

reflections on
lal batti

lal batti

This exegesis is submitted to
Auckland University of Technology
for the degree of a Master of Art & Design.

by Chander Kumar

B. Art & Design [Honours] (AUT University)
B. Humanities (Delhi University)
Cert. Fashion Design and Clothing Technology (NIFT, Delhi)

attestation of authorship

'I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements'.

Chander Kumar

acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Associate Professor, Dr. Welby Ings, as my primary supervisor, particularly for his valuable guidance and help with sharpening of my ideas throughout the development and final resolution of this project. I would also like to thank Yvonne Stewart (Senior Lecturer in Fashion Design) as my secondary supervisor for her continued help, support and guidance.

I am thankful to Ms Annah Pickering (Manager, N.Z.P.C., Auckland) for her valuable time and suggestions.

Many thanks to Raechelle Bass for her support and the modelling of my work.

I would also like to thank Lisa Williams for proof reading, Karen Yeung for her photography and “Cut Above” students Kym and Luana for their advice and assistance with makeup. I would also like to thank K.T. Ho (Senior lecturer, School Art and Design) for his assistance in printing.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the many other supporters of this research for their direct and indirect assistance.

dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my spiritual Guru, Shri Shirdi Sai Baba and my parents.

abstract

This project draws on aspects of research into the plight of women prostitutes working in *Lal Batti* areas of India. The project considers historical, contemporary and personal texts that form the basis of a creative synthesis. This synthesis is manifest in the design of five fabric-based artworks that seek to interpret issues of manipulation, entrapment, belonging, spirituality and demise.

The project is located beyond the boundaries of fashion design. However, it involves an artistic fusion of garment construction, fabric and surface treatment. In doing this, the thesis seeks to give 'voice' to a political commentary that reaches beyond commercial uses of garments for display and protection.

table of contents

introduction	background: colonialism and the disintegration of the kothaa	9
	lal batti	10
	the Indian constitution and sex workers	11
	personal positioning	12
	design of the exegesis	14
part one		
chapter one	manipulation	16
	social 'marking'	18
	HIV/AIDS	20
	Rape	21
	Artwork	22
chapter two	entrapment	24
	the 'family' and the prostitute	25
	rape and abandonment	26
	entrapment and finance	27
	artwork	30
chapter three	belonging	32
	artwork	36
chapter four	spirituality	40
	artwork	46
chapter five	demise	49
	artwork	54
conclusion		56
part two		
	methodology	58
	heuristic as a methodology approach	59
	advantages and disadvantages	60
	activating heuristic through the design process	61
	sketching, draping and fitting	62
	pattern design	65
	substrate design	65
conclusion		69
exhibition		71
references		76



introduction

This introduction briefly presents a historical and legal scaffold for the project. It then describes my personal position as the creative researcher.

background: colonialism and the disintegration of the *kothaa*

This introduction provides a brief explanation of the position of the *lal batti*¹ in India and the laws that affect it. It then positions the researcher in relation to the project.

Prostitutes have been an important part of Indian society since the *Vedic*² period. During this time prostitutes held a significant cultural position. Operating from *Kothaas*³, these women were sophisticated practitioners of many art forms including music, dance, poetry, adornment, coquetry and etiquette. Known as *tawayafs*, they were educators who epitomised the desires of contemporary noblemen. *Tawayafs*, sought to secure a permanent patron by establishing an enduring sexual liaison with a nobleman.

For centuries, the importance of the *tawayaf* continued to be interwoven with Indian nobility. Banerjee (1998) suggests, *Even 400 years later – in the 17th century – prostitutes continued to be major partners in the social and cultural festivities and royal expeditions* (p. 21).

During the *Mughal Empire*,⁴ *tawayafs* reached their zenith of influence and were considered a significant force in the socio-political system of the period. However, in the early 18th century, their status began to degenerate as a result of colonialism. When the *Mughal Empire* collapsed their role was threatened by the new English rule. Many traditional cultural norms during this period were destroyed.

¹ This is a Hindi word for Red Light District of a city.

² *Vedas* are Indian holy books written in *Sanskrit* and generally dated between 1500 and 800BC.

³ *Kothaas* were the institution in which these women lived and conducted their professional activities.

⁴ The classic period of the *Mughal Empire* began with the accession of Akbar in 1556 and ended with the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. The last Emperor, whose rule was restricted to the city of Delhi, was imprisoned and exiled by the British after the Indian rebellion of 1857 (See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mughal_Empire).

The British Empire failed to understand the cultural and traditional importance of the *tawayaf*. As a result, the concept of the street prostitute became the template for framing the role of the *tawayaf* in Indian culture. Under the British construct of 'whore', these women were reduced to the status of sex objects. Young, beautiful girls were forced to join the British barracks for the 'entertainment' of British soldiers. Christian missionaries banished these women from 'polite' society and these newly framed 'fallen women' began to cluster at the city fringes.

By the mid 19th century, the British educational system had heavily influenced Indian society. The press and missionaries regarded these women as criminals, and as a disease inflicted upon society. The traditional customs of singing, dancing and soirees were trivialised. Banerjee (1998) argues that by this stage the status of the *tawayaf* had become re-conceptualised as an object of the flesh trade.

lal batti

In contemporary India, the flesh trade is a phenomenon where women are framed as disposable commodities manipulated by the underworld, politicians, brothel owners and clients. There is little respect, status, or security for sex workers and they exist as pariahs on the fringes of acceptable society.

As a child in Old Delhi,⁵ these women were part of my life. While growing up in this environment, I was aware of their existence in G. B. Road,⁶ the *lal batti* district of the city. I grew up hearing the experiences of my friends who visited them. I read articles in newspapers and watched popular movies like *Mandi*⁷ and *Umrao Jaan*⁸ that were based on the lives of *tawayafs* and prostitutes.

⁵ Old Delhi was the capital of Muslim India in the 17th and 19th centuries. Today it forms a section of the Indian capital New Delhi.

⁶ An abbreviation for Gun Bastion Road.

⁷ This movie was directed by Shyam Benegal (1983). It is a story of a brothel in a remote town that becomes the bone of contention between political and business interests.

⁸ The movie directed by Muzaffar Ali (1981) tells the story of a famous *tawayaf*, Umrao Jaan, and the Kothaa culture of North India.

In my childhood I often went to the automotive spare-part market that operated near G. B. Road. I used to watch these women interacting with their clients, hanging from balconies or windows and calling and whistling to the men passing by. Small narrow *galis*,⁹ open drains, dark stairs, mounds of garbage, spit tobacco, skittering rats, and the incessant bells of the rickshaw pullers, were the aural and visual texture of this world.

Yet, as I grew up, I never communicated with them. Their gaudy make-up, bright clothes, sign language indicating their price, and their transgressive habit of making eye contact with people, marked them as outside of polite society.

In 2005, however, I became more deeply involved in their world when I worked as a volunteer for a New Delhi NGO, the Mitr Trust,¹⁰ and helped with the implementation of HIV prevention initiatives. While working for the trust I encountered, at a much more intimate level, the many issues faced by Indian sex workers. These included HIV/AIDS, illiteracy, exploitation and physical deprivation. As my life intersected with their world, I was exposed to issues that operated under the surface of what had been too easily accommodated as simply an embarrassing part of the society in which I lived. As a result, this research project has grown out of a world that I became increasingly exposed to.¹¹

the Indian constitution and sex workers

Currently under Indian law, commercialised prostitution is not illegal. Brothels are illegal, however, and are restricted to specific areas of cities.¹² In Indian society

⁹ The word *galis* refers specifically to the streets.

¹⁰ A Delhi-based NGO support group that works with road-side sex workers and deals with the issues related to their physical wellbeing.

¹¹ The project is not documentation. Rather it is an artistic/political reflection on issues within this world. However, it is important to state from the outset, that the 'voice' of this project is not transferable to framings of prostitution in other countries (including New Zealand). This is because the difference between the *lal batti* of India and street, parlour and private operators in New Zealand is culturally determined. Attitudes of the police, government, community and differing economic, educative and theological/social constructs make it inappropriate to attempt narrative or statistical transfers.

¹² For example, Sonagachi in Kolkata, Kamathipura in Mumbai, Reshampura in Gwalior and G.B. Road in New Delhi. Kolkata and Mumbai have the largest numbers of sex workers. In 2001 there were estimated to be over 100,000 sex workers in Mumbai (Country report on Human Rights

attempts are made to hide prostitution from the public eye. The most significant law dealing with sex workers is the Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act (1956). According to this law, prostitutes can operate in private but may not solicit clients in public.¹³ The law forbids a prostitute from working within 200 yards of a public place. Sex workers are not protected under normal workers law; they are not entitled to minimum wage benefits, or compensation for injury.

A Bill introduced in 2006 amended the Immoral Traffic (prevention) Act, 1956, so it can now combat trafficking and sexual exploitation for commercial purposes. The new Bill deletes provisions that penalised prostitutes for soliciting clients. It now penalises any person visiting a brothel for the purpose of sexual exploitation of trafficked victims. All offences listed in the bill are tried in camera.¹⁴ The term “trafficking in person” has been defined in the Act in such a way that it can now punish any person who is guilty of the offence of trafficking *in persons for the purpose of prostitution*. The Act also makes it possible to charge the clients of prostitutes.

The new Bill maintains the position that prostitution is not an offence.

personal positioning

This research project is a reflection on an aspect of Indian society. It deals with issues that have been ignored or marginalised. Although the media at times have approached the plight of Indian sex workers, the issue has rarely been considered in terms of how the garment as a social artifact might offer a unique commentary. Although some Indian fashion designers have created collections based on prostitutes, they have tended to consider the aesthetics of the phenomenon. These designers’ creations focus on the colors, style and make-up used. The designs are commercial and might be framed as a superficial consideration of the surface of the *lal batti*.

Practices: India. U.S. State Department 2001). It was estimated that over 50 percent of sex workers in Mumbai were HIV positive (HIV/AIDS in Asia and Pacific Region. World Health Organisation (2001), in *AIDS in Asia: Face the Facts*).

¹³ However in practice, the Indian penal code (1860) is often used to charge sex workers with vague crimes such as being a public nuisance, or ‘public indecency’. These prosecutions are made without the police having to define explicitly what these offences consist of.

¹⁴ This means the public are excluded from attending the trials.

In 2004 Sabyasachi Mukherjee presented his collection at Lakme India Fashion Week. This collection featured garish make-up, outlandish hair styles, gaudy colours, badly draped clothes, and mismatched footwear and accessories. Mukherjee claimed that he highlighted the poor and exploited condition of sex workers. However, his decision to project this issue from the catwalk allowed the audience to receive it as entertainment. The media covered the show and its fashionable positioning. Mukherjee provided neither explanatory nor discursive context for what he was doing. The designer arguably exploited the powerless situation of sex workers, and the audience was entertained by it. He appeared to have little concern for the social and political issues behind the theme.

The goal of this project has not been to produce a commercial, wearable fashion collection for the catwalk. I am designing work that ‘talks’ about the implications of the exploitative aspects of the *lal batti*.¹⁵ I am interested in exploring fashion as a voice to raise social, political and cultural issues.

The knowledge and insights I have gained about the flesh trade compel me to support and help others understand the situation of these women. There is a need to see them as human beings with human dimensions.

As a fashion designer, as a communicator of ideas, and as a believer in the need for each of us to affect change and to alleviate the suffering of others, my work engages both professionally and academically with the things I see in this world that I feel are within my power to influence.

¹⁵ It should be noted that not all paid sex work occurs in this arena. In India there are also several classes of sex worker that include those who work in high-class elite groups. Such high class sex workers are usually well educated and generally are more aware of the industry and their rights. These women often work for well-managed agencies or through personal contacts. They are protected while at the same time being more free to operate because of the discreet and self-defined nature of their trade.

design of the exegesis

In the following chapters, five specific issues related to the plight of Indian women sex workers are discussed in detail. These are manipulation, entrapment, belonging, spirituality and demise. These issues are considered in relation to five separate artworks that constitute the creative undertaking of this project. In the service of this, the exegesis is constructed in a unique manner.

I discuss each artwork in relation to the ideas behind it. This involves a description of a social construct intersected by quotes from contemporary research that illustrate specific conditions or incidents. Images inserted into the text operate as a supporting discourse.

This approach allows multiple voices to address specific issues as separate but integrated contributions.



part one

the artworks: critical and
conceptual frameworks



manipulation

chapter *one*

This image has been removed due to third party copyright restrictions.

Fig.1:1 Humiliation and intimidation. A madam pulls a sex worker by her hair in front of her clients. (Photographed by Zana Briski). Retrieved May 21, 2006 from <http://www.aliciapatterson.org/APF2003/Briski/Briski.html>

Few experiences in the world can be quite as bad as being a poor virgin girl in a cheap Asian brothel. It is the stuff of nightmares. Every day thousands of girls and women are initiated into prostitution through acute physical and psychological violence. And every day men are willing to pay to enjoy the violence of this initiation.

(Brown, 2000, p. 96)

In joining the flesh trade the only thing required is a female body. As soon as women enter, a process of physical, psychological and sexual manipulation begins. This process is designed to break the resistance of the girl so she becomes a more pliable commodity. New girls are usually kept in isolation for weeks. They live in dark rooms with a minimum supply of food. They are subjected to severe beatings and physical torture by pimps. They are often burnt with cigarettes and humiliated to the point where their self-esteem is destroyed. Beatings and physical torture occur when they do not make enough money, talk to clients on a personal basis, or fail to provide required services to a client. Any attempts to reveal the insights of the trade to strangers or the media can also result in beatings. Receiving little time for rest, they generally work from morning until well after midnight. They stand or sit

continuously behind barred windows or hang over balconies in order to entice clients. No consideration is given to sickness, menstruation or physical illness.¹⁶

Very young girls are sometimes allowed to go and play on the rooftop terraces at night. If there is a raid, children are often secreted underground. Each is given a new name and instructed not to tell their true age to anyone.

social 'marking'

Loud make-up and gaudy dresses change the outer appearance of initiates. They are often forced to cut their hair so that they look more western and attractive.¹⁷

I was raped: twice, thrice, ten times in a day. I used to love wearing new and colourful clothing and putting on make-up. Now I do that to attract the buyers who rent my body. I am not the only one, girls who are ten or twelve years old also stand in the streets wearing make-up and tight dresses. When I see this, I break with tears.

(Swapana interviewed in the Red Light Despatch 2006, Vol. 1, Issue 2)

By the time the process of psychological and physical manipulation is complete, most of these girls have lost their identity and sense of orientation. They leave their values and pride behind.

If you know the difference between heaven and hell you would realize the difference between the two worlds – inside the red-light area and outside. The basic difference between the two is in dignity. A woman's dignity is constantly shattered inside the red light area.

(Asma interviewed by Thakurta in Red Light Despatch, 2007, Vol. 1, Issue 3)

The physical and sexual exploitation has a strong impact on the mental health of sex workers. The fear of physical abuse or severe beatings forces them to accept this trade as the only option left to them. In extreme cases, severe beatings may leave a woman paralysed, or may damage other parts of her body so that she is left with no other option except working in the trade.


¹⁶ Gupta writing in the *Red Light Despatch* (2006) notes that in general, in the first five years (15-20) girls who have been kidnapped, stolen, tricked, sold and lured are locked up in small rooms with barred windows. They are only brought out by the brothel madam to serve 15-20 buyers of prostituted sex every night. They are generally served one meal a day and given some clothes and toiletries. However, they are not given any of the money that the buyer pays for them (Vol. 1, Issue 1, p. 5).

¹⁷ The reason behind changing young worker's appearances is that they will fit more cohesively into the visual paradigm of a prostitute and as such may be more easily marketed.

Directly and indirectly, *malkin* or *mausi*¹⁸ girls are trained by their co-workers in a new language that signifies their status and occupation. This new language demarcates them from 'acceptable society'. These women can then be easily recognised by people on the street.

*Do you know the names they have for us? Dhandewali¹⁹, rand²⁰, veshya²¹.
We aren't human beings....we are gande log.²²*

(Gangoli, 2000, p. 18)



This image has been removed due to third party copyright restrictions.

Fig. 1.2: Sex workers standing and waiting for clients in the *gali*. (Photographed by Zana Briski).
Retrieved May 21, 2006 from <http://www.aliciapatterson.org/APF2003/Briski/Briski.html>

¹⁸ Hindi words meaning female owner. They are used here to mean 'madam'.

¹⁹A Hindi word for a woman who is involved in prostitution.

²⁰ Whore.

²¹ Prostitute.

²² Dirty people.

For the young girls, the physical scars of a brutal initiation into prostitution can never be healed. They suffer irreparable internal injuries. In Calcutta, for example, dried and tightly packed pith, which expands where water is applied to it, is used to widen the vaginas of young girls who are to sell sex to adult men...Sanlaap, an NGO...has evidence not only of maiming and grievous injuries to young girls but also of their death.

(Anonymous in Brown, 2000, p. 122)

HIV/AIDS

Sex workers generally provide a lucrative income for their owners. Girls from the age of ten can be sex workers if given hormone injections or if the madam uses pith. Any newly procured virgin can be sold for a higher price with the assurance that she is HIV/AIDS free. However, no attention is given to the fact that the client might be HIV/AIDS positive. As a result, often within a very short time, these girls become infected with the HIV/AIDS virus.²³

Some of the clients use condoms but many don't. The malkins tell us not to use condoms because the customers don't like it and they will not earn so much money. It is very difficult. We can't make the customers use condoms. If they don't want to, and we try to make them, they just go to another woman and we have lost business.

(Anonymous in Brown, 2000, p. 214)

Women sex workers obey their owners out of fear of being tortured. The owner and the sex worker know if the client doesn't get what he wants then somebody else in another brothel will provide it. Most of the time the sex workers, owners and clients are well aware of the related danger of unprotected sex, but the owner emphasises the needs of the client.

The money made by new workers goes to the pimp or brothel owners. In return, the new girls receive food and clothing. This practice can continue for months. Later, workers are forced to take as many clients as they can; the number can reach 40-60 a day (Brown, 2000). Such sexual exploitation leaves these women brutalised. Their normal feelings and sensitivities become severely muted or damaged.

²³AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is the final and most serious stage of HIV disease which causes severe damage to the immune system. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, AIDS is also defined by numerous opportunistic infections and cancers that occur in the presence of HIV infection.

In the processes of breaking resistance, rape is also sometimes used. Rape can lead to a destruction of self regard especially in Indian society. Women may consequently accept prostitution as the only way of surviving. However, the pernicious dynamic of escalating psychological exploitation operates as a form of a trap. Already traumatised²⁴ by acts of rape, they find themselves in an environment where isolation, exploitation and debasement keep them vulnerable to those who profit from their situation.

²⁴ In a 2006 interview Beenu says, *The last time I tried to put my head on the railway tracks, but then I thought who would take care of my family if I died? I have seen a few girls here slash their wrist* (Red Light Despatch, 2006).



Fig. 1:3 The hand-knitted black woven fabric serves as a metaphor for the sex industry. In this world women are trapped. The textures, based on physical, sexual and psychological manipulation, are interwoven into a single network of frayed and knotted experience. (Photographed by Karen Yeung) August 30, 2007.

The artwork created as a synthesis of issues relating to manipulation of women in the *lal batti* is both symbolic and integrated. The hand-knitted black polyester satin fabric is the reflection of the Indian sex industry. It references the tangled dynamic of exploitation that keeps women trapped in the trade. The frayed and distressed edge of the fabric is used to represent the disintegration of identity and 'self'. It references the roughness of the world of the *gali*. The black colour reflects the darker side of the sex industry that society often ignores.

In this design three different, textured fabrics are integrated. These are inspired by the physical, sexual and psychological manipulation faced by these women. Polyester red, black, dirty pink and maroon cotton fabrics are stitched, slashed and washed. The severe beatings, relentless servicing, physical exhaustion and abject conditions are referenced in the way that surfaces are torn, frayed and distressed so that there is

always a conflict of surfaces and ‘under surfaces’ with no single fabric holding a stable position in the design.

The technique of *Bandhej*²⁵ from Northern India is used to create the embossed surface of the design. The textured fabric with its embossed surface is representative of the advanced stage of HIV/AIDS warts and other diseases to which these women are vulnerable.²⁶

The crinkled, distressed, bleached, and textured cotton fabric signifies the psychological status of the workers. The fabric is perforated and weakened, distressed and faded.

All parts of the design are both connected and disconnected; the fabrics are linked, but not harmoniously.

Sewing these textures onto the black, knitted fabric references how society covers, uncovers and uses these women to suit its own needs. While these women are trapped in the industry, it becomes difficult for them to protect themselves or to raise a voice against their own exploitation. Because of this, the artwork is designed to have a form only when a ‘user’ shapes it on the body of the woman. The work is tied or draped by others; the worker is trapped within it. Her hands are not free. She has no control over what is covered and what is revealed. She is not covered by fabric but covered by interwoven references to her exploitation. In ‘dressing’ her, the user manipulates her state of appearance and freedom.

When the woman is not dressed, the fabric drapes like a textured, damaged shadow, dragged across the floor.

²⁵ *Bandhej* is an old method of creating pattern on fabric by tying lintels on cotton or silk based fabrics.

²⁶ HIV infection among Indian sex workers according to World Health Organisation, is projected to reach 330,000 by 2033 (WHO reports (2001) AIDS in *ASLA: Face the Facts*. p.27).



entrapment

chapter *two*

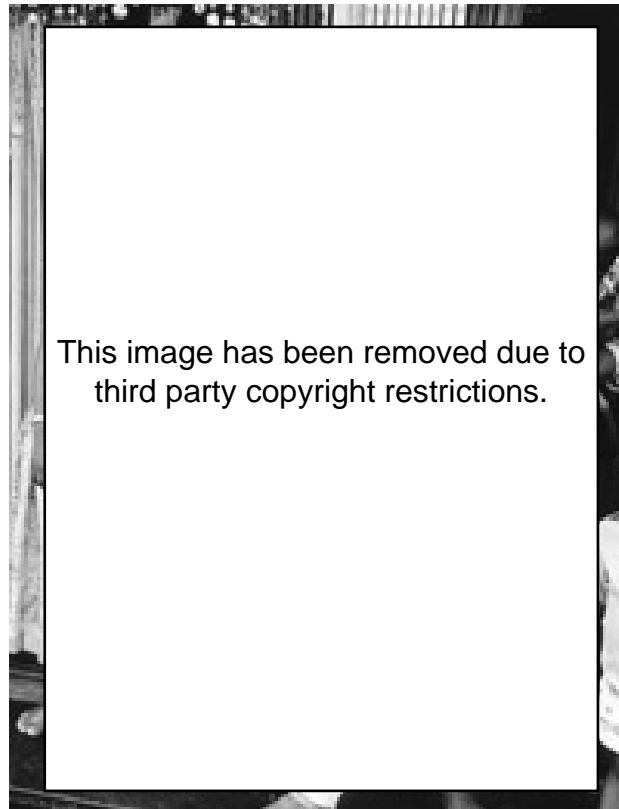


Fig. 2:1 Sex workers waiting outside the quarter for a client. One worker holds a child in her arms while her other child stands beside her.

"My husband was a rickshawala²⁷ but he started taking intoxicants and stopped working. I have to work thus for food and his drugs."

(Dutt in News Services, 2005)

Entrapment of sex workers may be seen as a socio-cultural, economic, and physical phenomenon.

the 'family' and the prostitute

In conservative Indian society, there is rarely a place for poor, uneducated widows, abandoned by husbands or families. Similarly, in some parts of India girls are forced to enter prostitution because of family traditions, or in the name of religious traditions. Once the women are homeless without any financial support they become a very easy target for entrapment. In some villages young girls are forced to join the trade as a family custom and their family members (i.e. brothers and father) bring

²⁷ A man who pulls a small two or three wheeled cart designed to transport two or more passengers.

clients to them.²⁸ The girls will later become major sources of income for the family. In the southern part of India some young girls are forced to become *devdasis*²⁹ in the name of religious custom.

Sometimes poverty-stricken parents are coerced into selling their female children to brothels or pimps who operate as go-betweens. The girls from rural communities serve as easy targets for traffickers and pimps who promise them love, marriage and improved economic conditions. Still, in Indian villages having many children is an approved tradition. For parents, feeding a large family, educating their other children and providing medical care to other family members becomes a substantial burden. In these cases a young girl may be seen as ‘easy cash’. Sometimes husbands or other relatives sell these young girls to the brothels for a few thousand rupees.

There a girl befriended me, made me unconscious with drinks and drugs and brought me here. When I gained consciousness and the effect of the drugs wore off, I realised I had nowhere to go. My parents did not want me, my husband did not want me I had no education and no skills. I had a son to look after.

(Beenu interviewed by Khanna in Red Light Despatch, 2006, Vol. 1, Issue 2)

rape and abandonment

Women who are rape victims, paralysed, mentally disturbed, handicapped or infertile also fall prey to entrapment. Poverty-stricken families can not keep these women at home because of economic and social pressures. Many times rape victims commit suicide or run away from home. However, because of their lack of status they become easy targets for entrapment. Already traumatised and socially isolated, they often end up in the brothels.³⁰

²⁸ There are some tribal communities who involve prostitution as part of their family tradition. For example the *Nutt* (a tribe in Bihar) live in communities on the edge of towns where they practice prostitution under the euphemism of “family business”. Similarly the *Bachara* (a tribe of people in the western part of Madhya Pradesh in central India) are known for the tradition of child prostitution, with families turning their first daughters, into child prostitutes to support the family. The tradition is centuries old and is still practiced widely today. (See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prostitution_in_India)

²⁹ The phenomenon of the *devdasis* will be discussed in the next chapter.

³⁰ It is a widely held, un-written law in Indian society that a raped victim should not live in the same society or community as her family because of the shame she will bring on them.

Often issues such as family responsibilities, unemployment, or involvement in drugs³¹ result in the coercion of single or married women into prostitution. These women ply their trade from home, in the streets or near restaurants situated by highways. As a result, poverty, ignorance, illiteracy, disease and disrespect have become synonymous with the present state of Indian prostitution.

Brown (2000) points out that the major brothels of contemporary India are populated with under-aged sex workers trafficked from Nepal, Bangladesh and from rural areas of India. These girls are mostly abandoned by families or husbands, or may belong to the lower castes. Some of them are also rape victims, infertile, mentally disturbed or handicapped.

entrapment and finance

A significant amount of research (Brown 2000; Dutt 2005; Ghosh 2004) has shown that it is easy to enter this trade but difficult to find a way out. When a girl is sold out to a brothel a financial transaction takes place. The price is never revealed to the girl. The only thing she knows is that if she wants to be free she will have to pay back the set amount to the brothel owner. In this dynamic, the worker is required to pay the debt of the value of her body. Sex workers in the *lal batti*, according to Arnson (2004), earn on average \$ 1.50 USD a night for sex. They earn two dollars on a good night and less than one dollar on a bad night. Arnson notes that women are often able to earn a little more if they have sex without a condom.

The rate is Rs. 50 per ejaculation and Rs 200 if the client stays for the night. I used to earn a minimum of Rs 200 and maximum of Rs 500. Now I earn about Rs 100 a day. Out off this the brothel madam keeps half and I have to pay about Rs 10 for food and then I spend Rs 15-Rs 20 on medicines, tobacco or alcohol. I save about Rs 600 a month, out of which I have to buy clothes and makeup. I can send only Rs 200 a month for my son.

(Beenu, interviewed by Khanna (2006) Red Light Despatch, p. 2,
Vol. 1, Issue 1)

³¹ Gupta (2006) states that from the ages of 20 – 25 women in brothels are often ‘taught’ to become dependent on drugs and alcohol. Brothel madams also make sure that they have one or two children so that they cannot think about returning home anymore. With children, suffering from depression and diseases, they do not see a way out. At this time, when asked, the women say they want to stay in the brothels and not go back home (Red Light Despatch, 2006 p. 5, Vol. 1 Issue 1).

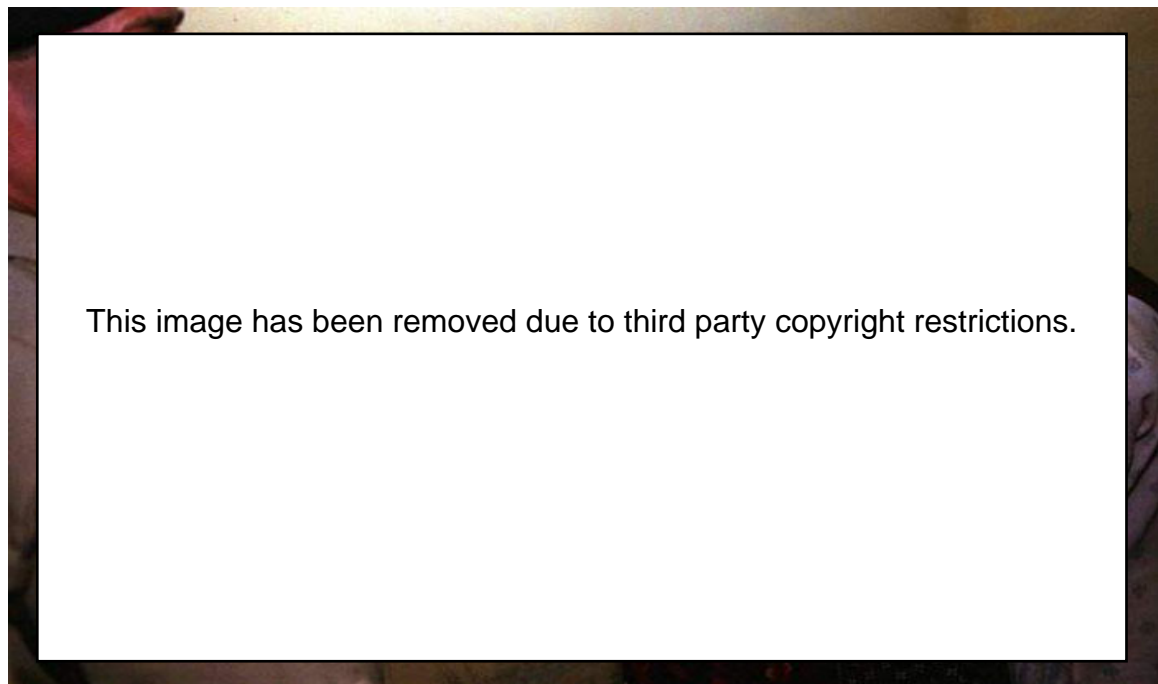


Fig. 2:2 Sex workers caught by police face the wall in shame.

Brown (2000) describes how the police, political bosses and the underworld share the profits generated by sex workers. The brothel owner pays the police department when a new girl arrives. This money is shared by high officials and political bosses. A large amount of money is also paid as an ongoing bribe to local police departments so that the brothels can continue to operate smoothly. Often sudden raids fetch an additional pay-off.³² When the police arrest a sex worker, she can be freed only after paying a bribe directly to the department.

This process affects sex workers both directly and indirectly. They end up working in order to pay the bribes the brothel owners give to the police. When they are arrested, they lose their clients, and when they return to their respective places, they tend to lose their belongings and money and must start afresh.

Because the cycle of paying the initial amount to the brothel owner is designed to be continuous, women workers remain trapped in the trade. After years of orchestrated abuse and manipulation they come to perceive their status as inescapable. The

³² In Mumbai, a sex worker will generally pay local policemen between Rs 50 and Rs 200 a month as protection money (Namboodiri and Chowdhury, 1997, India Today).

dynamic of traditional family and society values means that they can not return to their villages. Economic realities mean they can not live without an income, and police and local government corruption means that there is often no avenue of appeal for help.



Fig. 2:3 A woman struggles to free herself from a black polyurethane garment she is strapped inside. (Photographed by Karen Yeung) August 30, 2007.

This design signifies the entrapment of Indian women sex workers. The black polyurethane fabric is non-stretchable and stiff. The subtle animal skin texture signifies the way women are treated as animals. The garment is carefully designed without side seams; there is no entry or exit point. The dress simply wraps around the body, laces up and entraps the wearer. The design includes two darts in the front and the sides, indicating an eroticising of the contained body.

A significant feature of this garment is the way that the hair of the wearer is tied into the design. The hair becomes part of the lacing that entraps her. The garment transgresses the traditional role of protective covering and actually entraps the wearer because she becomes part of its system of enclosure. This design element is a translation of the way that workers in the *lal batti* are physically woven into the trade

and it becomes impossible for them to extricate themselves. The self and the trade become one; identity and abuse become a single seamless experience. The braided hair of the wearer weaves into the fabric's backbone. The relationship of the body to the trade is one of cohesion and restriction.

This garment does not use buttons but instead employs industrial eyelets. These are the same eyelets that are used in tarpaulins to wrap objects. They are employed in the design to signify the way women are used in the trade as commercial commodities. The eyelets are not delicate. They serve to protect the object from the 'wear and tear' of constant use. Black straps are laced through the eyelets. They are made from the same fabric as the dress and tie the body into the garment. The body is so tightly laced that the wearer cannot walk (escape).³³

The garment is also designed to expose. The modesty that indicates feminine virtue and status in Indian society is stripped away so a wide neckline (barely covering the bust), a visible stomach, buttocks and hips present the wearer to the world as an object to be used for sex.

³³ The same lacing that ties the anklets together, ties the wearer's hair and neck into a seamless entrapment.



belonging

chapter *three*

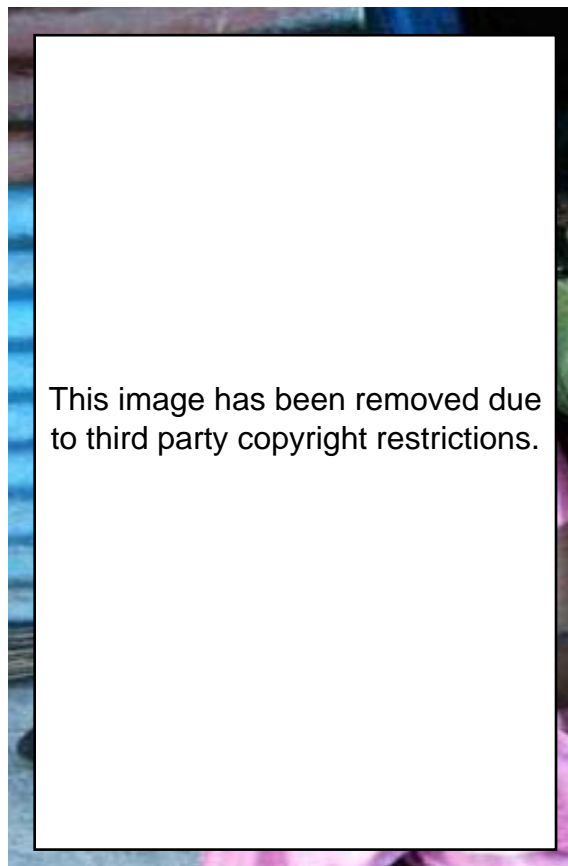


Fig. 3:1 A sex worker waiting for a client and wearing bindi, nose pin, mangal sutra, and bangles.

I wanted to flee from hunger at thirteen...now after seventeen years, I have enough money, enough and more...all I lack is a home....children...the desire to be domesticated.... I know my desire for a home of my own and children would never be fulfilled.

(Ghosh, 2004, p. 114)

Male-dominated Indian society is very conservative and generally categorised on the basis of wealth, caste and gender. Women are generally cast into specific roles as daughters, sisters, wives or mothers. A woman abandoned by her family or husband, a widow, a woman of lower caste, an infertile woman, a rape victim, or a woman with an unmarried child, faces ostracism in a society that allows little flexibility to its prescribed roles. A woman involved in prostitution is a pariah.

Marriage is a culturally reinforced desire for young women. From childhood they are asked to learn the basic duties of family life and to keep chaste so that they can ensure themselves access to good husbands. In Indian society, marriage is the vehicle for a woman to achieve status and respect. Once a girl is married she gets support from her family and freedom to move in society. She has dignity. Exemplifying 'family values' and

bearing her husband's children brings her appreciation and acceptance. Social security and participation in social and spiritual activities form the fabric of this respectability.

Sex workers entertain countless men, but for many of them, their innermost desire is to have a permanent husband. A man who can provide support, security, dignity, social status and a happy marriage is a dream for Indian women that are often hard to achieve. For sex workers the possibility of attaining the respectability that marriage provides is almost impossible.

However, despite the fact that sex workers are normally not married, they generally dress as married women. Wearing red/green *bindi*³⁴, *sarees*³⁵, *bangles*³⁶, *mangalsutra*³⁷, nose pins, toe rings and *sindoor*,³⁸ they attire themselves as wives to attract their clients. Regular clients like to treat these women as their wives. Many of their clients have migrated from other parts of the country and have left their wives behind. These men try to find a way of satisfying their physical needs and feelings of homeliness.

Wearing signifiers of marriage gives women sex workers a temporary illusion of status, and to their clients it gives an impression of being with their wives. Wearing such signifiers of married status also reflects sex workers' desire to belong.

Ghosh, (2004) suggests that the desire for love, affection and belonging sometimes causes these women to fall in love with their regular clients. The worker often gives her client money for alcohol, and cigarettes. She may also cook for him. Thus, many workers demonstrate the desire for domestication and affection. Although they know it is rarely a permanent relationship, they continue this pattern as a way of creating meaning and dignity for themselves as women in Indian society. If they are fortunate enough to get married to one of their regular clients, the shame of their profession generally does not vanish, and because of their circumstances they are often forced back onto the street.

³⁴ The *bindi* is the red dot on the forehead that serves as a traditional method of marking marital status.

³⁵ A garment worn by Indian women consisting of a long piece of fabric wrapped around the body with one end draped over the head or one shoulder.

³⁶ Bangles are a part of the jewellery used by Indian married women.

³⁷ A string of gold and black beads worn around the neck by married Indian women.

³⁸ Vermillion is a red powder used on the forehead by married Indian women.

One of her customers became a lover. He bought her back from the brothel and married her. When he needed money, though, she was back on street. She protested, and he stabbed her in the cheek and back, burned her with kerosene on the belly and legs and shaved her hip length black hair down to scalp.

(Giridharadas, June 6, 2006, Herald Tribune, p. 2)

The physical exploitation/manipulation of repeated abortions and re-occurring STDs can render sex workers infertile. As a result, further stigmatisation occurs, making them even less attractive as wives.

Ghosh (2004, p.114) records a comment typical of many women caught in this situation:

My little daughter can sing and dance to Hindi film songs so well, but I do not want her to suffer like me. I would get her married far away from this place, she would have a home and her husband, a shopkeeper – and children would tend the goats.

The desire for motherhood is a common aspiration amongst Indian sex workers. Yet most are denied access to a life in which they are allowed to rear children in a socially approved and supported environment. As a result, these workers struggle without avail to fit into a narrow social system that gives other women a degree of respectability. Because they are exploited and so profoundly disempowered, workers generally only attain an affectation of belonging.

The society that allows and often supports their marginalisation also actively excludes them from equal participation. They are denied cultural, economic and legal safety.



Fig. 3:2 A woman struggling to get into an Indo-Western wedding dress. The structure of the garment is such that it 'shuts' her out. (Photographed by Karen Yeung) August 30, 2007.

The design of this garment (Fig. 3:2) reflects the way in which sex workers are excluded from positions of status in Indian society. Red is the traditional colour worn by married Indian women. It also represents passion and affection towards the family. Green traditionally denotes prosperity. The rich embroidery and gold colours signify the wealth associated with married women.

The design of this wedding dress is based on an Indo-Western gown now in vogue in India.³⁹ An ensemble containing a train, corset and a jacket makes references to western influences currently fashionable in high society Indian wedding design.

The first piece of this attire is the red sequined jacket. This jacket is inspired by a jacket worn in the *Mughal* period with *Peshwaz*.⁴⁰ The jacket has three openings, the back of the collar, the centre back and centre front. However, in this garment these are false openings that shut the wearer out. In other words, the traditional methods of access are illusions. If one tries to don the garment, one is confronted with design elements that prevent the jacket from opening.

The jacket also has a long sleeve that is inspired by *Churidaar*⁴¹ sleeves. The long sleeve appears to have the subtle layering worn by respectable women, but the hem of the sleeve is too small so that a hand can not fit through the jacket. The jacket also has a huge neckline in the front (inspired by an Indian neckline style called *matka* or ‘pitcher neckline’). The back neckline is also based on a traditional pattern. It references the *Paan* and is translated as the Beetle Leaf neckline. However, although the necklines on this garment are large enough for someone to get through, the collar known (as a *Chokkar*⁴²)

³⁹ Kamal writing in the Brisbane India Times (2007) notes, “In the last few years, the streamlined mermaid lehnga has become very popular. Designers are modifying the lehnga ensemble into a kind of gown. Bustier double-up as a choli, tapered, layered and Victorian styled skirt displace lehnga” [sic.] (p.10).

⁴⁰ *Peshwaz* is an Urdu word for a traditional dress that featured a tight fitted body with enhanced bust lines. This body was attached to a long skirt. The length of the skirt varied and was worn with a *pyjamee*. *Pyjamee* were extra long trousers, tightly fitted at the ankles. The gathering of the fabric at the base operated as a decorative feature glimpsed under the *peshwaz*.

⁴¹ *Churidaar* sleeves tend to be long and cut on the bias so that they form gathers around the wrist when they are worn. This is a traditional design feature of Indian female attire popularised in the *Mughal* period. Since that time it has remained a favourite design with traditional women.

⁴² *Chokkar* is a piece of necklace, the same size as a woman’s neck, that is used as a system of adornment by married women.

shuts the wearer out. A woman donning the garment can not get her head through the ‘sealed’ collar.

The second part of this garment is the red sequined dress, worn under the jacket. The upper green bodice known as *choli* (top) is attached to the long skirt by the train. There is a material used between the lining and the main fabric of the *choli*. This material represents the strong boundaries Indian society has set against the sex workers. Irrespective of the individual build of the wearer, if this garment was successfully donned, the *choli* will not allow the woman’s form to influence the shape of the garment. Like the rare prostitute who does marry, she remains defined by her profession and the status it relegates her to in Indian society.

The skirt pattern used in the design is adapted from Indian *lehnga*,⁴³ which is fused with the western style of the train. It is possible to be deceived by the jacket into believing that there could be another opening underneath the garment. However, closer inspection reveals that this dress also has no opening. A substantial volume of fabric has been added to the skirt to make the dress richer and suggest opulence and status. Under this volume is yet another layer of dull green polyester. This operates as a lining that implies perhaps another method of getting into the garment. However, even this is a ruse. A woman wanting to put the dress on from beneath finds that the linings are sewn together, so she is literally designed out of the dress.

Thus, the very skirt that assures status, protection and modesty shuts the woman out. Status and safety are illusions. The protective layer that signifies belonging cannot be worn. One can hold the dress against one’s self and imagine how it might feel to wear it, but the (social) physical structure of the garment will not allow the woman to protect herself with its covering. Beneath its bright signifiers of status it is a closed door. It is desirable but exclusive.

The last element in the costume is a golden veil that is known as a *dupatta*.⁴⁴ traditionally this signifies the values and respect a woman carries in Indian society. It connotes modesty and the paying of respect to elders, which is reciprocated.

⁴³ *Lehnga* is a voluminous embellished, circular skirt worn by Indian brides.

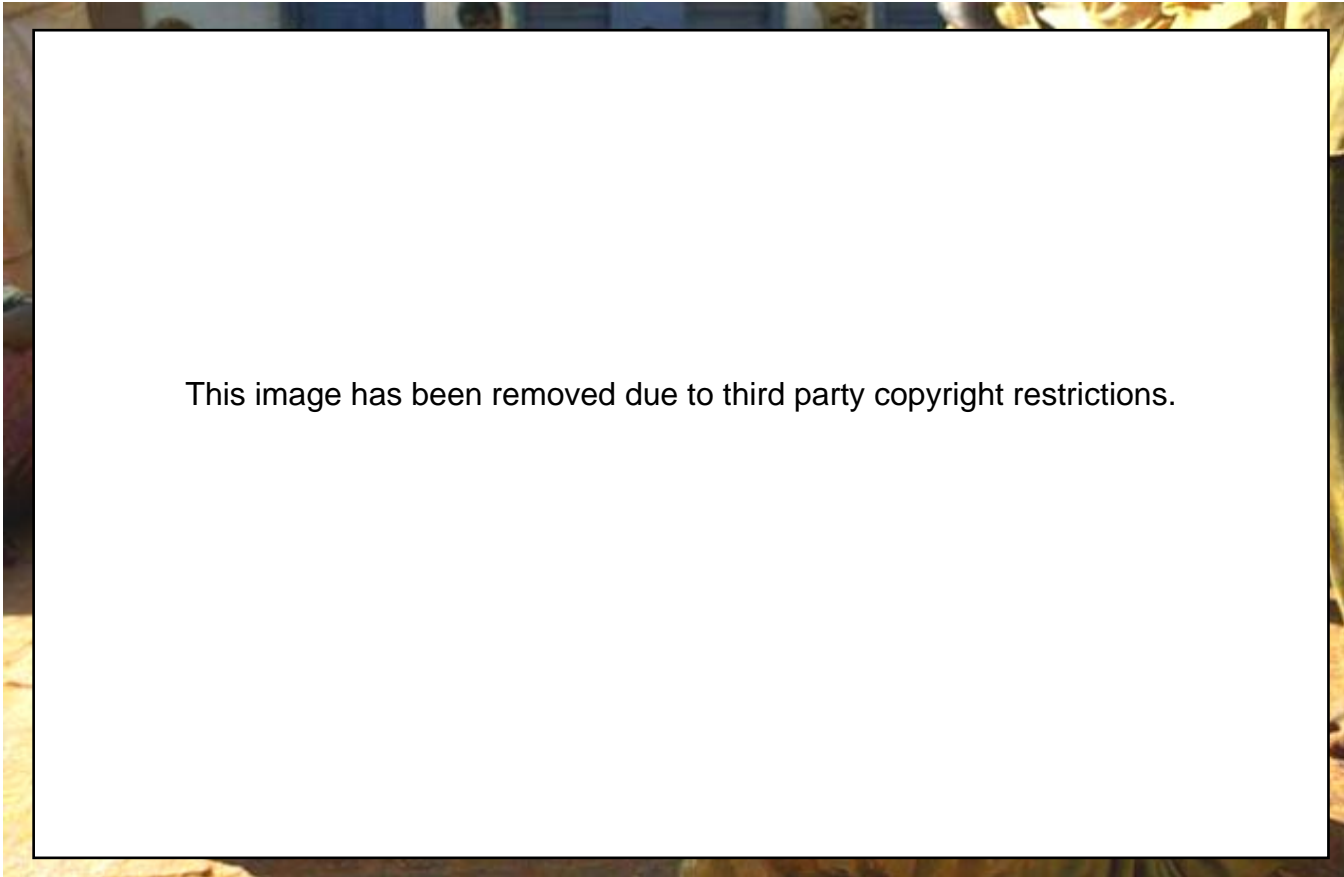
Thus this wedding dress carries signifiers of status as profiled in traditional marriage codes. It is expensive, voluminous, elegant and poised in the hybrid territory between Indian and western chic. On many levels it is designed to suggest the status and respect marriage holds for women in Indian society. However, beneath its illusion the design is a barrier. While offering the illusion of acceptance, it refuses the wearer access.

⁴⁴ *Dupatta* is a Hindi word for a long rectangular piece of fabric used by Indian women to cover the head and bust.



spirituality

chapter *four*



This image has been removed due to third party copyright restrictions.

Fig.4:1 The marriage ceremony of a young girl dedicated to the Goddess Yallamma.

According to some of the puranas, the presence of a prostitute was essential on certain sacred occasions. From the Vedic period prostitutes have always been an important part of Indian society. During the Deepavali (lighting of lamps) festival, a prostitute used to go from house to house uttering auspicious words, heralding the advent of the Goddess Laxmi⁴⁵. Again, a prostitute had to be present at the ritual of tying the sacred protective cord (raksha-bandhan) in the case of a king, whose waist also used to be purified with clay from the threshold of a prostitute's house.

(Banerjee, 1998 pp. 23-24)

We dance before the holy man and the gods to seek blessings. We basically pray that we should never be born again in this pitiable life of a sex worker. We pray that our future generation be relieved of being born associated with this ugly profession.

(Newindpress.com 2006)

These rituals to which the above quotation refer represent some of the important roles prostitutes hold in traditional Indian society. Prostitutes were known to have special spiritual powers and from the time of the *Kothaas*, were a respected part of religious and

⁴⁵ Laxmi is the goddess of prosperity and money. She was worshipped at the time of the *Deepavali* that falls in October or November.

cultural practice. This spiritual dimension of the prostitute is significantly different to the notion of the prostitute as framed in many western cultures.

The revered status of the prostitute may also be seen in the role of women known as *Devdasis*. These women traditionally went to the temple and conducted specific rites and rituals. Historically, wealth, respect, fortune and status have been historically associated with them. At puberty they are traditionally married to the Goddess *Yallamma*.⁴⁶ They conduct prayers, dances and duties in the temple to please her. They are worshiped as the personification of the Goddess. Neither housewarming nor marriage was traditionally complete without their presence. However, time has degraded the role of the *Devdasis* to something now more associated with entertainment and the fulfilment of sexual desire.

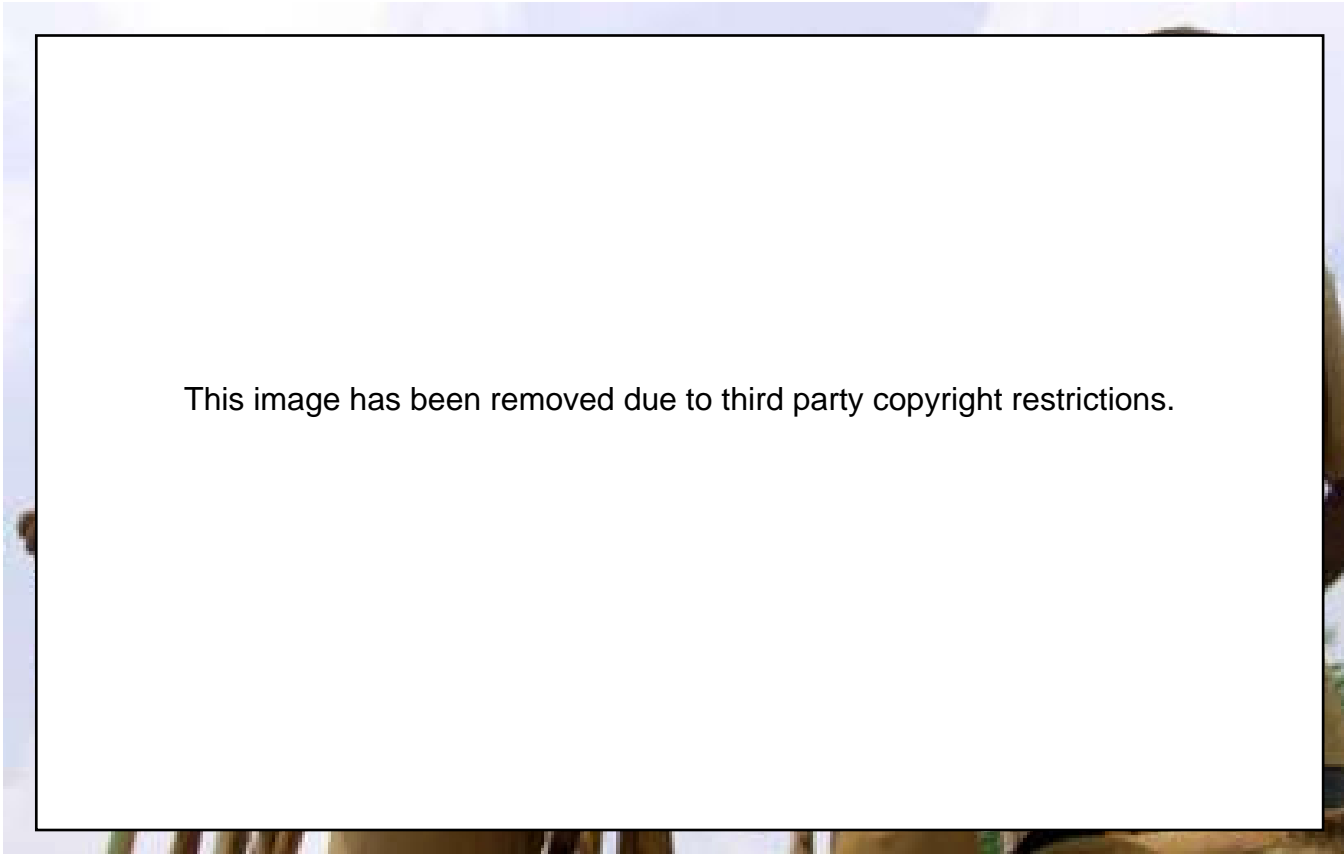
The role of the prostitute in religious rituals can still be witnessed today in an old custom that takes place every year in the Southern state of Karnataka. In this ritual, over half-a-million people gather at the Goddess *Yallamma*'s temple on 'full moon day'. This outlawed ceremony of giving away young girls to the service of the Goddess *Yallamma* is conducted by eunuchs. Although these young girls end up in the red light district of Delhi and Mumbai (or other metropolitan cities) they always carry a sign of their spirituality by wearing a string of red beads around their neck. The string indicates the belief that these women have in spiritual powers. It reflects the innermost connection of the human being with spiritual privilege.

The role of the prostitute in Indian religious ritual is a complex one. In Indian *tantrik*⁴⁷ practice, the *tantrika* (or male practitioner) needs a woman who embodies *Shakti*.⁴⁸ Without making love with *Shakti*, certain *tantrik* practices remain incomplete. The women who take part in these practices are normally prostitutes. These *tantrik* practices enable the desires of devotees to come to fruition. However, the prostitutes' status, while vital to the rituals, remains that of a pariah. The beneficiaries of these prayers and practices generally do not acknowledge the spiritual significance of sex workers.

⁴⁶ The Goddess *Yallamma* is known for her abundance of strength. She is also known as *Jogamma*, *Holiyyamma*, and *Renuka*. Her temples are located at Soundathi in the Belgaum district, at Chandraguthi in the Shimoga district and at Hulgi in the Bellary district of Karnataka State. Her temples can also be found in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh.

⁴⁷ A school of thought in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy that is concerned with powerful ritual acts of body, speech and mind.

⁴⁸ *Shakti* is a Hindi word meaning power.



This image has been removed due to third party copyright restrictions.

Fig. 4:2 The process of making a statue of Goddess *Durga*. The material used in the creation of this figure includes earth from the threshold of a brothel.

Retrieved 01, September from http://www.suprmchaos.com/durga_091403.jpg

Another significant tradition that is still celebrated every year in the Bengali community is *Durga*⁴⁹ *puja*⁵⁰. Every year the men who create statues of the Goddess *Durga* ask sex workers for the earth from their doorsteps. *Durga*'s devotees worship her for nine days during a festival known as *Navratri*.⁵¹ The idol-makers mix the soil from the sex worker's doorstep into the clay used for sculptures. This custom derives from the belief that when a man enters the brothel he sheds his virtues and sense of righteousness at the threshold. Thus, the earth at the threshold of a brothel must have gathered all that is pure and right. This 'pure' earth is seen as suitably appropriate for creating the form of the Goddess.

Many rituals that involve the participation of prostitutes are not acknowledged by polite Indian society. Indicative of this is a 450 year-old festival that takes place every year in

⁴⁹ The Goddess *Durga* is the incarnation of *Devi* or the mother Goddess. *Durga* is a unified symbol of all divine forces.

⁵⁰ *Puja* is a *Sanskrit* word meaning prayer.

⁵¹ *Navratri* is a nine-day festival devoted to the propitiation of Shakti or The Divine Mother.

Varanasi at the same time as the *Navratri* festival. At this time sex workers from different cities gather after midnight, at the shore of the holy river *Ganga*. The prostitutes receive a warm welcome from the locals and temple priests. They wear garish make-up and anklets with tiny bells. They sing spiritual songs and dance, intoxicated by spiritual powers. A significant part of the festival involves their prayers to the Lord for a better life, peace, and fortune for them and their families.⁵²

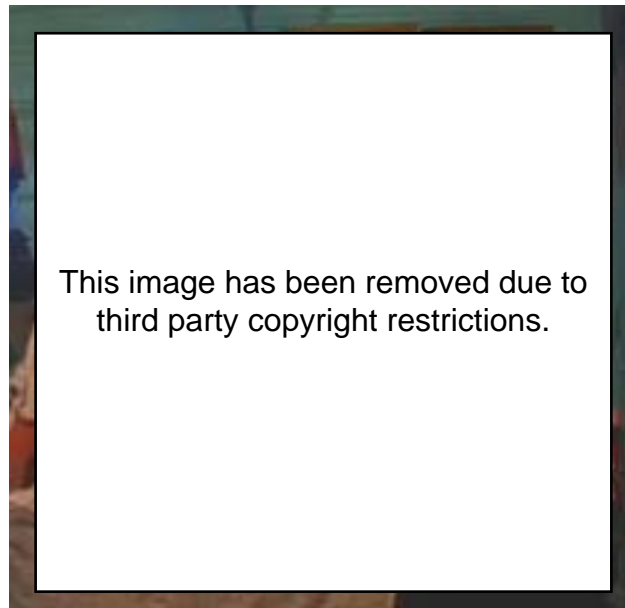


Fig. 4:3 Typical sex worker's quarters with photographs of Lord Shiva⁵³, and the Goddess Kali⁵⁴ hanging on the wall. (image from a movie, *born into brothels*) (Directed by Zana Briski, 2003). Copied August 01, 2006.

This complex dynamic involving purity and the sex worker is a difficult concept to translate into a western paradigm. The prostitute as a social construct is at once a necessary and marginalised agent in the realisation of complex theological constructs.

⁵² Because of the exploitive surroundings where they work and live and also the attitude of society towards them, prostitutes generally perceive their exploitation as a form of personal transgression (or sin).

⁵³The third deity of the Hindu triad is Lord *Shiva*. Shiva is called the Destroyer (of evil) but also has the aspect of regeneration. As destroyer he is dark and terrible, appearing as a naked ascetic accompanied by a train of demons, encircled with serpents and necklaces of skulls. As an auspicious and reproductive power, he is worshipped in the form of the *shivling* or *shiva linga* (lingam). Shiva is depicted as white, with a dark-blue throat, with several arms and three eyes. He carries a trident and rides a white bull.

⁵⁴ *Kali* means black. She is the Hindu Goddess, the ferocious form of *Devi*. *Kali* is represented as a black woman with four arms. In one hand she clutches a sword, in another the head of the demon she has slain. With the other two hands she encourages her worshippers. For earrings she has two dead bodies and he wears a necklace of skulls. Her only clothing is a girdle made of dead men's hands, and her tongue protrudes from her mouth. Her eyes are red, and her face and breasts are smeared with blood. She stands with one foot on her husband's thigh, and with the other one on his breast.

Although the *sex worker* takes an active part in specific festivals, the worshippers respect the *idol*. In general they still frame the prostitute as a pariah.

Like most other women in India, sex workers have spiritual dimensions to their lives. These are both personal and historical. Sex workers fast occasionally in order to please the gods. They worship gods and goddesses in their homes and celebrate regional festivals according to their capacity. Yet polite Indian society still does not acknowledge the profound relationship they have with worship and the enablement of rituals. Thus, in a pernicious twist of values, sex workers generally cannot find a respectable place in the temples and at other sacred sites. They are required yet outcast. They are framed as *randi* and *gande long*, without value in 'acceptable' society.



Fig. 4:4 A sex worker showing both the outer and inner world of her life. The outer world represents her position and work in the *lal batti*. The other layer represents a non-material and liberated soul. The draped fabric signifies an aspect of the worker that is free from the burden of social condemnation. She is covered and glows with spiritual resonance. (Photographed by Karen Yeung) September 5, 2007.

In this design I aimed to portray references to spirituality as they are experienced by some sex workers.

The design, in keeping with the preceding artworks, acts as a form of revelation. We see this garment first as one thing, but upon closer inspection something else is revealed.

The mini dress gives the impression of a trade garment with a long centre front zip that operates from between the legs to the top and ends with an unfastening of the whole garment above the breast. The formless and overlapped scraps of fabric represent the mixed factors drawn from the outer world of the Indian sex workers. The fabric composed of off cuts from the manipulation, entrapment, and belonging designs, is stitched together and dyed with black textile ink to create a soiled and darkened surface. The frayed edges of fabrics signify the insecure and perpetually damaging life women face in this trade

The artwork also reveals the sacred nature of the sex worker. Beneath the dull exterior, there is a beautiful and untouched layer that is the spiritual relationship with something higher than the men and women who exploit her. Once the outer layer is unzipped, the layer of *Bhagwa*⁵⁵ silk fabric is revealed.

This layer of fabric is hidden from view when we see the worker in the *lal batti*, but it unfurls and can be draped around the body. With this action completed, a subtle image of the Goddess *Durga* resides in the centre of the chest of the wearer. This is the place where the soul lives. The image of the Goddess *Durga* signifies belief and strength in spiritual rites and rituals, and from these the powers of the sex workers are drawn.

When worn, this garment is augmented with a string of red beads tied around the neck. This represents the spiritual initiation these women have as *devdasis*. Although these beads are worn at the initiation ceremony, they always remain part of the initiate's life. Devotees don't take them off while they operate in the *lal batti*. The beads are their strength and belief in the Goddess and her spiritual powers.

⁵⁵ *Bhagwa* is a Hindi word for the colour saffron. It is the colour used by Indian religious and spiritual saints and sages. It signifies liberation and freedom from the bondage of karma.

Thus, this artwork may be understood as a reference to the sex worker as something beyond the loud dress of Indian society. It references an appreciation that preceded the *Raj* and is still evident in the spiritual life of parts of Indian society. It is something many of these women hold onto, despite their exploitation and marginalisation.



demise

chapter *five*

This image has been removed due to third party copyright restrictions.

Fig. 5:1 A sex worker revealing hands covered in HIV/AIDS warts

After ten years of physical abuse, malnutrition and drug and alcohol dependency, the earning capacity of the women comes down. Buyers of prostituted sex look for younger girls. They are allowed to keep all of their earnings but earnings go down and the needs of their children go up. At this time, they want to leave prostitution, but don't have the life-skills or the physical health to do so. They have no choice.

(Gupta, Red Light Despatch, 2006, p.5. Vol. 1, Issue 1)

Brown (2000) argues that the physical condition of Indian brothels varies from place to place. However, in general, a cheap brothel is simply a series of claustrophobic cubicles partitioned by sheets. These cubicles are often lit by a single bulb. They contain a hard-surfaced bed, with the same bed sheet used for several clients. Profiteers of the trade give little consideration to the abject conditions in which these women live and work. Their work places are below hygienic standards for human habitation. These conditions expose sex workers to a range of serious physical illnesses. Mounds of garbage, open drains and skittering rats abound.

Women working in brothels generally have running water available. They have space to operate their activities and support from other co-workers. Conversely women those are operating from the *gali* have no immediate water facilities, no proper place for their activities and no support. Most of the time these women operate from dark back streets,

bushes, derelict buildings, fields and open construction sites. These places are dangerous, dirty, and unsafe.

Women say they are beaten up and raped in the fields by clients or petty criminals and goondas (hooligans) who demand free services. Local farmers also take advantage of them. The police do not register any complaints of assault. Sometimes, bodies of women are found on the fields, half eaten by animals. The police take no cognisance of these cases, the women say.

(Menon, 1999)

Women working on the *gali* also become victims of physical assault by truck drivers, passers-by, police and other criminal groups.

In contrast to the protection afforded sex workers in brothels, (a result of payoffs to officials) these roadside sex workers are terribly exposed and are the most vulnerable in the *lal batti*.

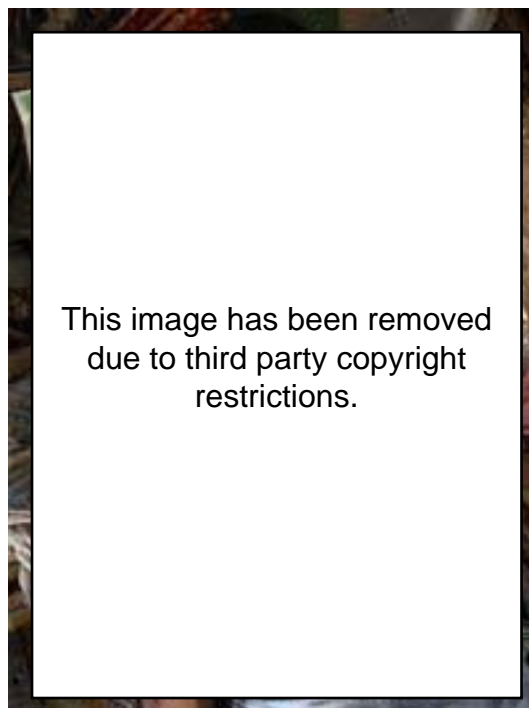


Fig. 5:2 Samarajyam Dandam, 9 years old, with sister Krupajoyti age 5 next to their HIV AIDS infected mother. Naccharamma aged 25, is in the advanced stages of HIV and TB and has been bedridden for the past 3 months. The family lives in a shanty shack on the embankment of the Krishna River in the city of Vijaywada. Retrieved September 10, 2007 from <http://www.netphotograph.com/article.php?id=10>

Shanti (name changed) is a 40-year-old woman living with HIV/AIDS from the 1st lane of Kamathipura in Mumbai's red-light district. She has no family. She has no home. She begs on the street. She was thrown out of the brothel when she turned positive and was getting old. She goes for a bath to the Bombay Central State Transport Bus Depot. She goes for breakfast for the Gaurabai hospital, for lunch to

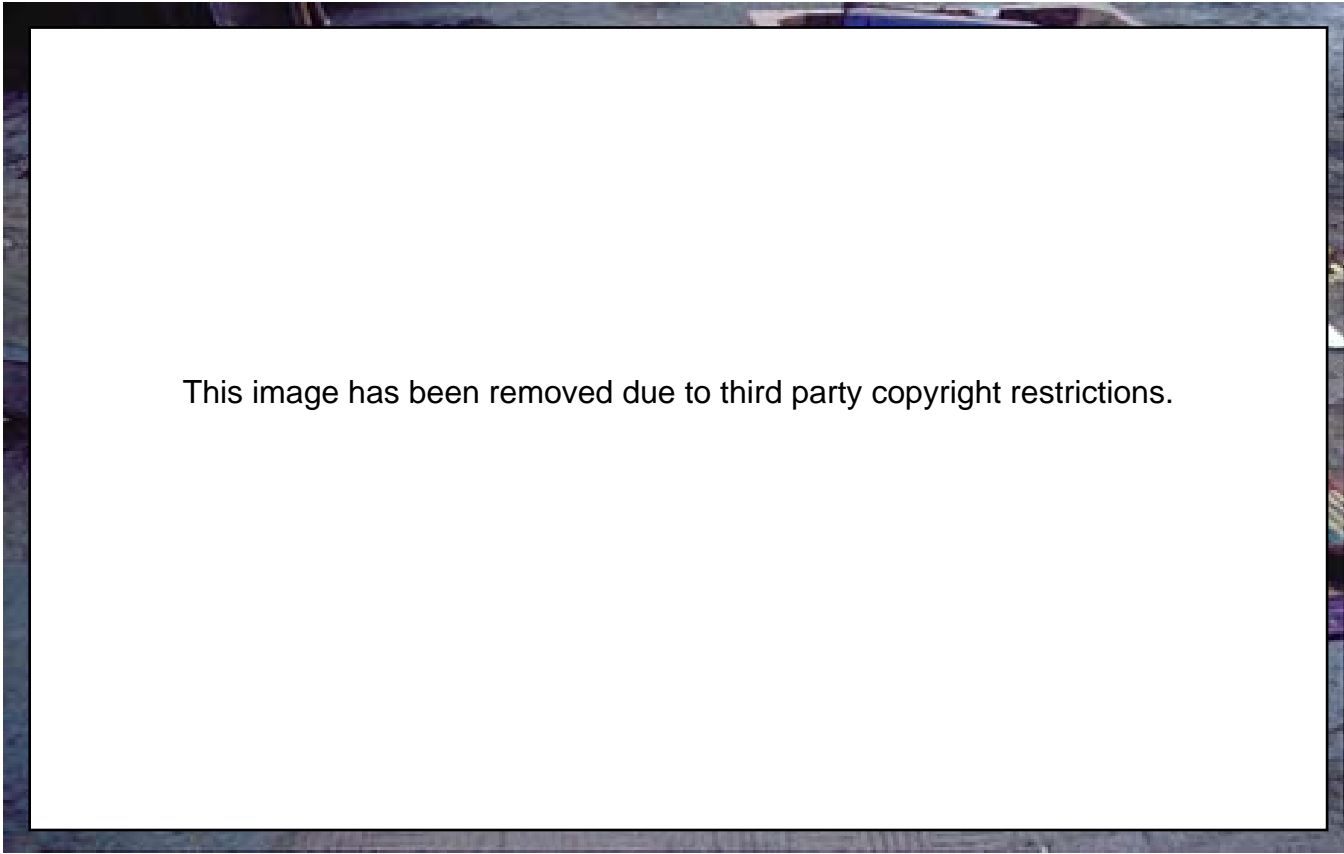
an NGO and for dinner to our center. We prepare dinner for about 45 to 50 women like her everyday. We ourselves are from this area. In 2001, HIV and AIDS entered our lanes. Women fell sick, and many were pushed into the streets. They had not eaten for days, let alone digest[ed] the medicines, which were being handed out.

(Sonavane, 2007, Red Light Despatch p. 4, Vol. 1, Issue 4)

Brown (2000) explains it is expected that workers on the *gali* will suffer from an early infection of HIV/AIDS. If the girl is bought into the trade as a virgin, then the chances of infection become very high because she is forced to have unprotected sex for a higher price. Workers face situations where forced sexual activities are commonplace, and they become the easy target of gang rapes or severe beatings if they do not provide services.

Often workers on the *gali* represent the residue of years of exploitation in brothels. Once their diseased status makes them a liability (in other words, signs of HIV are too physically evident) they are no longer attractive to clients and are evicted. Generally, these evicted workers end up trading on the *gali* where they sell their bodies for a minimum price just to survive. In rare cases they may be fortunate enough to have saved some money or have the support of children or a husband. In these cases they might access shelter for their sick bodies; otherwise they die on the *gali*.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Gupta (2006) suggests that between the age of 30 to 35 many women have no buyers of prostituted sex. They therefore have no income; have two or three children, and disease ridden bodies. At this point they are cast out onto the *gali*. They cannot afford food, and have no access to toilet facilities.



This image has been removed due to third party copyright restrictions.

Fig. 5:3 A HIV/AIDS infected sex worker living on the street in Falkland Mumbai.
Retrieved September 15, 2007, from
http://www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/14_1/fieldreports/gallerywalgren.html

Sometimes an NGO may look after these women and provide medical facilities. Living on *galis* however, becomes an open invitation to disease, because there is no proper place for, sleeping or washing. By living in such abject environments they become vulnerable to tuberculosis, pneumonia and jaundice. Finding medical facilities while living on the *gali* is almost impossible. These women live on the mercy of by-passing strangers.

When they are found dead, their bodies are generally used for medical research and practice purposes or are cremated using an electric current. Because they are anonymous, the cost is met by municipal corporations.



Fig. 5:4 Demise: integrated garment theatre makeup and soil. (Photographed by Karen Yeung) September 5, 2007.

The final work in this collection no longer contains a high level of substrate. The fabric is insufficient to cover the body and the demarcation between flesh and cladding is dissolving.

After working in the *lal batti*, the fabric of a woman's existence has often become tenuous. Her body is generally diseased with STDs and AIDS.⁵⁷ Her access to help is limited through engineered ignorance and marginalisation. Traditional society views these women as pariahs, and many people working with them who try to give them education and support is treated with hostility.

⁵⁷ Most workers with AIDS who end up dying on the roadsides have been infected with HIV through unprotected sexual contact.

However, on June 13, as she was counselling some sex workers on health issues at the old bus stand in Hubli, a police constable approached the group and began assaulting Manjula.

The constable, in a fit of rage, beat her with his lathi and she sustained fractures and swelling on her back and legs. She was admitted to KIMS for 3 days in the casualty ward.

(Yousaf, 2007, p.6)

This design therefore challenges the line between flesh and fabric. On a substrate of stretchable, skin-coloured nylon, the ulceration and Kaposi's sarcoma has become visible.⁵⁸ The work is not subtle. It seeks to lay bare the consequence of orchestrated abuse, hypocrisy and neglect. Using film makeup techniques imitating visually evident AIDS symptoms,⁵⁹ I have painstakingly depicted the reality of infection and vulnerability.

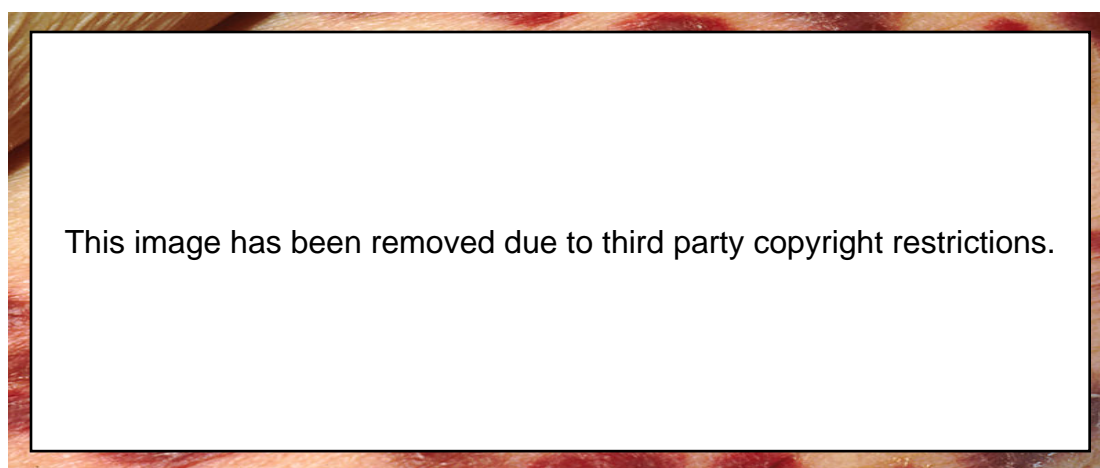


Fig. 5:5 Kaposi's sarcoma lesions generally appear as nodules or blotches that may be red, purple, brown, or black, and are usually raised. Dezube (1996) notes that these lesions are typically found on the skin, but spread elsewhere, especially in the mouth. Growth of these lesions can range from very slow to explosively fast, and the wounds are often associated with the last stages of AIDS.

⁵⁸ Kaposi's sarcoma is a non-curable tumor caused by Human herpes-virus 8 (HHV8). In AIDS patients, Kaposi's sarcoma is considered an opportunistic infection, (a disease that is able to gain a foothold in the body because the immune system has been weakened). Epidemic Kaposi's sarcoma was described during the 1980s as an aggressive disease in AIDS patients. The skin lesions most commonly related to Kaposi's sarcoma affect the lower limbs, face, mouth and genitalia. Associated swelling and eruptions are highly disfiguring for the sufferer.

⁵⁹ Opportunistic infections profiling as symptoms of AIDS include coma, extreme fatigue, fever, mouth ulcers in the genital region, pelvic inflammatory disease, persistent or frequent yeast infections (oral or vaginal), persistent skin rashes or flaky skin, eczema, psoriasis, candidiasis, swollen lymph glands, hair, and nail changes, non-specific folliculitis, scabies weight loss, as well as severe herpes infections causing anal sores, genital sores, mouth sores, and shingles. (See: Sexually Transmitted Disease Resource (2007) http://www.herpescoldsores.com/std/aids_pictures.htm)

The fabric is only sufficient to cover an arm and one breast. It is as infected as the flesh. The body is unprotected. The open wounds and warts of the roadside prostitute remain a target for continuing infection from the unsanitary environment in which she is forced to live. In addition to this, the *gali* provides little protection. The worker is evident to the people on the *gali* and as a result often falls prey to attacks by roadside hooligans.

This sense of vulnerability and isolation is embedded in the design by the way that the garment draws attention to nakedness. The work makes no attempt to align itself with traditional values associated with modesty and protection. Modesty has been burned away. We are confronted by the corporal nature of the body. Brutality, complicit neglect, ignorance, entrapment, and manipulation have resulted in demise.

conclusion

These artworks operate as metaphors for documented conditions in the *lal batti*. They speak not only through their appearance but also through their structure. They are not euphemisms, but they are a form of translation. They come from a world I know. The accounts woven through these chapters are not sensationalised incidents but part of the fabric of manipulation, entrapment, marginalisation and eventually demise that make up the every day world of the sex worker in the red light districts of Indian cities.

They are my voice as an Indian designer.



part two



methodology
heuristics

Having now discussed the five artworks and the ideas that influenced their design, the exegesis will consider the methodology employed in their research and development. A methodology that served this project had to be useful for both gathering data and for the creative processing of connections and resonances within that data. It had to provide a flexible structure that allowed conversations between data and emerging outcomes.

heuristics as a methodological approach

This project employs a heuristic model of research that allows divergent approaches to be applied to data gathering and processing. Heuristics may be framed as a qualitative method⁶⁰ of research where no pre-established formula exists for resolving the research question (Moustakis, 1990; Kleining & Witt, 2000; Ings, 2004; Wood, 2004). Heuristics uses informal approaches and experience. It utilises forms of trial and error as a method of heightening the potential for discovery in new work. The methodology relies on the researcher identifying information, discovering similarities through frequent questioning (which may be accomplished by asking questions of the diverse data gathered) and guesswork.

However, although methodology theorists like Moustakis (1990) and Kleining & Witt (2000) refer to *guesswork*, I would suggest that this is in fact the skilled application of tacit⁶¹ knowledge, which forms the basis for critical decision-making.⁶² In this regard, heuristics may be understood as emphasising the flexible application of tacit knowledge as a method of solving multifaceted and complex creative problems.

Although heuristics is used in science, social science and education, it is useful to this present project because of its flexible nature. *Reflections on Lal Batti* uses tacit

⁶⁰ Qualitative refers to research in which the researcher explores relationships using textual, rather than quantitative data. Results are not usually considered generalisable, but are sometimes transferable.

⁶¹ The concept of tacit knowledge was articulated by the philosopher Michael Polanyi. Tacit knowledge may be understood as knowledge that we have often gained through exposure and experience but may not know we possess. Tacit knowledge has been described in Polanyi's aphorism: "*We know more than we can tell*". Thus, tacit knowledge consists often of habits and cultural understandings and insights that we may not recognise we possess (See: <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/polanyi.html>).

⁶² Without a high level of experience on the part of the researcher, heuristics as a methodology could not function effectively because there would be insufficient basis to inform critical differentiation between potentials in the work. In this research I am enabled by my cultural background, my work in the red light districts of an Indian city, and my years of experience as a fashion designer and garment constructor. These backgrounds help me to make relatively informed decisions about the potential of emerging designs and their contexts.

knowledge and a subjective approach. It employs insight and intuition as methods of drawing connections between data. In this project much of the judgement in decision-making occurred as a result of acting on feelings and informed instincts.

advantages and disadvantages

One of the advantages of heuristics as a methodology is its ability to cope with change. Initially, I began this project by focusing on the historical nature of *Kothaa* culture and the impact of British colonisation upon it. However, as I began exploring more deeply I was constantly brought back to my personal experiences growing up and working in contemporary India. As a result, the topic changed several times.

The research then journeyed through considerations of the *kothaa* and the brothel, the brothel and the *gali*, spiritual dimensions of the sex worker in Indian society, the dynamics of the sex trade in Indian cities, and finally a creative consideration of a more subjective (politically driven) project that involved *reflections on the Lal Batti*. These changes in focus and direction occurred as a result of new explorations and the impact of data coming into the research.

Kleining and Witt (2000) state that the *topic of research is preliminary and may change during the research process* (p.2). They suggest that a research question may only be fully known after being successfully explored. Because of this they argue that *The research person should be open to new concepts and change his/her preconceptions if the data are not in agreement with them* (ibid.).

Because of *Reflections on the Lal Batti* needed to remain open to the potentials of ideas, heuristics suited the project. I was able to heighten the chances of discovery because the question was able to operate as a mutable frame rather than a rigid demarcation of knowledge.⁶³

One of the difficulties with heuristics, however, is that unless it is used carefully, the amount of collected data can become unwieldy. The researcher may be unable to negotiate patterns and potentials within it. There are several methods of dealing with this

⁶³ Wood (2004) suggests, *“Heuristics is concerned with discovery, rather than with proof”* (p. 2). He argues that it is a more appropriate method for many designers because it does not involve *a series of linear, finite questions* (p.9).

problem. Kleining and Witt (2000) suggest that the researcher must remain constantly aware of the state of the research question at any given time. If he is aware of exactly what he is asking of his material, he stands a higher chance of being able to discover pertinent similarities and patterns within it. Because he has framed the question succinctly, he is therefore able to *locate similarities, analogies or homologies within the diverse data that he is collecting and processing* (pp. 2-3). The success of this procedure they argue is often measured by the richness of the result, its cohesive patterns and inter-subject validity (ibid.).

Although I was constantly aware of both the framing of my project and the sub-questions⁶⁴ within it, I also created a visual environment that displayed data, reflections, experiments and emerging designs. I did this so I was able to surround myself with the ‘world’ of the project. By reflecting upon the discussions between aspects of the research, I was able to draw out potential creative potentials in the work.

activating heuristics through the design process

It was in my studio that most of the research was conducted. Its space and walls became a continuous discourse between images, created textures, photographs, mocks,⁶⁵ patterns, and fabrics surfacing through the research. The studio was constantly changing because of my constant reflection upon, and finding relationships between, new and disparate data.⁶⁶

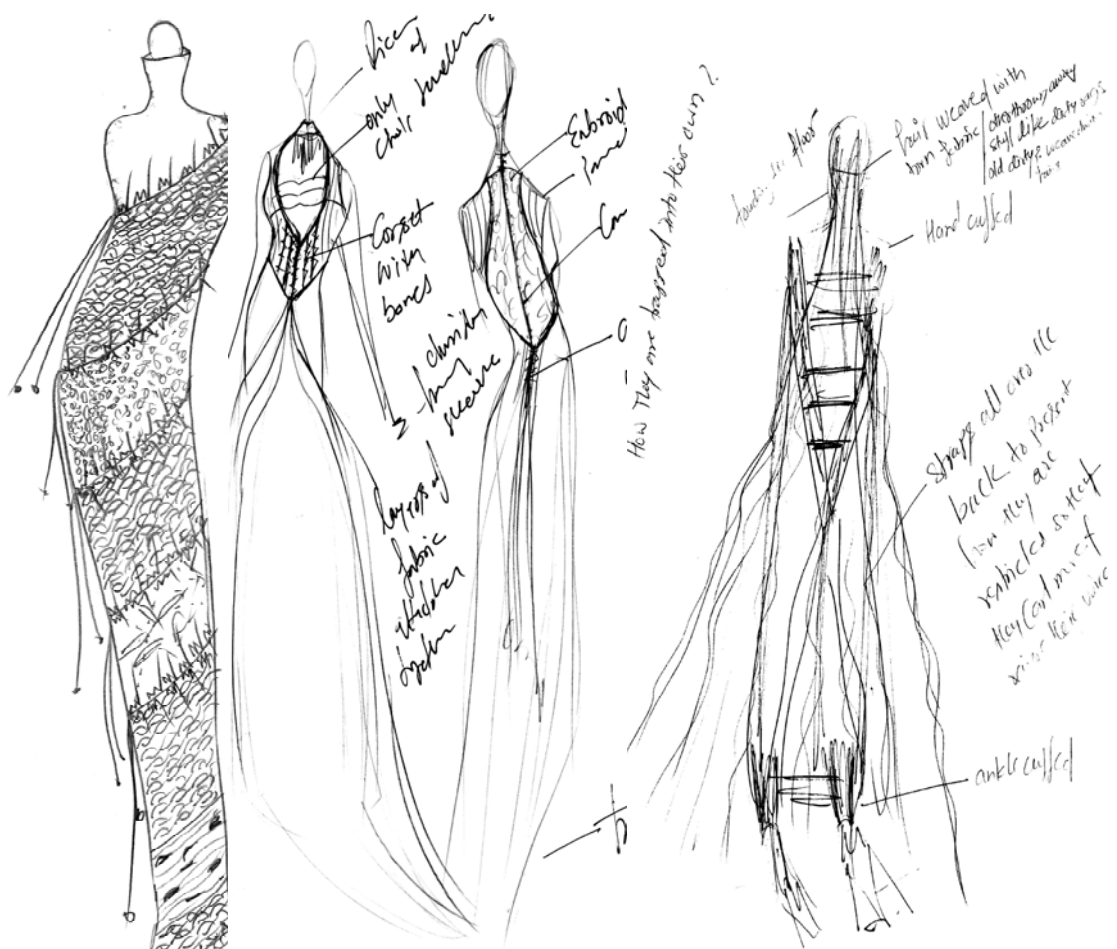
⁶⁴ By sub-question I refer to the range of questions used to make forays into the specific areas of belonging, manipulation, spirituality, entrapment and demise.

⁶⁵ A mock is another term for a *toile*. It is used to develop the final pattern, to enable fitting and to manipulate the design.

⁶⁶ Keeping this space in a relatively disorganised manner (like spreading my patterns out on tables, pinning fabric experiments onto walls, or leaving partially draped dress forms incomplete) gave me a new way of looking. When leaving the studio at night I would leave my thinking as it was, without moving or re-organising anything. Coming back to a chaotic space the next morning often allowed me to take a fresh ‘look’ at a problem that might have been troubling me. Kleining and Witt (2000, p. 2) see this ability to “*change preconceptions to data collection and analysis*” as pivotal to the successful implementation of heuristics as a methodology.

sketching, draping and fitting

In refining the designs for this project I employed draping as a method for shaping out initial forms. Draped ideas were activated off the many sketches I created. Sketches however, were only broad-stroke approaches to concept development (see Fig. 6:1).



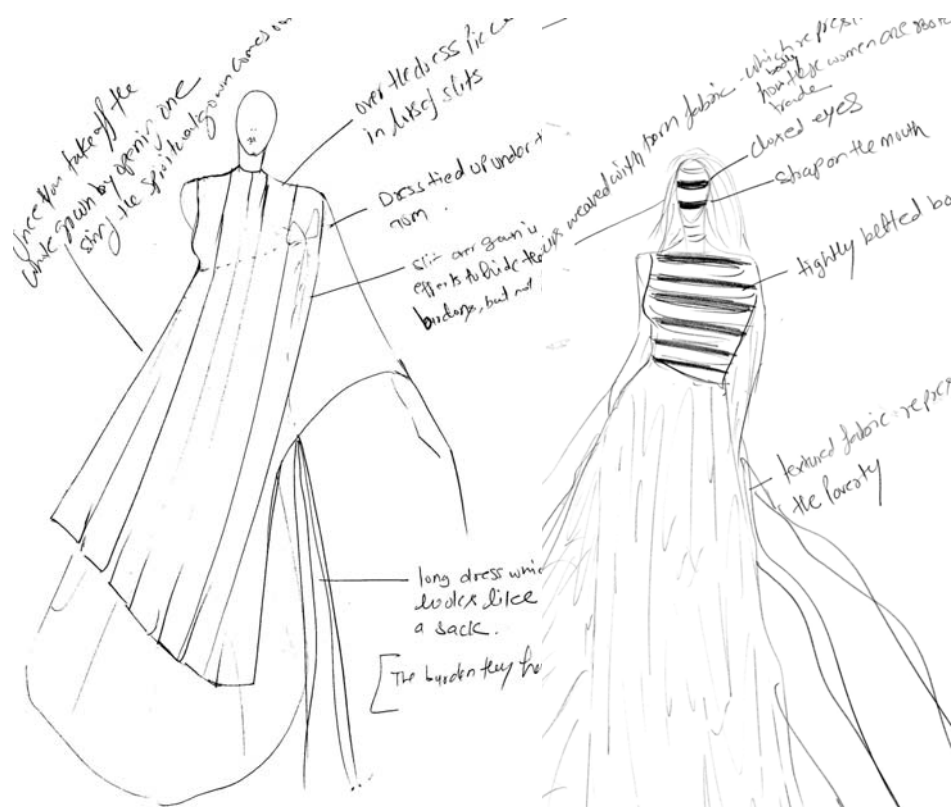


Fig. 6:1 Concept sketches for artworks (February 2006 to August 2007). These were generally pencil drawings with notes that allowed me to quickly capture passing ideas. They gave a sense of the potential *look* of a garment but did not seek to resolve any structural or technical issues. Often these sketches were used in meetings with supervisors when discussing conceptual approaches to abstract ideas.

Draping as a method of design development in fashion may be understood as a thinking process that is driven by the shaping of a design on a dress form (rather than as an adaptation of existing patterns). In my process a mock were made in cheap material (calico). This is because in designing a solution to complex garments like those in this research, multiple mocks needed to be generated and the final fabrics I wanted to use were either in very short supply, or extremely expensive. While the draping of dress forms was useful, it did not resolve questions related to weight or the fall of specific garments.

Fitting as a subsequent process involved modifying the draped garment to accommodate peculiarities of the design. This allowed me to make fine adjustments to how the cloth settled on the dress form using constraints and dynamic fields. For example, I could pull out wrinkles or pin portions of the garment to specific places on the dress form. During this process I was also able to assign different properties to the panels and set various attributes of the cloth to change the physical behaviour of the fabric.

What was important about this approach to the design of these works was that the research was embedded in the process of making.⁶⁷ This was not mere theory generating illustrations of itself but an integrated process. Physical changes to the designs surfaced from the designs themselves or from data that was being used to understand and interpret its conceptual framework (see Fig. 6:2).



Fig. 6:2 Images of three different draped designs. (Images photographed March-September 2007 in Studio WM 205) In the first image (left) we see draping and fitting experiments for the artwork *entrapment*. It was at the stage that the darts were manipulated, allowing the final design to be made from a single, seamless piece of cloth. This is a challenging design feature to achieve.

The second image shows a fitted mock for the artwork *belonging*. Here approaches for the rounded shape of the train are being trailed. We also see evidence of experiments related to the design of the back neck of the garment.

The third image is an initial draping of the design for *spirituality*. In this experiment I was trying to find ways of hiding and later revealing the ‘interior’ nature of the garment.

⁶⁷ Scrivener (2000) terms projects like *Reflections on lal batti* ‘creative production’. He indicates that in this form of research, the artefact may be more important than any ‘knowledge’ reified in it. The knowledge he suggests “*is a by-product of the process rather than its primary objective*” (p. 3). More importantly, he also suggests that creative production theses may have as their core concern a ‘*contribution to human experience*’ (ibid.).

pattern design

The activating of heuristics through the design process is perhaps less evident in the normal approach taken to pattern making. However, in this project even this remained open to intervention and creative ‘re-thinking’.⁶⁸

As my designs were developed on dress forms, I sometimes used the same draped calico pieces for pattern making (instead of calculation and the marking of brown paper). However, in the case of the black garment designed for *Entrapment*, the practices of draping and manual pattern making were integrated into a discursive process. In this design I was interested in a seamless garment that might be shaped only by the manipulation of darts. I achieved this by manipulating the brown paper and draped calico *on the dress form*. Thus, the demarcations between these processes were blurred; paper came up off the table and was manipulated, and fabric came off the dress form and was sometimes laid out on the table as a form of template. This integrated processes of draping and manual pattern making meant that I was able to find a unique way of negotiating the subtle use of darts, enabling me to create an outcome that was as seamless (and inescapable) as the system that entraps women in the trade.⁶⁹

substrate design⁷⁰

Many of the designs in this thesis required renegotiations of fabric so it spoke more effectively of the concept underpinning the work. These included distressing surfaces, designing and developing knitted textiles and applying finishes (including theatre makeup and dyes to existing substrates).

At the outset of the project, however, my primary concern was with collecting fabrics and other material⁷¹ that held a degree of resonance within the world of the *lal batti*.

⁶⁸ Normally, after final refinement in a draping process (involving checking the fit, fall, openings, and form) patterns are cut on brown paper. Accuracy in cutting and marking the pattern is very important. Considering grain line, notches and drill-hole marks are also key features of effective pattern lay out and marking indication on real fabrics.

⁶⁹ The only unwanted features in this design were darts on center-back seams, but without these the round shape of the hip was not achievable.

⁷⁰ I use the term substrate here as something differentiated from fabric. Substrate may be defined as any base, or a substance that is acted upon (Chambers, 1986).

I began by searching the flea markets of Delhi. In these I found a number of old *sarees*.⁷² These garments contained faded and damaged embroidery⁷³ I felt might be useful to the project.

However, these fabrics comprised only a small part of the research. Because the project was conceptually driven, I found that I needed to develop materials that would enable me to more articulately draw parallels between the garment and ideas I was discussing.

In order to portray the theme of *Manipulation*, I experimented extensively with woven non-stretchable fabrics in an effort to develop a stretchable, ‘man-made’ cloth. Although a range of knit or lycra fabrics might have been used for this purpose, I wanted to develop a metaphor for a flesh trade that was rough, inconsistent, dark and felt like a net. After many experiments, I developed the unique nature of this garment by tearing a satin fabric into one-inch widths. These I laboriously hand knitted into a seamless dress (see Fig. 6:3).

⁷¹ These included assorted satin fabrics and silk brocades, jacquard woven fabrics, beads, studs, jewellery, lace, and tassels.

⁷² An outer garment worn chiefly by women of India, consisting of a length of 5.5 to 6 meter lightweight cloth with one end wrapped about the waist to form a skirt and the other draped over the shoulder or covering the head.

⁷³ At this time I also visited the National Museum and Red Fort in Delhi, the Indian Museum, the Victoria Memorial Calcutta in Kolkata, and Ramgarh Fort. These museums all held significant collections of traditional Indian fabrics and garments. By accessing historical data regarding fabric, I was able to concentrate on purchasing second-hand materials that had both aesthetic and historical resonance with my proposed research area. I purchased the fabrics and brought them with me to New Zealand, as I knew they would be hard to procure after I left India. At this early stage in the project, I felt it might be important to include fabrics in my work that had ‘lived’ in the world of which I was intending to speak. I also wished these fabrics to have embedded within them traditional signifiers of customary meaning. Significantly fabric from this early collection of materials appears in the artwork for *belonging* (in the golden tissue used in the veil).



Fig. 6:3 These images show a number of early experiments where I was considering the use of machine-made samples of knitted/woven fabric. Although these experiments proved unsuccessful, they demonstrate early concerns with the potential of mixing of wool, satin and cotton strips.

To create metaphors that would speak of physical, psychological and sexual manipulation I experimented with various fabrics. I used a combination of techniques that included ammonia bleaching, distressing, and the crinkling of cotton substrates. Similarly, a combination of sewing, slashing and rough-washing layered fabrics produced other results that were helpful in developing surfaces for discussing physical abuse. At this time I also began experimenting with the traditional Indian technique of *bandhej*. Historically this procedure uses small locally grown grains (like lentils). These are tied in the fabric and then the cloth is dyed to a desired colour. The grains are then removed. By experimenting with this technique eventually developed textures that referenced HIV warts.⁷⁴



Fig. 6:4 Above are examples of experiments undertaken in 2006. The first texture is developed as a metaphor for physical manipulation. Here I was stitching, washing and slashing different layers of fabric so they formed a 'whole' through a process of integration and disintegration. The second texture is based on psychological manipulation. Here I was using ammonia bleaches to distress the denim fibre. The third texture was an experiment I undertook to find a 'voice' for the symptoms of AIDS. Using an adaptation of the *bandhej* technique, I employed a stretchable transparent fabric into which lustrous red studs were tied.

⁷⁴ These warts are a symptom of the later stages of AIDS infection, (see Fig. 6:4).

I conducted another experiment in order to create the discordant surface for the outer layer of the *spirituality garment*. Initially I tried using commercially produced crushed fabrics (like crushed velvets). However, these were more indicative of illusions of sex workers on the *gali* and did not carry references to fatigue and disconnection. Eventually the design was realised by a technique I developed where off-cuts from other artworks were stitched onto black nylon net. I then distressed and dyed them with black pigments to achieve the illusion of connection. The strength of this design was that it presented visually, a surface that was ‘used’, distressed and disconnected.

While I conducted a plethora of other trials involving substrate design, the experiments I undertook to create a metaphor for the rigidity of the *belonging garment* serve to illustrate how I moved flexibly outside of traditional notions of ‘fabric’. I sought a very stiff material that might work as a metaphor for the strong boundaries of the Indian social system (as it related to rigid roles assigned to ‘marriageable’ women). I tried various mediums including plastic sheet, hard paper fusing stitched with calico, the same material coated with 100% acrylic polymer emulsion, and polymers used on polythene, satin and cotton fabrics. None were successful. When I was working on an old plastic dress form, however, I discovered the proper material. While having difficulty pinning into it, I realised how rigid and ‘uncooperative’ it was. I quickly secured an old dress form and cut, adapted and reshaped it into a bodice that would force the wearer to conform to prescribed dimensions and body shape (see Fig. 6:5).



Fig. 6:5 Experiments developed between June and July in 2007 in studio WM 205)
The image on the left shows hard-paper fusing stitched with calico. The one on the right shows a constructed bodice made from stitched hard-paper fusing on calico. This surface was stiffened with several coats of 100% acrylic polymer emulsion.

conclusion

By employing heuristics in this project, I have been able to push the conceptual boundaries of fabric and garment design so they might more effectively ‘speak’ of the world of the *lal batti*. I achieved this by incorporating rigorous and diverse methods of experimentation. In terms of developing new or altered fabrics, I generated solutions by being creatively disobedient. I sought to disrupt conventional approaches to surface and texture by using chemicals and fabric creation techniques one might normally not consider as a fashion designer.

The research methodology heuristics has therefore been employed as a means of heightening the chances of discovery and locating creative connections inside a complex research project. The method has both strengths and weaknesses, but these have been addressed by altering approaches to my working attitudes and processes as the project has developed. Heuristics was helpful because of its flexibility and ability to validate (and activate) intuitive knowledge. It meant that as a designer, I was able to adopt a subjective position, and from that point take substantial conceptual and technical risks in a process of exploration that would bring a voice to a difficult and culturally complex issue. It also meant that otherwise traditional approaches to fashion design development, like

sketching, draping, fitting and substrate manipulation, could be conceptually driven and referenced back against memory, emotion and the narratives of specific workers.

It was this ability to activate the subjective and the intuitive that made the methodology so applicable to the nature of this thesis.



exhibition



Fig. 7:1 The exhibition display. (photographed by Jules Allen) November, 30, 2007.



Fig. 7:2 The exhibition display. (photographed by Jules Allen) November, 30, 2007.

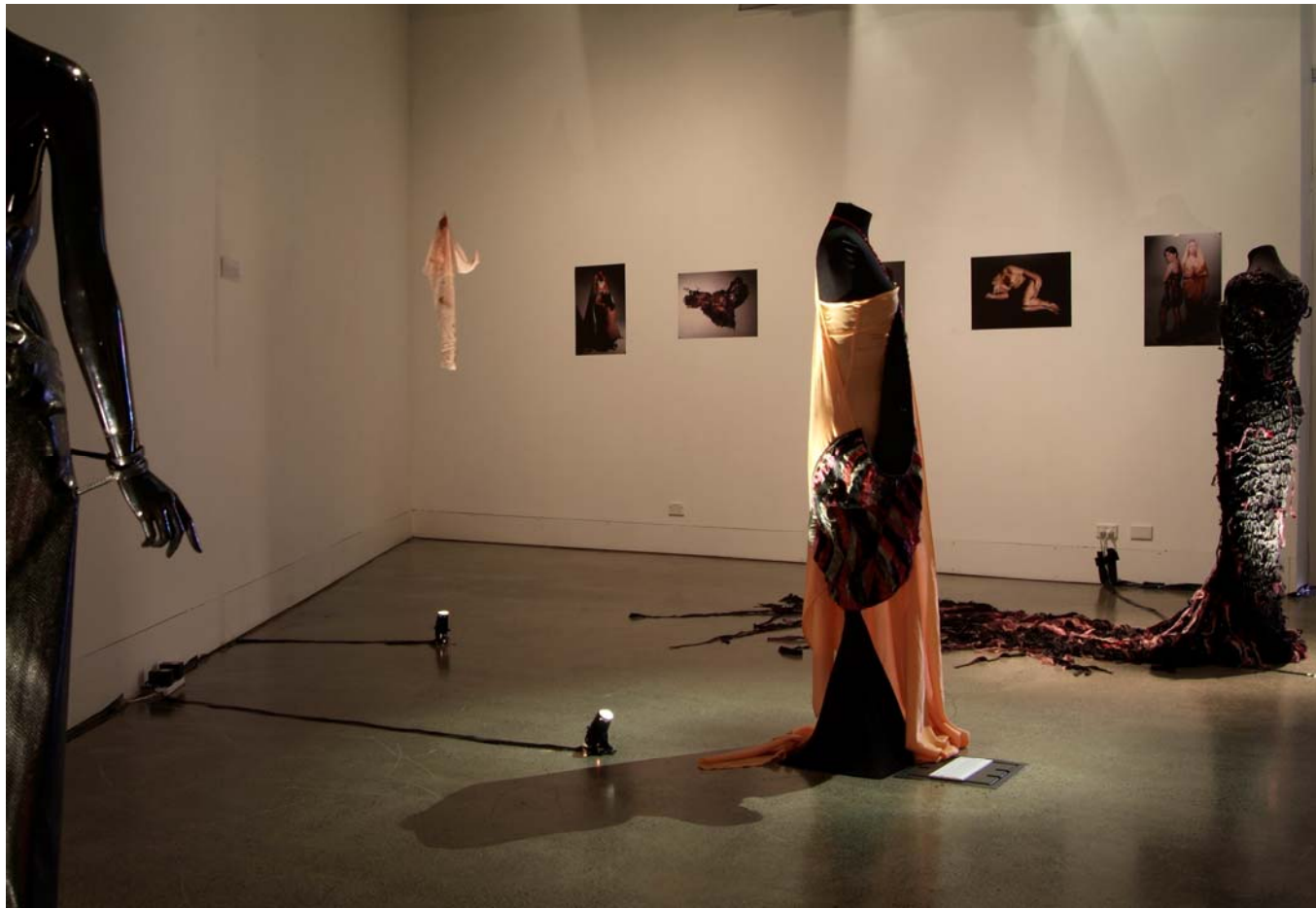


Fig. 7:3 The exhibition display. (photographed by Jules Allen) November, 30, 2007.

I chose to present this body of work in a small, enclosed corner gallery containing no natural light. The primary aim was to create an environment where the works could ‘talk’ to the public in a stable and contemplative environment without outside distraction. The space emphasised control and privacy, yet the intimacy could be disturbed at any time [unheralded], by other viewers.

The design of the exhibition emphasised the subdued light found in the shadows of Indian highways, streets and around the brothels.

Behind this visual atmosphere ran an aural design. On hidden speakers I played the sounds of Indian streets; the noise of rickshaw bells, street hawkers, moving traffic and conversations overheard between passing pedestrians. This audio layer was set at a subtle level... as restrained yet as evident as the light.

The non-symmetrical display of the artworks represented the unbalanced and disrupted lifestyle of Indian women sex workers. In the room the garments were splayed across

hard floors and were complemented by masked wiring leading to temporary lights. This system is often evident in the cheaply wired brothels of the *lal batti*. This was not the formal elegance of an art exhibition but the difficult positioning of a lifestyle in a foreign space.

At the base of each artwork I positioned a brief explanation. To read the explanation one had to lower one's self to the floor. One was forced into a vulnerable yet obviously enquiring position. In the process of squatting and reading the explanation the viewer encountered the artwork from a position of intimate powerlessness. They were exposed to its details yet smaller than its totality.

All artworks were displayed at the same height except for the one dealing with *Demise*. This artwork was displayed hanging from the ceiling. This position emphasised the last stage of the soul, and the frail yet corporal consequence of prostitution in the *lal batti*. It drifted above the world of the street yet was clearly part of it.

Digital ink jet enlargements of photographs of the artworks were positioned along a sidewall of the gallery. These emphasised the human context of the work and indicated the performative nature of each piece.

The design of the exhibition therefore emphasised restraint and contemplation. It removed sensationalism so one encountered each piece and the collection as a whole 'voice'.

The exegesis was positioned in the same space but lit as if discovered under a streetlight. However, the theory lay revealed in the work and the provision of this text served only as a support for those wishing to experience a deeper reading of the artwork.



references

- Aronson, R. (2004). The story. *Frontline/World*. Retrieved September 10th 2007 from <http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/india304/thestory.html>
- Antman K, Chang Y. (2000). Kaposi's sarcoma. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 342(14):1027-38.
- Banerjee, S. (1998). *Under the raj*. Calcutta: Seagull Books.
- Bhushan, B.J. (1958). *The costumes and textiles of India*. Bombay: D.B. Taraporewala Sons & Co. Pvt Ltd.
- Brown, L. (2000). *Sex slaves: The trafficking of women in Asia*. Great Britain: Clays Ltd, St Ives Plc.
- Chatterjee, A. (2004). Sabyasachi's haute affair, *The tribune*. Retrieved September 11, 2006 from <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2004/20040918/saturday/fashion.htm>
- Chang Y, Cesarman E, Pessin M. (1994). Identification of herpesvirus-like DNA sequences in AIDS-associated Kaposi's sarcoma. *Science*. 266:1865-9.
- Davidson, G.W., Seaton, M.A., & Simpson, J. [Eds.]. (1985). *Chambers Concise 20th Century Dictionary*. Edinburgh: W&R Chambers Ltd.
- Dezube, B. J. (Oct 1996). Clinical presentation and natural history of AIDS--related Kaposi's sarcoma. *Hematology Oncology Clinic North America* 10 (5): 1023-9.
- Felluga, D. (n.d.). Modules on Kristeva: On the Abject. Introductory Guide to Critical Theory. Retrieved from : <http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/kristevaabject.html> October 5th 2007.
- Gangoli, G. (2000). Silence, hurt and choice: Attitudes to prostitution in India and the west. Retrieved May 24, 2006, from <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/asiaResearchCentre/pdf/WorkingPaper/ARCWP6GeetangaliGangoli.pdf>
- Ghosh, S. (2004). The shadow lines of citizenship: Prostitutes' struggle over workers' rights. Retrieved May 24, 2006. from http://www.codesria.org/Links/Publications/icp1_04/ghosh.pdf#search=%22the%20shadow%20lines%20of%20citizenship%3A%20prostitutes'%20struggle%20over%20workers'%20rights%22
- Ings, W. (2004). *Talking Pictures: a creative utilisation of structural and aesthetic profiles from narrative music videos and television commercials in a non-spoken film text*. [Chapter on Methodology]. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis Auckland: AUT University.
- Kleining, G. & Witt, H. (2000, January). The qualitative heuristic approach: A methodology for discovery in psychology and the social sciences. Rediscovering the method of introspection as an example [19 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research [On-line Journal]*, 1 (1). Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-00/1-00kleiningwitt-e.pdf>
- Kumar, C. (2006). *From the Brothel to the Gali*. Auckland: AUT University (unpublished dissertation).
- Kumar, R. (1999). *Costumes and textiles of royal India*. London: Christie's Books Ltd

Menon, M. (1999). Twilight zone for women red-light workers along Indian highways. Retrieved May 24, 2006 from <http://www.hartfordhwp.com/archives/52a/061.html>

Moustakas, C. (1990). Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology, and Applications. Sage Publications.

Nevile, N. (1996). Nautch girls of India. New Delhi: Ravi Kumar Publisher.

Nevile, P. (2000). Beyond the veil: Indian women in the raj. New Delhi: Nevile Books.

Wood, J. (2004). The Culture of Academic Rigour: does design research really need it? <http://futures.gold.ac.uk/rigour/rigour2K.html>

When sex workers perform puja during Navratri in Varanasi (2006). Newindpress.com. Retrieved June 06, 2006, from <http://www.newindpress.com/NewsItems.asp?ID=IEP20060407123032&Topic=&Title=&Page>

Yarchoan R, Tosato G, Little R.F. (2005). Therapy insight: AIDS-related malignancies - the influence of antiviral therapy on pathogenesis and management. Nature Clinical Practice Oncology. 2(8):406-15.

Yousaf, S. (2007 Sept. 3). Sex workers suffer due to police apathy. In Southern News - Karnataka. Retrieved from: <http://www.newindpress.com/NewsItems.asp?ID=IEK20070903034038&Page=K&Headline=Sex+workers+suffer+due+to+police+apathy&Title=Southern+News+-+Karnataka&Topic=0> October 5th 2007.