



**ICSSR sponsored**  
**A Three-Day International Conference**  
**Bodies across Boundaries: Representing Human Trafficking, and Sex**  
**Works in Contemporary Indian Films and Media**



MANIPAL INSTITUTE OF COMMUNICATION  
 MANIPAL  
 (A constituent unit of MAHE, Manipal)

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## Concept Note:

Sex Work and related issues have dominated feminist theory and politics, both Western and Indian feminist enquiries. Patriarchy is the second form of misogyny, which literary connotes the 'rule of father or the dominant male' and was originally to describe a specific type of male-dominated society. According to Sylvia Walby, 'patriarchy is the system of social structures and practices, where women are exploited and oppressed according to the power relationship'. (Walby: 1990). Since patriarchy has treated women as a sexual object, hence under patriarchal conditions, women are primarily conditioned to provide sexual services to men according to their sexual requirements and desires. This is instead an abusive and regressive idea of a woman's body because it is regarded as an inert and passive object, a decorative piece and not as an intelligent, dynamic and creative human body. Within a patriarchal society, a girl is habituated to believe from the beginning that for the purpose of procreation, her sexuality is meant (and controlled) for the sexual indulgence and pleasure of her husband. Patriarchy has branded prostitution as an unavoidable evil since it protects women from committing adultery and safeguards the male concepts of virtue against assault and destruction. Within a patriarchal social structure, the prostitute is stigmatised as a nasty, impure whore or vamp – the femme fatales who disrupt the fabric of a male-dominated society. Barry (1995) defines prostitution as sexual exploitation: 'When the human being is reduced a body, objectified to sexually service another, whether there is consent, violation of the human being has taken place. Barry defines a four-stage process through which prostitution becomes sexual exploitation: (1) distancing, (2) disengagement, (3) dissonance and (4) disembodiment. It is in these stages, Barry argues, that the objectifying of the female body and separation of sex from the human being gets institutionalised. More recently, Jeffreys (2008) argues that states which have legalised prostitution or made provisions for regulation are acting as pimps and are continuing the male domination of women.

The migration system approach was developed in response to the disparagement of the two main approaches in migration theory: the neo-classical economic equilibrium approach and the historical structuralist approach. Both methods seem biased in their analysis levels and, hence, inadequate to explain the complexities of contemporary migration and related consequences. It is essential to mention that migration is not restricted to simply understanding 'push' and 'pull' factors - socio-cultural, political, and economic dimensions are also included. There is an interrelation between migration, poverty and women who enter sex work. Migration into sex work is often understood in the public discourse as trafficking takes place in different countries and different locations. For migrant women, the act of migration is seen as going against the traditional female role of staying at home and being looked after by the men and by their families. They are, therefore, pushed into sex work as they are already seen as having transgressed the boundaries defined by patriarchal traditions.

In the liberal world, human trafficking is a lucrative business. In India, it is the second biggest criminal activity, linked with illegal arms and drug trade. The total annual revenue for trafficking in persons in India is estimated to be between Rs. 5 billion and Rs.9 billion. Globally, nearly 2.5 million people from 127 different countries are victims of trafficking per

year. (UNICEF 2023) Worldwide, 1.2 million children are trafficked for sexual exploitation, with India being the most significant contributor. The recent National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) Report reveals some interesting statistics regarding the kidnapping and abduction of women and girls -this data also indicates the extent of ineffective state intervention against couples who elope. According to the NCRB, their primary focus is on cracking down on interstate pimps and con artists who are involved in hiring young adults on the pretext of getting them jobs in the city. Incidents of human trafficking have focused on its rising trend from 2011 to 2020. A total of 3517 cases were registered in 2011, which rose to 6877 cases in 2018-19. The crime under human trafficking during the year 2022-23 has increased by 95.5%.

In the 21st century, a new understanding of practice has appeared with the gradual politicisation of people who engage in prostitution. That the term 'sex work' has replaced prostitution is an indicator of this change. Positioning sex work with other forms of work counters the classification of sex work as an unusual and isolated activity. In the present context, the sex worker's movement in India invokes the assumption that it is better to be one man's wife, effectively subject to feudal power relations, than being a sex worker, subject to capitalist contract. The debate on the regulation of sex work has influenced three positions, Criminalisation, Legalisation, and Decriminalisation, which also attempt to deconstruct the sex worker's movement in Indian feminist discourse.

Over time, media coverage of sexual assault and abuse has been evaluated, analysed and theorized to study the social impact. News on rape may be associated to cruelty, gender inequity and justice provision. The questions raised include what reasons led to violence, and did media coverage play a role? Did the coverage promote additional violence? Does rape often lead to sensationalized and biased reporting in journalism? What impact did class, caste, colour, and location have on coverage, in addition to gender? Understanding how the media portrays gender violence remains a work in progress (Sreedharan & Thorsen, 2021). News coverage can affect people's thoughts, and attitudes toward sexual violence, particularly rape. It furthermore affects in what way society reacts to such violence. Good news coverage, which challenges cultural and societal conventions and seeks answers, is decisive for controlling sexual assault (Sreedharan & Thorsen, 2021). The language that is used by media to report rape and sexual assault incidents is confusing and problematic (Varma, 2023). The media can perform a vital role in facilitating the change of chronicle of incidents pertaining to rape and sexual assault in society by altering the narrative and having an improved understanding of the problem in the process of writing and display (Dorfmann, 2011). Framing of media manifests through the depiction of a particular topic, how it is represented, the choice of important words, terminologies and phrases used (Provalis, 2022). The media's understanding of happenings is "influenced by several factors, comprising the reporter's subjective belief system, broader cultural and ideological conditions in the society and organisational journalistic practices (Provalis, 2022). Journalists' news framing is often exceptionally reliant on the availability of several sources of facts and stereotypically exemplifies the outer quintessence of the cultural norms.

At the beginning of the 1980s, *Shyam Benegal* critically and extensively visualised the lives of sex workers, their struggles, crises, grief, desire and frustration in his film '*Mandi*' (1983). At the beginning of the 1990s, when feminist discourse stimulated the fields of gender relations, some

critical changes occurred in the representation of sex workers in the Indian context. Post 1990s, directors operating in the parallel Indian cinema movement have visualised and rearticulated the identities of sex workers, their sexual-reproductive and other fundamental rights through their cinematic oeuvre. In 2004, director *Ross Kauffman* and photographer *Zana Briski* made a documentary, *'Born into Brothel'* on the lives of children doomed to be confined between four walls of brothels. After the enormous international success of the *'Born into Brothel,'* non-Indian film directors like *Michael Glawogger, James Johnson, Robert Bilheimer, Justin Dillon, Larry Rich, Andrew Levine, Chris Davis, Nicholas Krist of Lars von Trier and Jørgen Leth* have raised some critical questions regarding trafficking, sexual exploitation, child abduction and other ethical and moral issues related with prostitution in South Asian Countries like India, Bangladesh and Nepal.

#### Themes:-

- ❖ The Role of Print and Electronic Media in Covering the Global and Local Fight against Human Trafficking and Sex-Work ”
- ❖ Disrupting International Human Trafficking: A Network Analysis
- ❖ Contemporary Media: depicting Roles of Social Stakeholders in Human Trafficking
- ❖ The question of Race and Gender Shape Efforts to Counter Human Trafficking in media and films.
- ❖ Human Trafficking Vulnerability: A Randomised Controlled Trial in India, Nepal and Bangladesh
- ❖ Measuring Exploitation: Depiction through Indian Films and Media
- ❖ Raising Awareness against Human Trafficking and Sex work
- ❖ Depiction of Relationship between Patriarchy and Prostitution in Indian Cinema
- ❖ Born into Brothel: Depicting socio-economic and psychological status of children of Sex Workers
- ❖ Stereotyping of Sex Workers in contemporary Indian films
- ❖ Debate on Legalizing Sex Work
- ❖ Sex Work and Health Hazards and Question of Safety

#### Key Dates

- Deadline for submission of abstracts: 20<sup>th</sup> September 2024
- Communication of acceptance of abstracts and panel proposals: 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024
- Deadline of Registration: 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2024
- Conference dates: 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> October 2024

Abstract Submission: All submitted abstracts will undergo a blind review. An abstract between 500 to 700 words, with 5 key words. Clearly summarizing the arguments, should be submitted before the deadline. The committee normally reaches its decision within 10 days after abstract

submission. Please send the Abstract and Paper to [debjani.halder@manipal.edu](mailto:debjani.halder@manipal.edu),  
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#### Registration Fees

Category	Date	Amount
MAHE Students	3 <sup>rd</sup> October 2024	1000 INR (820+18% GST)
MAHE Research Scholars, MAHE Professionals	Do	2000 INR (1640+18% GST)
Non MAHE Students	Do	1500 INR (1230+18% GST)
Non MAHE Research Scholars, MAHE Professionals	Do	2500 INR (2050+18% GST)
International Participants	Do	150 USD

Accommodation for participants arriving from outside locations will be organized at the NIH guest house, MAHE, subject to prior request. Participants are required to settle their accommodation fees directly at the venue.