

Writing the history of women in the margins: The Courtesans in India

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Abstract

The history writing project always involves silences, selectivity and homogeneity and as a result major section of the people in the margins, especially courtesans, prostitutes, temple women get left out and are never the part of the main stream discourse. The present paper focuses on one such category of women, the Courtesans and traces the history of these women from being the epitome of culture and having a high status to becoming a fallen woman. Courtesans are known also as tawaifs .These women were financially independent, and there were many who had high status within society due to their beauty and talents. Courtesans were also considered carriers of culture because besides dancing, they had to be proficient in other skills such as painting and singing. Unfortunately, a lot of the information available on courtesans are through other perspectives, such as men of high status and colonialists. In the Deccan too, the tawaifs held very respectable position in Nizams society and they were looked up as artists therefore it was compulsory for tawaifs to sing in the marriage functions and after the nikah a group photo was taken for the sake of remembrance and in the group tawaif is also given place. Tawaifs were an integral part of various festivities—marriage celebrations, Bismillah ceremonies and Urs (death anniversaries of Sufi saints). With the coming of the colonial order and the accompanying changes in the economic set-up: with the loss of their patronage these women do not have too many options available to earn their livelihood and many of them are reduced to working as full time sex workers or vying for space in the upcoming film and sound recording industry. With the coming of this new women, the courtesans were marginalised and seen only as fallen women who indulged in sex for money.

Key words: Courtesans, Tawaifs, marginalized, patriarchy, Baijis, courtly norms, dancers.

History writing has never been an innocent enterprise. The project always involves silences, selectivity and homogeneity and as a result major section of the people in the margins, especially courtesans, prostitutes, temple women get left out and are never the part of the main stream discourse. By and large history

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does not study women. If as historians we are hopefully working towards recreating a total picture, moving away from the hitherto male and elite perspective, and then unless the history of women is studied and researched the picture of the past shall continue to be a partial one. The feminist movement of the 1960's and the consequent development of Women's studies have drawn attention to the fact that, though women like men have been actors and agents in history, their experiences and actions are not recorded. Traditional historiography has always focused on areas of human activities in which the males are dominant, ie. War, diplomacy, politics or commerce, as worthy of studying and women's participation in agriculture, animal husbandry, family ritual, folk art are regarded as unimportant and outside the realms of study of history and always in the margins.

Women's History:

By and large we have ignored women's history. Men's history has been presented as universally human. The framework, concepts and priorities of these universal histories reflect male interests, concerns and experiences (Mathew, 1985). Activities which are mainly female like child bearing, cooking, women's work in agriculture, husbandry, magic, folk art and traditions have been generally regarded as unimportant and unworthy of study and as such outside the purview of the academic discipline of history (Pande, Rekha and kameshwari, 1985: 172).

The earliest of women's histories were additive history, which is history

written after a reexamination of the sources to discover the contributions and role of women. The first women's history often reclaimed for history of women who had done what men had done but been left out. The second approach, gendered history, draws on feminist perspectives to rethink historiography and make gender differences a key to the analysis of social relations. There was an effort to focus on women as women — histories of women's childbearing, their embroidery and needlework, cooking, the stories women told — to balance off histories that men had created. A third approach, contributory history, privileges female agency while recognizing how patriarchy impedes women's actions (Forbes, 1998:2). The current emphasis on gender looks at how constructions of masculinity and femininity have affected historical events but previously gone unrecorded.

A big lacuna in most of the works related to Women's history are that they are based in European context, and there are very few works which have attempted to look at women within the historical context in ancient and medieval period of India. Again, here when we look at women, we study them through the prism of patriarchy and focus on elite women or common women and leave out the other women. The problem is more with the sources available for the reconstruction of women's history for these are often male biased and elitist sources. In order to write a new history worthy of its name we will have to recognize that no single methodological and conceptual framework can fit

the complexities of historical experiences of all women (Lerner, 1979). In order to construct a new women's history we have to relook at the existing material, chronicles, literature and archival information and to read between the lines and ask for each and every aspect, "what about the women". Here it may be pointed out that there are certain facts and figures which cannot be generalized. Therefore the history we read ignores this and becomes a master discourse or a meta narrative which explains why different people at different times and places have used generalization without emphasizing these facts. Therefore the history that has been handed down to us becomes a series of accepted generalizations (Bentley, 2002: 868).

As a result of the efforts of a large number of academicians though we do focus on women's history now but by and large women in the margins get left out of the general discourse. It is necessary to study these women and bring them into main stream history writing. Women like courtesans, prostitutes, temple dancing girls, serving women were never given importance in history writing. Traditional historiography has thus either ignored the positive role of these women or portrayed it as insignificant. We have looked at these women through the lens of patriarchy as immoral women. Sexual divisions have been one of the most basic distinctions within the society encouraging one group to view its interests differently from another. Just like class or race, sex has been used to create a separate identity for men

and women. By studying the history of men and assuming that this would cover the women also we cannot find out the realities of women's lives during any given period. Gender like any group, class or race has always been a very powerful factor in history. It is therefore necessary to view the development of women's history from the feminist perspective of women as a distinct sociological group which experiences both overt and covert controls through legal, political and social restrictions (Pande, 1999: 48).

Marginality, sexuality and seeing reality:

Many postcolonial writers and theorists have challenged the representative claims to marginality of the elite or dominant classes in postcolonial cultures and societies. For example, drawing on the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci's idea of the subaltern – elaborated in his prison notebooks, written during his incarceration under Mussolini's fascist regime in the 1930s – the South Asian historians known as the Subaltern Studies collective have sought to recover the histories of insurgency and resistance in South Asia from the perspective of subordinate social classes. As Ranajit Guha puts it in 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', which forms the introductory essay to the first volume of the series, *Subaltern Studies*, the elitism of Indian history, whether colonialist or bourgeois nationalist, has excluded the 'subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country – that is, the people (Guha, 1982:4).

What Guha means by subaltern, therefore, is not only the labouring population but ‘the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way’ (Guha, 1982, 4). Gramsci notes that the history of subaltern social groups is always intertwined with the history of States and groups of states, and as such it is necessary to study their active or passive affiliation to the dominant class, political formations, their attempts to influence the programmes of these formations in order to press claims of their own and the consequences of these attempts in determining processes of decomposition, renovation or neo—formation” (Gramsci, 1971).

Foucault argues that we generally read the history of sexuality since the 18th century in terms of what Foucault calls the “repressive hypothesis.” The repressive hypothesis supposes that since the rise of the bourgeoisie, any expenditure of energy on purely pleasurable activities has been frowned upon. As a result, sex has been treated as a private, practical affair that only properly takes place between a husband and a wife. Sex outside these confines is not simply prohibited, but repressed. That is, there is not simply an effort to prevent extra-marital sex, but also an effort to make it unspeakable and unthinkable. Discourse on sexuality is confined to marriage. Rather, “each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth—that is the type of discourses it accepts and makes function as true”

(Foucault, 2003: 316). Truth in this sense is sustained by Power, and in turn plays a role in the functioning of Power. It is important to understand that for Foucault Power is all pervasive but at the same time not simply coercive/oppressive—”...it doesn’t only weigh on us as force that says no, it also traverses and produces things; it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, and produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a *productive* network that runs through the whole social network, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression” (Foucault, 2003: 307). Foucault suggests the repressive hypothesis is essentially an attempt to give revolutionary importance to discourse on sexuality. The repressive hypothesis makes it seem both defiant and of utmost importance to our personal liberation that we talk openly about sex. Our discourse on sexuality, in its promise for a better, freer way of life, is a form of preaching. Foucault asks three questions about the repressive hypothesis: (1) Is it historically accurate to trace what we think of today as sexual repression to the rise of the bourgeoisie in the 17th century? (2) Is power in our society really expressed primarily in terms of repression? (3) Is our modern-day discourse on sexuality really a break with this older history of repression, or is it part of the same history? (Foucault, 1990).

Bell hook talks of a different way of seeing reality, featuring a new preface, “Seeing the Light: Visionary Feminism,” which was published in 2000. In the pref-

ace to the first edition, hooks, talking about black Americans in her hometown, discusses the meaning of her title's "From Margin to Center:" "Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked from both the outside in and the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center"(Bell hooks, 2000)..

Women in the Margins:

Women such as the courtesans, prostitutes were in the margins of the society in the past and yet an integral part of the social and economic system of the period. While they played a central role in the society, ideologically and culturally they were never in the center stage. The general trend with regards to women shows that the audience were diverse as also the material context and the social worlds which they inhabited. This is also tied to the diverse patterns of production in the Indian subcontinent. As these were from different modes of surplus appropriation, there developed many layers of intermediary. However when we talk of categories of women we still have the division of women based on the moral codes of the patriarchal family as the elite and common women who are within the respectable fold of the family and history focuses on them. The past also had the fallen women the prostitutes, courtesans or the *Twaiifs* who are outside the family. People with-

out histories continue to be social and political outcastes or vice versa. The outcastes are one people chastised and neglected in history(Vijaisri, 2004:10). Even within the outcaste we have varying degrees of institutionalized patriarchy and the specific socio cultural processes in relation to the varying experiences of women as against a simplified notion of an over arching patriarchy. Many of the categories of women do not fit into these neat divisions in the 18th century.

Current research on colonialism has, however, focused on new forms of production, which coincided with new market relations developing out of European occupation of Asia and Africa. This affected women universally, as women wage workers in British textile mills, Afro-American slave women in the plantations and Indian women spinning in remote villages fared badly under the economic changes ushered in by imperial rule. Yet, specifications of race and class shaped their experience in such a way that certain boundaries can be clearly demarcated. It is within this framework of race, class, and gender that a process of categorization was set in motion. The term "prostitute", however, did not give an objective description of an already determined group, but rather overlaid some of the earlier categories like Devadasis (temple dancers) or Baijis (court musicians). It also denied the Indian prostitutes a history as performers and artists. Colonial rule thus constructed a specific identity for the prostitutes obliterating their existing

class gradations. The reality was that these women had political, financial, social, and sexual liberties that British women did not. This recognition significantly undermines the imperial feminist rhetoric circulating at the time that positioned British women as the most emancipated females in the world and as the natural leaders of the international women's movement (Charnkamal, 2011). Thus rich courtesans, Muslim concubines, Brahman widows and Sudra maids were now all fitted into the parameters of an outcast group. As a term it was only one within the signifying system of the colonial order and was to be understood in relation to other terms constructed during the colonial period like the "untouchable castes" or "criminal tribes" (Lynda Nead, 1990: 95).

Courtesans:

Both courtesans and concubines played a prominent role in ancient and medieval kingdoms. Courtesans, in Indian context, can be defined as women who are paid to dance in royal courts for the entertainment of royalty. These women were financially independent, and there were many who had high status within society due to their beauty and talents. Courtesans are known by various other names, such as tawaifs who were courtesans who performed during the medieval period. Courtesans were also considered carriers of culture because besides dancing, they had to be proficient in other skills such as painting and singing. Unfortunately, a lot of the information available on

courtesans are through other perspectives, such as men of high status and colonialists. This likely skews the image of what the lives of these women were like. Women often chose this path because they wanted to be independent, or they were trying to get away from violent and degrading situations. Although courtesans often had financial independence, the societal norms encouraged by patriarchy forced women who wanted freedom and independence to choose this specific path, which often involved entertaining men and providing sexual pleasure.

A Courtesan was a woman who is associated generally with wealthy, aristocracy or nobility as a prostitute or dancer who entertains them. Concubines are those ladies who cohabit with a man without being legally married to him, a mistress or a secondary wife to a certain extent. The life styles of these women almost remained the same, both being the representatives of sensuality and attractiveness with beauty to entertain the sultan and his nobility to fullest extent. They remained within harem and noble houses and such harem scenes with royalty became one of the themes for artists to depict these courtly beauties and aesthetic figures in royal courts. The miniatures paint them amidst dark, vaulted cellars, huge halls, fountains and tanks which constituted one of the most striking styles of architectural excellence combined with artistic perfection.

A Courtesan was a woman of stature and culture. This was a medieval institu-

tion, a courtesan literary meaning a woman of the court. In medieval times the courtesan was an embodiment of a culture and artistic talents well versed in music and dance. This institution came to an end with British colonial rule and the end of Nawabi patronage. The British divested them of their earnings and forced them into the abysmal ghettoized life of red light areas which ultimately resulted in the birth of the *tawaif* or prostitute with all its negative connotations and exploitations. This image of the Twaif was further strengthened by iconic Bollywood nautch girl through a series of popular films like *Pakeezah*(1972), *Umara Jaan*(1981), *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), *Devdas*(2002), where the tawaif cannot escape the degrading life of prostitution in the kotha (brothel), where she undergoes a series of misfortunes, including the tragic loss of her lover, and is destined to remain alone forever, marginalized by Indian society. The term 'courtesan' hardly captures the regard and the affection in which these learned and accomplished women were often held. Nor does the translation give us a sense of the wide circle of other artists and connoisseurs of culture to which some of them belonged (Tharu, Susie and K. Lalita, 1991: 64).

Many stories and descriptions of courtesans come from Medieval texts and tales and colonialist and nationalist writings. These writings often either do not actually focus on the courtesan herself, or it skews the reality into a purely erotic and exotic image. The Mughal courtesan tales

actually focused on the male protagonist and not the actual courtesan (Schofield, 2012:159-160) Many of these tales have the same generic characters, plots, and purpose. The moral of the story is that men should abstain from distractions and attachments to "unworthy things," which includes attractive women such as courtesans (Schofield, 2012:160). Colonial authors on the other hand used the term courtesan as an umbrella term for sex workers, which blurred the lines between women entertainers and dancers who did, and did not, perform sexual services for money (Tula and Pande, 2014: 74). These writings used the terms prostitute and courtesan interchangeably, which explains why many people today consider the term courtesan as someone who is a sex worker. Historically speaking, there were different types of sex workers and there were hierarchies that determined the status of that sex worker. Courtesans who did perform sex work often had a higher status than other prostitutes who did not work within a palace or temple. That changed during colonial times when courtesans were just reduced to sex workers and no longer were seen as 'keepers of culture.' This caused them to lose the status they once had. These misguided writings skewed the true stories of these women into erotic tales that encouraged negative stereotypes of sex workers, while also allowing men to simultaneously criticize these women and still go to these women for sexual services.

In pre modern societies women were confined to the four walls. It has been con-

ventionally defined that the women's place was primarily in the home and it's her destiny to organize the household and to rear children. Thus the early women were by and large in private domain. There were few women who came to public space by crossing the boundaries of private and they were not regarded as 'respectable women'. In rural societies women were participating in the agriculture fields along with their men. Whereas in urban centers 'courtesans', 'tawaifs', 'ananas' and 'mamas' (zanana servants) came to the public domain in order to earn bread for their families. The Indian prostitute was thus by tradition inseparably associated with professional entertainers and the terms *Nati*, *Ganika* or *Barangana* (considered synonymous in ancient India) generally indicated the accomplished courtesan. She was perceived as the product of a feudal society which she also aesthetically represented. The hierarchy that was built into the core of the feudal relations regulated the lives of the courtesans and their aristocratic clients. This conception did not stretch to peasant women since their usually catered for men of their own class, or, as the *Dasi* (slave/servant) for the sexual needs of their masters.

There are only few works that focus on these women. Moti Chandra, in his study *The World of Courtesans: Sensuous Women Who Practiced Love as an Art and Profession* maps them through their associations with sensuality and love. He looks at them since the Vedic period and analyses their social functions. He talks

about their sexual, ritual, sacred roles citing various textual sources, and catalogues the various terms that have been employed for courtesans over the ages—*ganika*, *khumbhadasi*—and the hierarchies between these various communities. He states that, courtesans are women who “served the *baser* needs of society but were also a symbol of culture and *ar-samoris*” (Chandra, 1976: 1). At the same time, Moti Chandra stresses also on the condemnation of courtesans on moral grounds, which is a “common feature of *Smritis* and certain Puranas” – for instance, “Her person is sold to others for money, while she often meets a violent death” (Chandra, 1976: 23). To him these women are in the category of ‘fallen women’ and they are “crafty” and “worldly-wise”. They tempted their lovers, perhaps depriving the rich Aryans of a part of their possessions in cattle and gold.” (Chandra, 1976: 15). Chandra cites that the courtesan's primary function is sexual; seeing it as the sole aspect that ‘explains’ all other dimensions of the courtesan—ritual, cultural, political.

Veena Oldenburg in her essay, *Lifestyle as Resistance: the Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow, India*, (1990), looks at these women through the lens of repression and ‘resistance’. Tracing the history of courtesans from their opulent and ‘respectable’ lives in pre-colonial India and with the coming of the colonial government, when the courtesans lose their erstwhile patronages and benefits and protection that they often received from

their royal patrons—”The British usurpation of the Kingdom of Awadh in 1856, and the forced exile of the king and many courtiers, had abruptly put an end to the royal patronage for the courtesans...signaling the gradual debasement of an esteemed cultural institution into common prostitution (Oldenburg, 1990 :261). She shows how, despite attempts to exclude them from social and civic life, courtesans under the colonial rule wielded significant power and owned large amount of property and paradoxically to ‘colonial designs’ commanded considerable ‘respect’ in social circles. “In the tax ledgers from 1858-77...they were classed under singing and dancing girls, and were under the highest tax bracket, with the largest individual income of any in the city...they were also in lists of property and...the value of this part of this booty from war (spoils seized from ‘female apartments’) was estimated to be worth 4 million rupees” (Oldenburg, 1990: 259).Oldenburg also talks about the struggle of the courtesans against an intrusive civic authority that taxed their incomes and inspected their bodies. To circumvent the various intrusions by the colonial authorities, the courtesans devised ingenious ways like keeping two sets of books of their incomes or bribing the local nurse to avoid health inspections etc. “The tactics were new, but the spirit behind them was veteran. These methods were imaginative extensions of the ancient and subtle ways the courtesans had cultivated to contest male authority...and added to a spirited defense of their rights against

colonial rule” (Oldenburg, 1990: 261). Within the altered political economy of colonial rule, the multi-faceted life of the courtesan was reduced to their being located within the frame of the market—be it in their continued existence as sources of high revenue, or as commercial sex workers.

Vikram Sampath’s *My Name is Gauhar Jan: Life and Times of a Musician* (2010) talks of the courtesan and her relationship with newly arrived modern technology, specifically the gramophone, that ‘rescues’ the courtesan women from their ‘fallen-ness’. Sampath’s Gauhar Jan escapes a life of victimhood that her predecessors led as she is ‘saved’ by modern technology. Sampath’s account is of a courtesan whose musical accomplishments have not been valued, at the same time a not-yet modern woman being saved by modern technology, but one whose life story turns out to be tragedy, devoid of money and love, there is no changing her fate. She adopts new technology and emerges in the public sphere.

Courtesans in the Deccan:

In Deccani context the word *tawaif* was coined for singing and dancing girls and not for prostitutes (Kazmi,1988). Today, there is a common notion that all courtesans performed sex work, which is not true. Although some were sex workers, the term courtesans only refers to royal dancers.This erotic idea of courtesans was influenced by colonialist writings that simply viewed courtesans and harems as something inherently sexual Colonialists

failed to see the other aspects of a courtesan's life, such as her community and the other skills she mastered. These women were trained in the long standing tradition of skilled entertainment. During any happy occasion it was these *tawaiifs* who provided entertainment and performed especially on marriage and birth of male child among aristocrats and elites. Hence they were known to be artists with skills. The Nizam patronized *tawaiifs* by establishing office known as '*Dafter-e ArbabNishat*'. In the Asaf jahi court during the period of Nizam Ali khan, a sum of rupees twelve thousand per month was spend towards salaries of *tawaiifs* (Kazmi, 1988, 26).

The *tawaiifs* held very respectable position in Nizams society, they were looked up as artists therefore it was compulsory for *tawaiifs* to sing in the marriage functions and after the *nikah* a group photo was taken for the sake of remembrance and in the group *tawaiif* also given place (Kazmi, 1988:24-25). *Tawaiifs* were an integral part of various festivities—marriage celebrations, Bismillah ceremonies and Urs (death anniversaries of Sufi saints). Kazmi talks of marriage ceremonies in which there is a *takht-e-rawa*, which was a movable throne on which the *tawaiifs* used to sing and dance (Kazmi, 1988: 65). Women were judged by their purity, their ability to service their husbands, their abilities as mothers, and how well they listened to the men in their lives. At the same time, there were women who were judged for their artistic skills, their conversational abilities, and their ability to

seduce men. Women were praised for purity, but ridiculed for their sexual activity. Men complained about how sexually active women were bad and impure, but they still paid for sexual services. Women were both idealized to be these perfect beings and they were also criticized for anything that society deemed inappropriate for women. The patriarchal norms within society forced women to choose either a path of domesticity or a path of becoming a courtesan or sex worker

The important reason as to why courtesans had more respect than other women who entertained and did sex work is that they were considered carriers of culture. This is because an important part of a courtesan's life was learning skills that would make her more appealing to customers while also increasing her status as a woman. There were about 64-100 skills she should learn. Although dancing was her main prerogative, other skills were just as important, such as conversational and musical skills. Women who did perform sexual services had to become adept in those skills as well. Many classical dance forms, such as Kathak and Thumri, can be traced back to the dances of courtesans. Due to the amount of respect these women received, they were sometimes very influential in court. Some even went on to be spies because it was so easy for them to get valuable information from their royal audience (Misra, 1967: 83). Learning these skills helped these women gain confidence as well as learn how to be financially independent.

Being financially independent gave these women legal status, which means there were many laws created that had both positive and negative effects on their lives. There were laws that were intended to help the courtesans, such as the assailant being fined for rape, as well as sexual and physical assault. Courtesans who paid taxes would later get pensions when they became older. There is not a whole lot of information based on how well these laws were upheld. These women did not have the same property rights as men, but they were able to have land that they could give their children for use. Courtesans were not able to buy or sell the property, and the land was taken from their children by the state when the courtesans passed away. Killing a prostitute was not considered a crime because they were still treated as property themselves. Even when these women had more freedom than their counterparts who stayed in the domestic sphere, they still faced so much danger and degradation.

Tamkeen Kazmi postulates that there are two kind of professional women in this period—prostitutes and *tawaifs*. Even though *tawaifs* might not always be “married and never contact another man” like he says but they were usually, “highly cultured women, very disciplines, and trained in etiquettes and mannerisms...they were also teachers in mannerisms (Kazmi, 1988: 65).In Hyderabad society *tawaif* was known for decency, politeness, manners and culture. They had their own place of pride; many elite families sent their

boys to their doors for the learning of culture. During the Qutb Shahi period a number of *tawaifs* served the court. On festivals and other royal ceremonies dance and song and parties were held for several nights, and in the reign of Sultan Abdullah Qutb Shah the *tawaifs* of Karachi, Gujarat, Agra, Lahore and Kabul came of Hyderabad and stayed on. Umda Jan, Elahi Jan of Meerut, Jaddan Bai, Akhtar Jan of Surat, Benazir Jan, Nazir Jan all came from North India and established themselves in Hyderabad. In suburban area of Hyderabad there were 20,000 registered *tawaifs* at this time and an annual budget of 3,24,000 rupees was used for their salaries. (Kazmi, 1988: 64)

The singing and dancing girls performed in *mehfils* and behind from *pardha* the ladies of *zenana* also enjoyed, especially on occasions such as marriage and the birth of male child. All these proved to be entertainment of high class, especially Muslims aristocrats. “It was through a very lavish and luxurious life style that the *Nawabs* of Hyderabad become financial bankrupt” (Sarma, 2008). The general public was not cautioned about this and had no inkling. One of the correspondences collected in *Hyderabad in 1890 and 1891: Comprising all the letters of Hyderabad Affairs written to the Madras Hindu: by its Hyderabad correspondent during 1890-1891* reads, “I wrote to you sometime ago about how a prominent nobleman in the city amused himself at times...I am informed of a game of *chausar* which is played by the means of

three dice and eight wooden pieces representing equal number of men and women...his way of playing the game was so original...he hates having to deal with inanimate objects and picked women and men from dancing girl class and eight men from his companions—all in flesh and blood”—this gives us an idea of the decadence pervading the nobility in the Deccan at this time.

Tavernier who visited Hyderabad during Qutb Shahi period giving description and procession scenes remarked that, Courtesans nearly ten to twelve preceded procession scenes followed by elephants, horses, camels etc. and who await the nobility at the end of the bridge, leaping and dancing before him up to the square (Tavernier, 1925:128). He also noted that courtesans enjoyed considerable amount of status in the Golconda society. He states that there were nearly twenty thousand courtesans in the Golconda kingdom (Tavernier, 1925) They became a source of revenue to the state for they paid tax to the State. Some of them were expected to dance in the court regularly. They were a potential source of income and a perpetual source of enjoyment to the people and rulers in the kingdom. Most of the artists depicted these portraits of courtesans mainly for sale to European and other foreign travelers.

Thevenot who visited India and Golconda in (C 1665 – 1666 AD) also remarked that public women are allowed in the kingdom, so that nobody minds it, when they see a man go to their houses

and they are often at their door well dressed to draw in passengers. But they say most of them are spoiled (Lovell, A, 1687 : 94-97). He also remarked that no stigma was attached to those who frequented the rooms of these whores. Literary sources also mentioned about the famous courtesans Bhagmati, Taramati and Premamati. For instance regarding the historicity of Bhagmati, it was said that Hyderabad was also known Bhagyanagar or Bhagnagar named after a lady Bhagmati, popular courtesan of that time and the name was given by Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah in C 1590 – 1591 AD.

There are controversial views among historians and foreign travelers regarding the veracity of Bhagyanagar being named after Bhagmati. While few historians liked to call her as courtesan or mistress of Muhammad Quli, others called her as his beloved wife. However majority of historians affirmed that Muhammad Quli built the city and named it after Bhagmati who he married. She also embraced Islam in 1605 AD, and higher Hayat Bakshi was their daughter (Chandraiah, K, 1996 : 15).

Faizi, the imperial resident of the Deccan between (C 1590 – 1593 AD) writing about Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah and Bhagmati remarked that, Ahmad Quli steeped in Shiaism and has built a city Bhagyanagar by name after Bhagmati, the old whore (*Fahisha – i - Kuhna*) who has been his mistress for a long time (*Mashuqa – i- Qadim*) (Sherwani, 1974 339). Nizamuddin Bakshi, a panegyrist of the imperial court in his chronicle *Tabaqat*

– i – *Akbar Shahi* written in 1594 AD said that Muhammad Ali Qutb Ul – Mulk, Son of Ibrahim succeeded his father. He became so enamored of a Hindu prostitute (*Patare*) Bhamgasi by name that he founded a city which called Bhagyanagar after her and ordered that one thousand horseman should always accompany the whore (*Fahisha*, 1281:173). Another well-known historian Ferishta mentioning about Bhagmati and Bhagnagar in C1609 – 1610 AD remarked that, the Sultan was greatly fascinated by a whore (*Fahisha*) named Bhagmati. He ordered that whenever she came to the court she should be attended by a thousand horseman so that she should not be inferior to any one of the big nobles. About this time the climate of Golkonda had become so bad that it was for this reason that the Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah founded and populated a city four Kroh away which became unequalled throughout the length and breadth of India for its planning as well as for its cleanliness he called it Bhagnagar at first but later changed the name to Haidarabad.

There is another legend, which says that Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah loved a girl named Bhagmati, who lived on the other side of the river Musi in a village called chichlum. (Vedagiri, 1991:73). She was beautiful and an accomplished dancer. Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah used to go across the river to meet her. His passion for her was so strong that on a stormy night when the river was in spate, he jumped his horse into the river unmindful of the risk to his life just to keep his ren-

devous. The incident was duly reported by the spies to his father Ibrahim Qutb Shah, who ordered a bridge to be built across the river. According to another version, as a punishment for this dare – devilry the young Prince was confined to his quarters and provided with a bevy of international beauties to lure him away from his infatuation for a rustic commoner. After the death of Ibrahim, Muhammad Quli Qutub Shah became the king. He bestowed honors upon her and later married her. After he founded the new city he called it as Bhagyanagar after her and later when she was given the title Hyder Mahal, the name of the city was also changed to a Haiderabad. Bernier, the physician of ShahJahan also said that Bhagnagar was named after Bhagmati. Françoise G Careri who came to this city in 1695 AD also called this place as Bhagnagar. The commentators and Editors of the travels of Thevenot and Careri recorded that Bhagmati was the favorite mistress of the Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah and Bhagnagar was named after her.

Regarding Bhagmati's social status Sri Jagannadham asserts that she was an Arundhatiya damsel. The place Chinchalam, where Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah encountered Bhagmati was a devotional place, where cult of Mathangi or dedication of young girls as devadasis to temple was a religious custom of the day and community. Hence Bhagmati could be from a sect of courtesans. Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah charmed with her beauty nourished it and took her to the palace as

courtesan, who later turned to be his royal mistress. The tradition of adopting such girls by royalty and nobility as slaves and courtesans existed during this period and such women who were beautiful did enjoy a high status and were sometimes even given as gifts to royal personalities or monarchs. Children born to such women were generally legitimized through *Nikah* marriages by kings. Many Muslim historians called such legally wedded Hindu ladies as courtesans or sometimes as prostitutes in derogatory terms. Tavenier also remarked that the grandfather of the present King Abdullah Qutb Shah founded Bagnagar. Here the king had very fair gardens _____ Bagnagar or the garden of nagar (Tavenier, 1925:132). He asserts that Bagnagar stands for the city of gardens or Bagnagar, as a new capital was replete with gardens and groves.

Such description is very much related to the relationship between the royalty and the courtesans, which became a theme for miniaturists and we have many Decani miniatures that depict the courtesan. Two other prominent concubines of the time were Taramati and Premamati (Bilgrami, 1927: 153). They must be Hindu converts to Islam and later on were regularly married to Abdullah Qutb Shah and Abul Hasan Tana Shah respectively. As per Taramati she was builder of a Mosque right in the center of the apartments of the Golconda forts which go by her name and further, the pavilion above described is the very symbol of the Shia sect of Islam. Neither of them could have been merely,

temporary wives of the Sultan or perhaps exclusive occupancy of the palace. It was observed that AbbdullahQutb Shah used spend his leisure hours, listening to the music of these two ladies, carried over the distance by the wind (Raza Ali Khan, 1991:58).

Taramati Baradari, the stately pavilion during Qutb Shahis days in particular used to reverberate with music and dance whenever Taramati entertained. This lady is said to have seen her days as a royal mistress during the reign of Abdul Qutb Shah and Abul Hasan Tana Shah roughly from 1626 – 1687 AD. This beautiful courtesan was an accomplished singer and musician. According to popular lore, Taramati, on moonlit nights used to dance on a tight rope that extended from her pavilion all the way to the Golconda fort.

Architectural evidences reveal that such women were given importance gleaned from the facet that they also constructed Mosque after their names. They were buried along with the dead royal ladies within the *Langer – e – fourse* (compound of the Qutb Shahi tombs). For instance the tombs of Premamati and Taramati were buried in close vicinity of grand Tomb of Hayat Bakshi Begum. Even literature of the time described about the courtesans constituting social fabric. For instance Kandakuri Rudrakavi, the court poet of Ibrahim Qutb Shah, in his work *Nirankuso Pakhyanam* describing the accomplishments of courtesans, remarked that, these ladies who without themselves loving any

one evolved love in their clients by pleasing each one in a particular way.

Similarly during Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah's reign Sarangu Tammaya Mantri, Karnam of Golconda wrote *Vaijayanti Vilasamu* in which he mentioned about two courtesans Madhuravani and Devadevi (Chandriah, 1996: 51). These two sisters who were prostitutes by profession lay a wager to entice a Brahmin youth, Vipranarayana. One of them, Devadevi succeeds in her attempts and the youth fell in disrepute and finally was saved due to his faith in Sriranganatha. These kavyas though mainly served the interests of the aristocracy, yet, indeed gave a picture of decadent morals of the society during this period. Particularly in relation to the condition of courtesans and their life styles in medieval period.

Tavernier who visited Golconda in 1648 and 1652 AD observed that there were nearly twenty thousand women who entered into this profession and were obliged to go every Friday with their governess and their music to present themselves before king in the square in front of the balcony. He appears to have visited their locality and remarked that, in the cool of the evening, they stand before doors of their houses, which are for the most part small huts and when the night comes, they place at the doors a candle or a lighted lamp for a signal, who also sells tari or toddy indicating women and wine go together.

Muhammad Quli poetry also talks about extensively about courtesans, their

dressing-patterns and features. With great ease and felicity he composed many *rubais*, *masnavis*, *ghazals*, *marsiyas*, and *qasidas*.etc, with full imagination and varied themes and vividly described his devotion to wine and courtly beauties appreciating their charms and bodily flavor. Hence he was considered to the Deccan what Geoffrey Chaucer was to the England when related to poetry aspect (Sherwani, 1967: 47). His descriptive natural-ity gives a world of woman in the realm of courtly atmosphere and harem with pleasant nature of seasons, gardens, parks, fruits and flowers and festivals of culture of love and season. Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah's poetry in Dakhni language mainly Diwan in particular consists admiration of Hafiz of Persia. Some of its poems were lavishly illustrated. For instance Diwan of Hafiz contains miniatures of sultan enthroned watching dance performances at his royal court, among which scenes of courtesans engulfed in wine and dance are also depicted.

Courtesans and dancing girls also played a major role in the life of Nizams, Nawabs, Jagirdars and people of Hyderabad. Famous among them were Kaminiji, Muradji and Muneeraji. They used to get a monthly salary from Nizam and nobles. From the records of Kanchan kacheri, it can be said that they were exempted from tax and payment of Nazarana in the city and districts. The nautch girls of Qutb-Shahis on other hand to register but paid no tax for their professions.

The Asaf Jahis established an office known as *Daftar – e- Nishat* or *Kanchan Kacheri*. The superintendent of this office was lady called Mama Sharifa, who held a high status in the palace and society. And was very influential among all Mamas of the palace during Nizams VI reign. She was assisted by a Jamadar and four other subordinates. All cases relating to prostitutes were presented before Mama Shafira. The patronage leading to respectable and prosperous life for these dancing girls of Hyderabad attracted many such women from Northern India; the increase in their numbers changed their position and the profession no longer respectable, later on they adopted prostitution.

Nawab Rafat Yar Jung Bahadur turned his attention towards this evil, which none of his predecessors had ventured to face in the past and raised his voice against this evil practice. Nautch women adopted girls with the immoral motive of benefiting by them in later years. The Nawab first ascertained whether such girls related to the nautch women or were obtained during famine or in any other way. According to the information obtained, he compelled them to deposit securities whereby there were forced to bring them up in a decent manner and later arranged for their marriages with worthy persons. On marriage, they were given a few useful articles, clothes and a little cash to start their fresh lives.

However this profession continued both at societal and royal levels and in particular they remained as an important components of royal harem, with whom roy-

alty passed their leisure hours and hence, the paintings of the time depicted such themes highlighting the activities, features, garments and ornaments of these women, who remained as part of sexual life of royal sphere.

Among Salarjung Begums Janaba Hazrata Zinatunnissa Begum, mother of Salarjung wrote to Sarver – ul – Mulk, asking that concubines of late Nawab Mukhtar ul Mulk Bahadur (Salarjung - I) be granted enhanced pensions. 19 concubines were listed in the letter and these included Wazir – un – Nisa Qanum (mother of Imad – ul – Salamat, Salarjung – II) and Amir – un – nisa Qanum (mother of Munir – ul – Mulk, his younger brother). The other concubines had endearing names like Nurafza Buwa, Dilruba Buwa, Khush – Kadam Buwa and Nanhi Bi, which indicates that Salar Jung did not follow the custom of Nikah or wedding ceremony and entered into marriage bond at all.

Mahlaqa Chanda:

Another famous courtesan of Hyderabad was Mahalaqa Bai Chanda. She was a poet and a signer also. She used to wear heavy and priceless jewelry. She entertained Nawab Ali Khan Asaf Jah II, Nawab Secundar Jah, Meer Alam and Raja Chandulal(Chandraiah, 1996: 60). During the reign Nizam II, families of highly cultured courtesans migrated to Hyderabad, one of them being Mahalaqa Chanda Bibi. Mahalaqa was given the title of Mahalaqa meaning Moon cheek. She was an outstanding poetess and an

expert dancer who patronized and entertained by Nizam (Chandraiah, 1996: 248). She was a favorite of the Nizam due to her performance of poetry, dance and magic. Nizam Ali Khan gave her the title of senior Omrah. This title granted her land, honarary guards, nobles palquini and a drummer to announce her arrival (Stewart A Courtney, 2015, 3/5). Among women she was considered as par with Muhammad Quli, the founder of the city for her proficiency in poetry. Her elder sister who also equally well versed in fine arts was reported to have married the Prime Minister, Ruknuddaula. She had a jagir conferred on her by Nizam II near about the Moula – Ali Gutta.

Mahalaqa had already compiled her first collection of poetry and attained fame when legendary Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib was just a year old. As per Dr. Shahid Naukez Azmi, “There are a number of women poets in the Deccan and Mahlaqa Bai Chanda was the first *Sahib-e-Dewan*, woman poet of Hind. In the recent research it has been proven that Lutf-un-nisa Imtiaz was the first women poet but the crown is still on Mahlaqa Bai Chanda’s head”(Shahid Naukez Azmi, 2010, 8). Various sources suggest that Mahlaqa was born in 1766 AD. Her father Bahadur Khan belonged to an illustrious family. Her mother Maida Bibi also came from a family of repute in Gujarat. She was given the name of her maternal grandmother Chanda Bibi. Her paternal grandfather Basalat Khan was a noble. According to Rahat Azmi, her name was Chanda Bibi

and the title Mahlaqa was bestowed on her by Nizam II and her poetic name was Chanda. Bai was added because of her profession. She was the court singer of Nizam II, Nizam III, Prime Minister Arastuja, Mir Alam, Raja Raurambha, Maharaja Chandulal Shadab. Mahlaqa’s jagirs included Adikmet, Sayyadpalli, Hyderguda, Chandapalli, Pallebhaad, Alibagh. (Shahid Naukez Azmi, 2010, 11). Various *tawaifs* Mahlaqa Bai Chanda, alongwith Hasan Laqa Bai, Husn Afza Bai, Mama Chameli constructed a number of buildings at and around the mount of Hazrat Maula Ali. (Kazmi, 1988: 35). A significant indicator of Mahlaqa’s status in her contemporary society was that she was very close to the Nizam II. She used to accompany him on his travels. She also went with the Nizam to the battle of Pangal (Shahid Naukez Azmi, 2010, 11). Though she was known for her beauty she often accompanied the Nizam in male attire during his battles.

She learnt music and singing from Ghulam Mehdi Shah Nazir, Pannalal Bhaant. Her contemporary poets Shah Nasir, Shah Mohd. Khan, Imaan Hafiz, SiddiQaiz, Mir Alam, Goin Baksh Ziai, were all well acquainted with her. All of them applauded her poetry. Also Mir Alam, Imaan Hafiz and Jauhar wrote poetry on her (Shahid Naukez Azmi, 2010, 8). *Mahanama* or *Tariq-e-Dilfaroz* written by Ghulam Husain Khan Jauhar revolves around Mahlaqa— it’s about her ways, morals, mannerisms and character (Shahid Naukez Azmi, 2010, 11), while poet

Shah Kamaal is believed to have said, “How should I not call Mahlaqa a rare and precious pearl, her lips put rubies to shame... and anyone who sees her all decked up would lose their minds” (“*Mahlaqa ko nayaab aur kimti moti kaise naboloo, inke honton ko dekh kar laal kintipatthar bi pareshan hai... aur uski sajdhaj dekh kar koi bhi deewana kaise na ho?*”) (Shahid Naukez Azmi, 2010, 12). Even noblemen like Chandulal were completely in her spell, “I have no respite without seeing you Mahloqa, I am thirsting to see you, show yourself to me.” (“*nahi hai chain bin dekhe mahlaqa tujhko, daras ko mai to pyaasa hoo, daras apna dikha de mujhko.*”) (Shahid Naukez Azmi, 2010, 13)

Her poetry, filled with “Religion, music and fun” (“mazhab, mosiqui, masti”) (Shahid Naukez Azmi, 2010, 14) was collected and published after her death in 1824 as *Gulzar-e-Mahlaqa* (Mahlaqa’s garden of flowers). A copy of her Urdu *divan* that has 125 ghazals, which was compiled and calligraphed by herself is preserved in the British museum in London. This tomb was built by Mahlaqa when her mother had died. It was built at a cost of Rs.one lakh way back in 1792. An Ashur-khana, ‘baodi’, naqqar-khana and *dalaan* were part of the complex. After her death, she was buried beside her mother’s grave.

Mahlaqa’s library was well-known for her collection of rare books and manuscripts. She had a number of writers, ‘Kaatibs’, in her personal service, for copying texts for her library. Whenever

she heard of a new or rare book, she would somehow get hold of it and ask the *Kaatibs* to prepare a fresh copy for her library. She built mosques like Masjid Baitul-Atiq a hospice for Musa Qadri, baradari for Sufi Taar Shah other than construction of *dalaan* for the pilgrims at Maula Ali shrine. She was associated with six royal courts starting from Ruknuddaula, followed by Nizam Ali Khan to Sikandar Jah, Arastu Jah, Maharaja Chandulal Shadaan and Raja Rao Rambha. Rahat Azmi, who painstakingly collected details about Mahlaqa Chanda’s life writes that this famous Urdu poet of Deccan was a contemporary of renowned poets like Mir Taqi Mir, Sauda and Dard in North India. Mahlaqa had received early education under the watchful eyes of Nawab Ruknuddaulah, Madarul Maham of Asafia dynasty. Apart from fine arts and training in music, she also learnt horse riding and was imparted military training.

At the age of fifteen she accompanied Asaf Jah II in battles. She was renowned for her mastery on *dhrupad* apart from *khayal tappa*. A prominent personality, she lived in Khasa Mahal with hundreds of khadims at her disposal. Mahlaqa’s estate was spread over Syedpalli, Chanderguda, Chandapeth, Ali Bagh and several other areas. She was a generous woman who spent lavishly on the preparations for Khat Darshan Mela and Gyarahvin Sharif. For Muharram and Jashn-e-Haidari, she prepared for months in advance. She threw banquets in the honour of visiting poets and also patronized poets and artists. This form of patronage is not imperial or sub-

imperial patronage but a different form of patronage that has not been problematized or analysed well.

Once she accompanied Asif Jah II to Madhav Rao's court in Pune. When she saw Nana Phadnavis turning away a French trader who had brought rare breed of horses for sale and Phadnavis refusing to pay more than Rs 1,500 apiece, she offered him Rs 12,000 and bought all the six steeds. There are several such tales about Mahlaqa. She died in 1824 (1240 AH). It is said that she died during the outbreak of an epidemic in Hyderabad.

Among the early women strict *pardah* was prevalent. During the early years of Nizam rule, the practice of *pardha* was prevalent in every class of women's especially among elite class. Even the 'mama' (maid servant) wore *pardah* while going to the market. The *pardah* was very strict in Hyderabad, but the unmarried daughters of the Nizam were exempted from its rule. They attended palaces and residency parties and accompanied their father in race. They did not participate in any public functions.

Muslim courtly norms confirmed the earlier position of the courtesan in the society and continued to grant them a space in the court. As dancers and musicians they participated in public rituals and moved into the *zenanamahal* (women's quarters) to entertain the inmates. Often they were incorporated into the household through contract marriages. This practice continued well

into the eighteenth century. Nawab Wziid Ali Shah of Oudh, known as an accomplished poet and musician, turned his entire harem into a dancing school which he called the *Peri Khana* (the place of fairies). Every dancer was connected to the Nawab through the contractual form of *muta* marriage. Yet the courtesans were not the only persons involved in the profession of commercial sex. Lower than the *tawaiifs* in rank and accomplishments were two other categories of women known as *thakahi* and *randi* who lived in the market area and catered for lower class clients including the labourers.

A courtesan was usually part of a household establishment under the chief courtesan or *chandhrayan*. The latter owned and maintained extra apartments, having acquired wealth and fame through her beauty and musical and dancing abilities. Typically a wealthy patron, often the King himself, would set her up in agreeable quarters and support her household in the style in which he wished to be entertained and she would recruit budding young singers and dancers to compete with other reputable establishments. Every reputable house maintained a team of skilled male musicians who were often connected to famous lineages or *gharanas* of musicians thereby enhancing the prestige of the establishment. Doormen, touts and other male auxiliaries screened the clients at the door (Oldenburg, 1989: 134-13).

These dances were regarded as a social event even by the British, and in the early days of the East India Company the

“native” way of entertaining the *Sahebs* was through a feast following a *Nautch*. This developed into a new “custom” which had its roots in the early history of Calcutta. Traditional festivals like *Durga Puja*, originally an occasion when the family got together with men travelling from far off workplaces to their ancestral village houses, were transformed in Calcutta. The urban *Babus* seized the celebrations as an opportunity to invite the *Sahebs* to their homes and offer them lavish entertainment. For European artists like Belnos and Solvyns these feasts offered a colourful opportunity to look at the “native” household and its luxuries of which the dancing girls formed apart. To the artists the dancing girls, the dancing hall and its mixed audience of Indians and Europeans provided a colourful background. The British refused to recognize these hierarchical differences among “prostitutes” in Lucknow out of administrative convenience, and though the officials went to *Nautch* parties, they looked upon the dancing girls as products of the “native society” to be left alone. So the laws, specially that of clinical examinations in lock hospitals were uniformly forced upon all prostitutes. This completely alienated the women who were accustomed to see themselves as the pivot of aristocratic cultural practices. To be equated with a common bazaar prostitute was to them an extreme degradation. When asked by Talwar Oldenburg they expressed their common bitterness:

The soldiers, they said, had no *tamiz* (manners) or *tahzib* (culture), we could

not speak their language, nor they ours. For them we were not different from *randis* and they seldom wanted to stay for the time, nor money to partake of the pleasures of the *Nautch*.(Oldenburg,1989:137-138).

Even though they are sought to be systematically controlled through legal, literary, social and medical means it is important to investigate if the courtesan women and all that they came to represent under the colonial rule—sexual promiscuity, decadent lifestyle and languid entertainment rather than earlier associations with culture and entertainment—was being suppressed and repressed in certain spheres, did they re-emerge elsewhere? Foucault points out “We must... abandon the hypothesis that modern industrial societies ushered in an age of increased sexual repression. We have not only witnessed a visible explosion of unorthodox sexualities; but –and this is the important point – a deployment quite different from the law, even if it is locally dependent on procedures of prohibition, has ensured, through a network of interconnecting mechanisms, the proliferation of specific pleasures and the multiplication of disparate sexualities.”(Foucault, 1990).

With the coming of the colonial order and the accompanying changes in the economic set-up: with the loss of their patronage these women do not have to many options available to earn their livelihood and many of them are reduced to working as full time sex workers or vying

for space in the upcoming film and sound recording industry. It is also important to note that professions like these are considered to be more 'respectable' than prostitution. A popular belief at that time was that courtesans kidnapped girls and introduced those girls into their communities (Oldenburg 1990: 264). This concept was likely instigated by Mirza Hadi Ruswa's *Umroo Jan Ada*, which was a historically accurate novel, but it did also influence the stereotypes of "evil kidnapper" (Oldenburg, 1990: 264). Although kidnapping was one method that girls became a part of the courtesan community, it should not be considered the most common reason why someone would become a courtesan. Oldenburg interviewed thirty women who ranged from thirty-five to seventy-eight years old. Through these interviews she was able to deduce that the most common reason for becoming a part of a courtesan community was because these women were unhappy with the lives they lived. They were either unhappy with the households they grew up in or the households they married into. Some of these women were widows from marriages they entered into when they were teenagers. About a third of them were physically abused or sexually assaulted. Some women were unhappy with their jobs or just wanted the financial independence that courtesans had access to. Only four out of the thirty women were daughters of other tawa'if. Many of the interviewed women spoke about their stories with excitement. These were women who were finally able to be independent. Through becoming courtesans,

these women had to learn professional skills they earned their own money and gained a sense of confidence in themselves (Oldenburg, 1990: 267).

Using the information gathered from Oldenburg's research, it makes sense that women during the early period and before would have had similar reasons for becoming a courtesan. Women from pre-colonial India faced those same exact issues. They were unhappy with the lives they were forced to live as daughters, wives, and mothers. These roles did not give them the happiness or independence they desired, because they were constantly subordinate to men and did not have the opportunity to control their own destiny. Due to the double standards created and reinforced by patriarchy, women either had to choose between becoming a wife and mother or becoming a courtesan or prostitute. In either position, they are still servicing men, but in one they may face less ridicule if they stay in the domestic sphere while in the other they gain financial independence but may become outcasts, especially if they have a low status in society.

The nationalist movement in its Gandhian phase was geared towards involving women into the freedom struggle. Interestingly, while it seems that colonial discourse situates the courtesan outside the domain of culture, the constitution of the woman subject in nationalist discourse seems to simultaneously constitute the woman subject around cultural markers, repeatedly. The depictions of womanhood

in this period are many, in poetry, prose and journals. An editorial published in *Chaand*, a popular women's journal defined the ideal woman as "...she should be free from the present ignorance, bad influences and ill feelings...she should not observe purdah but this does not mean that she should go out laden with jewels, unnecessarily attracting men's attention...she should know how to fight oppression and to defend herself with her own hands, singing and keeping merry are her ornaments, but only songs that become a respectable woman, she should be as virtuous as a heroic wife and as courageous as a mother of lions and bear sons who will free India from servitude"(Orsini: 2009: 303) Virtue and respectability, even in the choice of her songs, are important merits of the modern Indian woman. With the coming of this new women, the courtesans were marginalised and seen only as fallen women who indulged in sex for money.

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