



Prostitution in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This paper shows that several times the Thai Government took some major actions to stop forced prostitution. Especially they put greater emphasis on the child prostitution. Specific punishments are also attached with this. But it is viewed as the other social problems in Thailand, there are many factors which causes the problems of prostitution in Thailand.

Keywords--parlours, GDP, HIV/AIDS

I. INTRODUCTION

Thailand is one of the most attractive countries for the tourist for its colorful temples, floating markets, wonderful beaches, blue-green waves, smiling peoples and above all fascinating parlors and sex comfort.

It is believed that before the Vietnam War the entire scenario of this country was totally different from the present scenario. Pattaya was such a locale equipped with palm trees, beautiful beaches, thatched hut and fishing opportunity was also there. During the War the lonely solders wanted to have all this kind of pleasure at any cost. On the other hand Thailand being a poor country grasped this opportunity and supposed to provide them all comforts including sex. Since then the so called sex trade gain popularity in Thailand gradually. As of now the sex trade has become one of most attractive profession and it contributes around 10 percent of total GDP of Thailand. One can easily identify the "prostitution zones" in Thailand such as Bangkok, which is the capital city and consists of remarkable centers Patpong, Nana Plaza, and the red-light district of Soi Cowboy besides all these Pattaya, Phuket (Patong), etc. are countable. Prostitution in Thailand takes place in variety of venues as well as different forms, ab ob nuat, massage parlours, hostess bars, saunas, go-go bars and beer bars. Though according to a report in July 2016 that the Thai government intends to abolish the sex industry.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Thitsa in 1980 stated that, entering sex work may not be a choice, those are powerless entered into this profession. She further shown that Thai women who have a lower position assigned to them by Buddhism, which is the foundation forming social, cultural and spiritual life in Thailand. Based on that, male Buddhist to join Buddhist monk-hood, on the other hand this opportunity is not available to the women because of their lack of karma. To support their family female of Thailand preferred to enter into prostitution. From the argument of Thitsa it indicates that Thai women have no agency in their lives or in choices they make.

Leslie Ann Jeffrey (2002) discussed in his book on the women in prostitution, which was done by interviewing a few women. She asserts that the structural constraints enclosed with prostitution as a 'choice' is mostly evident in the developing world. Meaning that your choices are limited in what labor options the society can offer you. She further made a constructionist approach, but also on poststructuralist feminist theory, which according to her uncovers how constructed categories, such as prostitute, whore and victim are imposed on the women. She claims that there is no singular prostitute. Kamala Kempadoo (2005) is one of the scholar argues that prostitution as the entrepreneurial moves by women. Kempadoo further claims that, women take initiative by moving to improve their living conditions and finally to empower themselves.

Ashley Mason (2011) studied on "Tourism and the Sex Trade Industry in Southeast Asia" and concluded that number of global processes that interconnect to set the stage for sex tourism in Southeast Asia. The relationship between tourism as an agent of development has been explored through a discussion of sex tourism. The historical precedent set in Southeast Asia demonstrates that it is necessary to understand a phenomenon, such as sex tourism, along a lengthy continuum, rather than as a static or momentary occurrence.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

From the extensive review of the existing literature the following stated objectives have been framed:

1. To shed some light on the emergence of prostitution profession or sex trade in Thailand
2. To explore the impact of prostitution on the Thai society.

IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study is descriptive in nature and it is primarily based on the secondary data. The sources of secondary data are various published research articles, books, Newspapers, Magazines, search engines, published and unpublished thesis, etc.

1. Evolution of Sex Trade in Thailand

Prostitution or sex trade in Thailand was legal and taxable from the 1300s to mid-1700s. At the meantime there was a tendency found that a huge number of labour workers coming to Thailand from China and a lion portion of them also joined to prostitution. This tendency continued to the late 1850s. During the Vietnam War the U.S. military identified Thailand as a place for recreation and rest destination. It is noted that during the War the rural poverty raised to such extent that it led to urban migration and particularly in between 1960s and 1970s put some extra fuel to the sex trade in Thailand. The evolution of sex trade in Thailand has been summarized into three phases:

- 1) The role of Buddhism
- 2) Economy
- 3) The Vietnam War

The Role of Buddhism

Thailand, a proudly Buddhist country seems to be in a big sexual mess. So much so that many have started to wonder what exactly Buddhism teaches about sex? Many well-known prostitutes give up their profession by inspiring the Buddhist history and tradition. Many of them have joined the 'Sangha' as 'bhikkhuni' to spiritual development for the rest of their lives. But Buddhism is often criticized as a religion that, being mainly concerned with personal salvation, lacks a social ethics.

The teaching of Buddha are inherently engrained into the Thai Culture, which are carefully followed in order to keep their karma pure. The doctrine of karma maintains that each human act carries its own merit or demerit. The Thai people believe that during their lives, they are in the process of being born again. When they die, they will either be promoted to a higher karma or if their soul is impure, they will be punished and reincarnated to a lower from their life where they must learn to clean their karma. With every act they do, by helping someone, by showing gratefulness to their parent, they are making merit or they are performing actions which will purify their soul. If Thai do something which will bring dishonor or shame to themselves or their families, they will have made a

'stain' on their karma and must therefore redeemed themselves by performing good actions, thereby cleansing their Karma once again. The trade in women in Thailand arose from social conditions which were external to Buddhism as a body of thought, but has been consolidated by the biases inherent in Buddhism. It is this very fact that women want to purify their soul by doing work which will help their families, not to escape them. The daughters feel that by showing their gratefulness to parents for what they have been given, they not only have an opportunity to alleviate financial pressures on their family, but also as a chance to purify their karma and as one more step to reaching nirvana (the highest level of enlightenment). The Buddhist view of women is one which puts them on lower level than men. Women are looked down upon especially by monks who view them as merely dangerous objects that provoke sexual interest in men. Buddha advises his disciples not to look at them or to talk to them. Buddhism acknowledges the view that women's natural role is for having children, but it excludes the notion of women being sexually desired or attractive. The fragmented conception of the female body and the process of biological reproduction may be regarded as one of the major source of gender bias which has implications for the social position of women. Although this bias does not exist in Buddhist thought, the girl enters prostitution knowing that they are not being judged by the family, they know that they are taking the opportunity to make merit for their family and to purify their Karma. While Buddhist attitudes prevail about women as inferior beings, their status is karmic and not due to a personal failinf or moral flaw. Temporary work in the sex industry may be seen as fate or karma, not a moral flaw in the girl herself, or it may be seen as work for her family that gains her karmic merit. The Sangha, the Buddhist institution, do not reflect Buddhist teachings perfectly. Their negative attitudes towards the prostitutes lead Thai society to see those women in a bad sense. The Sangha maintains a reluctant attitude towards the 'worldly concerns' of the common man. Their understanding or misunderstanding make it difficult to expect any logical or effective involvement about the issue of prostitution.

Economy

The western penetration by the end of nineteenth century depicts the economic factors behind. Through the pervasive colonial expansion in Southeast Asia during the period of AD 1880-1930 it could not avoid the influence exerted by the colonial system. Under Western influence, a commercial economic policy develop, the consequent change was for production for subsistence to production for the export. A rich commercial community and a bureaucratic class thus emerged. This commercial community, from the urban areas, took apart in a developing rice-economy. In other words, the commercialization of rice trade in the late nineteenth century large expansion of the export economy were

accompanied by a large scale influx roles and marriage systems of these community were very different from those traditional rural Thai society; this community was more interested in polygamous marriages or taking of concubines and opposed to marriage life along with it. Women were assigned to provide entertainment to those rich influential men and this helped in the growth of the practice and trade of harlotry. This time the practice prostitution was introduced on a large scale for a first time. It was usual then the concubines of the men folk of rich family.

In this period of Thai nobility also became more public about the multiplication of concubines, elaborating a complex system of graded wives and concubines. The values and practices of the rich and powerful provided a model for aspirant members of the new urban populations as the towns and cities began to grow in the important development sexual politics the prostitution significantly expanded.

The Vietnam War

Prostitution in Thailand flourished long ago because of some social and political changes. The exchange of girls and dollars between Thailand and America during the Vietnam War (1967) was a root cause of it. Moreover, it was legalized by king Rama V in 1943 which was also responsible for increasing the number of prostitutes. Domestic prostitution has for centuries been a part of the Thai tradition. It was simply accepted as normal and it has been estimated that as many as 95% of Thai men have gone to local brothels that re found almost in every city of Thailand. Some say 95% may be the higher and more for sensationalism, but the percentage is certainly high.

During the Vietnam War American service men asked for "rest and recreation" by to the Thai official then. Thailand officials was agreed to provide them what they asked for. The response of the South Vietnamese government was surprising, "the American needs girls, we need dollars" it was an inexhaustible source of US dollars for the state.

Prostitution was so popular that it has replaced tourism after the War was over. So, dramatic escalation of prostitution industry was outcome of the establishment of US military based during Vietnam War. Prostitution continued to expand even after the bases were dismantled. It took its forms under the umbrella of bar girls, singer, partners and other occupation.

During the Vietnam War the West came to know about the tradition of Thai prostitution. To the American soldiers Thailand was an R and R spot. Thai prostitution combined international economics in the guise of international tourism. Under this circumstances places like Pattaya was created. A kind of social consciousness emerged at that time.

2. The Impact of Prostitution on the Thailand

Thailand is one of the middle-income country in South-Asia, where the economy is mainly based on agriculture and tourism. This is the most attractive tourist destination. Thailand is also popularly known for its sex tourism in different forms and high rate of human trafficking mostly for prostitution. Though prostitution illegalized in the new 2007 constitution, still remains in Thailand widespread. It is believed that prostitution has been popular in the country since 1800s. As of now lakhs of women have been trafficked in Thailand. In 2003, the Ministry of Justice of Thailand has discussed regarding the legalizing of prostitution as a means of increasing tax revenue and improving conditions for sex workers. Though that debate never been legalized. Today is largely seen that prostitution in Thailand as financial transaction and is widely accepted. Behind the existence of sex industry in Thailand several cultural and economic factors are responsible. In spite of that prostitution has positive as well negative impact and these are discussed below:

Prostitution as the High-end Profession for the Rural Poor

Many scholars pointed out that female sex workers works as prostitutes for the purpose to fulfill their duties to their family. As per the social norms in Thai the grown children are mostly responsible to feed of the parents. Particularly this responsibility falls on that of the youngest unmarried daughter of the family. Based on that principles of the society many uneducated, rural unmarried girls find interestingly that working with the sex industry is one of the easiest and best way to earn money and live. In the rural area there are less opportunity of this profession and they have started to move to the metropolitan areas. These high-end establishments are tourist centric and are mostly in the major tourist areas in Bangkok.

Prostitution as the Source of Livelihood

Though prostitution is illegal in Thailand, in spite of that there is existence of brothel, massage parlor, etc. different form of prostitution. It is interestingly noted that the Thai Government indirectly promoting it to some extent. The reason behind it that because of migration to the cities a kind of artificial crises have been created in the job market. On the other hand the growing numbers of the tourists in the cities paved the way of tourism. Besides that the higher needs of sexual satisfaction among the tourist leads the prostitution. There is a balance of demand and supply of sex workers.

The Thai government as well as brothel owners and sex workers have found that it is an extremely profitable business; sex workers openly solicit on the streets and in red light areas. As per one of the report published by the. As per Dr. Nitet Tinnakul of Chulalongkorn University there are a total of 2.8 million sex workers, that includes 2 million women, 20,000 adult males, and 800,000 minors under the age of 18. Bangkok is known as the hub of prostitution and is filled with local

sex buyers, sex tourists and prostitutes. Lion portion of the sex workers of the country is depended on Bangkok.

V. PROSTITUTION AND HEALTH: HIV/ AIDS

It is very much important to know that how do prostitution and sex tourism affect the physical as well as the mental health of the women associated with this profession. They have to work in miserable conditions. The working hours, number of customers, dress code-all have been decided by the owner of the brothel. The brothel owner usually thinks of his/her own profit rather than thinking of the well-being of the girls. Sometimes they even to do intercourse without condoms for the sake of the pleasure of the customers.

The sexual health of the women and children those are associated with prostitution is severely harmed in many ways:

- i). Increased risk of HIV/AIDs
- ii). Risk of sexually transmitted infections
- iii). Risk of unwanted pregnancy
- iv). Rape
- v). Physical abuse
- vi). Confinement, etc.

Prostitution may affect the mental health of the women also. It is violation of women's human rights and treats women as objects. The pain of being treated so poorly can led to depression. Sadly, the conduct of a relative few has adversely affected the reputation of Thai women, in general.

HIV was first detected in Thailand in 1984. The government's response was very slow at that time.

They were actually concentrated on earning more tourist dollars to meet the economic pressure.

Also, the number of AIDs cases were few earlier. But the Thai government officials and health care providers faced the rapid explosion of the new cases of HIV infection and AIDs very soon.

Promotions of condom has increased in Thailand to get protect from HIV/AIDS.

VI. SEX TRAFFICKING

Scholars have interestingly found out that sex trafficking has become a part of the Thai culture. Many women have directly or indirectly become involved in it, as sex trafficking historically popular as a source of livelihood in the country. Though sex trafficking is against the law in Thailand, despite of that, sex trafficking is continuing in the country. There are several reasons behind sex trafficking in Thailand. Due to lack of job opportunities and difficulties because of citizenship for the Thaihill tribe girl or woman it is possible to be trafficked

or otherwise exploited. In Thailand without having the proof of the citizenship it is somehow impossible to get a job. As a result of that, many women is being sex trafficked in order to make arrange for food and shelter. The victims by sex trafficking are generally found in the sex clubs, massage parlors, brothels, and street prostitution in the country.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Prostitution has been illegal in Thailand for more than 45 years but the surprising fact that it is the backbone of the country's economy. Several times the Thai Government took some major actions to stop forced prostitution. Especially they put greater emphasis on the child prostitution. Specific punishments are also attached with this. But it is viewed as the other social problems in Thailand, there are many factors which causes the problems of prostitution in Thailand. The blame for prostitution may be on the parents who sell their child, culture and society of the country, the customers, the gangsters, the corrupted police and the social and financial inequalities in the country.

It is important to raise questions about the se industry in Thailand, not necessarily from a moral view point, but in the context of the serious AIDs situation. There is a need for more specific and appropriate action which should be based on reliable and comprehensive information.

What is needed in Thailand is that the Buddhist base community which would seek to promote the enduring values of Thai culture that is ultimately rooted in a religious worldview. Form the leadership of well-educated or well informed Buddhist monks Buddhist base community can be possible to promote in the country. Cultural identity can be fostered through the adoption of such values, and Buddhist social ethics would become guidelines for actions.

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