

BIOSCOPE



KAKOLI SENGUPTA

Bound by Tradition



At first Ashok Nanda couldn't believe it was true. But UNICEF report made him come to terms with the harsh reality. And he decided to make a Film. This is how Riwaaz came into being.

Riwaaz is a story of a girl who is born in a community where prostitution is a family tradition. Having reached the adolescence, she is being initiated into this profession. However her mother is determined to get her out of this vicious circle thus inviting the wrath of the community. It is a story of trials and tribulations of a girl for whom tradition has become a bane, whose burden she is unable to bear anymore. Sad but true. According to Reuters there are around 300 communities in Central and South India still practicing prostitution as a family profession. Communities like Bedia, Kanjars, Rajnats are some of them. Originally these communities were entrusted with the task of preserving the rich culture and tradition, serving only the Rajas and Maharajas.

But with time due to disappearance of royal patronage and lack of employment opportunities the girls here took to prostitution. "Actually the members of these communities were custodians of rich culture. Various dance and art forms got preserved because of them. But now the scenario is different. Not only are they living hand to mouth but also many women are forced into this profession against their wishes" says Paramjeet Bernard of Sanchar Integrated Social Development, an NGO working towards rehabilitation of girls belonging to these communities.

While the economy of these communities is based on sex work, men of these communities act as pimps for their own sisters and daughters. The girls are often harassed by the male members who gamble with the hard earned money. Most of these communities are ostracized by the society and therefore live outside villages. Many efforts are being made by several NGOs to improve their education. World Vision is one such NGO working in this direction of imparting education and motivating the children and the youth to go to schools and inculcate various vocational skills.

However impediments faced by these NGOs are also many. According to Paramjeet Bernard of Sanchar Integrated Social Development, many think prostitution gets them easy money; others are still bound by tradition while some are dominated by the male members of the family, who make merry at their expense. But inspite of these difficulties these NGOs are working in this direction and trying to make a difference to these communities.