

The Entry of the Red-Light Culture into Society

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One significant change in contemporary social life is that the traditional red-light areas located within cities are now almost on the verge of decline. The very red-light areas that are naturally fading today were once the subject of major movements aimed at their displacement and eradication. Places such as Kamathipura, Sonpura, Heera Mandi, and Dalmandi have considerably lost their former prominence.

If a historian looks back through the lanes and by-lanes of these localities, he would find that the women who lived there, as well as these narrow streets themselves, possess a remarkable history. They contributed significantly to the cultural heritage of India, the national movement, and the functioning of social life.

At an intellectual gathering, I once heard an elderly man expressing his views on this social transformation. He remarked that earlier every city had a designated brothel area, but those establishments have now declined. Cities are changing rapidly, and the red-light areas is no longer a distinct social unit; it has become a thing of the past. According to him, what once remained confined to a particular locality has now spread throughout society like a moral and social ailment.

Reflecting on his observation, one finds a degree of truth in it. In the age of social media, the public display of the body and physical appearance has become a matter of concern for many civilized societies. News of illicit relationships, brutal murders, and sexual violence appears regularly in the media. Alongside this, the growing “spa culture” has also attracted attention. Reports of police raids on spa centers frequently raise questions about activities taking place behind the façade of legitimate business. Similar concerns are often expressed regarding certain hotels and resort venues where entertainment programs and dance performances are organized, with allegations that other activities may occur behind the scenes.

While the culture of “call girls” may be considered an old phenomenon in many Western societies, it has become a topic of considerable discussion in a culturally rooted country like India. Indian cinema continues to produce item songs, social media generates endless memes, and institutions strive to preserve social order. The important question is whether the decline of traditional red-light districts should be viewed as a warning sign for society.

Over the past two decades, concerns regarding HIV and other sexually transmitted infections have remained significant public health issues in India. This suggests that commercial sexual activity is no longer confined to a specific geographical area. Its changing forms and manifestations present new social challenges that deserve serious attention.

According to tradition, it was after witnessing four profound sights that a young prince named Siddhartha experienced a spiritual awakening and later developed the philosophy that came

to be known as Buddhism. In contrast, today's youth are exposed to thousands of images and videos within a single hour through social media reels, yet such exposure rarely results in comparable philosophical reflection or intellectual transformation.

There was a time when wealthy merchants and local elites hosted grand musical gatherings at their residences. Renowned courtesans often performed at these events and enriched the cultural atmosphere. In villages and small towns, folk theatre and nautanki served as important forms of entertainment. Later, the rise of cinema transformed the entertainment industry, and subsequently television and screen-based media gradually limited the public and communal forms of entertainment that had once been central to social life.

Today, the nature of entertainment has become highly individualistic rather than family-oriented. People can now access and enjoy a wide range of entertainment from around the world through a single mobile phone. There is no doubt that social media has emerged as a major source of entertainment in contemporary society. However, it has also gained prominence as a powerful medium for obscenity, explicit content, and the display of the human body.