

# Deconstructing Stereotypes in the Liminal Phases: A Postcolonial Feminist Analysis of *An Educated Woman in Prostitution*

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## Abstracts

Postcolonial Indians' psyche has been colonised by the long effects of colonial and patriarchal stereotypes. Stereotypes work as a master's tool in hindering the freedom of postcolonial Indian women. Due to the impact of this two-fold domination (colonial and patriarchal stereotypes) in the lives of postcolonial Indian women, they are forced to endure their sufferings and are oppressed to remain passive. Postcolonial feminism theory uncovers the unknown struggles endured by various voiceless categories and unrecognised social divisions of third world women. The memoir, *An Educated Woman in Prostitution*, was chosen for the study as it documents the traumatic life transition of a young girl choosing sex work as her identity in the Indian context. The effects of socio-political principles and dogmatic patriarchal stereotypes constructed around sex workers are transparently discussed in the text. The article employs Arnold van Gennep's anthropological concepts, the three phases of liminality (preliminal, liminal and postliminal) from *The Rites of Passage*, to closely observe the life transitions and decisions made by the protagonist. The study utilises these phases of liminality to trace the survival strategies employed by the protagonist and other female characters in dismantling stereotypes and gaining freedom of choice. Conclusively, the study employs a qualitative analysis of Manada Devi's memoir, drawing upon the theoretical exploration of liminal phases and stereotypes from a postcolonial feminist standpoint. The study identifies the transitional phase during which the protagonist breaks stereotypes and reintegrates into society with a new identity.

**Keywords:** liminal phase, stereotype, postcolonial feminism, sex worker, voiceless woman, freedom of choice

## 1. Introduction

Postcolonial Indian writing in English highlights the colonial impact on the contemporary socio-political system, economic system and Indians' psyche. The Postcolonial study "focuses on subverting the colonizer's discourse that attempts to distort the experience and realities, and inscribe inferiority on the colonized people in order to exercise total control." (Tyagi, 2014). "In the eyes of some post-colonial critics, the so-called "women of the third world" that western feminism is fond of talking about, particularly the emphasis on their "differences," is itself colonial" (Riyal, 2019). Tiwary (2020) states that "western feminists tend usually towards a complete and homogenous notion of women's identity [...] they represent women of the third world countries as meek, docile and marginalised" "as 'ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized'" (Mohanty, 1994). "Western feminism is criticized for the Orientalist way in which it represents the social practices of other races as backward and barbarous, from which Black and Asian women need rescuing" (Tyagi, 2014).

Postcolonial feminism acutely studies the misrepresentation of third world women by Western feminists. It also explores the specific problems of third world women from varied sub-divisions of a postcolonial nation. Tyagi (2014) says that "the task of a postcolonial feminist is far more complicated. She suffers from 'double colonization' as she simultaneously experiences the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy". Postcolonial feminism theory primarily focuses on the two-fold suppression experienced by women in postcolonial nations. "She has to resist the colonial power as a colonial subject as well as the patriarchy, simply because of being a woman" (Tiwary, 2020). The objective of the study is to examine the impact of colonial and patriarchal stereotypes on postcolonial Indian women's freedom and agency, particularly within the context of sex work. It aims to explore the experiences of marginalised women, uncovering the struggles they face and analysing the strategies they employ to challenge stereotypes and reclaim their identities.

Postcolonial feminism serves as a crucial lens through which to illuminate the myriad, often overlooked challenges faced by marginalised groups and unacknowledged social strata among women in third world postcolonial nations. It endeavours to amplify the voices of these individuals, advocating tirelessly for their equality, irrespective of cultural distinctions. This postcolonial feminist inquiry selects the memoir of a sex worker as its focal text, recognising the dearth of contributions within Indian writing in English that authentically depict the lived experiences of individuals engaged in sex work. The protagonist, Manada Devi, emerges as a compelling figure within this narrative, challenging societal stereotypes by portraying herself as an educated sex worker. The work in question, *An Educated Woman in*

*Prostitution*, was initially published in Bengali under the title *Shikshita Patitar Atmacharit* in 1929 by Manada Devi and subsequently underwent translation into English by Arunava Sinha in 2021.

“The way that the colonizers were successful is by using stereotyping, fetishism, and the concept of otherness to promote their superior society.” (Colonial Discourse of Otherness, 2007). “Indian nationalism attempted at controlling female bodies by imprisoning them into stereotypes” (Tyagi, 2014). Using postcolonial feminism as a theoretical framework, this study seeks to challenge the dominant narratives, colonial/patriarchal stereotypes and power structures that have historically oppressed women in postcolonial India. Adding to the long effects of colonial stereotypes, patriarchal stereotypes work as a master’s tool in hindering the freedom of postcolonial Indian women. Stereotypes have been colonising the Indian culture and the psyche of Indians until now. The impact of this two-fold domination (colonial and patriarchal stereotypes) in the lives of postcolonial Indian women has clogged their ability to silence their sufferings and to remain passive.

“Stereotyping has an agenda of bringing a society down while bringing another society up. Therefore, stereotyping creates a kind of hierarchy, where the colonizers are on top.” (Colonial Discourse of Otherness, 2007). The article problematises stereotypes, as they play a vicious role in every class of society as a patriarchal and colonial tool of suppression. The study deconstructs the marginalised life of the protagonist and identifies the phase in which she breaks the stereotypes, overcoming patriarchy and witnessing self-acceptance that helps in decision-making. Precisely, the study theorises the life of a sex worker from a postcolonial feminist perspective by articulating stereotypes within the phases of liminality.

Liminality is an anthropological concept derived from *The Rites of Passage* by Arnold van Gennep. Turner borrows Gennep’s concept of liminality and expands it. Victor Turner, “with primary reference to spatial transitions, employed the terms preliminal, liminal and postliminal” (Turner, 1977) in his work *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. A. R. Chakraborty (2016) traces the transition and development of liminality from Gennep to Homi Bhabha and ensures the vast use of liminality in various fields. He clearly explains the stages of the evolution of liminality, which is an inevitable literary contribution. The preliminal phase, liminal phase and postliminal phase are the major divisions of liminality. The researcher borrows these concepts to analyse the transitional phases through which women liberate themselves from the colonial clutches of stereotypes. According to the rites of passage, the process or stages of an individual involved in a ritual are regarded as follows: “The initiate (i.e., the person undergoing the ritual) is first stripped off the social status that he or she possessed before the ritual, inducted into the liminal period of transition, and finally given his or her new status and reincorporated into society” (Chakraborty, 2016).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Historical Background: Double Colonisation

Postcolonial feminism emerged during the 1980s and gained limelight in research during the 2000s. In 2006, Bruno addressed the limitations of western feminism and its effect on Third World scholars. A qualitative study (Razvi, 2007) on poverty alleviation among female grassroots leaders within the informal work sectors of Ahmedabad suggested Indian feminists focus on the intersection of identity. Mishra (2013) and Tavassoli and Mirzapour (2014) emphasised the urgent need to voice out the problems of postcolonial women in the globalised world. Postcolonial Feminism challenges the unity notion of culture and contests images and representations of the essentialised cultural ‘other’. The article titled “Postcolonial Feminism: A Dissent to Double Colonisation” by Dr. Ruchika Tiwary (2020) explores the concept of double colonisation and its impact on third world women’s association with Western feminist ideology. Tiwary (2020) argues that women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy and registers it as an ongoing process in postcolonial countries, even after achieving independence. Dr. Tyagi (2014) explored the struggles of postcolonial feminists fighting against postcolonial and feminist theorists to sustain identity. Postcolonial feminism “explores ‘Third World’ feminists’ resistance against their misrepresentation in the nationalist discourses that imprison their bodies in traditional stereotypes” (Tyagi, 2014). Tavassoli and Mirzapour (2014), through the novel *A Passage to India*, highlight double colonisation by focusing on the privileges granted to a Western woman by Indian men and on the other hand, how an Indian woman is treated by the same men. Mansoor (2016) challenges the binary closure of global feminism and argues that the margin can be redefined for a Third World woman.

### 2.2 Sex Workers in India

Prostitution was “completely legal in ancient India” (Ghosh & Nag, 2021). “prostitutes were treated with respect and dignity and their administration and protection was done by the throne” (Ghosh & Nag, 2021). The colonial period brought about a shift in social attitudes towards prostitution, leading to the stigmatisation and marginalisation of sex workers. Ghosh and Nag (2021) emphasise that the colonial influence introduced a more negative perception of prostitution, impacting the social status and rights of sex workers. Joice and Sivakami (2021) employed feminist concepts (choice and care) to study sex workers as historically silenced.

Prostitution in India stands as a multifaceted issue, intricately interwoven with socio-economic, cultural and legal considerations. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, is the principal legislation governing prostitution in India. This act penalises activities related to commercial sexual exploitation and immoral trafficking, indicating a legal stance against forced prostitution and sexual exploitation. “There are certainly victims of trafficking in sex work today, the majority of women in sex work consent to doing it. They have decided that making money from sex is a lucrative option for them and their families” (SANGRAM & VAMP, 2005). However, private or voluntary prostitution, where individuals willingly engage in sexual activity for commercial purposes, is not explicitly illegal under Indian law. The legal outlook on prostitution in India is characterised by a distinction between forced prostitution and voluntary sex work.

### 2.3 Stereotypes and Indian Women

The article Kaur (2014) discusses the evolution of feminist ideology in Indian literature and the gradual erosion of stereotypes surrounding female characters. Nwokolo and Iyanya (2020) document the plight and transition of Ngugi Wa Thiongo's female characters, who resist the burden of patriarchal activities and strive to discover their real strength. Parveen and Radhakrishnan (2023) highlight that the objectification of women has entered our culture and become embedded in our way of thinking by viewing the female body as a lifeless object that must strictly obey gender stereotypes.

The realm of postcolonial feminism, particularly as applied to sex workers, remains relatively underexplored within scholarly inquiry. This article endeavours to address this gap by offering a theoretical exploration of the lived experiences of sex workers through a postcolonial feminist lens, focusing on the identification and deconstruction of prevailing stereotypes inherent within the transitional phases of liminality. "I AM A PROSTITUTED WOMAN myself" (Sinha, 2021), echoes the voice of a voiceless community in first-person narrative and the protagonist's statement, "unusual life of mine" (Sinha, 2021), is the rationale for choosing the text as a postcolonial feminist text.

### 3. Methodology

The paper studies the memoir *An Educated Woman in Prostitution* by Manada Devi, as it narrates the life events of a sex worker in first-person view. The memoir begins with her early childhood and slowly progresses through the paths of lust, exploitation and deceit, as mentioned in the subtitle. The rationale for the selection of text is that the real-life witnesses and evidence of a sex worker and her life decisions are clearly stated with reference to time and cultural aspects. The study is carried out because there is a need to voice out the real-life situations of female sex workers in postcolonial India and to document their sufferings in an unexaggerated way. As the primary text chosen for this study is a memoir, it substantiates the cause of the study. The text is treated as prime evidence that documents the harsh reality of a sex worker and the community in which she survives. This memoir, translated recently in 2021, contributes to the contemporary study of postcolonial feminism and Indian writing in English.

This study is an interdisciplinary study as it borrows the anthropological concept of liminal phases from *The Rites of Passage* by Arnold van Gennep and equips it with a postcolonial feminist literary work. Patriarchal stereotypes are closely examined in this study, as they play a vital role in subjugating postcolonial women. Third world women are stereotyped as "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized" (Riyal, 2019) in the West. The text helps in unveiling the real struggles of a sex worker caused by stereotypes and patriarchy. It helps in identifying the stereotypes and the phases of liminality in which the protagonist overcame certain stereotypes to acquire her identity. Precisely, the article theorises the life of a sex worker from a postcolonial feminist perspective by articulating stereotypes within the phases of liminality, as evidenced through the selected text and other substantial secondary sources.

### 4. Discussion

#### 4.1 Misrepresented Group and Its Unheard Voice

Prostitution is legal in "Aruba, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Colombia, Hungary and many more" (Ghosh & Nag, 2021), unlike India. In some Indian cities, brothel houses are run illegally. They continue to exist in the rural parts of major cities as communities and groups despite the constitution's disapproval. These sex workers lack identity within their community. The protagonist and her co-workers feel unrepresented and grab opportunities to anchor themselves in society. As they thirst for representation and identity, they participate in social activities.

Neither patriotism during the Non-cooperation Movement, nor compassion while collecting funds for the victims of the flood, affected our hearts greatly. It was just that we had taken advantage of an opportunity to establish our presence among our own people. (Sinha, 2021)

The narratives surrounding the livelihoods of sex workers are notably scant in both media representations and literary discourse. The genuine voice of this community is left unheard. They are mostly misrepresented as sexually aroused, immoral beings and their social, political or cultural needs are not taken into consideration. A memoir written and published by a sex worker is a break through the glass ceiling.

#### 4.2 Liminal Phases Through the Life of Manada Devi

According to the text, the researcher finds Manada's elopement as a ritual, as it separates her from her past life and leaves her in an ambiguous state and in time, reintegrates her new self into society, shedding the old values and stereotypes that clog her.

##### 4.2.1 Preliminary Phase: Questioning and Accusing Societal Norms

In the preliminary phase, the character starts questioning and develops a thirst for reasoning. This pursuit of reasoning gradually facilitates the discernment between genuine necessities and superfluous desires within the individual's psyche. This allows the individual to distance themselves from certain sociocultural practices. "The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a 'state'), or from both" (Turner, 1977). The memoir holds more questions and arguments against stereotypes exerted on women and sex workers. The protagonist questions education and the societal norms that abound in her life.

Manada complains, "Today I feel that I would not have walked on this road had my mother been alive. If my father had turned his

attention to me even once, if he had been even slightly caring or if he had controlled me, my life would possibly have taken a different turn” (Sinha, 2021). Her father’s liberal parenting projects him as an irresponsible father. She is free from parental warning or guidance and has no restrictions on playing with male friends. Her father allows Ramesh to enter Manada’s room and they accidentally make love. This particular act enhances her sexual attraction towards him and induces her lust and sexual drive, which successively separates her from the confines of familial love.

“When I saw working class people passing by on the streets, lovingly holding their children in their arms, I used to curse all my riches” (Sinha, 2021). As she is deprived of parental love and care, she falls for lust, satisfying her ego. Manada ceaselessly complains about education and her parents, for all her choices. She points out the misguidance of inappropriate education in introducing romance fiction and dramas to young children, which effectively leads them to untamed lasciviousness.

I have received neither an appropriate education nor the company of people of virtue. Because of my school education, all I have learnt to read [...] poetry and texts and stories. They excited my imagination to encourage my depraved passions. No one ever gave me books of piety [...] that taught me self-restraint [...] The singing and dancing of theatre and the images from films did nothing to stimulate suitable thoughts [...] the young women and men of this land being led towards their death by going to the theatre and reading texts [...] from my own experience; I am certain that others in my situation will testify in my support. (Sinha, 2021)

#### 4.2.2 Liminal Phase: Ambiguous State

The liminal phase or transitional phase can be defined as a “period of uncertainty, a liminal period” (Chakraborty, 2016). In the liminal phase, the person travelling through it experiences an ambiguous state of flux. This is because the person withers away from old beliefs, values, culture, family, character and other aspects of life and arrives at a temporary phase of confusion, carrying the pain of shattered values and beliefs. This phase is “accompanied by, or equal to, a life-crisis” (Chakraborty, 2016), and it instigates a turning point in life. Turner states that “during the intervening “liminal” period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the ‘passenger’) are ambiguous” (Turner, 1977). Manada decides to choose sex work as her profession out of her own will, despite listening to the influential talk of Rani Mashi. She starts with enthusiasm and makes a huge profit, yet she abuses herself with cursing statements like “mere prostituted woman” (Sinha, 2021), “tainted glance of a woman like me” (Sinha, 2021), “the air around me, polluted by my presence” (Sinha, 2021) and “as wretched as me” (Sinha, 2021). She also degrades her friends and the prostitution community. “we are nothing but lowly worms from hell” (Sinha, 2021), “we were sinners” (Sinha, 2021) and “we are demonesses, demonic pleasure is what gives us joy” (Sinha, 2021). While seeking identity and questioning society’s acceptance of sex workers, Manada’s swearing statements delineate her ambiguous, confused and shattered state.

She reflects upon her decision to engage in sex work with a profound sense of regret, casting reproach upon herself and the sex worker community as a whole. Ceccoli states that “a key aspect of sexual excitement is that it disrupts the coherence of the self, and that such a disruption occurs from within. Such a dys-regulated experience of self is often felt to be alien, unknown, and even ‘not me’.” (Ceccoli, 2020). The regret is evident, but she is continuing her sexual profession with utter compulsion and dilemma. She finds herself miserable, as she does not know where to go after quitting prostitution. Turner uses the liminal phase to indicate “the unstable social or magico-religious position of the person who undergoes a change: during the transition the state of that person remains uncertain as he or she has been separated from a clearly defined state in the past and has not been incorporated yet into a clearly defined future state” (Chakraborty, 2016).

#### 4.2.3 Liminal Phase: Problematising Conventional and Patriarchal Stereotypes

“According to Bhabha, stereotyping is, ‘knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always already known, and something that’s repeated.’ Stereotyping was used by the colonizers because it creates an identity with a large group of people, whether is it correct or not. It employs a system of representation.” (Colonial Discourse of Otherness, 2007). “stereotypes are long believed moral practices, which are being questioned and thought upon to be immoral” (Danaher, 2019). Stereotypes have a harsh impact on every society, class and gender. “Stereotyping is a reductionist view of a society. And usual only portrays outward appearances. It allows the colonizers to extend critical political objectives.” (Colonial Discourse of Otherness, 2007). The colonial stereotypes imbibed in the minds of the West over the East and the East over the West are still alive. For example, the East is misrepresented in history as barbarians and the West as hyper-cultured. The patriarchal stereotypes in third world countries continue to colonise women. In the memoir, representing the female sex worker community, Manada questions and blames society for its judgemental and stereotypical mentality. “Prostituted women may not be pure, but they are not devoid of human ideals. Considering that the fallen woman can be simple at heart, spiritual, godfearing, compassionate and generous, why does she have to an object of scorn? The fault lies with society, not with the woman.” (Sinha, 2021). Manada breaks the pessimistic nature cast upon sex workers through her bold words.

Education is a key term, which repeats itself several times as a traumatising term in the life of Manada Devi. The article is not against women’s education, but it tries to substantiate that not every educated person is morally right and not every uneducated person is immoral. Reading literary works leads Manada to make poor decisions and poor choices of character. “the novel is to lovers as the pastoral is to shepherds. This amorous association creeps in even when the ostensible focus is elsewhere.” (Turner, 2005). Adding to it, the external issues during her childhood—neglect of assistance from parents, insufficient knowledge through academics and feeding into fiction, poetry and drama performances over real-world experiences—blindfolds the victim off her reasoning and decision-making. The influence of the

fantasised literature read during her childhood and romantic scenes in the dramas and plays witnessed at an early age induces her sexual desires and vehemently draws her towards lust. “The English words novel and romance were in fact wildly unstable during this period. Sometimes they were used interchangeably as if synonymous” (Turner, 2005). The author, through the title and her long-suffering, voices out to document that academics go purposeless without practical reality and proper sex education.

“For all you know, you might find your Nanda-dada knocking on your door one night. It could be your Mukul-dada too. Don’t be upset ma, I speak nothing but the plain truth. Nor is it beyond the realms of possibility for you to run into your own father in my room some day” (Sinha, 2021). Rani Mashi, the maintainer of a prostitution centre, pacifies Manada to help her choose sex work. This is a negative stereotype of men. In the text, Nanda’s friend unexpectedly meets Manada at her place. He works on persuading and eradicating alcohol from the lives of prostituted women. On identifying Manada, he brings to her attention that her father is broken and stays at home; her cousin Nanda works under Gandhian movements; and Mukul practices law and stays single. She comes to know that Nanda’s “restraint was intact, no woman had succeeded in tempting him” (Sinha, 2021). Men came into prostitution centres not for sexual pleasure but to rescue sex workers from alcoholism. All these male characters disprove the stereotype that all men are prone to sex or sexual drive. Nanda and his friend have broken the stereotype.

“liminal has been seen as the threshold stage between waking and dream, or the conscious and subliminal state of awareness” (Chakraborty, 2016). Manada fights for the rights of other women at sex work; she works for social causes and still continues prostitution, which is all unconscious behaviour, as she is still unclear of her identity. During this state of fluidity, Manada breaks the following stereotypes.

**Kind-Hearted Prostituted Woman:** “people perceive sex workers as morally destitute, sex loving and consensual criminals” (Aminath, Binz, & Koopman, 2019). Society casts vicious looks on sex workers and brands them as sexually driven beings, neglecting their human nature of love and compassion. The hidden truth of their silenced voices is mined out with the aid of postcolonial feminism. Manada’s sensitivity towards young women suffering patriarchal violence and concern towards her co-workers and women abandoned at the prostitution centres is notable. Manada feels hurt and helpless when Aparajita, a chaste woman, is forced by her husband’s aunt to sell her chastity. Aparajita is so stern and opposes to subdue to their cunning plots, at the cost of her life. Listening to Aparajita, Manada fears the death of an innocent young woman and on witnessing her spirit and strength of mind, Manada is devastated and grieves for her demise. “leaving early on the pretext of not feeling well. Nightmares didn’t let me sleep that night [...] I spent a week in acute anxiety and unhappiness” (Sinha, 2021).

Manada is so concerned with the youth and society that they fall prey to fantasy through theatre and literature. She says, “it causes me pain to see all of society sink into it the same way” (Sinha, 2021), as she sinks. The society is carefree and disregards the women in prostitution, who are sensible and caring towards the society. Dr. Schwartz brings to light that “The most common stereotype of prostitutes is that they are all street walkers, drug addicted, controlled by pimps, and willing to accept a few dollars for their services” (Schwartz, 2008). Through this memoir, Manada portrays the reality of a sex worker’s life. Manada breaks the above-mentioned stereotype. She never consumes alcohol or drugs and registers that women were not allowed to walk around the cities but rather stay inside the brothel or near its gate. Manada feels pity for her pimps and continues sex work irrespective of her liking, and she is not controlled by her pimps. In the aspect of money, their survival depends on it.

**Socio-Political Involvement of Sex Workers:** Manada proudly submits, “Even though I’m a woman in prostitution I immerse myself in political news” (Sinha, 2021). In 1915, a great cyclone burst out in East Bengal, causing heavy life and property damage. Manada’s involvement in social reform liberates the sex workers to work with social reformers by conducting rallies and collecting funds. “East Bengal Cyclone Fund [...] my first involvement in a public cause” (Sinha, 2021). One of the barristers, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, accepts their monetary contribution and invites them to serve the country. Their contribution through canvassing for the Non-cooperation movement, Satyagraha and wearing khadi sarees is notably selfless. “extraordinary enthusiasm and fervour, along with an unprecedented wave of activity. Some of us prostituted women formed a small group, with our babus” (Sinha, 2021).

To the readers’ surprise, Manada is concerned about the ruthless acts of the badshahs, rajas and nawabs, who borrow money and pawn their ancestral assets of personal legacy for sexual pleasure. She implies that if these acts of men in political positions continue, there won’t be anything left out for the future and there will be no hope for freedom. “if they value a seductive look from a prostituted woman more than their personal legacy, where is the hope of breaking free from foreign rule?” (Sinha, 2021). Manada’s socio-political reasoning is reflected in her writing.

#### 4.2.4 Postliminal Phase: Reincorporation and Redefining

The postliminal phase enhances confidence and decision-making ability. Turner conceptualises the postliminal phase as reincorporation in society with a new standard of values and belief system. Manada steps out of social taboos, overthrows societal and patriarchal pressures and stereotypes and reincorporates new standards, which is undoubtedly reflected in her work. Manada, with an empowered, self-resilient mind, steps forward in contributing her memoir of lust to literature, which is also translated into different languages. Through this published work of art, she breaks a barrier, questions cultural and patriarchal stereotypes and expresses the voice of a voiceless, long-suppressed group.

The final stage of reincorporation into society with new standards and values lies in the postliminal phase. The actual reversal of a stereotype happens when Manada Devi steps forward in accepting herself as a failed academician and as a sex worker and produces a text

on her life incidents to create awareness in society regarding immature relationships and moral education. Manada, with reforming intentions, stresses certain stereotypes ruptured in her life through her published work and they are as follows:

#### Loving Stepmother:

Originating from traditional fairy tales, stepmothers have been depicted through stereotypical portrayals as malevolent figures akin to demons or witches. Further, “fairy tales suggest that stepmothers are the equivalent of wild animals and supernatural beings” (Dainton, 1993). Here in Manada’s life, this portrayal of a loving stepmother is reversed. She states, “My stepmother was a good person, who loved me [...] she was a simple soul” (Sinha, 2021).

Beauty: “Keats proclaim that the union of Beauty and Truth are ‘all ye know on earth and all ye need to know’” (Heartney, 2000). One of the deeply rooted abusive stereotypes in the psyche of the East is the oneness of beauty with respect and virtue; fairness with truth and intelligence. Beauty is also portrayed as misleading and adulterous when it comes to women who wear makeup and dazzling outfits. It is time to loosen and do away with beauty’s connection with good and truth. In the case of sex workers, society terms them ugly due to their immoral acts, but the truth differs. Manada says, “It isn’t as though all prostituted women are beautiful, but it is not true that all of them are rather ugly” (Sinha, 2021). On analysing the lives of sex workers in the memoir, prostitute women are kind-hearted, service-oriented and have selfless natures. “the good, the true and the beautiful are anything but kindred souls,” says Eleanor Heartney in the foreword of the book *Beauty Matters*.

Ageing: Adding to the stereotype of beauty, the ageing of women is considered a decline in their beauty. Manada declines this patriarchal stereotype, stating, “On women’s beauty, the male claim is that twenty is the end of all glory. This is not applicable to all” (Sinha, 2021). She also includes that there are many women who, after crossing forty, remain as beautiful as rivers after the rains and as untainted as the moonlight in autumn.

The postliminal phase comprises reintegrating life, which passes the stage of separation: having blind beliefs, withering certain practices, norms or stereotypes and then confidently assimilating into society as a new version of one’s self. The study traces the postliminal phase as the important phase in which Manada dares to break the stereotypes built around a sex worker. Reintegration occurs by gaining freedom of choice. She is educated and without any hesitation, identifies herself as a prostitute. “I AM A PROSTITUTED WOMAN myself” (Sinha, 2021). Some sex workers choose the field of prostitution and some remain sex workers regardless of their liking. This is due to the fear of acceptance by society. “even if I were to run away, I did not know where to go” (Sinha, 2021) and “main worry was ‘how will I survive’” (Sinha, 2021). They no longer trust society to accept or respect them as humans. Even if they choose to quit prostitution, Manada states that “constant exposure to a wayward life of lust and greed strengthens the immoral side of women working in this line” (Sinha, 2021), which makes it difficult for them to confidently shed their past or renew a social life in a patriarchal judgemental society. This shadow may fade away when they experience their acceptance in society or create one.

## 5. Results

The memoir of Manada Devi is a voice representing the sex workers’ community in India during the nineteenth century. The text, translated and republished in 2021, reflects the essentiality in lending ears to the voice of this voiceless women’s community in India. Through her narrative, Manada exposes the harsh realities of sexual exploitation, trafficking and societal ostracisation faced by sex workers in India. The text encompasses various astonishing stories of victims witnessed by Manada. The lives of sex workers as victims help in understanding and creating awareness of the core issues of the sex worker community. Sex workers mentioned in the memoir were forced into prostitution by sexual assault or sex trafficking. They are also coerced into the circumstances of choosing sex work, whether concerning their family’s livelihood or their own. Such unavoidable situations are created due to poverty or by male counterparts, who plunder the lives of innocent women and leave them with no other choice but to resort to sex work, as they are already stigmatised as morally unacceptable women by society.

Manada’s life experiences are marked by tragedy and chaos as she grapples with enduring patriarchal stereotypes throughout her journey. The liminal phases in her life are discerned through meticulous analysis. Initially vulnerable in the preliminal phase, she gradually gains confidence and wisdom during the liminal phase, ultimately reintegrating into society by embracing her identity as a sex worker in the postliminal phase. In the identified postliminal phase, a resounding voice of liberation emerges from a sex worker within a patriarchal society as Manada unveils the scandals of powerful individuals and challenges society’s biased stance towards scandalous men versus sex workers, thus defying stereotypical perceptions. Additionally, Manada’s ground-breaking endeavour to publish her memoir has shattered stereotypes and societal taboos. Her freedom of choice played a crucial role in achieving her re-established social identity.

Despite the adversities she faces, Manada emerges as a resilient and empowered figure, unapologetically embracing her identity as a sex worker and advocating for the rights of her community. Her fearless exposure to societal hypocrisies and her active involvement in social and political movements challenge dominant narratives and pave the way for broader societal change. Through her memoir, Manada not only breaks stereotypes but also fosters empathy and understanding, prompting readers to confront their own prejudices and preconceptions about sex work and marginalised communities.

## 6. Conclusion

Colonial influences in India have shaped attitudes towards sex work, leading to persistent stereotypes that marginalise sex workers despite increased feminist attention. Literature and research articles begin to reflect the evolving feminist perspectives that challenge traditional

stereotypes hindering Indian women. This research underlines the importance of examining the experiences of marginalised groups, especially sex workers, through a postcolonial feminist lens to foster inclusivity and equity in society. It employs a sex worker's memoir as its primary source, offering valuable insights into the personal experiences often ignored in research that primarily focuses on legal and objective matters. By addressing this research gap through the lens of Manada Devi, the study sheds light on the hidden realities and personal experiences of sex workers in first-person narrative. The article also highlights the need to rebel against stereotypes for the empowerment of marginalised postcolonial Indian women (sex workers). This study supports the hypothesis that postcolonial Indian women's freedom and agency are hindered by colonial and patriarchal stereotypes, contributing to their oppression and marginalisation. The research also demonstrates how the protagonist breaks stereotypes, finds identity and asserts freedom of choice by using anthropological concepts of liminality. It highlights the real-life challenges they endure while navigating societal acceptance and creating meaningful social connections, which is achieved through a step-by-step process of realising their freedom of choice, breaking stereotypes and voicing their stance through literature. The study brings to attention how Manada Devi's memoir exemplifies a narrative challenging societal norms and advocating for social change. By sharing the experiences of marginalised postcolonial women, Manada's narrative inspires empathy, solidarity and a call for justice. Her rejection of stereotypes and advocacy for sex workers' rights leave a lasting legacy of empowerment and liberation. As her memoir continues to resonate, it emphasises the significance of amplifying the voices of marginalised communities in the pursuit of gender equality and social justice.

### **7. Limitations**

Further research can be acutely focused on the sufferings of trafficked women who are forced into prostitution. As the study is limited to postcolonial Indian stereotypes against women in prostitution, other stereotypes with regard to different cultures and regions can also be analysed. This postcolonial feminist study analyses the stereotypes broken by female characters, which can be elaborated by including men who broke stereotypes. Future studies shall consider different genres and contemporary works based on prostitution or other Indian women issues like surrogacy, sex/organ-based trafficking, Dalit stereotypes, etc.

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### **Authors contributions**

Ms. Caro Velma J and Dr. G Alan were responsible for study design and revising. Ms. Caro Velma J is the first author. She analysed the text, conceptualised the article, collected materials and drafted the original text. Dr. G Alan is the corresponding author and the second author. He reviewed and edited the final draft. All the authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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