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Kamatipura: A Red Light Express, taken from A.Revathi's

The Truth About Me

Abstract

Revathi a transgender was born as Doraisamy in Salem, Tamil Nadu. “*The Truth About Me*” projects her life as a whole with all its turmoil. This article titled “Kamatipura: A Red Light Express, taken from A.Revathi's *The Truth About Me*” explains the history, nature and lifestyle of the people in Kamatipura. It also brings the bills passed by the government for their welfare to like lime light.

Keywords: Kamatipura, Kamathis, Sex Work, Red Light Area, Change, Status, Awareness, Job Opportunities, Hijra.

Introduction

Revathi was born as Doraisamy in Salem district, Tamil Nadu. She is a transwoman and belongs to the Hijra community. She is an activist and Bengaluru-based writer. From childhood she has experienced many violence and assault by the society. Her social and personal hardships affected her academic performance. She went to Delhi and later underwent a sex-change operation (nirvanam). Revathi faced many problems in life as a hijra like sexual harassment. She initially did sex work and finally she got a job at Sangama, NGO working for sexual minorities. In spite of all the mishappenings in her life, Revathi also published her first book in Tamil, *Unarvum Uruvamum* in 2004. Later she published her second book *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story*, in 2010 which was first written in Tamil *Vellai Mozhi* and translated into English by V Geetha. In this book she wrote her own experience as a hijra, where she travelled many places in Mumbai like Byculla, Ghatkopar, Kamatipura and so on.

The Black History of Kamatipura

Mumbai was once called as Bombay, which was a scattered island and offered to the Portuguese by the Treaty of Bassein on 25 October 1535. Later Mumbai came under British control as the Portuguese gave it as a dowry to Charles. In order to connect the seven scattered islands of Bombay, Hornby Vellard started to build causeway in 1782. People from different states of India were picked for this purpose. In this juncture, the Maratha army also defeated the Nizam of Hyderabad. So, many construction workers and artisans from Andhra Pradesh migrated to Bombay and settled into the flats which were constructed by the Hornby Vellard. Group of

people from Telungana who came for this work were referred as Kamathis. Men were used as laborers and women were misused (sexually harassed). Kamathis settled in Lal Bazaar which was renamed as Kamatipura.

Later in the 19th and 20th centuries, a large number of girls and women from Europe and Japan were illegally taken into Kamatipura, where they served as prostitutes for British soldiers and local Indian men. As a result, farmers in Kamatipura were declined and it became a busy road for prostitution. When the British left India, the Indian sex workers and the transgender people took over the places. In recent periods, many Nepalese girls and women were taken into Kamatipura as sex workers. Kamatipura then flourished and became Asia's largest sex district.

The Transformation- from Doraisamy to Revathi

Revathi was born as Doraisamy in small village in Tamil Nadu. Doraisamy was the youngest—the fourth boy in the family. As he grew up he loved to dress like girl and do all female activities. Initially this behavior seemed to be just playfulness but it became harder to ignore all of it as he grew older. In his mid-teens he met a group of men who behaved like him and introduced him to the hijras. Doraisamy stole money and an earring from his mother, and ran away from home to join people of his kind. He went to Delhi for this purpose. He then joined hijra house and done his nirvanam or castration (sex change operation) and renamed himself as Revathi, as he resembled actress Revathi after her castration.

Kamatipura in *the Truth About Me*

Revathi can now dress, walk and talk as a woman. But as a hijra, she faced many problems to live and earn. She had only three options to make money – she could beg or she could do sex work. The story follows Revathi's life as she moved from city to

city, from Hijra house to house, which is also called as parivars. Initially, she begged in Ghatkopar and later went to Kamatipura for sex work. Revathi moved to Kamatipura which is said as, “My older gurubai lived with my guru at Byculla and I visited them as well. Byculla is also called Kamatipura. There are many houses for sex work there— houses where hijras employ women to do sex work, houses where women employ other women in this trade”(142). At the age of twenty she decided to do sex work to fulfill her sexual desire. Revathi mentioned that she had both moments of happiness and sorrows in her life. She faced the dangers, the assaults, the rapes by clients, random rowdies and policemen in Byculla.

Bills passed

The Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2014 is a proposed Act of the Parliament of India which seeks to end the discrimination faced by transgender people in India. The Bill was passed by the upper house Rajya Sabha on 24 April 2015. It was introduced in the lower house Lok Sabha on 26 February 2016.

Conclusion

Mumbai, especially Kamatipura is still known and remembered for sex works. All transwomen seek refuge in Kamatipura and believe it to be their place of hope and dreams. Even after the government has passed bills and various NGOs and LGBTQ centers are creating awareness, the status of Kamatipura and its inhabitants are not yet fully changed.

If students in school and colleges are given exact details about the sufferings faced by these Kamathis', there are possibilities for a change. People in Kamthipura must also be provided with certain number of job opportunities which will help them earn their bread for life and distract

their mind from continue living as a sex worker. As change can begin only with a spark, this would be of great help to change their status.

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