¹¹

In this context Nabakanta Chatterjee should be mentioned. In 1870s Nabakanta Chatterjee and a group of young *Brahmos* made a few attempts to rescue girls from prostitution. Nabakanta rescued a *kulin* girl from Bikrampur from prostitution, but the lack of any other viable means of support after the death of her mother forced her to take up that profession later. At the time there were no refuge organizations in Bengal. Sibnath Sastri was once approached by a prostitute who told him her life story and begged him to take her child and give it a better life. As the child was still being breast fed, Sibnath advised her to wait for a few months, but she never contacted him again.

Not only the rehabilitation centres were established, but also the alternative ways for the livelihood of those prostitutes were introduced. In 1896 Sasibhusan Mallik founded the Dacca Girls' Rescue Home. A school was attached with the home. The girls were taught religion and sewing by *zenana* missionaries. Till 1897 only three prostitutes had been "rescued", but their numbers gradually increased. The home relied on public donations. Before the above mentioned home, a protestant home for prostitutes had been set up by an English woman. But it catered mainly to Europeans and Anglo-Indians.

One well-publicized case was that of *Laksmimani*, whose story is very much attached with North Bengal. *Laksmimani*, whose mother was a prostitute. Naturally she was going to take her daughter to a brothel. But fortunately she contacted some *Brahmo* friends. Those *Brahmo* members rescued her from that fate. They, did and won the legal battle that ensued. ***Laksmimani* was taken to the home of Sibnath Sastri until her marriage to a school teacher from Jalpaiguri** in 1877.¹² It was an amazing incident in the history of North Bengal which is cordially appreciable as well as inspiring.

A Hindu widow who committed suicide in 1875 wrote a note explaining that nothing was as miserable as the life of a widow. She planned her own death carefully. She send a boy out to buy one or two paise worth of opium each day until she had one rupee and five paise worth, which was enough to kill herself. The fate of many other widows, following a lapse in chastity and subsequent social ostracism, was to end up as prostitutes. *Brahmos* also tried to rescue 'respectable' widows from this fate, with

varying degrees of success (in Bengali book '*Jiboni O Bansabrittanta*' by Nalinikanta Chatterjee & Nabakanta Chatterjee, Kolkata, 1922).¹³

As most social reformers in nineteenth century Bengal shied away from coming to terms with the full social and economic implications of prostitution. It was not surprising that the *bhadramahila* (lady belongs to reputed family) were even less able to tackle it. Although *Brahmo* women often lent support to their husbands' rescue schemes, and looked after the girls they managed to save, there is little record of their active participation. Annapurna Chatterjee gave shelter to a few prostitutes, hoping to reform them, but the success of her efforts is not known. Nagendrabala Mallik helped publicize the work of her husband's rescue home among women, and sought donations from them.¹⁴ Kalyani Dasgupta from Jalpaiguri, who belonged to a *brhamo* family, helped the distressed fallen women. With the help of *Paschimbanga Ganatantrik Mahila Samity* (West Bengal Democratic Women Association), she dedicated herself to serve those women. In that mission she was fully supported by her husband.¹⁵

'*The Silchar*', May 31st, 1901 has the following - "In Bengal, prostitutes bring up minor girls for immoral purposes as a provision for their own support in their old age. In order to put a stop to this practice, government has made such offence punishable of law. The *Brahmo Samaj* of Dacca has rescued many such helpless minor girls. But that law not being in force here, the local prostitutes are having recourse to that practice. We hope the kind hearted Mr. Cotton will enforce the law here too."¹⁶

League of Nations :

The League of Nations also took up the question of traffic in women and girls as a serious problem. This spurred the reformers and government officials in India to take a look at the *devdasi* practice of adopting girl children. *Devdasis* responded by forming organizations to institute reform from within and protect their way of life.

Contribution of Vigilance Association¹⁷ :

It was an organization of Europe, which one founded by both European men and women. The records of the vigilance societies reflect the accounts of prostitution. Before

1920s Indians didn't join that organization. As Dr. Jerbanoo E. Mistri put it, finally Indian women who had remained 'silent and distant spectators' began to see that their 'self - interest, self - respect, and honour' were connected with the practice of prostitution. By the 1930s both the president of the National Vigilance Association were Indian and Indians dominated the provincial branches.¹⁸

Among the Vigilance Association's records are short sketches, letters, and translated statements about and from the women in rescue homes. These records must be used with caution for they were kept by people who denounced prostitution and represented women who had left this way of life. According to the records of the Vigilance Association the prostitutes all told more or less the similar stories. As we have already mentioned in Chapter IV, according the survey reports of *Sanlaap* (NGO) mainly the relatives played the role of agents in this business. Here the records of Vigilance society repeats the same story. The unmarried women reported they were seduced, abducted or kidnapped when they were away from their traditional guardians. Sometimes the young girl travelling or visiting relatives in distant places were vulnerable and gullible. Either they innocently followed a distant relative or uncle or family friend or fell in love with a casual acquaintance. Actually those innocent girls were trapped and when they got the realization, they were ruined by the men who abducted them and then finally sold them into brothels. Young girls and women, forced by modesty to seek medical personnel and institutions designed for women only, were deceived by procuresses disguised as women doctors or trapped when they entered brothels masquerading as hospitals for women. Many of the women, especially widows and orphans, reported they had nowhere to go and sought refuge in brothels.¹⁹

The Vigilance Association also stated the description of those women who were abducted and seduced. They needed shelter. Whose mothers, brothers, husbands and other relatives forced them into prostitution, they belong to the third group according to the view of Vigilance Society. Even it has been seen that, the livelihood of their entire family depends on the income of those unfortunate women. A fourth group was formed with those women who left abusive husbands and sought the protection of the brothel.

The Vigilance Association wanted to banish the brothels. But wherever this happened, prostitutes began soliciting on the streets. And to stop that, establishment of rescue home or rehabilitation shelters are the only way out. Women's organizations set up rescue homes to train prostitutes to earn their livelihood in some other alternative way. These rescue homes also tried to re-unite these women with their families and relatives. These homes tried their level best to return those women into the main stream of society.

But there was a question, the Regulationists or Segregationists, a group dominated by government officials and the police, worried about the 'disposal of the women' once the brothels were closed. They argued that prostitution could not be outlawed and even if it were, there would never be enough rescue homes for all these women. May be they seems to be more concerned about the young generation of the society. Regulationists wanted brothels and prostitutes contained in designated areas to facilitate 'administrative supervision, the maintenance of order, sanitation and medical supervision'. A number of influential educationalist and medical men supported and advocated this position, or it is better to say they often eclipsing abolitionist aims.²⁰

Ladies National Association :

The British feminist Josephine Butler was the leader of Ladies National Association. This organization protested against the Contagious Diseases Act. Butler and her organization demanded for the withdrawal of that Act. In 1883, they send a petition to British Government : "We, as Women, desire to protest in the strongest and most solemn manner possible against the wrong done to our sisters and fellow subjects in India."²¹

Social Reform Movements :

Nineteenth century Bengal witnessed the flow of social reform movements. Participation of women reformists along with the male reformists was noticeable. Women's organizations and philanthropic projects both were undertaken by women. There was a lack of engagement in social problems outside the realm of experience of the *bhadramahila* (woman from reputed family) Reforms took the lead in seeking to alter the fate of widows and *kulin* brides. Because the hardships of their lot were often evident within the extended families of the *bhadrolok* (gentleman) themselves. Most of

the preoccupation with social reform reflected a concern for the problems affecting their own community. Broader social problems among low caste women such as poverty, destitution, poor working conditions and prostitution received scant attention.²²

Role of the Contemporary Periodicals and News Papers :

Marriage expense was one of the reasons to adopting prostitution for some poor women. Till now the dowry system and all these absurd rituals are considered as one of the most important push factors in flesh trade. The movement for the reduction of marriage expenses emerged. It needed the encouragement and support from all the well-wishers of the country. Few reforms were more urgently needed in the contemporary state of the country. Enormous marriage expenses are the ruin of many families. It caused deep anxiety and unspeakable trouble to thousands of poor and middle class families. In that situation the most important move in this direction seems to have been made by Babu Baradaprasad Banerjee of Barasat, a member of the class of panditrathi Brahmins.²³ A correspondent writing in the columns of a contemporary says that above gentleman called “several meetings for the purpose of considering the question, to which Brahmins of this class were invited from various villages in Bengal. The last meeting was held at his residence a few days ago, and was largely attended. It was decided that the marriage expenses should, under no circumstances exceed Rs. 200. A general willingness to abide by this decision seems to prevail among these Brahmins, Babu Baradaprasad seems to have succeeded in bringing about a reform so essential for the well-being of society. If the influential members of other classes were to follow, and bring happiness and peace in its train. They have only to take the land, and the ranks will be soon filled, for what Hindu family is there whom this social question does not affect to some extent or other?”²⁴

Polygamy and *kulinism*²⁵, these two practices pushed a lot of ladies into flesh trade. Another article regarding those issues published in a contemporary news paper is providing here :

“Several Bengalees have petitioned the Lieut - Governor to put a stop to ‘the revolting abuses of the practice of polygamy’. They pray that Mr. Beadon will signalize the close

of his career by emancipating the females of Bengal from “the pains, cruelties and attendant crimes of the debasing custom of polygamy”. Mr. Beadon would have introduced a bill into the Bengal Council to prevent *kulin* polygamy, but Rajah Deo Narain Singh wished to introduce it into the Viceroy’s Council and Lord Elgin, advised by Mr. Harington, declined to sanction it. We trust Sir John Lawrence will be more true to his reputation.”²⁶

In an article on polygamy, the Education Gazette says that the people themselves will never be able to put a stop to it. Many cry out against it, but there is no little unity and the influence of public opinion is so slight that no action they can take will be found sufficient to put it down; and as to the interference of Govt. When they have been applied to by the majority of the people to put down a practice so pernicious, the charge of undue interference will not apply.²⁷

‘Hindu Intelligencer’ (16/08/1855) had published:

“Our readers are aware that our Junior Magistrate Baboo Kissorychand Mitter, sometime ago distributed among his friends certain printed papers in Bengalee, relating to the remarriage of *Hindu* widows, in which we perceived that he was the active and zealous Secretary of an association of young men, called the society for the promulgation of social reforms. We do not know whether the association is still in existence or not; but we find him now at the head of another body of denominated the Association of Friends, and presenting a petition from them to the Legislative Council praying for the enactment of a law prohibiting polygamy among the *koolin* Brahmins. The document, which we understand was forwarded to the Legislative Council, on Tuesday last, will be found reprinted in another place. We perfectly agree with Baboo Kissorychand Mitter and his friends that the practice of marriage more than one wife at a time, is a very great evil, and should not be tolerated for a moment. The days of *kulinism* are numbered, an extra ordinary and unexpected change has taken place in the opinions of the people of this country. Thirty years ago we saw several *koolin* Brahmins, who had married as many as fifty or sixty wives, but now we do not know of one who has more than two wives. The old custom prevails to a certain very limited extent to the eastern districts of Bengal, where the eyes of the people have not yet been

sufficiently opened to the evils of polygamy. But in the principal towns and districts surrounding them, the light of education has already effected what Baboo Kissorychand Mitter and his friends wish to accomplished by their petition. They are not probably aware of this, and would therefore, do well to make enquiries beyond the narrow circle of their personal friends. If they had done this, we are sure, the Junior Magistrate would never have joined in going upto the Legislative Council and asking them to put a stop to a practice which the growing intelligence of the community has already repudiated.”

Kaliprasanna Singha was determined to specify the red light areas in Kolkata and suburbs. He started a movement to fulfill his motive. The *Sambad Prabhakar* published his petition on 19th November, 1856.

The news papers and periodicals also focused on the incidence of trafficking of girl child for prostitution. For evidence one example is providing here :

A news ‘Traffic in Minor Girls’ had been published in the English news paper ‘The East’ (22nd June, 1901) which brings to light seven cases of minors girls being abducted for immoral purposes, of whom only two, aged 3 or 4 years, were eventually made over to the Dacca Rescue Home, the rest being returned to the prostitutes in whose possession they were found. The news paper proceeds to cite rulings of the Allahabad, Bombay and Calcutta High Courts, under which it has been held that professional prostitutes are by their very calling disqualified from exercising guardianship over minors, and remarks that if the local authorities cared they could easily arrest the progress of this shocking vice.’²⁸

There was a general acceptance of prostitution as a necessary evil and there were many of those women who fought for abolition of prostitution. They wanted to eradicate such an evil practice from the society. For example, we should mention Charulata Mukherjee and Romola Sinha in Bengal. They devoted their energies, their valuable time to rescue homes. Whatever reformers wanted to do abolish or contain prostitution or ameliorate the hardships of endangered women - they were determined to regard men as providers and women as dependents. Few of the women interested in this topic were capable of approaching prostitution as sex work and trying to determine what would be

the best course of action. Instead, they ‘rescued’ these women and provided them with an alternative shelter.²⁹

The first debatable issue regarding the primitive practice of prostitution was its eradication or continuation. The another debated aspect was the dress reform and wearing of shoes by prostitutes. Orthodox women never wore shoes. Apart from the practical consideration that in a hot climate wearing shoes and stockings inside the house was unnecessary, shoes were associated with immoral women.³⁰ Such as contradictions were remained in society for the welfare of prostitutes. In traditional Bengali society the *Bhadrolok* only had contact with women as relatives or prostitutes. These women must have been *hindus* rather than *Brahmas*, who strongly disapproved of the theater. The plays staged were often ribald satires or romantic epics considered unsuitable for women. The fact that most actresses were prostitutes or courtesans also offended the puritanical *Brahmo* sensitivities.³¹

Rajlaxmi Sen, the member of the *Bama Hitaisini Sabha*, expressed similar views. She noted that women dressing in the reformed style had to avoid not only ‘de-nationalization’, but also the danger of being mistaken for prostitutes, some of whom were chemises, jackets and shoes with their saris. Her idea was for a *bhadromahila* to be distinguished from them by wearing an additional *cadar* (shawl), or wrap, covering her from head to foot.³²

The reference of **Ashalata Devi, wife of Barada Bhusan Chakrobarty, the great mass leader of Dinajpur district of North Bengal** may be mentioned here. Ashalata devi’s one achievement was in respect of the prostitutes. It was conventional in those days that the prostitute used to walking bare foot. The **Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti** (1940-42) was able to put an end to this inhumane custom and induce them to wear shoes since then.³³

The committee of the *Arya Nari Samaj* agreed on a variety of social resolutions, such as that girls should not marry against their will although their guardians would guide their choice that only properly dressed ladies could go into society; that no fallen

woman be allowed to marry, unless she has been thoroughly reclaimed under proper care and discipline, and kept in trial for a sufficiently long period.³⁴

Contribution of Thakur Panchanan Barma for the Distressed Women in North Bengal :

Roy Saheb Panchanan Barma is popularly known as Thakur Panchanan Barma. The legend of Cooch Behar district was a believer of a complete protection and respect of woman. He formed *Nari Raksha Sebak Dal* also popularly known as *Sebak Dal*. He engaged his *Sebak Dal* in resuming the honour of women. Even he planned rehabilitation of victims. In order to prevent the unfortunate incidences against the modesty of the women, he arranged to provide arms training to the women for their self-defense. The distressed women whom he arranged to rescue were Smt. Barada Sundari Vaishnabi of Palasbari areas of Gaibanda district, the widow namely Smt. Radha Majee of Kumar Para village of Nageswari areas in Rangpur district, Smt. Ghrita Kumari of Kataduar village in Rangpur district and Smt. Kanduri Barman etc.³⁵

In respect of Cooch Behar we should not forget the individual efforts of the royal people of Koch dynasty as we have already discussed in Chapter III. The Koch king Maharaj Shibendra Narayan, Maharaj Narendra Narayan and Maharaj Nripendra Narayan tried their level best to ban the human selling at Cooch Behar Bhowaneeganj Market. Finally Maharaj Nripendra Narayan stopped that inhuman practice with the help of Commissioner Cornel Haughton in 1864.

Role of the Communist Party :

As the missionary charities and the other organizations had started to think for the welfare of the prostitutes, similarly one of the most important political party of contemporary India namely Communist party vividly protested against the women oppression by *zamindars* and *jotdars*. Adrienne Cooper had described the incident of Faridpur where Krishna Malu, the daughter of poor farmer, refused to satisfy the sexual desire of jotdar. The *jotdar* declared their family as a outcast. As a result the local communist workers had strongly protested against this incident and started movement.³⁶

Krishaksabha was one of the important offspring of communist party. *Krishaksabha* also protested against the women oppression by the local landlords.

Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti :

Without referring the contribution of *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti*, the discussion can't be completed. *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* was politically supported by Communist Party. On 13th January, 1944, *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* convoked a meeting. All women associations and relief organizations were invited at that meeting. The meeting held at Kolkata. Representatives from nineteen organizations like *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti*, *Nikhil Bharat Mahila Sammelon*, *Saroj Nalini Sangha*, *Bangiya Mahila Khadya Committee*, *Bengal Relief Committee*, *Peoples Relief Committee*, *Marowari Relief Society* etc. attended the conference. The president of Bengal Relief Committee, Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukherjee presided the conference.³⁷ Bengal's famine affected the women mostly, and that was unanimously accepted in that conference. During the fire-pit of wartime people suffering from starvation, poverty, diseases. Poor parents forced to sell their daughters. A particular group of greedy people took the advantage and supplied the poor women into brothels. In several places from Chandpur, Bhola, Tangile, Narayanganj, Rangpur, 24 Parganas flesh trade was going on in full-fledged. The main objective of *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* was to rehabilitate the distressed women with proper training of cottage industry.

At the end of that conference it was decided that, first of all they should protect the women from destruction. And for that purpose the women should be provided proper livelihood. But the problem was that government didn't take the issue seriously. Government should take initiate step to stop prostitution and punish those peoples who provoking poor girls for adopting prostitution.

Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti was demanding to implement the above mentioned measures by government. They also assured for any kind of assistance from non govt. organizations. The *Samiti* put these demands to govt. : (1) The orphans and guardian-less girls must be provided shelter, education, craft training (2) set up the village co-operative society for women, (3) stop the women flesh trade etc.³⁸

A committee was formed into Bengal Legislative Committee to sort out the problem. Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukherjee, Gananjon Niyogi, Mr. J. K Biswas, Probhudoyal Himmatsinka, Mr. Sarogi, Hemtola Mitra, Sita Chowdhury, Kamola Chatterjee took the membership of that committee.³⁹

From March 15th to April 15th 1944, 2nd District Conference (*Zela Sammelon*) of *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* held in twenty six districts viz. Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Pabna, Rajsahi, Nadia, Chattagram, Noyakhali, Dhaka, Maymonsingh, Bankura, Burdwan, Birbhum etc.

In 1944 (4th-5th May), *Bangiya Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* organized their second annual conference at Aswini Kumar auditorium in Barishal. Total ninety four elected representatives from twenty five districts of Bengal and a few audience attended the meeting. There was 331 primary committee of *Bangiya Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* in twenty eight districts of Bengal. Total number of members was 43,000. The general secretary of *Nikhil Bharat Mahila Samiti*, Kulsum Sayani, Muslim League leader Mrs. Momin, renowned litterateur Pravabati Devi Saraswati, Indira Devi Chowdhurani wished the success of the conference.⁴⁰ The president of reception committee was Snehalata Das, the leader of *Brahma Samaj*. On behalf of the secretary, the report was presented by Kamala Mukherjee in the conference. The main proposals taken in the conference were: 1) agitation in favour of the proposed bill in legislative assembly to eradicate prostitution and 2) rehabilitation the shelter-less destitute women.

On 3rd June, 1944, the manifesto on behalf of *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* was propagated. The words of the manifesto were : 'having lost everything the women from different families forced to sacrifice their chastity. It is the first job to protect their honour and resettle them. That is why it appeals to Congress League, *Hindu Mahasavapanthi*, Hindu-Muslim all communities to join the movement. Specially the educated ladies should play the leading role.....'.⁴¹

From 10th June to 17th June, 1944, *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* celebrated the festival of '*Samaj jiboner Punorgothoner Saptah*' (Week for reconstruction of Social Life) in all over Bengal. Throughout the week, the *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* was applying help

from the government for the rehabilitation of distressed, poor women. They called all the women of Bengal to join in this mission.

Three days exhibition of women made handicraft products was arranged at the Corporation's school room of Wellington in Kolkata from 17th September to 19th September, 1944. It was inaugurated by Samsunnahar Mamud. Professor Amiya Chakraborty had presided the cultural programme on second day. The last day Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy presided the conference and he became overwhelmed having seen the festive look of the exhibition.

Rescue centres were opened in Noyakhali and Rajsahi, handicraft institution was opened in Chattagram by *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti*. '*Nivas Nari Kalyan Bhawan*' was opened in Barishal by *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti*. In those institutions weaving, making bamboo-craft was going on. Almost one hundred handicraft centres opened in Kolkata and the others different districts of Bengal.

In the mean time Srinur Mahammad proposed Immoral Traffic Bill in legislative assembly to ban prostitution. During the time of war, famine and epidemic obligation of social life gradually deteriorated. Prostitution appeared as a curse. When the Bill came into legislative assembly, *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti* and *Nikhil Bharat Mahila Sammelon* collected mass signature in favour of the Bill.

Nari Seba Sangha :

In April, 1944, a permanent organization namely *Nari Seba Sangha* was formed with the representatives from different organizations like *Bangiya Pradeshik Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti*, others women organizations and relief committee. The rescued women permanently settled down in the newly formed rehabilitation centres or homes. *Nari Seba Sangha*, was supported by others eighteen organizations viz. *Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti*, Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), Bengal Women Jukto Committee, Kolkata Relief Committee, Servants of India Society, *Hindu Mahasabha*, Peoples Relief Committee, Hindu Mission, Calcutta Vigilance Association, Bengal Presidency Council of Women, *Maharastra Bhogini Samaj*, Friends Ambulance Unit, All Bengal Food and Famine Relief Committee, Ramkrishna Mission, *Nari Siksha Samiti* etc.

Sarojini Naidu, Lady Pratima Mitra, Lady Abola Basu were the patrons of *Nari Seba Sangha*. Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukherjee was the president, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was the vice-president, Sita Chowdhury and Khitish Prasad Chatterjee were the secretary of *Nari Seba Sangha*.⁴² Many others renowned and influential personalities joined it. This organization took loan of Rs. 400000 to conduct fifty rehabilitation centres, craft centres for women in the different distressed areas of Bengal. The handbill signed by president Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukherjee, secretary Sita Chowdhury and Khitish Prasad Chatterjee distributed in all over Bengal. In this petition they appealed : '*Nari Seba Sangha* formed the central committee with several others organizations to rescue distressed women and children and to rehabilitate them. In the mean time two rehabilitation centres and two craft centres had been opened. Many more should be opened. Otherwise national disaster may come. All the sensible peoples are requested to come forward to help the distressed women and children.'⁴³

In all districts of Bengal such as - Kolkata, Hawra, Hoogli, 24 Parganas, Khulna, Bogura, Faridpur, Dhaka, Bankura, Noyakhali, Chattagram, Maymonsingh, Rajsahi *Nari Seva Sangha* propagated their movement.

The objectives of *Nari Seba Sangha* were : (1) rescue the prostitutes and distressed women, (2) rescue the children, (3) provide them effective education, (4) prepare them as an important part for society, (5) protect them from any kind of disease, mishap and trouble.

During four days from 27th December to 30th December, 1944, an exhibition of handicraft organized by *Nari Seva Sangha* at Presidency College in Kolkata. The inauguration speech was given by Sarojini Naidu. Seminar held on rehabilitation of distressed women. Smt. Naidu appreciated the initiative taken by *Nari Seva Sangha* and as well as the exhibition. She said : 'Having seen the exhibition we have gained rebirth. I hope all the political parties will come forward unitedly in any trouble in future.'⁴⁴

Handicrafts from twenty five different districts had been shown in the exhibition. It reflected the struggle of distressed women for establishing in life. The cotton sarees

made by the women weaver of Hazong, wollen dresses from Darjeeling, appreciated by all in the exhibition.

Here it is mentionable that at the post independent period *Nari Seva Sangha* didn't remain an organized unit. Government took the responsibility to supervise the rehabilitation and handicraft centres. It was a great success for them. For a long time the organization was in Amir Ali Avenue, Kolkata. After few days, it was shifted at its own building in Jodhpur Park, Kolkata. From 1948, the renowned painter and revolutionist, Smt. Indusudha Ghosh held the post of superintendent of the residential home of *Nari Seva Sangha*.

The period of Nationalist Movement :

At the period of India's National Movement, **Mahatma Gandhi's** appeal was reaching down also to the marginalized women, even the prostitutes and *Devdasis* or temple women.⁴⁵ The marginalized women responded positively towards the approach. It proved that nationalism united all the peoples whatever the categories they belonged to and it also indicates the changing attitude of the people to the women engaged in sex trade.

Prostitution was the first women issue which proposed in Indian National Congress. They wanted to ban the British law which was introduced for the reformation of prostitutes.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the presence of Gaharjan couldn't get support in Congress. Finally she had to leave the conference of Congress.⁴⁷

Reforms in Post - Independence Period :

The Provisions for Rehabilitation is precisely narrated by Jean D' Cunha in the journal namely '*Economic and Political Weekly*.'⁴⁸ An important portion of that article is relevant to mention here :

"The Indian law is an example of the combination of penal sanctions against and efforts to rehabilitate prostitutes. The rehabilitation of girls or women rescued or arrested under the SITA, 1956 or now ITPA(A), 1986, is the responsibility of protective homes on corrective institutions set up under the act. Minor girls rescued or picked up under Section 40 of the Bombay Children Act (for safe custody and shelter, as they are

destitute and have no fixed abode) and under Section 78 of the same act (for being exposed to moral danger or being in prostitution) and minor girls and women rescued and produced in court under various sections of the Indian Penal Code relating to rape, kidnapping and abduction for illicit sexual intercourse, wrongful confinement or procurement for prostitution and the like are sent to rescue and rehabilitative houses for females, which are different from those set up under SITA.

The previous study conducted by the author Jean D' Cunha of one such home *Asha Sadan*, showed that the corrective and reformatory orientation in these homes is partly the product of dominant social attitudes towards and penal sanctions against prostitutes in the Indian law, reinforcing an image and status as criminals, delinquents, offenders or fallen women, in need of reformation. This was evident from the following facts :

- (a) Memos from the police and the Metropolitan Magistrate of the juvenile court to the superintendent referred to the girls as 'girl juveniles'.
- (b) Counselling by the then physiologist urged the girls to give up prostitution, because it was an immoral profession.
- (c) Raking up the girls' past and abusing them as prostitutes in the event of quarrels between the inmates themselves or between the latter the resident maintenance staff was a common phenomenon.
- (d) Beating and physical punishment were also common. Punishments like salt-free food and barring the girl from watching T.V. were also resorted to, by the home authorities. 'Hardened girls' were isolated in a special room, without bulbs, fans and long pieces of cloth to avoid the occurrence of suicide.

This orientation towards rehabilitation does little reintegrate women in prostitution. In part this accounts for women attempting to escape or succeeding in doing so from these houses.

Criminal sanctions against prostitutes and their artificial isolation by the legal and moral system thus not only reflect the widely held assumption that prostitution emerges from the contradictions of the moral system alone, they also fail to distinguish between prostitution as a social institution and the individual woman in prostitution. The

economic base of the institution of prostitution and its interaction with the rest of the economy thereby remains concealed. Also concealed are the individual and collective vested interests grounded in the economic system underlying prostitution.

These assumptions also mask various aspects of social transformation that impact women as a group and result in charges in the institutional manifestations of prostitution. The failure to recognize the hierarchical structure and organized nature of the sex industry conceals the heterogeneity within the prostitute population itself differentiated in their self-perceptions, needs and demands. The above mentioned assumptions of prostitution laws inevitably result in placing the onus of social blight and invisibility on the individual woman in prostitution which is a cruel irony. She has to resolve the contradiction between social necessity and social unacceptability.

It is necessary to place the institution of prostitution within the context of wider social processes to understand the subtle interconnections between prostitution and the economy and polity, to understand how existing and changing patterns of production processes and relations can lead to conversion of female sexuality into economic assets for individuals and collectives. The issues that need to be addressed are not why so many women deviate from prescribed norms of sexual conduct, but why and in what way female sexuality is valorized and how values are extracted from it, as well as who benefits from this extraction. Questions such as these would point to the larger socio-economic-political system and vested interests within prostitution, as the originators of the institution, not the individual women in prostitution.

Criminalizing women in prostitution not only reinforces a prostitutes sub-culture as moral outcast, it forces many a woman to operate more discreetly and clandestinely. The use of bogus names and addresses is often used to ensure this. One can only speculate on the effect of constant shifting between real and work designated identities or between restricted and open activity on those who remain in the profession for long. The value extracted from women in prostitution, facilitated partly by a process of making it invisible through moral and criminal sanctions render the prostitute dependent on commercial enterprises and vested interests, who appropriate the gains from the trade of

sex and women bodies. The invisibility of the woman's oppression and exploitation behind closed doors is thus ensured.

The narrow moralistic concerns and criminal sanctions embodied in existing prostitution laws, over prostitutes, the penal measures for violations of these and the lack of regulation of brothel management under the system of state legalized prostitution are being challenged by those who are advocating the decriminalization of prostitution.”

In this context the following report titled ‘Bengal Plans Residential Facility for Former Sex Workers’ in News Track India, the informative news portal, on 23rd December, 2013, is mentionable⁴⁹:

“Kolkata, December 23 (IANS) : Former sex workers, in urgent need of health care can breathe a sign of relief. The West Bengal Govt. plans to provide a residential facility for ailing sex workers complete with medical care.

On the anvil is another housing establishment that will cater to minor children of working members of the community.

‘There will be two separate establishments. One will accommodate ailing former sex workers while the other will house minor children of present sex workers.’ Sashi Panja, Parliamentary Secretary, Women and Social Welfare Department, told IANS.

Initially, each will house one hundred or so inmates.

‘For the retired sex workers, the focus would be on health and for the children, education would be priority. Those sex workers who wish to take away their children from their environment will get a chance through this initiative’, said Panja.

For the initiative ... a brainchild of West Bengal Chief Minister Smt. Mamta Banerjee, a few residential spaces have been scouted in the south of the city.

Welcoming the decision, Bharati Dey, secretary of *Durbar Mahila Samanway Committee* (a sex workers collective) said, they haven't discussed anything with the state govt. yet but the only concern is it should not stigmatize the inhabitants as being a ‘only sex workers’ residential building.”

One think should be noticeable from the above statement (of honourable Chief Minister) is that, no step had been taken for the sake of prostitutes who belong to North Bengal. There is a govt. remand home for adult women at Liluah in Howra district. Establishment of govt. remand homes and rehabilitation centres are very essential for this part of Bengal.

In the late fifties the 1st municipal election held in Jalpaiguri. The *Mahila Samiti* had visited the red light area situated at Dinbazar for election propaganda. They motivated the sex workers to use their voting right. *Mahila Samiti* campaigned to spread political consciousness among those women. Most probably in 1964 - 65, Jalpaiguri police rescued a trafficked girl aged nineteen to twenty years old and informed *Mahila Samiti*. After a long efforts of **Sachi Sarkar and Kalyani Dasgupta** the victim girl was sent to Liluya Home in Howra. In a conversation between the present writer and Kalyani Dasgupta, Smt. Dasgupta had memorized the girl came in a very severe condition. The brokers came repeatedly to them and pretending themselves as the relative of the girl.

The Ex - M.L.A. of Jalpaiguri, Dr. Anupam Sen and his elder brother Lt. Dhiraj Mohon Sen visited the medical camp in the red light area of Jalpaiguri regularly.⁵⁰ Those camps were organized to detect the venereal disease. The people who were detected as syphilis patient sent to Jalpaiguri district hospital. Dr. Sen had said to the present writer that, the CMOH and BMOH of Jalpaiguri District Hospital sent doctors to the centre during the period from 1960 to 1980. The members from the centre used to visit the nearest truck stands for the medical check-up of truck drivers. Dr. Sen had stated syphilis spread in Jalpaiguri but it couldn't be called an epidemic.

During the survey of some red light areas in north Bengal the author come to know that now a days the councillors of respected areas helped the sex workers to issue their ration cards and old age pension cards.

Reports from News papers :

The health centre of **Matigara (in Siliguri) Jeshu Ashram** (a missionary health centre) providing free treatment to the sex workers of adjacent area. It was reported that within a week two sex workers suffering from AIDS had been died.⁵¹ Both of them

lived in Siliguri. Another two sex workers were under treatment when the information collected by the reporter.

On 29th July, 2007, a meeting was held at the red light area in Khalpara Samsiya Madrasa to ban the business of prostitution by the girls under eighteen. Siliguri Police had taken the initiative for the meeting. Indra Chakraborty (The Deputy Police Super of Siliguri), DMSC, Nandeswar Prasad (Councillor of that ward), Sanjoy Tibrewal (representative from business association), Samir Bhattacharjee (O. C of Khalpara Police Fari), Tanushree Biswas (from women police branch) attended the meeting. A special committee was also formed with Tanushree Biswas, Pravat Chakraborty (I. C of Siliguri), Samir Bhattacharjee, Nandeswar Prasad and two other members from DMSC.⁵² The formation of Special Police Force to resist women trafficking was an issue of discussion.

‘GOAL INDIA’ the international voluntary organization has organized an workshop with collaboration of Jalpaiguri District Administration on October, 2007. Narogopal Hira (the Additional District Magistrate), Debal Kumar Ghosh (Sub-divisional Officer of Malbazar), Atanu Roy (Sub-divisional Officer of Jalpaiguri) Tapas Das (Additional Police Super), Pratima Bagchi (Chairperson of Child Welfare Committee) were present at that workshop.⁵³ In this workshop they invited several NGOs and ICDS to join them in their mission to protect the women and children.

Nari Kalyan Samiti in Islampur Sub-division has taken an initiative to start pension facility for sex workers until their death. Having seen the miserable condition of sex workers in Islampur and Panjipara (North Dinajpur), Islampur police and the other organizations from North Dinajpur had taken the decision to make a fund. They organized a cultural function to make the fund. Film actors from Bengali film industry and some celebrity singers came to attend the function. Jamila Khatun, Sayerabanu, Domina Khatun from Champabag, (red light area in Islampur) and Khoyitunnesa, Omida from the red light area of Panjipara (in North Dinajpur) - all those old ladies received Rs. 500 individually. The secretary of *Nari Kalyan Samiti* and I. C of Islampur Police Station, Mr. Udayshankar Majumder assured to carry on their efforts as well as try to provide education to the children of sex workers.⁵⁴

United Nations has already taken an important role to combating against women trafficking from this part of the country. In this purpose **United Office on Drugs and Crime (UDOC)**, a branch of United Nations, financially helps police. And not only that it providing car, mobile, computer and other accessories which are essential to rescue trafficked girls.⁵⁵

Tea garden areas in North Bengal becoming the birth place of AIDS. For severe poverty, the poor women are forced to adopting prostitution. As a result the number of HIV patients are being increased. Onbumni Ramadas, the former Health Minister, Govt. of India himself visited those areas under Darjeeling district. But the condition is not changed yet. Mr. Krishprasad Malla, the member of Darjeeling red-cross society, opined, the AIDS centre was not well equipped. They had to wait three years for a machine. And after that patients came to visit the centre.⁵⁶

Sarbani Bhattacharya, the member of State Women Commission, West Bengal Government, ordered the *Gram Panchayet* to remain alert for resist women trafficking. Even the separate cell within *panchayet* might be formed, said Smt. Bhattacharjee.⁵⁷

Another organization namely '**Sara Bharat Mahila Sanskritik Sangathan**' (**All India Women Cultural Association**), the **Branch of North Dinajpur District** trying to combating against women trafficking for prostitution. The president of this organization, Smt. Madhabilata Paul playing a dynamic role in this mission.⁵⁸ She not only rescued a lot of trafficked girls but also trying to return them into the main stream of society.

The Responsibility of the Relief Committee :

The relief camps were not save for the refugee women, as it is depicted by Debesh Roy in his novel '*Tistaparer Brittanta*' (in Bengali). The international relief community has been slow address the problem of rape in refugee camps. Guidelines have been developed to improve protection, but while these documents reflect enhanced awareness of the urgent plight of refugee women, they have not been consistently implemented by **UNHCR** - the lead U. N agency for refugee relief and protection, has promulgated two sets of guidelines to deal with sexual assault of refugee women. In July 1991, UNHCR promulgated the '*Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women*' to assist the staff of

UNHCR to identify and respond to the issues, problems and risks facing refugee women.⁵⁹ In March 1995, UNHCR issued the Sexual Violence Guidelines described above to improve or initiate services to address the special needs and concerns of refugees who have been subjected to sexual violence.

The '**Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women**' prescribe measures that 'can' or 'may' be taken to counter physical and sexual attacks and abuse of women during flight and in their countries of asylum.⁶⁰ They call for, among other things : (1) changing the physical design and location of refugee camps to provide greater physical security; (2) using security patrols; (3) reducing the use of closed facilities or detention centers; (4) training staff regarding the particular problems faced by refugee women and employing female staff to work with women refugees to identify their concerns; (5) establishing mechanisms for law enforcement within the refugee camps; (6) educating refugee women about their rights; (7) giving priority to assessing the protection needs of unaccompanied refugee women and (8) ensuring women's direct access to food and other services, including whatever registration process is used to determine eligibility for assistance.

International Refugee Law protects the right of those persons who have fled a country to seek asylum in another if they have a well-founded fear of persecution should they be returned to the country they have fled.⁶¹ Same as governments and the UNHCR have a responsibility to ensure the safety of refugees. This obligation extends to the protection of refugee women from gender-based abuse.

Responsibilities played by Police & Administration :

Police is tricky in the case of prostitution. It has been seen that police do support the existence of sex trade and their role mainly as eliminating excessive exploitation such as trafficking of minors. They are also concerned to keep the sex trade confined within the red light areas. The police only implement the laws usually when the women are too visible or when there are complaints from the public or they are seen to soliciting in public place. The extent of police co-operation with brothel keepers and traffickers and their harassment of sex workers is a reflection of the double standards of morality

prevailing in the implementation of the law.⁶² Agents of the law are ordinary people, mostly men who have been brought up in this society that creates and tacitly accepts sex work, while being unable to accept the sex workers themselves. It is true that the law itself is unable to resolve these contradictions, nor can the police officers, police chiefs or court functionaries.⁶³

It can't be denied that certain changes be made in the Act to help eradicate this social evil. It is essential to prevent those women who caught under this Act. Actually they return to the profession for the reason of adequate rehabilitation arrangements for them. There is no doubt that the persons who pay for their bail are invariably the procurers or brothel keepers. Instead of sending the women and girls to jail, it is necessary to send them to protective homes or rehabilitation centres. Those who are detained under the Act require long-term treatment for rehabilitation. In the rehabilitation centres special counselling service by professionalist should be provided to those women. The children of prostitutes should be prevented from entering the profession especially the girls. They should be segregated from their mother and institutionalize but not social homes which would put a social stigma on them. Women and girls, who do not wish to continue in this profession, but are compelled to so for poverty or financial crisis should be rescued from that atmosphere. They should be engaged in remunerative work. There is, therefore, greater need for understanding the cause underlying prostitution and to make efforts to prevent more women from entering this profession as well as to rehabilitate those who are already victims of the trade.⁶⁴

Rehabilitation is the primary need for those women. Their emotional and psychological problems are to be tackled with understanding, much better with counselling. The most significant aspect is preventive. This applies particularly to women and girls in moral danger. An important segment of this groups are women who are victims of family discord. Counselling services could help them and prevent their taking recourse to this profession. Counselling centres should also have homes for such women. It will be good if govt. take the initiative for the counselling in free of cost. Throughout the surveys of different red light areas, it has been seen that the NGOs are conducting the counselling without receiving any co-operation from govt.

The following recommendations are made by Jean D' Cunha⁶⁵ -

“Legal Reform : Review of dominant prostitution laws and other laws related to prostitution to identify the loopholes through which prostitutes are victimized and delete all sections in these laws that penalize and discriminate against prostitutes. Strengthen, tighten up and enforce criminal sanctions against prostitution rackets, especially procuring networks trafficking in young women and girls for prostitution. Penal sanctions against clients for acts that violate prostitution. Penal provisions against corrupt enforcement authorities.

Citizen’s Committee : Enhancing efficacy in implementation by the constitution of statutorily and mandatorily recognized citizens committees, area wise to observe implementation of prostitution laws. Provide legal education to implementing authorities on the provisions of prostitution laws and other related local laws. Organize awareness workshops for them, analyzing the structural base of prostitution and questioning prevailing sexist attitudes towards prostitutes and prostitution.

Rehabilitation : Change the corrective and reformatory orientation towards rehabilitation to perceiving prostitutes as victims, active survivors and human beings with self-respect and dignity. Pro-government provision of adequate enforcement facilities for integrations of criminals in rehabilitation centres. Provision of halfway houses and subsidized hostels for women and their children needed especially when they leave the rehabilitation centre.

Socio-economic Measures : While the task of providing adequate support structures to women in prostitution and those wanting to opt out is an urgent need, it is equally important to initiate measures that prevent women being forced to prostitute. The following are some - wide spread public education, on the structural roots of prostitution, the subtle and blatant manners in which the public sustains the institution, public awareness on the moral and legal isolation of prostitution and their concealed exploitation in prostitution, emphases on values of gender equality and justice. Increase educational and job opportunities for women and eliminate gender based discriminatory work conditions. Review and change discriminatory provisions in other laws against women that may either predispose them to prostitution or reinforce their image as sex objects,

e.g., marriage and divorce laws, custody, maintenance, employment laws on the use of women's images in the media. Review existing and planned economic policies that directly predispose women to prostitution.”

The Department of Social Welfare set up an Expert Committee in 1968 to consider various proposals and suggestions including the enlargement the scope of the Act (SITA) with a view to make it more comprehensive, various amendments are under consideration.

NGOs Working for Prostitutes and Trafficked Women in North Bengal :

The New Encyclopaedia Britannica giving the introduction of NGOs or Non-Governmental Organizations as follows⁶⁶:

“as global sub-group comprises ‘Compositions’ who nurture an intellectual appreciation for local cultures. As pointed out by Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, this group advocates a view of global culture based not on the ‘replication of uniformity’ but on the ‘organization of diversity’. Often promoting this view are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that led efforts to preserve cultural diversity in the developing world. By the turn of the 21st century, institutions such as cultural survival were operating on a world scale, drawing attention to indigenous groups who are encouraged to see themselves as ‘first peoples’ - a new global designation emphasizing common experiences of exploitation among indigenous inhabitants of all lands. By sharpening such identities, these NGOs have globalized the movement to preserve indigenous world cultures. Although specialized international bureaucracies manage the operations of most IGOs (International Governmental Organizations), ultimate authority rests with member states. IGOs often work closely with other organizations, including NGOs, which serve many of the same functions as their IGO counterparts and are particularly useful for mobilizing public support and providing information and expertise. Most NGOs are based in developed states with pluralist political systems, and though only a small function have an international scope, they have played a significant role in international relations.”

The institution of prostitution has existed in one form or other in all class-based patriarchal society. In ancient period, female prostitution in several societies was closely

linked to religious practices. By contrast prostitution in modern time is taking a new form and tends to be associated with promiscuity, crime and social condemnation. A new development naturally is noticeable in the effort of the government, non-government organizations and the prostitutes themselves to minimize the suffering and exploitation of these women by way of legal as well as social welfare measures.

Many people assume that rehabilitation is the only possible intervention, and this is, in a sense, a hangover from the past when policies were either health related or geared towards bringing women out of prostitution. It is quite difficult to rehabilitate the sex workers for many reasons. Most of the employment schemes which are offered to sex workers are not financially attractive or lucrative to former prostitutes. That is why they prefer their former job. But an opposite scenario is also seen in red light areas. Many sex workers want to adopt new jobs, specially the senior and elderly women. Since prostitution is intrinsically a part of society and it is not possible to eradicate this profession, it simply with a 'welfarist' approach.⁶⁷ The situation in red light areas is not static by any means. It is changing and particularly this change is possible for NGOs and government interventions as well as by the sex workers themselves. Their good will and initiative resulting a favourable climate for sex workers.

The voluntary bodies like the NGOs have played and will play important role in raising social awareness regarding the issue of welfare for prostitutes. The government provides a small number of welfare and health interventions, generally being a far less significant presence in the areas than NGOs other than through the STD/HIV Intervention Programme. While NGOs aspires to a more empowerment-oriented approach, using the language of women's rights and often advocating broader social, economic and political changes, on the ground they are generally providing welfare programmes that substitute in the absence of the government and replicate rather than challenge many weakness of many mainstream approaches of service provision. NGOs are constrained by their funding and have to develop on paper a strategy that appeals to donor agencies and to current trends such as community participation and challenging gender issues. As can be appreciated, it is far easier to learn the language of current issues in development than to implement them. Many NGOs in practice lack the skills, experience and access to

training that would allow them to fulfill their promised agendas. At the same time the 'conference culture' ensures that visibility is guaranteed to the articulate and charismatic few who rarely admit to the difficulties faced by their organizations in implementation.⁶⁸

The sex trade is changing and the definition of women in sex work broadening. In North Bengal, NGOs working on HIV prevention say the newly introduced female condom is helping women protect themselves.

The 'hidden' sex worker is a growing phenomenon across the country. This view is widely accepted by several NGOs working in North Bengal. Economic distress and domestic violence are pushing women over the edge. Abuse and exploitation in various forms leaves them no option but to turn sex work. Some are married women, who must repay family debts; others have been deserted by husbands, disowned by families they were married into as teenagers. Still others are single women who must provide for a family of eight. Most are women in their twenties who say working as cooks and maids does not get them the money they need to repay debts, run the family, secure children's future and, in many cases, provide for husband's daily dose of alcohol. In most cases, families are unaware of the work they do, or at least pretend to be. Most 'hidden' sex workers have a several occupations like sales-girls, domestic help, vegetable vendors etc. The pressure to hide from the family is extremely high, adding to the stress and guilt.⁶⁹

Description of NGOs working in North Bengal :

NGOs are playing a vital role in the field of welfare for the sex workers. In this part of the chapter, a vivid description of the NGOs is mentioned which are working for those fallen women in North Bengal specially.

DURBAR MAHILA SAMANWAY COMMITTEE (DMSC) :

The ID NO. of the NGO is WB/2009/0010006. The chief of functionary is Asha Banerjee. Bharati Dey is the chairperson and treasurer is Sanatan Das. Registration No of Durbar is S/87070 of 1997-98. City of Registration is Kolkata, State of Registration is West Bengal and date of Registration is 26/05/1997.⁷⁰ The key issue of Durbar is Women's development and Empowerment. Their operational area is West Bengal.

STD/HIV Intervention Programme has been started its journey in 1992 with the help of All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health (AIHPH). And as a result under the jurisdiction of SIP (STD/HIV Intervention Project) project the association for sex workers, '*Durbar Mahila Samanway Committee*' came into existence on 12th July, 1995. With the initiatives of thirteen '*Sathi*' teachers *Durbar* started its journey. Now-a-days *Durbar* working for more than sixty five sex workers all over West Bengal. *Durbar* maintaining a good contact with the other organizations of sex workers throughout the country like Bihar, Delhi, Maharashtra, Andhrapradesh and Kerala. In 1997 *Durbar* organized an all India conference for sex workers. This organization dreams such a world where the distressed people from different parts of the country will live together with their proper and equal respect, right, honour and dignity. They want to make such a world through the socio-political changes. This movement will involve the entire world. And through this movement *Durbar* wants to assure a secured. Peaceful life for the sex workers. They are determined to uplift their social status and standard of living. *Durbar* has its centres in **Siliguri, Islampur, Chagrabandha, Malda** in North Bengal.

Aims and Objectives of Durbar :

The aims and objectives of DMSC are -

- To make a strict contact among all sex workers in West Bengal.
- Try to stop the displacement of the sex workers and protect them.
- To the police raid and stop the illegal activities of police and administration against the sex workers.
- To stop the criminal activities, illegal money collection, abuse scuffle etc.
- To end the exploitation of *babus*, middlemen, land lords.
- To put forward the proposal before public for making of a self-governing board of the sex workers.
- To reveal the problematic factors in their profession through various meetings and conventions.
- Legal recognition of the sex workers and to organize mass movements all over the country in order to get recognition as sex workers.

- Form a suitable and appropriate health management system for getting good treatment and the control of the management system for getting good treatment and the control of the management would lie with them.
- To make alternative way for maintenance of retired and old workers.
- To make crèches for their children.
- To make arrangement the adult education and work education for sex workers.
- To make the workers aware of AIDS and other venereal diseases.
- To set up the shelters for the children of the workers and introduce proper education for their children.
- To give training to the workers to solve their professional problems.
- To control AIDS, syphilis and other venereal diseases.
- To arrange the programme for regular VD test.
- To oppose the particular clause of ITPA which were formed by Reba Naiyar. These clause are :
 - Prohibition on house rent to sex workers.
 - The children of sex workers, who are above eighteen years can't get their mothers' income.
 - Sex workers can't call customers.
- Rescue the minors girls by trafficking.
- Protect the girls from the oppression of masis.

The Proposals of Durbar :

- Reject the ITPA as early as possible.
- Stop the child labour in the field of sex work.
- Recognize the right of self control of the sex workers.
- Government should support their all legal rights as labour.
- Sex service is to be included in the list of labour department of State Government and Central Government as labour service.

In Siliguri the branch of DMSC was established at Khalpara in 1999. From the day of beginning, *Durbar* has covered a long journey. Each and every inmates of Khalpara

can't deny the contribution and dedication of DMSC for the welfare of sex workers. The main intention of DMSC is to organize the sex workers. They are trying to solve the problems of this area. The children of sex workers could not get admission in school. The school authority asked their fathers name. *Durbar* has solved this problem. Now the children of sex workers can get admission in schools easily. With the help from local people it runs a night school for children to stay them away when the mothers are busy with clients.

The old mothers who acted as sex worker in their early age, hold a very peculiar position in the family. The sons and daughters of such women are not bound by a tie of natural love and affection as they are born from different fathers. Naturally none of the offspring feel any obligation for taking the responsibility of the sex workers at the old age. Rather the poor women are treated with misbehavior. *Durbar* family handled this type of situation. They demand for old age pension for retired sex workers. *Durbar* is fighting for getting the right of provident fund, gratuity on behalf of the sex workers as they introducing themselves as labourers. *Durbar* is demanding all these privileges for the security of these women in their retired stage.

A large number of sex workers from North Bengal joined the Parliament expedition on March, 2006. It had been materialized for the inspiration of DMSC.

Durbar is providing training for the girls in several fields like weaving, embroidery, craft, fabric work etc. The illiterate are being given education. Most of them have learnt, they can read and write. Some of them are being trained in singing and dancing. One think is remarkable that it has its peculiar distinctive characteristic that there is no sign of training for entertaining customers, no sound of classical music and dance are heard from the rooms of sex workers. And here is the typical distinction between the *kotha*⁷¹ - culture of old traditional cities like Lucknow and the pros-quarters of present day's red light areas in North Bengal. In this sense the business of prostitution gradually becomes simply a flesh trade in the cities like Siliguri, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Islampur, Malda and so on.

DMSC launched the **Self Help Group**. In Siliguri it inaugurated a self help group on 16th September, 2006. They have other six units in North Bengal at Cooch Behar, Dinhata, Islampur, Malda, Alipurduar and Changrabandha. On 19th December, 2005, DMSC's modified Self Regulatory Board has been constituted with the following members -

- Chairperson, Sabhapati, Siliguri Mahakuma Parishad.
- West Bengal Voluntary Health Association.
- CINI – Child in Need Institution.
- Kanchanjangha Udhhar Kendra.
- Representative of Labour Commission.
- Representative of National Commission for Women.
- Representative of the Department of Health and Family Welfare.
- Representative of Social Welfare Ministry.
- Representative of the Bar Association, Siliguri.

The inmates of the brothels celebrate Independence Day, Republic Day as well as *Kartic Puja* with the help of DMSC. Even they have started to celebrate *Durga Puja*. *Durbar* is trying to giving a new life by involving these women into such functions and celebrations. After the formation of DMSC the sex workers the workers become more organized, more conscious about themselves. Trying to cope up with social problems.

The offices of *Durbar* are well furnished with proper equipments like chairs, tables, almirah, book and magazine case, xerox machine, telephone. They have separate medical chamber with waiting room for patients, counselling room and also visitor's room. Regular health check up by doctors from renowned medical colleges and hospitals, workshop, seminar and various other project and programmes are being organized by *Durbar*. The influential personalities even ministers, M. L. A., intellectuals are invited on such occasions to create a feelings of importance within the sex workers. The present author herself witnessed the photographs of the former minister Mr. Ashok Bhattacharjee inaugurating such a function at the office of *Durbar* in Khalpara, Siliguri.

During the period from 2001-2002, the Additional Superintendent of Police, Siliguri, had taken an initiative to introducing identity card for the sex workers and brokers at red light area. He compelled them to enlist their name in police register.⁷²

According to the report of DMSC in Malda town, seventy five sex workers out of one hundred ten (in Hansagiri Lane, the red light area in Malda) used protection while out of seven tested for syphilis and gonorrhoea, five were found positive. All sex workers in the area were living below the poverty line.⁷³

Durbar is proceeding towards success, but it is to face many obstacles in its way. The problems as pointed out through the interviews with the members and co-ordinators of DMSC as follows :

- Frequent police raid.
- Lack of co-operation from police and administration.
- Police interference.
- Outrage or criminal activities of anti-social.
- Indifferent attitude of clients about AIDS/HIV.

However, the DMSC in North Bengal is very active as well as determined to its ultimate goal and objective. They were encouraged by the Millennium Mela, Help Line Camp, Art Camp, Exhibition, *Durbar* Publication Stall, Cultural Programmes like plays, dramas and all those activities which were organized by DMSC of Sonagachhi, (Kolkata), at Salt Lake stadium in Kolkata. Having enjoyed that programme the workers of DMSC in North Bengal dream to organize such a Millennium Festival or *Mela* in this region of West Bengal. They hope to make a secured and unworried life for the sex workers and to reach on that day they need help from this civilized society. So that they can think that they are a part of this society.

DMSC's Work in their voice :

“We focus on the brothel based sex workers. Our self-regulatory board has a doctor, municipal counselor, lawyer, sex workers, social workers. We ensure there are no minors, all women are over eighteen. In some cases girls are run away from home. In some

places it is a romance angle where they have eloped with a man or they have been kidnapped or trafficked. The peer educators go around the brothels, encouraging women to seek STI treatment. The doctor comes at 4 pm. We speak to women who have *babus*, about condom use.

One of the leaders of the collective asserts; ‘Today we can speak to a minister. We are holding programmes. 90% of the women are members of DMSC. We have voters cards and ration cards. We have done polio programmes. In one instance, a sex worker’s child was called names by the teacher. We protested. This was showcased by the local channels.

One peer educator has four daughters. She does not earn much. She has to go out in search of clients. Once police beat her up very badly. We all went to the *thana* (police station) and created trouble. Today if one woman is beaten up, we all go and protest.

Many of the women here are second generation sex workers. Daughters join the trade only if they feel there is no one to take care of elderly mother. We try and get girls married. We don’t want to hide anything.

Durbar is people centred and people owned. It is not just for treatment but for collective rights. It is a platform for women and sex work. We are not getting Bangladeshi women in the brothel these days. We have made it clear because it increases raids for us. The police don’t come; if they have to come they call us on the phone to inform us before coming.”⁷⁴

Details of Achievement :

DMSC is a community based organization of, for and by the sex workers. DMSC for the last one decade has been running HIV/AIDS targeted intervention program in fifty one red light districts including the WHO acclaimed a ‘Sonagachhi project’ as well as in street settings covering a population of over 40,000 sex workers and 100000 clients. Besides West Bengal, DMSC recently has up scaled its programme and initiated Sexual Health Intervention Programme in other five states of the country. In order to complement its work in HIV prevention. DMSC is running tuberculosis program among

the vulnerable population since 2003. ‘**Mamta Care and Treatment Centre**’, one of the DMSC’s affiliated organizations in providing services for HIV testing with the pre and post test counselling for the last few years. DMSC recently has facilitated the formation of **Mamta Network of Prostitutes Women (MNPW)** an organization of woman living with HIV/AIDS. Considering the overall development of sex workers community DMSC also initiated comprehensive education programme for sex workers and their children. At present the organization runs thirty one education centres covering a population seven hundred sex workers and their children. In order to institutionalize the process of learning DMSC has set up two libraries (one in Kolkata, other in Midnapur). The organization has two residential homes for sex workers’ children. Currently the organization runs a vocational unit and imparting training on various professional courses to more fifty sex workers and their children. Besides health and education program, the organization also runs anti-trafficking program following the unique approach of **Self Regulatory Board (SRB)** mechanism. At present DMSC runs thirty three SRBs in different parts of the state of West Bengal. These boards prevent entry of minors and unwilling women into sex sector and act as principle arbitrator in cases of violation of sex workers frights. Till today through these SRBs DMSC has rescued and reintegrated more than three hundred minors and unwilling women. Currently DMSC is running anti-trafficking programme in collaboration with Action-AID India. In order to ensure the economic security of sex workers the organization has set up a consumer co-operative society (USHA Multipurpose Co-operative Society Limited, or USHA). USHA is for and by the sex workers. USHA runs a micro-credit programme for commercial sex workers, creates alternative jobs for out of work or retired sex workers and plans to start a large scale production until for generating employment for retired sex workers and those who want to opt out of sex worker. At present USHA has more than eight thousand registered members and its increasing turn over (eighty million rupees during 2004-2005) its trumpeted as a success story of the co-operative movement in West Bengal by the department of co-operatives of the state government.⁷⁵

Partnership with NGOs working at transit sites and at sites of origin developed by DMSC since 2000. DMSC has collaborated with BHORUKA welfare trust, UNDP (United Nation Development Progrmme) and CARE (Child & Adolescent Resources and

Education) Bangladesh to address issues around cross-border trafficking, out of this collaboration, SRBs were initiated in sex worker sites close to Indo-Bangladesh border at **Changrabanha (Coochbehar), Hilly (South Dinajpur)** and Bashirhat (North 24 Parganas).

SHANKAR FOUNDATION :

The address of Shankar Foundation is 'Man Hari House', 18, upper Kutchery Road (behind DFO office), **Darjeeling** - 734101. Hari Chhetiri holds the president-ship. Shankar Mani Rai is the secretary of this organization.

The Darjeeling hills are identified a highly vulnerable area with regards to HIV/AIDS. The issue is focused mainly in urban areas which have resulted from high migration, lack of education and floating sex worker population. This is why the NGO network has decided to work with its member organization Shankar Foundation on awareness and prevention campaign.

FOSEP (FEDERATION OF SOCIETIES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION) :

There are actively working NGOs in Darjeeling. FOSEP is the one who is the model NGO in **Darjeeling** with their documentation and activities, working with three hundred flying sex workers.

MISSIONARY OF CHARITY :

The address is 78, A. J.C Road, Kolkata - 14 and the areas of Work are **Darjeeling**, Kolkata, Burdwan.

They are working in the field of care and protection of neglected children and placing them in In and Inter Country adoption. It runs home for destitute women.

MIRIK NARI SAMITY :

Mirik Nari Samity works on flying sex workers in **Mirik in Darjeeling**, where about three hundred flying sex workers are involved.

HILL SOCIAL WELFARE SOCIETY :

Hill Social Welfare Society works in flying sex workers in **Kalimpong**.

LIFELINE :

‘Help for commercial sex workers and other marginalized women’, the project of the organization ‘LIFELINE’ has received support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Govt. of Finland. The direct objective of the project is to help women from the **North Bengal** region, who are working in commercial sex due to poverty or human trafficking, by providing them possibility for vocational training which gives them technical, handicraft and entrepreneurship skills. After training and rehabilitation they will start to earn steady income throughout the produced handicrafts.

WAASTA :

Waasta, Indian NGO operates in North Bengal’s rural areas and it has the office in the city of **Siliguri**. Siliguri is rapidly growing city throughout emigration. Sadly over the recent years Siliguri is known to be one of the main transit points of human trafficking from Nepal to India and other countries.

Waasta has vision for skill development and income gathering programmes for these vulnerable women from North Bengal. Therefore it has been running two different development projects *Kalakriti*, vocational training program for vulnerable women and rehab-work among commercial sex workers and their children. Now *Waasta* wants to combine these projects and have a new project, which provides help chain for these women. This would be a program, which gives possibilities for women to come out from brothels or crisis, and provides handicraft and other skills that will give steady daily income.

GUP (GANA UNNAYAN PARISHAD) :

The office address of *Gana Unnayan Parishad* is H/O Ganesh Bahadur Kamal Durgagiri, Ward No. 45, New Darjeeling More, P. O. Pradhannagar, **Siliguri**, Dist - Darjeeling, Pin - 734003.

GUP (*Gana Unnayan Parishad*) a social organization stand behind the commercial sex workers of Dinbazar area in Jalpaiguri for their struggle against STD/HIV/AIDS problems. GUP started its program in Jalpaiguri in the year 1999 with the financial support of DFID and later on from April, 2001 the project has been supported by WBSAP&CS. During this program more than one hundred sex workers and their clients have been provided with basic education, health care, STD treatment, counselling and other services to combat the dreaded STD/HIV and AIDS. Around four hundred CSWs congregated to form an association of their own and decided not to allow any of their customers to have sex without using condoms. GUP providing non formal education to the children of CSWs (commercial sex workers) through the comprehensive STD/HIV/AIDS Prevention Project.

GUP had been also running a telephone counselling service centre at Cooch Behar supported by West Bengal State AIDS prevention and control society (WBSAP&CS) from 2004 - 2006 with a view to meet the necessity of awareness, motivational and counselling programme in STD/HIV/AIDS among the general population of the district in reducing the STD/HIV infections and also to help people to get in touch with the doctors for the treatment who are suffering from these diseases.

GUP have been running truckers project with the guidance and financial support of West Bengal State AIDS prevention and control society for advocacy and awareness generation among truckers. The intervention area **Siliguri Paribahan Nagar of Matigara** and adjacent area and **Fulbari Truck Stand** and adjacent area.⁷⁶

BHORUKA :

The address of main office is *Bhoruka* Public Welfare Trust, 63, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road, Kolkata - 16

PROJECTS OF *BHORUKA :*

Community Care Centre Truckers, Intervention Program, Care Home for HIV infected and affected children, Reproductive Child Health Programme, Anti Girl Trafficking,

HIV/AIDS Stigma and violence, Capacity Building, Work Place Intervention Programme, Child Watch and *SNEHNEER* - Home away from home.

From the very beginning, HIV/AIDS prevention and care is one of the main focuses of *Bhoruka* with special focus on trucker intervention. *Bhoruka* has initiated intervention among another high risk groups (commercial sex workers) in **Guwahati and Jalpaiguri**.

Bhoruka has taken special initiative. So that its target communities can access the facilities of various schemes of state and central government. As a result of this, a course of community health workers has started *Swabalamban Schemes*. One residents of *Snehneer*. children for those infected and affected by HIV has been admitted under **Jawahar Navodoy School**, run by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development. It has an office at **Naxalbari in Siliguri**.

CINI (CHILD IN NEED INSTITUTE) :

The area of work of CINI is Kolkata, Two 24 Parganas (North and South) and different districts of North Bengal. The address is 63, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road, Kolkata.

Since the late 80s CINI has worked with children of sex workers, children living on the streets, run away, missing, sexually and physically abused, at risk of early marriage, out of school or victims of other forms of violence. CINI Child Protection Resource Centre co-ordinates programme activities and fosters innovation in both institution and community based child protection work.

CINI extends protection intervention to over five thousands children through community based services. They offers education and protection services to children who are most vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and trafficking in the metro areas of **Kolkata through CINI ASHA and Silguri through CINI North Bengal Unit and in the district of Murshidabad through CINI Murshidabad Unit, North Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri through CINI North Dinajpur Unit, in South 24 Parganas through CINI Diamond Harbour Unit and in Khunti district through Jharkhand State Unit**. Several programmes are implemented along the borders of India with Bangladesh and

Nepal, where child trafficking is as serious as much as an elusive problem. Services and facilities are concerned in red light areas, around bus and railway stations and in deprived slum and village areas. Several partners are involved to address the multiple forms of violence on children. In at risk locations it offers temporary shelters both in the form of drop in centres and shelter homes, for children in need of special protection. All efforts are made to re-integrate children with their families and communities when possible, including providing the necessary support to parents who may have difficulties in accepting their children back.

In partnership with the police, judiciary, local NGOs, community based organizations, children, youth and women groups, the child-line services with five units deployed across the state of West Bengal offering a 24 hour toll free telephone helpline to extend assistance to children in distress and the police report on the hot line instances of child abuse, child labour and child trafficking. CINI also operates a helpline for teens and persons affected by HIV/AIDS offering counselling and assistance.

In parallel to institutional, rehabilitative services CINI promotes child protection in deprived urban and rural communities through preventive action. Children and women's groups advise families and local elected representatives (*Rural Panchayet* Institutions and urban local bodies) on how to avert violence, corporal punishment, early marriage, child trafficking. Child protection cards and registers, community child protection mapping, child trafficking sentinel groups are among the tools used to make child protection an integral component of child and women friendly communities. More over CINI conducts AIDS awareness program all over North Bengal. CINI has an office near Tenzing Norgay Bus Terminus, in Siliguri.

The hills of Darjeeling are still high vulnerable to AIDS, according to CINI it is conducting an awareness initiative across one hundred rural areas in Darjeeling. It has selected three more districts in North Bengal including Jalpaiguri to conduct a similar campaign. The relative backwardness of the region is leading to an increase in migration, intravenous drug users, floating sex worker population, while past awareness programmes focused only on urban areas have also raised vulnerability levels, said CINI.

Giving the spiraling number of people infected with AIDS, Darjeeling district has been placed in category 'A' along with Jalpaiguri and North Dinajpur district, while Cooch Behar is in the 'B' category. Mr. Sekhar Saha, co-ordinator of CINI, North Bengal, informed, the NGO will conduct awareness programme in four hundred villages in the four districts under the aegis of the Governments' Link Workers' programmes in order to arrest the spread of the killer disease. Free medical check-up camps will be arranged at every block health centres, he added.

Mr. Saha pointed out several compelling factors responsible factors for the spread of AIDS⁷⁷

- Very few people opt for testing due to lack of awareness and fear of social stigma. Although blood donations are screened, donors are not notified of their HIV status.
- Awareness programmes usually only cater to the urban populace and lack a strong connection with the rural population.
- The poor economy of the region and massive unemployment has given rise to a large migration labour population including sex workers. High risk groups such as intra venous drug users, migrant porters, flying sex workers and labourers have limited access to AIDS awareness programmes.
- Most institutions do not impart sex education to public, let alone AIDS awareness workshops.

Mr. Saha concluded by adding we have elected this particular time of festivals for our initiative as large numbers of migrating workers come home to celebrate festivals.⁷⁸

ASHA :

The address of this organization is *Amader Bari*, 63 Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road, Kolkata - 16.

CINI has a sister organization CINI ASHA that works for prostitutes' children. It provides education to the vulnerable children of red light area. They have specially emphasized on short home for girl child of pros-areas.

LAMP :

This organization conducts a school for the children of sex workers. The office of LAMP is situated at **Jalpaimore in Siliguri.**

SPANDAN :

SPANDAN is a network of positive people in North Bengal has celebrated Global AIDS Week of Action on 14th May, 2006 in **Siliguri** through the informative and sensitization programme for the commercial sex workers.

KANCHANJANGHA UDDHAR (RESCUE) KENDRA (CENTRE) :

The address of the office of this organization is Pradhan Nagar, **Siliguri**, Dist - Darjeeling.

This organization combating against women trafficking. Ms. Rangu Souriya, secretary of this NGO said in every year a lot of girls trafficked from Darjeeling district to different parts of the country for prostitution and they rescued nineteen girls in the year of 2006. The number is alarming. 'The Darjeeling hills, Terai and Dooars are fast becoming the hot bed for girl traffickers. Poverty and ignorance are the main reasons for the increase in such activities here' said Ms. Souriya. They are trying to rescue trafficked girls and after that hand over those girls to their parents or relatives.

SANLAAP :

The address of main office of *Sanlaap* is 171 A, Rasbehari Avenue, Kolkata - 29.

It was founded in 1989. Indrani Sinha is the founder member of *SANLAAP*. At Liluya, *Sanlaap* runs a home for destitute girls. It has a branch in Siliguri. *SANLAAP* advocating to set up a special court for trafficking as Mumbai and Andhrapradesh have. This organization is trying to sort out the problems regarding the issue of documents' clearance for those rescued girls want to go back their home in Bangladesh or Nepal.⁷⁹

Total number of employees in *Sanlaap* is two hundred. This is a multilateral networking. *Sanlaap* has networked with the following organizations to put an end to trafficking :

- End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking (ECPAT).
- Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW).
- Action against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC).
- National Alliance of Women's Organizations (NAWO).
- *Maitree* (a state feminist network).
- NGO - AIDS Coalition (West Bengal).

Successful Examples : It has organized a national seminar on trafficking and sexual exploitation of children.

Source of funding : State Social Welfare Board, Govt. of India, Save the Children, Denmark, ICCO Christian Aid and European Embassies.

Geographical Areas of Operation : Murshidabad, Nadia, Siliguri, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, 24 Parganas.

Campaign, Awareness, Training and Networking of SANLAAP : *Sanlaap* is a development human rights organization that aims towards correction of gender imbalance, prevention of violence and exploitation of women and children and facilitation of the empowerment of survivors trafficking and sexual exploitation. *Sanlaap* strives to prevent trafficking.

Sanlaap conducts seminars, workshops and media campaigns to generate awareness amongst the vulnerable groups. It also distributes IED materials for awareness generation, undertakes advocacy through networking with NGOs and police officials and conducts sensitization programmes for governmental officials.

In order to prevent trafficking the NGO undertakes gender sensitization programmes and community mobilization programmes in the vulnerable communities.

Sanlaap has networked with police department/CID and governmental officials who are provided necessary information and feed-back by the volunteers of this organization working in the red light areas. It has formed watchdog committees. To deter the traffickers, the organization, with the help of police, undertakes vigorous interception operations at the vulnerable locations.

Rescue of children and those who are being forced to work in prostitution, is either undertaken directly or with the collaboration of police. The organization runs a short stay home and observation home (details about these homes not been furnished by the organization) where vocational training is imparted in embroidery, block painting, skill cotton weaving, garment designing and beauty parlour training for the rehabilitation of the inhabitants. If the addresses of the victims are known, then efforts are made to reunite them with their families.

The Strategy adopted by SANLAAP : *Sanlaap* interwove three lines of work three lines of work-training, advocacy and networking with a prevention strategy. The NGO networked with the *panchayat* leaders, people's organizations and the police in the areas where trafficking of children was in vogue due to poverty and/or cultured practices. Such networking was operationalized through dialogues and training with those groups on gender-sensitivity, forms and patterns of trafficking and procedures by which to respond to political cases of trafficking.

Youth groups, who acted as pressure groups, were particularly targeted for the development of advocates among them. An infrastructure of organized communities was developed who acted as watchdogs to prevent the entry of women in prostitution.

Awareness in the communities was created through information materials that alerted the families to issues related to trafficking and sexual exploitation as well as to the concepts regarding violations of the human right of women and children.

In between 2000 to 2001 *Sanlaap* has received and provided services to over three hundred children and minors who were rescued from prostitution. 40% of them were HIV positive.

The organization runs a psychological rehabilitation program for children rescued from prostitution, providing services in mental health, occupational training and legal aid to facilitate rescue, repatriation or restoration after release from state custody. *Sanlaap* runs to shelter homes, as well as running interventions in the state run Remand Homes in West Bengal, the focus of which are on healing and empowerment of girls, emotionally, economically and psychologically, repatriation and restoration, economic empowerment through occupational training and education. *Sanlaap* has networked with the NGOs of Nepal such as *Maiti Nepal* and Bangladesh for the prevention of cross-border-trafficking. According to *Maiti Nepal*, an anti-trafficking organization of Nepal, almost 25% of girls are from Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Sikkim. There is no difference between a Nepalese from Nepal and an Indian Nepali in a red light area. It is also found that Nepali girls in general are very much in demand in Indian brothels and abroad.

HRIDOY :

The office of this organization is situated at Ukilpara in **Jalpaiguri**.

Organizational activity at a glance : STD/HIV/AIDS targeted intervention programme among the female commercial sex workers (brothel based and flying) in Jalpaiguri sub-division with the financial assistance of West Bengal State AIDS Prevention and Control Society, Govt. of West Bengal and the HIV Sentinel Surveillance Programme among the female commercial sex workers with the financial assistance of West Bengal State AIDS Prevention and Control Society, Govt. of West Bengal.

Jalpaiguri *HRIDAY* established a ten bedded community care centre for HIV positive with partnership of the National AIDS Control Organization, A Ministry of Health and Family Welfare Department, Govt. of India. Frequently they organize free health check-up camps and supplying medicine at Dinbazar, the red light area in Jalpaiguri town. There is a non formal school for sex workers children Smile Foundation in partnership with **Hridoy at Jaigaon, Jalpaiguri**.

WOMEN INTERLINK FOUNDATION :

In 1990 the main office of Women Interlink Foundation established in Kolkata. Its branch established at Beguntari in **Jalpaiguri** in the year of 1999. It has its another office at Changrabandha in Cooch Behar. Previously it had branch offices in both Dinajpur (North and South) which are closed at present. Women Interlink has eleven centres all over West Bengal. Smt. Sikha Mitra Majumder, the project director of Jalpaiguri branch, said, they running a home 'Ashroy' for distressed trafficked women who are rescued. This foundation receives foreign donation and govt. donation for running the non formal education centre. Their support services provide to children of resident prostitutes.

JABALA ACTION RESEARCH ORGANIZATION :

Under *Jabala* Action Research Organization, *ASHA* funds is supporting the Kalabagan school for children in Kalabagan slum (the red light area in Cooch Behar). The main office of this organization is situated near Ballygunj station in Kolkata.

SHAKTI VAHINI :

This organization work against anti trafficking in Siliguri, Malda, Cooch Behar. *Shakti Vahini* unit has organized a stockholders' meeting on Anti Human Trafficking on December 14, 2013 at hotel continental in Malda. The meeting was organized as part of Missing Child Alert Initiative of Plan India. The purpose of organizing the meeting is to discuss the issue of human trafficking with special reference to the cross border trafficking and missing children with the stockholders and also to strengthen the link between the source and destination.

Discussions were held on Supreme Court order on missing children and also on the various advisories and protocols of the Govt. of India.

The meeting was attended by sixty participants from various government and non - governmental organizations. Among the participants the Chairperson and members of the child welfare committee, Malda, Deputy chief Medical officer, Department of Health, Malda, District Social Welfare Officer, Malda, District Child Protection Officers, Police

Officers of GRP and Anti Human Trafficking Units, Shelter Home Representatives, CHILD LINE representatives from the seventeen NGOs.

In the day long programme the issue of cross border trafficking was discussed at length. Citing some cases of cross border trafficking the Chairperson, Child Welfare Committee said, 'The NGOs should work more closely with the law enforcement agencies and to sensitize them that the Bangladeshi children found in Malda region should not be treated as accused as there are some cases in which the children were booked under foreigners act. These children immediate after rescue need to be produced before the Child Welfare Committee for their care and protection and further repatriation.'

The representatives of Social Welfare Department have expressed that the department is planning to reach all the 146 *panchayet* in Malda with the issue of anti-trafficking, which is the need of the hour. All the government officers present in the meeting should their interest to work in close partnership with NGOs. The *Shakti Vahini* representative welcomed the initiative of the Social Welfare Department and assured that all the NGOs working for anti-trafficking should join hands and work together to combat the organized crime.

In the meeting the District Social Welfare Officer also discussed about various government schemes available for the children in need of care and protection. The family of a survivor, who was rescued recently by *Shakti Vahini* from Hariyana also present in the meeting and shared about how their daughter was rescued with the help of the West Bengal police and Hariyana police from the clutches of the traffickers and also shared the message that no child should be trafficked if necessary they would come forward to sensitize the masses.⁸⁰

According to study conducted by *Shakti Vahini* in 2006, trafficking women children for prostitution from the north-eastern states and the bordering countries in the north-east is a serious issue but has so far not drawn public attention.⁸¹

SPAR - INDIA :

Women and child anti trafficking programme supported by Group Development and European Commission launched on July, 2010 in Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri. South Dinajpur and Malda.

WBVHA (WEST BENGAL VOLUNTARY HEALTH ASSOCIATION) UNITS IN NORTH BENGAL :

It is one of the project of NACO (National AIDS Control Organization) which working with the sex workers.⁸² It has selected seven sex workers from Siliguri who bring patients to the clinic of WBVHA. It provides counselling session on HIV.

- 1) North Bengal Training Centre (Vocational and Rehabilitation), Lokenath Nagar, P.O. Lower Bagdogra, Darjeeling.
- 2) North Bengal Health Resource Centre, Opposite - SMT Godown, Pradhan Nagar, Siliguri.
- 3) Sebyan Drug De-addiction Centre, Ramkrishna Pally, Matigara, Siliguri.
- 4) Injecting Drug User's Project Office, Dakshinpara, Changrabandha, Dist - Cooch Behar.
- 5) STD Clinic, Tinbattimore, Siiguri.
- 6) ICTC Centre, New Jalpaiguri Station Road, NJP, Siliguri.
- 7) Flying Sex Workers Project (HIV/AIDS), Mallaguri, Pradhan Nagar, Siliguri.
- 8) RCH Unit, P.O. Kadamtola (2nd Floor), Mukta Building, Shivmandir Main Road, Beside Sarojini Club, Darjeeling, Pin - 734011.
- 9) RCH Unit North Colony, Ward No. 11, P O. Malbazar, Jalpaiguri, Pin - 735221.
- 10) RCH Unit Alipurduar Branch, College Para, Alipurduar, Pin - 733122.

CEDAW :

The obligation of state parties to take all appropriate measures to suppress the traffic in women was later reiterated in the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW does not, however, elaborate upon specific steps. Like the Trafficking Convention, CEDAW links trafficking to the

exploitation of prostitution, but fails to address trafficking for other exploitative ends, such as coerced marriage and forced labour.

UNICEF :

With the association of the representatives of Labour, Health, Human Resource Development and Education Ministries along with NGOs UNICEF is always available to help design programmes that specially cater to the needs of the women and children of the communities which practice prostitution in the name of tradition.

CSSP (CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT PROGRAMME) :

‘SANGVEDAN’ - collective forum of Civil Society organizations in Cooch Behar and ‘UTTARAN’ - collective forum of Civil Society organizations in Jalpaiguri have undertaken major initiatives against women trafficking.

UNODC :

United Nations Office on drugs and crime (UNDOC) to set up regional office for south Asia in New Delhi, in partnership with the ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India is ‘strengthening law enforcement response to human trafficking’. One of the mandates of the projects is to set up integrated Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTU).⁸³ AHTU as a good practice model of communities policing and the best mechanism of addressing human trafficking. The first AHTU launched in India in Andhrapradesh. The second AHTU unit set up in Goa in March 2007. In June 2007, West Bengal became the third state to set up AHTU unit. The configuration of Anti-Human Trafficking units is quite simple. It has a vehicle, computer systems, cell phones and other communication system, resource materials in the form of law book, compilation of court rulings, investigation kit with forensic equipments, tools and standard operating protocols (SOP) on the various activities. MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) among the agencies concerned registers to maintain records and contingency funds to meet with the day to day requirement. Police officials, NGO representatives are the main officials of AHTU. At least 30% representatives of this units are female. The AHTU has also support officials of other departments of governments like welfare, health development. The

officer in charge of AHTU is a police officer usually of the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police. He / she will be in command and control of the functionary of AHTU. The functions of AHTU are⁸⁴ :

- Undertaking all activities in preventing and combating human trafficking.
- Protection and rehabilitation of victims.
- Expeditious and professional investigation of crimes and effective prosecution of offenders.
- Taking all steps in ensuring prevention of re-trafficking of the rescued person.
- Networking with the police officials at other persons.
- Networking with other Governmental departments.
- Networking with NGOs.

United Nations office on Drugs and crimes, together with other UN agencies, Governments and NGOs, launched the Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (GIFT) in March, 2007. This global initiative based on one simple principle and that is it considers Human trafficking is an organized crime. And that is why it needs an organized response. The strategy for achieving this goal starts with efforts to increase public awareness of the problem, specially women awareness, enhanced knowledge of how to combat trafficking, and co-ordinate existing but disparate efforts by international and national groups, Governments and NGOs and by concerned individuals to end the vile practice.

At present, however, children in the red light areas must live with the ugly reality that they are considered to be different from other children, that society is not ready to accept them. They are rejected because of the environment they live in. We have to remember that a red light area is not just a place where men go to buy sex. It is a place where all generations live where children growing up. All NGOs interventions require cooperation with local people, it must advocate a fundamental shift in societies attitude to prostitute.

In conclusion it may be said that neither tolerating it is a moral safety-valve nor placing undue reliance on a piece of legislation, it is felt that the best way to ensure a

healthy growth of modern society, stopping all its possible leakages, lay in - (1) legalizing by all means, even by the semblance of law or a show of ceremony, all known connections of love or of passion; (2) disposing of young widows who are unprotected or helpless honourably in marriage, or anyhow letting them know that they can be so disposed of if they are not unwilling; and (3) founding in suitable places all over the country separate homes for the protection, education and vocational training of helpless mothers burdened with the care of children, of widows unprotected and helpless, of fallen women who are old or are sick of their open profession of shame and ugliness as well as of those unfortunate women who have been dragged by force or missed by clever tricks and are thus stranded.

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