Prostitution refers to habitual or intermittent promiscuous sexual intercourse by a female for mercenary inducements or for some kind of personal satisfaction. It is an old institution which has thrived through ages attaining universality unknown to other social malpractices. It came into existence when marriage failed to satisfy the sex urge of all and the code of morality refused sex gratification except through unconventional methods. A class of women then arose for the satisfaction of man's sexual urge. Several factors, such as the attitude of rulers, social customs, marital maladjustments, defective education, and economic conditions helped it to grow as an institution.

The history of prostitution in Rajasthan is interesting and thought-provoking.* It is characterised by certain unique features depending upon the social customs which have undergone rapid changes in recent times. It may be said that there are three phases through which it has so far passed. The first phase covers those centuries of the medieval period when kings, princes and jagirdars governed the various States of Rajputana. This continued up to 1949 when the Princely States were integrated and the jagirdari system was abolished two years after India achieved Independence. The second period runs from 1949 to 1958, the year when all-India legislation to suppress immoral traffic in women and girls was passed. The last period starts from 1959. The mode and scale of prostitution have definitely changed during these periods.

During the first period, prostitution was carried out mainly by three different groups of females: (i) by women trained for this purpose in the palaces, (ii) by common prostitutes in brothels and (iii) by tribal women. Clandestine prostitution also existed but on a very negligible scale.

The first group consisted of beautiful girls and young women who had caught the watchful eyes of the rulers. They were brought into the palaces and given training in singing, dancing and the court etiquettes. They catered to the sex needs of their masters. They were intended to please the ruler in more ways than one, and if he was pleased, he gave them wealth and honours. They were also employed to entertain princely guests from other States. These women were popularly known as Baijis and played an important part on the occasion of marriages and public festivities.

They held quite a prominent position and an accepted place in the medieval social set up as long as it lasted. They had fine buildings set apart for them and it was quite normal for a ruler to have many such court-sans in his harem. Sons born to these women were acknowledged as the illegitimate offspring of the ruler and they were known by different denominations in different States. Usually they were called Laljis. Some of them were taken into the ruler's personnel or State service. Others became musicians. The daughters born to the court-sans followed

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*The information has been gathered from old and young prostitutes, police officials, responsible citizens and young students who are familiar with this trade.
the profession of their mothers. History has recorded a few instances of some courtesans who wielded great influence over their masters and played a prominent part in court intrigues.

The Jagirdars had their mistresses too and society gave its approval to this custom. A Jagirdar kept as many mistresses as he could afford because this was associated with his social and economic status. In the Daroga caste, whenever a Jagirdar’s daughter got married, she was given five to six girls in dowry and henceafter they belonged to the bridegroom’s house. In Meghwal community in Jodhpur and Bikaner, whenever a girl got married, she wore two sets of wedding bangles—one for her would-be-husband and the other for the Jagirdar of that area. She took four rounds of the ‘Havan Kunda’ in the name of her would-be-husband and three in the name of the Jagirdar with his photograph in her hand. This was often done without the knowledge of the Jagirdar. Custom, however, had its sanction to this rite because any time a Jagirdar could call a Meghwal woman and she felt proud if she was given this honour.

Thus the official attitude seems to have been to encourage prostitutes in their profession as performing a public service. For any place which had a population of more than 5,000 persons, it was considered necessary to have at least one or two prostitutes for socio-religious functions. Religion never acted as a barrier here as it did for the common man. In fact, the association of religion and prostitution was well established for the royal family and the aristocracy. The kings managed to raise the status of prostitution to such a level that it almost became respectable.

An analysis of social attitude to prostitution in high society makes it clear that the fortunes of prostitution are inextricably linked with fluctuations in attitudes towards marriage. Whenever it is maintained that full sexual contentment is to be found within marital life, the prostitute tends to be despised. This is our attitude today. When, however, marriage is regarded as little else than the necessary means for the creation of a family and the conserving of the property, sexual pleasure being sought elsewhere, then the status of the prostitute is high. The kings and the jagirdars are outstanding examples. The result is that these prostitutes are considered by people with a feeling which is not extended to the common prostitute.

The second category of prostitutes who catered to the needs of the common man in brothels was different from the above glamorous courtesans. These prostitutes joined this profession for various reasons. Poverty, destitution, unhappy family life, desertion by husband, kidnapping, deception, ignorance, desire for easy life, indifferent upbringing, unhappy marriage are some of them. A whole gang of pimps, touts, procurers and brothel-keepers worked together to get young girls for prostitution and live on their earnings. Their brothels were known as ‘Addas’ or ‘Kothas’.

The distance between the courtesan, serene in her ability to maintain herself, and the ordinary prostitute was great. The first kind which were maintained by the palace or the aristocracy were far from being regarded as infamous or degraded like the second group. They were envied by the lesser ones of the profession who aspired to the same happiness. This hierarchy of prostitution reflected the class structure of society. Such a stratification of prostitutes is an almost inevitable development in a class-conscious society.

The third and the last group which was active in the business of prostitution during
the first phase was formed by about six tribes, some sects and communities. Women from Jagri Nutt, Kanjar, Meena, Sansi and Bawari tribes practised prostitution without any inhibitions. They did so with the full knowledge of their husbands and other tribe-men. The men kidnapped small girls, violated them and sold them. They earned their livelihood through these methods. The Nutts, among these tribes, wandered as nomads and wherever they moved, they carried prostitution along with them. Besides these tribes, women belonging to the goldsmith community also prostituted with or without the connivance of their husbands. Most of the women in this community are beautiful. It is said that some still carry on this profession in some places to supplement the family income. Other communities which followed this profession represent certain sects such as the Kunda Panth, the Kanchalia Panth and so on. These people occupied mostly the Bheel area of Dungarpur, Banswara, parts of Udaipur district, Matrkundiya etc. These Panthis moved from one place to another in groups of forty or fifty. Six to eight times a year, they followed their sect’s custom to promote prostitution. The Kunda Panthis, for example, got together at some place with their so-called wives. They place a vessel in front of them and every man put coin into it. One among them was chosen as a ‘Mahant’. They tied his eyes with a piece of cloth and he then gave a coin to every male member. According to the coin, these male members exchanged their wives till the next function of this kind. The Kanchalia Panth also followed this custom in a similar way except that they put in the vessel a bra of their wives instead of a coin. These Panthis also kidnapped young girls and raped them. Some of these practices are still to be found though carried on clandestinely.

Besides the above publically known prostitution, clandestine prostitution also existed in society. This was generally encouraged by licentious persons with their sisters-in-law, friends' wives or maid servants etc. in the house. This was highly condemned and once the women were exposed, they completely lost their social status.

Before the independence of India in 1947, Jaipur, Jodhpur and Bikaner were considered to be the largest centres for prostitution.

**PHASE II—PRE-LEGISLATION PERIOD**

The second phase of prostitution which runs from 1949 to 1958 is a period of depression for this profession qualitatively. The Independence of India in 1947 brought integration of the States of Rajasthan and the abolition of the jagirdari system. This step was like a bolt from the blue for the upper class prostitutes in the palaces. With the disappearance of kingdoms and jagirs these prostitutes became downgraded and were compelled by circumstances to start singing and dancing societies. In the absence of welfare services, there was no alternative for them but to rehabilitate themselves in society. They lost their social and economic status and became common prostitutes. Many of them also started brothels. The number of brothels and red light areas increased greatly after 1949. Thus we find that prostitution from 1949 to 1958 was carried out by four categories of females: (1) by prostitutes in the singing and dancing societies, (2) by prostitutes in the brothels, (3) by tribal women as in the first phase, and lastly (4) clandestinely by a mixed group of women and girls from different social and economic strata generally for economic reasons and easy life.

The partition of India in 1947 gave a favourable push to prostitution for the last group mentioned above. Many Punjabi and Sindhi families migrated to Rajasthan and most of them were in a state of poverty and
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destitution. Some women and girls from such families were forced to prostitute with the connivance of their husbands or parents to supplement the family income. It is reported that the number of hotels and restaurants run by these communities also increased and their proprietors carried this 'business' behind doors, thus giving birth to a new form of clandestine prostitution.

The national highway from Delhi to Ahmedabad also provided an attractive outlet for the tribal prostitutes. In spite of the efforts of the Government to rehabilitate the tribal population, these women, it is reported, still continue their profession having settled on the national highway in tents or in small houses. Most of them possess agricultural land, but that seems to be their secondary occupation.

PHASE III—POST-LEGISLATION AND CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

In 1956, the Government of India passed the Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act. This was enforced in 1958. With this legislation starts the third and the last phase of the profession of prostitution.

This legislation declares the keeping of brothels, procuring and living on the earnings of prostitutes illegal. A great commotion occurred for people in this 'business' with the enforcement of this Act. All brothels were closed and the tribal population carrying on prostitution was forced by the police to leave the precincts of towns and cities. The result, however, has been more devastating than expected. All prostitution has become clandestine and has taken quite different colours. It is now carried on not only by the professional prostitutes but also by many girls and women belonging to the middle class and rich families.

The professional prostitutes now have either opened singing and dancing societies under the Shops Establishment Act, with regular hours from 7 to 11 p.m. or have scattered in decent localities to carry on prostitution clandestinely in their houses. Since legislation is defective on the definition of a brothel, the providing of witnesses, and the police powers to convict a case, the great majority of prostitutes and pimps have taken advantage of this lacunae. They are able to exercise their calling without restraint and the procurers do not find it difficult to recruit girls. The great selling business of girls between the age of 12 and 20 by Kanjar and Bawari communities for trifling amounts of Rs. 1500 to Rs. 1800 per girl is done, among other places, at Dholepur in Bharatpur District, it is said, with the connivance of some local leaders and the protection of the police. Some girls are sent to Agra at Sevka Bazar and some at G. B. Road, Delhi. Most of the girls are brought from Madhya Pradesh. This is one way that the trade is carried on and the authority of the law is flouted without any difficulty. The procurers, pimps and brothel-keepers seem more vigorous in carrying out their activities. They have found very clever ways to evade police action.

Apart from 'official' singing and dancing societies, the clients are well-served in other respects. The tribal women, as mentioned earlier, still carry on prostitution. Generally the old females among them settle the bargain and act as pimps while the male members sit outside the houses with their hukkahs when the business is on. Truck drivers, travellers, school and college students constitute the clientele for them. There are nine villages from Ajmer to Jaipur, namely Dudu, Bandra, Sindri, Dantri, Dausa and Bagru, which are known for this trade. The outskirts of Kishangarh provide another place for the availability of such women.
Apart from this, the present day pattern exhibits other distinct changes. The semi-professionals and the amateurs, together with a particular vintage of 'cafe' society, and call girls have now taken over. Deviant forms of mating that are socially frowned upon or at best the object of gossip are becoming popular. The use of rented rooms changed frequently provides the 'game of flats'. A variety of cover agencies in the hotels, dak bungalows, restaurants and clubs serve to arrange rendezvous. The brokers have redoubled their activities for this concealed type of prostitution.

In certain restaurants and hotels a discreet type of solicitation may also be encountered. It is reported that some hotels in Jaipur, Ajmer and Udaipur carry this business. They have set apart rooms where professional prostitutes practise this trade. Sometimes these hotels are patronised by call girls with the consent and connivance of the management. Typists, teachers, sales girls, clerks and telephone operators generally work as call girls. The economic incentive is quite strong among such women to augment their income by this means. Proprietors of some hotels and firms keep address books of such women with their photographs and other details of age, family, physique, etc. Rikshaw pullers, scooter and taxi drivers form a gang to supply this information to the tourists and the local residents and get their commission. For call girls, ordinary solicitation does not enter into their life. Clients are acquired by recommendation from each other, or through recommendation by old customers, such recommendation serving as an introduction. When the girl first goes into 'business', she sometimes relies on the good offices of a male or a female procurer. Some girls combine the offices of procurer and call girl. An interesting development is the custom which the so-called respectable business firms bring to call girls.

Another prominent group of women who resort to prostitution and are not gainfully employed like the above-mentioned call girls belong to some low income groups. Prostitution which some women had started because of economic necessity after Partition has not stopped. Although the first group of women of partition days has become old, other girls and young women have replaced them in this trade. Now they practise prostitution to obtain more money to expend in dress and jewellery. The rate of some girls from this class is between Rs. 50 and Rs. 200, depending upon their age, beauty and education. Girls from some communities can be had for Rs. 10 to Rs. 20 and women for Rs. 10 to Rs. 50. This evil is more rampant among young girls because of low moral tone in their families.

Recourse to prostitution as a means of sexual outlet is on the increase in the upper strata of society also. What concerns us most is women of the highest social class setting the bonds of matrimony aside and indulging in clandestine sexual pleasure to win favours for their husbands or relatives. These are party women who often visit the clubs. The double standard of morality seems to work now in both the sexes without traditional condemnation. Male members who could not tolerate unchastity among women now seem to be quiet on the question of morals.

An alarming aspect is the rapid development of teenage prostitution. Socio-economic and political changes after independence have brought a new freedom for young girls and boys. The coy reluctance of elderly women to appear in public and share the life of men is unknown to the teenagers. With greater freedom of thought and action, and imbued with lesser fixed moral standards, teenagers today refuse to accept the morality which their parents and older people may.
have taught them, all of which is responsible for the increase in promiscuity and the forces that operate to break down earlier restraints and encourage greater sexual freedom. Several instances can be witnessed of teenage prostitution by youngsters barely out of their teens, even engaging in sexual aberration in schools during noon-hour recess, and after classes, and thinking nothing of it.

Most of the college boys and girls take sex lightly. Boys indulge in casual sex intercourse with girls on the campus or outside. If a college girl becomes pregnant, help of known senior medical students is sought to avert any social calamity. Students in the medical colleges feel quite free in such indulgence and some of the girls act as call girls for the high class clientele. Fear of V. D. or pregnancy does not haunt them as they know how to avoid them. Easy availability of contraceptives is an additional encouragement to such behaviour. Such girls, even when they graduate, find it difficult to give up their way of life. The result is that some of them turn out to be call girls and semi-prostitutes.

It is said that boys between the age of seventeen and twenty-one form a group by itself which is encouraging professional prostitution, especially on the outskirts of the cities of Ajmer, Kishangarh, Jaipur and Udaipur. They feel quite indifferent about their own behaviour. A few boys interviewed by the author mentioned that boys from the well-to-do families only visit these prostitutes. Sometimes, some strong and rough boys, generally called 'Elders Brothers' or 'Dadas' compel the wealthy boys to give the money which is often used for such promiscuity. The fee to visit a prostitute is generally five rupees. The amount is given to the pimp beforehand. A sum of fifty naya paisa is also given as tip to the prostitute. Sometimes the rate is as low as two rupees. Most of the prostitutes, they said, have kept vulgar or nude photographs in their small rooms. A few have neat and well-furnished rooms.

The manner of meeting the prostitute is almost an action of emotional adventure, especially for the beginners. The boy concerned has simple sexual intercourse with the prostitute with practically no talk and no love-making. After copulation, he is out and is replaced. by some other student if they happen to come together, which they often do. When asked how the boys feel about their behaviour, they mentioned that it is just like smoking the first cigarette. There are mixed feelings—feelings of fear, of getting caught, of being noticed by family friends and so on. But once it is over, one forgets about it. Similarly, while visiting the prostitutes, the greater thrill for them is in getting the car which is sometimes stolen at the time of college functions, the feeling of fear of being noticed by the known people, then of noise and light when they are with the prostitute, and finally of getting back hurriedly unnoticed. If a stolen car is being searched, they get the hint on the outskirts of the town by their friends, desert the car and pose as pedestrians. These boys think low of the prostitutes and of the opposite sex in general. They compare a prostitute to any piece of furniture or article in a room. Use it when you like after payment like an automation and come out. The boys mentioned that they have seldom been stranded by the police which in their opinion is corrupt. Addiction to liquor, sometimes available near the schools and colleges, gambling, lack of parent-child understanding, the unsatisfactory system of education and a general feeling of frustration are responsible for their loose sexual behaviour, they said.

In addition to the above, tourism, industrialization and urbanization, we find, have also created new groups of pleasure-
seekers, and unattached men who migrate to towns in search of work without their families. Udaipur and Jaipur for tourists, and Bikaner and Kota for business and industrialization provide examples of increased prostitution in recent years.

It is estimated that there are about 6000 prostitutes who belong to the tribes and sects, and about 3000 others in the singing and dancing societies, schools and colleges, families and so on. In the absence of a scientific survey, if this rough estimate is considered, then it can be worked out that for every one thousandth man there is one prostitute in Rajasthan, taking adult males as constituting a little more than one-third of the population according to the 1961 population census. Promiscuous sexual behaviour still does not seem to be widespread, if we compare the situation with Europe and America where virginity is becoming a rare thing.

CONCLUSION

These are briefly some of the salient aspects of the medieval and contemporary situation of prostitution in Rajasthan. From a hierarchy of public prostitutes, society has moved to a period of widespread clandestine prostitution with family women and teenagers coming to the forefront. Professional prostitution is comparatively on the wane. This is natural because an individual of any class now can easily enter into an arrangement whereby the woman of his choice becomes his casual mistress or obliges him for the evening.

The causes which seem to have created the current situation spring from the material civilization of the affluent society, low character of politicians and administrators, the strange disregard for law, the desire of many women to attain a comfortable life the easy way, the changes and the crises in family, the mental and physical corruption of children in the absence of moral values of the family, the sexual lust of tourists and the concentration of male labour in particular areas. All these make their contribution to a setting in which sexual standards are essentially lax and prostitution can flourish.