

# THE BADI: PROSTITUTION AS A SOCIAL NORM AMONG AN UNTOUCHABLE CASTE OF WEST NEPAL.

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## Introduction

The Badi belong to an untouchable Hindu caste, with a total population of approximately 7,000, who inhabit scattered settlements in the Salyan, Rolpa, Rukum, Dailekh, Seti, Jajarkot, Dang-Deukhuri, Banke and Bardiya Districts of west Nepal. Badi men fish (keeping most of the catch for their own family's consumption) and make drums and pipes, which they sell to Nepalese in neighboring communities. Badi women engage in prostitution beginning at puberty and continuing until they become too old to attract any more customers or get married. This article focuses on Badi prostitution, its practice, and its social, economic, historical and cultural dimensions. The conclusions presented here are based on in-depth interviews conducted with over forty Badi men and women, in the Districts of Bardiya, Banke and Dang-Deukhuri, between May, 1990 and May, 1992.

## A Short History of Badi Prostitution

The Badi originally came to west Nepal from India back in the fourteenth century, first settling in Salyan, and later in Rolpa, Rukum and Jajarkot. From the time of their settlement in Nepal, until the 1950's, the Badi made their living as entertainers, travelling in groups consisting of three or more families from one community to the next, staging song and dance performances and telling stories, from the great Hindu epics of the *Mahabharat* and the *Ramayana*.<sup>1</sup> The Badi's travels often took them out of their home Districts as far east as Palpa, Baglung, Pokhara, Gorkha and Bandipur (see also Gurung 1982).<sup>2</sup>

Until the 1950's, the Badi were supported primarily by rulers of three principalities- Jajarkot, Salyan and Musikot<sup>3</sup> and to a lesser extent by some wealthy high caste landlords (see Regmi 1978 for a good description of the

rulers and landlords who lived in west Nepal in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). These patrons provided the Badi with basic needs; housing, land, clothing and food. In return the Badi provided them with entertainment and sex. At this time, however, Badi women limited their prostitution to patrons and some of their male relatives.

After the overthrow of the Rana regime in 1950 and the subsequent establishment of king Mahendra's *Panchayat* government, rulers and landlords in west Nepal were stripped of much of their previous authority, and they lost the right to tax subjects and exact unpaid labor and rent (on agricultural land) from them. As a result, they lost much of their economic clout and were unable to continue their patronage of Badi.

Badi women, in an effort to make up their lost income, began prostituting themselves with increasing numbers of men. This growing reliance on prostitution was encouraged in the mid- 1960's by new accessibility (facilitated by a malaria eradication program) to Tulsipur, Ghorahi, Rajapur, Nepalgunj and other growing, populous *terai* (plains) towns with large, expanding markets for prostitutes. At the same time that the market for prostitutes was expanding, demand for singing and dancing was shrinking (as a result of the radios, movies and tape players which became increasingly available throughout the 1960's and 1970's), making the Badi even more dependent on prostitution as a source of income.

### **The Socialization and Day-to-Day Practice of Badi Prostitution**

Badi girls, from early childhood on, know and generally accept that a life of prostitution awaits them. Their parents and other Badi tell them that prostitution is and always has been the work of women in the Badi caste, and that to aspire to any other profession would be unrealistic. Badi girls see all the young women around them including their own mothers and sisters, engage in prostitution on a daily basis. Indeed, they virtually never see any Badi women engaging in any profession but prostitution. Badi girls also usually do not go to school, they have little contact with outsiders, and they thus are not exposed to many ideas, values or beliefs that counter those in their own society. Girls also learn early on that prostitution is the only means of support available to most Badi families.

As Badi girls grow up, they learn from their mothers, sexually mature sisters and other Badi women all about sex and how to dress and act in such a way as to attract men. Within a few months after reaching menarche (at an average age of thirteen), Badi girls begin to engage in prostitution themselves. Some girls start on their own, but most are prompted to begin by their parents.

A Badi girl's first episode of sexual intercourse is accompanied by a ceremony known as *nathiya kholne*. During *nathiya kholne*, the man gives the Badi girl new clothes, jewelry (which usually includes an earring that is worn on the nose) and a sum of money, which ranges between 1,000 and 5,000 rupees. Then the girl rubs a streak of vermilion powder (known as *sindur*) onto the man's head, and he does the same to her (see also Gurung 1982:7). Then the man and Badi girl go off by themselves and he deflowers her.

The *nathiya kholne* ceremony is similar to Nepalese Hindu weddings, where the groom bestows clothes and jewelry on the bride and exchanges *sindur* with her, prior to consummating the marriage. And in traditional Nepalese Hindu marriages, as in *nathiya kholne*, the girl is supposed to be a virgin (see Bennett 1982 for a comprehensive discussion of Hindu weddings in Nepal). The major difference between *nathiya kholne* and a Hindu marriage ceremony is that the latter is meant to mark the beginning of a lifelong relationship, while in the former the couple usually separates after having sexual intercourse, with the Badi girl going on to a career of prostitution with other men.

Mothers play a major role in initiating their daughters into prostitution. In the beginning, mothers often offer the services of their own daughters to prospective clients and personally handle the bargaining. After a few months the girl usually feels confident enough to approach clients and bargain on her own. Even at this stage, Badi prostitution is still a "family affair," with girls continuing to prostitute themselves in their parent's home. When a client arrives, he will sometimes sit and talk with the Badi girl and her parents over a glass of *rakshi* (homemade liquor). After a while he will then take the girl to some other room in the house and have sex with her.

Since Badi prostitutes work openly and congregate in specific wards, they are easily found. Some men stay with a Badi girl for only an hour or so, while others remain with her for up to three days.

Men from all walks of life come to Badi prostitutes as clients. They include engineers, truck drivers, teachers, policemen, farmers, students, contractors, agricultural technicians, shopkeepers and hotel owners. They may be local residents or come from India or Kathmandu.<sup>6</sup>

Badi girls from Bardiya, Dang, Seti, Salyan, Dailekh, Rolpa and Rukum often go to Nepalgunj for several months out of the year to find work. While working here some girls rent rooms, while others stay with relatives or in their own second houses (which they usually rent out while not around).<sup>7</sup> Badi prostitutes are often accompanied on these trips by their parents, who cook, clean and do all the domestic chores to give their daughters the most time possible for prostitution.

### **The Economics of Prostitution**

Badi girls usually charge their clients between 30 and 60 rupees for a single session of intercourse, and between 250 and 300 rupees for the whole night. They make anywhere between 3,000 to 7,000 rupees a month.

Badi girls retain control over most of their earnings from prostitution. When Badi parents (or other family members) need to buy food, clothing or anything else, they ask their prostitute daughters for money. But they rarely ask for all their earnings. Badi parents told me they were afraid to ask daughters for all their income, as they might become dissatisfied and run away.

Income from prostitution is the Badi's primary source of support.<sup>8</sup> The money which Badi men make from selling drums or pipes is negligible. For this reason Badi prefer to have daughters and not sons. Some of my informants even told me about Badi women who had cried with disappointment after giving birth to a son.

Badi parents, in an effort to maintain their income from prostitution, often try to prevent their daughters from getting married. As a result, many Badi women who want to get married are forced to elope. In other cases, Badi parents will let their daughters marry, but only after the man has agreed to compensate them for their lost income. If Badi parents have three or more prostitute daughters, they will sometimes allow one to marry, if income from the remaining girls is sufficient. In still other cases, Badi parents with land or other resources are not so dependent on their daughter's income, and thus they will let them marry.

The following case study shows how the members of one Badi family have had their lives shaped by various economic forces.

Janak, the son of a Badi prostitute, shova, and a high-caste (Chetri) Nepalese man named Durga, was born and raised in Salyan. Durga had come to Shova as a client and visited her regularly for almost a year before leaving for good. When Janak was only 16, he married Sita, a Badi girl (who was not a prostitute) from Musikot (Musikot has the only Badi community where the women do not engage in prostitution. This is because Badi of Musikot have developed alternative means of generating income. Most Musikot Badi families have a substantial amount of land, on which they grow a variety of crops. They also raise and sell horses, and the men usually work for part of the year at wage labor jobs in India). After Janak and Sita got married, they went to India, where Janak worked as a laborer on road construction crews. While in India, Janak and Sita had a daughter and three sons. After 12 years in India Janak and Sita finally decided to move back to Nepal. By this time their daughter was almost old enough to begin work as a prostitute and Janak and Sita knew that she could make a substantial income much more than the

20 rupees a day Janak had made in India. Janak and Sita decided to move to Tulsipur, because land was still fairly cheap there, and they know that the town had a good market for prostitutes. When they first moved to Tulsipur, Janak rented a house for his family, and opened a small store (selling spices, tea, soap and food) with money he had saved from India. The shop folded due to a lack of business, but Janak's daughter earned 5,000 rupees a month at prostitution and within two years Janak had enough money to buy land and build a house. The land cost 20,000 rupees and the house cost 25,000 to build. Janak built his house right on the main road leading into the Tulsipur bazaar, as that was the place frequented by the greatest number of potential customers for his daughter. Janak said that he lets his daughter control most of her earnings from prostitution. He does not want to ask for too much money, for fear that she would get upset and elope with one of her clients, thus cutting off Janak's only source of income.

### **The Badi Argot**

The Badi have an argot, which they use to talk about prostitution in the presence of outsiders without being understood (see appendix one). A Badi girl will often use the argot to confer with her parents or others about whether to sleep with a particular man or what she should charge him. The Badi also use their argot to talk about prostitution in buses, bazaars, shops, offices and other areas where there are people who might be able to overhear what they are talking about.

### **Relations Between Badi Women and Men From Other Castes**

#### **Relations with High Caste Men**

The Badi are the lowest ranking untouchable caste in the districts where they live. It is primarily because of their prostitution that Badi have so little status. Members of Nepal's highest (twice-born) castes (which include Brahmans, Chetris and Thakuris), in accordance with the rules of orthodox Hinduism, are not supposed to allow Badi into their homes or accept a meal of cooked rice or a glass of water from them. Marriage with a Badi is also strictly forbidden. A Brahman, Chetri or Thakuri (either a man or woman) who marries a Badi, stands to be disowned by their family and ostracized by other members of their caste.

Despite the restrictions of orthodox Hinduism, many high caste Nepalese men have sex with Badi prostitutes. Most of the time, relations between a Badi woman and her high caste client will begin and end with the sex act. I have, however, encountered many cases of high caste men who ended up marrying, or otherwise developing long-term, live-in relationships with Badi prostitutes. In the majority of these cases, the man ended up leaving his Badi

wife (or lover), because of opposition from his parents. I did, however, collect some cases of marriages between Badi women and high caste men that have lasted. I saw still other instances where a high caste man had a Badi woman with whom he had been having social and sexual relations with on a regular basis for several years. In other cases that I was familiar with, a Badi woman was living (without being formally married) with a high caste man, but had doubts as to whether the relationship would last, because of opposition from the man's parents (and/or other problems). What follows are case studies which illustrate the four kinds of relationships between high caste men and Badi women outlined above.

**Susila, Age 22. Home: Rajapur (a hamlet just outside Tulsipur)**

When Susila was 13 (and had only been working as a prostitute for a couple months) she became involved with Mohan, a Chetri engineer who was working and living in Tulsipur. Mohan first came to Susila as a client, and he soon began visiting her regularly. After a few months, he proposed marriage, and Susila accepted. Susila's parents, however, objected to the marriage, as they did not want to lose the income from her prostitution. Susila and Mohan eventually eloped, marrying in a private ceremony at a local temple and subsequently moving into Mohan's rented house. Mohan and Susila lived together in Tulsipur for five years, and they had two sons, Shyam and Durga. At the end of this time, Mohan's project (which involved putting in drinking water systems) came to an end. But Mohan's plans to return home to Janakpur were ruined when his parents refused to accept Susila or Shyam and Durga. Mohan, after remaining in Tulsipur for two more months, eventually abandoned Susila and his two sons, and returned to Janakpur alone. After Mohan left, Susila took Shyam and Durga, moved back into her parent's home and began her prostitution again.

**Shanti, Age 21. Home: Rajapur**

Shanti at fourteen, had been prostituting herself for five months, when she met Sanjiv, an Indian Chetri man who was working as a mechanic in Tulsipur. Sanjiv came to Shanti as a client, and soon he began seeing her on a regular basis. After they had known each other for about six weeks, Sanjiv and Shanti began living together in his rented house. In moving in with Sanjiv, Shanti initially faced considerable opposition from her parents, who knew that if Shanti got married it would stop her prostitution and, thus, cut off their income. The opposition from Shanti's parents was eventually defused when Sanjiv began giving them money on a regular basis. Shanti and Sanjiv have been living together, without getting married, for six years. During that period of time Shanti has had three children (two sons and a

daughter) by Sanjiv. Sanjiv wants to move back to his home in India, but is sure that his parents would never accept Shanti or his children. Sanjiv's parents (not knowing about his relationship with Shanti) keep sending him letters saying that he should come back to India and marry a girl of their choice. Shanti is very concerned that in the end Sanjiv will succumb to his parent's wishes and abandon her.

**Pravina, Age 29. Home: Bungusri**

Sunil (a Chetri) came to Pravina as a client when she was 15, when she had been prostituting herself for a little over a year. After seeing each other for about three months, Sunil and Pravina decided to get married. After the marriage Sunil resigned from his job (with the police force in Nepalgunj) and moved into Pravina's home in the village of Bungusri. Sunil and Pravina have now been married for fourteen years, and have three sons, age 13, 11 and 8. They make their living from farming Pravina's land, and both expressed satisfaction with their marriage, Claiming that they had no serious problems. Sunil did not have to worry about parental opposition to his marriage, because his father and mother had both died long before he met Pravina. Sunil's two brothers and other relatives are upset about his marriage. But Sunil was not that close to them to begin with, and he is not concerned about what they think. Sunil claims to have been completely accepted by the other Badi, Tharu<sup>10</sup> and Muslim villagers in Bungusri, and he has no desire to go anywhere else.

**Jamuna, Age; 25. Home: Bagar (a village in the Dang Valley)**

Jamuna was 21, and had been prostituting herself for about eight years, when she first met Prakash, who came to her as a client. Prakash Budhatoki is a 26 year old Chetri man who manages his family farm in the Dang Valley and lives with his mother and sister. In the four years since their initial meeting, Jamuna and Prakash have been seeing each other, on average, several times a week. They have also taken several extended trips together to Kathmandu, India, Pokhara and other places. During this period, Jamuna has not prostituted herself with any other men, as she receives enough money from Prakash for herself and her parents. Prakash really wants to marry Jamuna, but says he probably never will, as he knows the union would never be accepted by his mother.<sup>11</sup> While Jamuna is disappointed that Prakash will not marry her, she has continued to see him. Jamuna does not have any children, and she takes regular depo provero injections to prevent conception by Prakash.

### **An Analysis of the Case Studies of Relationships Between Badi Women and High Caste Men**

During my research, I collected a total of three case studies of Badi women who (as in Susila's case) had either married or (in the other two cases) lived with a high caste man for several years and had children by him, only to be abandoned as a result of opposition from his parents. I collected another two case studies (and this includes Shanti) of Badi women who were currently living with a high caste man, but doubted whether the relationship could last in the face of opposition from his parents. I collected another three case studies of Badi women (including Jamuna) who had high caste lovers who they saw on a regular basis, and who wanted to marry them, but would not as a result of parental opposition. I collected a total of two case studies (of which Pravina is one) of Badi women who had seemingly "successful," stable marriages with high caste men. Significantly, in both of these cases, the man did not have any parents. It was precisely this lack of parental opposition that enabled the marriages to work. In all the other cases, it was disapproval from the man's parents that ended, or threaten to end, the marital (or long-term, live-in) relationships. The presence, or lack thereof, of a high caste man's parents seems to be the crucial factor which determines whether or not he will be able to successfully marry a Badi woman.

### **Relations with Low Caste Men**

During my research, I also collected two case studies of marriages between Badi women and *Kami* (an untouchable blacksmith caste) men, and another of a marriage between a Badi woman and a Tharu man. The *Kami* men and their Badi wives have been married for eight and eleven years respectively. The Tharu man has been married to his Badi wife for seven years. None of these marriages were opposed by the men's parents.

There are two major reasons why *Kami* and Tharu seem to be more willing, than Brahmans, Thakuris or Chetris, to allow their sons marry Badi women. (1) Tharu and *Kami* are closer in caste status to Badi than Brahmans, Thakuris or Chetris are. (2) There is a certain sense of unity and solidarity between *Kami*, Tharu and Badi, deriving from their common oppression at the hands of high caste Nepalese.

The following case study describes the household (mentioned above) of a Tharu man, Mahesh, and Urmila, his Badi wife.

Urmila was born and raised in the village of Bagar (in the Dang Valley). When she was 20, Urmila moved with her parents to the village of **Bungusri** in Bardiya district. Urmila worked as a prostitute until she was 26, at which time she began living with a Chetri school teacher. After four years (without having any children) they separated, and Urmila subsequently began to engage



in prostitution again. But after three years she married Mahesh Chaudhary, a Bungusri Tharu man eight years her junior. After their marriage, Mahesh moved into Urmila's house (which she had built on two acres of land). They say that their marriage had been accepted by Mahesh's parents, as well as by Bungusri's other Tharu, Badi and Muslim residents. Mahesh and Urmila grow wheat, corn and potatoes on their land and work as laborers on local construction crews and at a nearby tile factory. They have two children, a son of five and a daughter of three. Urmila speaks fluent Tharu, and her children are growing up bilingually in both Tharu and Nepali. Urmila also says that she follows many Tharu beliefs, values and customs and expects that her children will do the same.

## **Badi Family Structure, Marriage Patterns and Social Organization**

### **Family Structure and Marriage Patterns**

Badi women generally do not use birth control, and thus they commonly have children by their clients.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, out of a sample of sixteen women who had been working as prostitutes for 4 years or longer, fourteen had given birth to children by their clients. Of these, four women had one child each, six had two children apiece and four had three children each.<sup>13</sup> Out of these fourteen women three eventually married, while eleven others are currently raising their children along.<sup>14</sup>

The children of Badi mothers and high caste (Brahman, Chetri or Thakuri) clients are generally considered to be Badi by other Nepalese, even though descent in Nepal is patrilineal. For the children of high caste men and Badi women to be accorded a higher caste status, the father would have to admit paternity. But in the vast majority of cases, high caste men, even when they know they have fathered a Badi women's child, will not claim it as his own. Badi women's attempts to bring paternity suits against high caste men are generally unsuccessful, for the judge usually says that since the woman is a prostitute, she has no way of knowing who the father of her child is.

The majority of Badi prostitutes (whether they have children by their clients or not) are unable to get married. Men from other castes usually shun them, and even most Badi men will not marry them. Indeed, there is a rule in Badi society that men cannot marry prostitute girls who are the sole source of support for their families, as that would stop their prostitution and the income that it generates. Thus, Badi men who marry women from their own caste are usually only able to take spouses from families that have three or more daughters (so that the income from one will not be missed) or other income earning resources (such as land, a profitable business or a well-paying job or both).<sup>15</sup> Approximately two-thirds of Badi men end up marrying

women from other untouchable castes-usually Damai (Tailor), Sarki (Shoemaker), or Kami or Tharu women.<sup>16</sup> These women generally live patrilocally in their husbands' homes; and their children are raised as Badi, with the daughters usually entering prostitution themselves to the same extent as those who are offspring of Badi parents in either one or two parent households. Since the income generated from Badi men is so minimal, two parent Badi families usually depend on the earnings of prostitute daughters to the same extent as single, unmarried Badi mothers.

### **Social Organization**

Badi are organized into eight exogamous patrilineal clans. My informants claimed that these clans represent the descendants of Badi who came from specific districts. The presence of the words Kami and Damai in two Badi clan names, however, suggests that the origin of some Badi clans may lie in intermarriages between Badi and members of other castes (or other factors). Badi clans include: Pyuthani, Rolpani, Kami Badi, Salyani, Sankoti, Chinal Damai, Purbiya Badi an Multami.

### **Prostitute Castes in India and a Possible Historical Connection Between one of them and the Badi**

In India there are at least three castes, Nat, Beriya and Kolhant, in which prostitution has existed as a social norm (see Baines 1912; Blunt 1969; Crooke 1974; Sherring 1974).<sup>17</sup> These castes are very similar to the Badi in many respects. They all lead a mostly transient life, wandering from one town to the next putting on song, dance and/or acrobatic performances, and, in the women's case, engaging in prostitution. The Nat, Beriya and Kolhant also each have their own argot, which they use to discuss prostitution (and other matters) without being understood by outsiders (see Blunt 1969).

Beriya men, generally do not marry women from their own caste, as that would stop their prostitution and the income that it generates. In Farrukhabad, Beriya men who marry women from their own caste are expelled from the community. In Etiway, they are heavily fined. Beriya men, in most cases, marry women from other castes of equal status (Blunt 1969: 153).

In India there is a sub-caste of the Nat known as the Badi, whose way of life is (or at least was until recently) almost identical to Badi in Nepal (Baines 1912: 108). Is it possible that Badi in Nepal originally came from this group? If so, how many years ago did the two groups split up? To what extent have the two groups changed over the years? To what extent have they remained the same? These are important ethnographic questions. Unfortunately, the available data on the Nat, Beriya and Kolhant is very

sketchy. The above questions will have to be answered through future research.

### **The Current Status of Badi Prostitution**

The Nepalese government has always considered Badi to be an embarrassment to the country.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in an effort to bring an end their prostitution, the government has given several Badi families agricultural land and established a school for the Badi in Nepalgunj.<sup>19</sup> There are currently seventy-three Badi students in the Nepalgunj school- forty-eight boys and twenty-five girls. The school currently goes up to the fourth grade but there are plans to add more grades in the coming years.<sup>20</sup>

However, most Badi girls in Nepalgunj who attend school eventually drop out and prostitute themselves. They see almost all other Badi girls around them working as prostitutes. Their parents and other Badi generally still expect them to enter prostitution and they usually do not have many other options for generating income.

Even when other jobs do become available, these jobs are usually rejected, because they do not pay as much as prostitution. For example, officials from the National AIDS Prevention and Control Program attempted to hire several Badi girls to work as peer counsellors to teach Badi prostitutes about the dangers presented by AIDS and the measures they could take to protect themselves against the disease. The peer counsellors were also supposed to encourage Badi girls to give up prostitution by informing them about training and education programs and employment opportunities (such as clothing and handicrafts production). But the officials were unable to find anyone to fill the positions. All the Badi girls said that the positions did not pay enough, and that they could make much more money by working as prostitutes.

Badi girls generally are also given little encouragement from high caste Nepalese society to enter professions other than prostitution, or even to pursue their education. Badi girls who pass through their private school and pursue their studies at public schools are often severely harassed by high caste students. There was also a case, in the Dang Valley, of a high caste headmaster who refused to admit Badi girls to his school, saying that they would corrupt the other students.<sup>21</sup>

The prevailing orthodox high caste Nepalese attitude towards Badi women manifested itself in an incident which occurred during my field work. I had just finished interviewing a group of Badi women in the (exclusively Badi) hamlet of Rajapur (which lies in the Dang Valley), when I was approached by a Brahman landlord who lived nearby. The landlord began to yell at me angrily. "If you came to have sex with Badi women, that would be

acceptable. That is the only reason why other men come here. But you come here day after day and do nothing but talk and take notes. You actually seem to have a friendship with these women. What is wrong with you? Don't you have any respect for yourself?" The orthodox high caste Nepalese attitude is (generally) that untouchables are nothing but service castes. The *Kami* exist to make metalware. The *Damai* live to sew clothes. The *Sarki's* sole purpose on earth is to make shoes, and the only reason the Badi are around is to provide sex. To treat Badi women as anything but sex objects, and to have a close, platonic friendship with them and treat them as equals, is to many orthodox Brahmans, Chetris and Thakuris in Nepal a gross violation of caste boundaries.<sup>22</sup> And yet, as has already been discussed, many high caste Nepalese men who come to Badi prostitutes as clients, end up having enduring serious relationships (or even marriages) with them. The reality of relationships between high caste men and Badi women often differs from the norms defined by orthodox Hinduism.

### **The Threat of AIDS**

The majority of Badi women in Bardiya, Nepalgunj and Dang now know about AIDS, having been informed by doctors, social workers, public health officials and one anthropologist (i.e., myself). While Badi women claim to be concerned about AIDS, they have not generally decreased their prostitution or taken any other precautionary measures (such as requiring clients to wear condoms).<sup>23</sup>

In February and March of 1991, a team from the National AIDS Prevention and Control Program (NAPCP) tested 228 Badi prostitutes in Nepalgunj and Dang for the HIV-1 (AIDS) virus. They all tested negative.<sup>24</sup> However, the prevalence of AIDS in India (approximately a third of Bombay prostitutes are HIV positive), combined with the large number of Indian men who come, as clients, to Badi prostitutes, almost ensures that it will not be long before HIV enters the Badi community.<sup>25</sup> When it comes, HIV will probably spread rapidly through Badi prostitutes, primarily because of their high rate of infection by sexually transmitted diseases (70 percent of the Badi women tested by the NAPCP team tested positive for sexually transmitted diseases other than AIDS).<sup>26</sup> These diseases cause genital sores through which HIV can easily enter the body.

AIDS, threatens to devastate the Badi. In Tanzania, there is an ethnic group known as the Bahaya, who have a population that is 50 percent HIV positive, one of the highest infection rates in the world (Serrill 1990:44). and then there is the Badi, where the vast majority of sexually mature women prostitute themselves almost daily and usually have children by their clients. It is not difficult to see that the Badi could go the same way as the Bahaya,

and, indeed, reach even higher HIV infection rates, unless preventative measures are taken.

### **The Emotional Impact of Prostitution**

In the Philippines and Thailand, there are programs that have been established to rehabilitate child prostitutes (i.e., girls who have engaged in prostitution from the age of twelve or thirteen). These programs, for the most part, have met with little success.

The girls are usually so emotionally traumatized that they never completely recover and continuously suffer from low self-esteem, depression and a sense of hopelessness concerning the future.

Badi girls, on the other hand, are not usually emotionally traumatized by prostitution. They are no less (or more) happy than the rest of us. They accept prostitution as their fate, the only way of life open to them.

This suggests that what is so emotionally traumatic for some prostitutes in the Philippines, Thailand and elsewhere - is not the physical act of prostitution, but the stigma that society places on it. There is no stigma on prostitution in Badi society; on the contrary, it is the norm. It is precisely because Badi prostitutes receive emotional support from other members of their community that they are not traumatized, as some prostitutes in other societies are.

## Appendix One: The Badi Argot

The Badi argot is, for the most part, Nepali that has been changed by the addition of a variety of syllables (including wa, ma, mi and suru) which are used as prefixes, suffixes, infixes or a combination thereof. There are also, however, some words in the Badi argot that are completely different from their Nepali equivalents. For example, the word for good in the Badi argot is *chido*, whereas in Nepali it is *ramro*. Similarly, the word for cooked rice in the Badi argot *suwal*, whereas in Nepali it is *bhat*. The word for drum in the Badi argot is *goodol*, whereas in Nepali it is *madal*. What follows is a list of words and phrases from the Badi argot and their Nepali and English translations.

Badi	Nepali	English
Kamaka	Kaka	Paternal
		Uncle
Mamaka	Mama	Maternal
		Uncle
Hamsure	Hami	We
Bawamzee	Banzee	Niece
Gumtiyar	Natedar	Relative
Aimamai	Aimai	Woman
Lamagni Mamanchis	Logne Manche	Man
Bombain	Baini	Younger
		Sister
Sumangat	Sathi	Friend
Suwal	Bhat	Cooked Rice
Kaksila	Rakshi	Liquor
Namatchu	Nachchu	Dance
Kimelchi	Khelchu	Play
Amaza	Aja	Today
Himija	Hijo	Yesterday
Amasti	Austi	Day Before
		Yesterday
Boongoli	Bholi	Tomorrow
Yumo Sal	Yo Sal	This Year
Pamiley	Pahile	Before
Pumachey	Pachi	After
Ma Goodol	Ma Madal	I Play the
Bazhmachu	Bazaunchu	Drum
Jai Gu, Tu La Bo	Aunus, Wahaa	Come Here,

Ley Guney

Dimeri  
Lumamo  
Tumaoco  
Hamat  
Kumata  
Bimey  
Pumardchu  
Samanchey  
Bimamarey  
Gimit

Ley Janus

Dherai  
Lamo  
Taoco  
Hat  
Khuta  
Bihey  
Pardchu  
Sanchai  
Birami  
Git

Take Him and

Go  
A Lot  
Long  
Head  
Hand  
Foot  
Marriage  
Read  
Well  
Sick  
Song

## Appendix Two: Badi Religion

One of the most important thing that ethnographic research has taught us about Nepal, is that there is no uniform, pristine version of Hinduism which exists throughout the country. Every Hindu community selects some elements from the orthodox tradition, but rejects others, has local deities which are not worshipped elsewhere, and, in many cases, follows certain Animist traditions as well. Every Hindu community in Nepal has its own unique version of Hinduism.

Badi Hinduism is no exception. For example, the Badi worship several gods, some local and others from the main Hindu pantheon. One of the most important Badi deities is Bageshwori, the Hindu goddess of speech. Badi from Bardiya and Dang-Dekhuri often go to worship Bageshwori at a local temple in Nepalgunj, as well as in their own communities and homes.<sup>27</sup>

The local gods worshipped by the Badi include Kalimati, Kairibang, Pane Khola and Bagpati. All of these gods are believed to live in particular locations in the hills above the Dang valley.<sup>28</sup>

Once every three years, Badi (both men and women) from the Dang Valley go to Kalimati and sacrifice a *boca* (uncastrated male goat) to the god who resides there.

Every year, in March, many Badi also attend a religious festival, the *Patan mella*, in the town of Krishnanagar on the Nepal-India border. The primary purpose of this festival is to pay homage to Bageshwori (through worship and offerings of money, flowers, vermilion powder and/or milk).<sup>29</sup>

### Badi Origin Myths

During the course of my research, I was told two different Badi origin myths by my informants. I will relate and discuss them here, as they constitute a valuable symbolic lens through which we can better understand how the Badi view themselves and the Hindu caste system.

#### Origin Myth One: The Curse of Mahadev

Badi used to work as servants for the god Mahadev, cooking his food and serving it to him. But instead of working, they would spend much of their time in the kitchen dancing and singing. During the course of such merry-making, they would often forget about the rice being cooked. As a result, the rice was often burnt. Finally, Mahadev became so angry at being fed burnt rice that he kicked the Badi out of his home and threw a curse on them. "If you like to dance and sing so much, from now on that is all you will do," said Mahadev. From that time on all the Badi have done is sing and dance.



### Origin Myth Two: The Two Brahman Brothers

Once there were two Brahman brothers who were very different from one another. The older brother studied hard in school and went on to become a successful priest and scholar. The younger brother was lazy and irresponsible. As a child he never went to school, choosing, instead, to spend all his time wandering through the forest shooting birds with his slingshot. Eventually the younger brother got married and had three daughters. But he was too poor to build a house, and thus he slept under trees and wandered from village to village with his family, begging for food. Finally, when his daughters got big, they began dancing and singing for a living. The descendants of the younger Brahman sing for a living.

### Discussion

Some Badi believe that their current way of life is the result of Mahadev's curse. Because Mahadev is a god his curse is not to be questioned. The way of life that he has established for the Badi must be accepted. That, essentially, is the fatalistic attitude. Only some Badi, however, believe this myth. Many others do not.

The second origin myth is accepted by more Badi than the first. This myth is seen, by many Badi, as proof that they were originally Brahmans and thus deserve a higher status than that which the wider Hindu caste Nepalese society accords them today. I did not meet one other Nepalese (from any other caste), however, who believed the Badi claim that they were originally Brahmans.

The caste system in west Nepal is stronger than in many other parts of the country. Many, if not most Hindu Nepalese in west Nepal, including Badi, accept the caste system, its theory that certain occupations can only be performed by certain groups of people, and that all people should be ranked along an axiom of purity and pollution. Through the myth of the two Brahman brothers, the Badi have attempted to raise their status within the caste system. They have not, however, rejected the system itself.<sup>30</sup>

### Notes

1. The Badi sang and danced at festivals, weddings and private parties.
2. The Badi also used to go to India. some of my informants used to go annually (in November) to the Indian town of Sunpur, where they would dance and sing at a religious festival. My informants also said that a little over one hundred years ago, there was a king in the Indian town of Isanagar who had a Badi wife (who eventually left him and returned to her home district of Salyan).
3. Musikot lies in Rukum district.

4. My informants claimed that the ruler's generous remuneration-for singing, dancing and sexual favors-had spoiled the Badi, enabled them to lead a luxurious life without having to work very hard. As a result, when the Badi lost the ruler's patronage, they found themselves unable to give up prostitution for more arduous, lower paying work.
5. My informants told me that Badi men usually do not approach prospective clients or become involved in bargaining. This is almost always the mother's (and other women's) or prostitute daughter's responsibility. This was backed up by my own experiences. There were several times when I walked into a Badi community and was approached by women offering me the services of their daughters (or the daughters of relatives or neighbors). But I was never approached by men. The offers of girls were usually made during my first visits to Badi communities, before they knew me. when the Badi discovered I was conducting research (and not looking for sex with Badi girls) the offers usually stopped.
6. In Nepalgunj, the majority of Badi clients are Indian men; and in both Nepalgunj and Tulsipur Indian clients come from as far away as Bombay.
7. Over the last three years many Badi families have come from Bagar (a small village in a remote part of the Dang Valley), Pyuthan and Salyan, and settled in Tulsipur (a bazaar town in the Dang valley), because of the good market for prostitutes there (due to Tulsipur's large population of merchants, drivers, civil servants and other single men "inclined" to look for female companionship). Most of these recently settled Badi families have been able to buy land and build houses in the Tulsipur area (primarily with income generated from prostitution). Many Badi families have two houses, one usually in some remote area (often where they were born) and another in a urban setting, like Nepalgunj, where there is a good market for prostitutes. I met one Badi man who owned three houses, one in Bagar, another in Tulsipur and yet another in Nepalgunj. He had four daughters, all in their teens and twenties, **who** were working as prostitutes thus generating enough income for him to **acquire** such a substantial amount of property.  
When a Badi girl begins to work as a prostitute, her mother will often retire, secure in the knowledge that she will now be supported by her daughter. Badi women also cease prostituting themselves if they get married, and, of course, when they can no longer attract customers (because of age or other factors).
9. The names of case study subjects have been changed to protect their identities.

10. There are three hierarchically ranked categories in Nepal's caste system. The top ranking category is known as *tagadhari* and includes "twice-born" castes (Brahmans, Chetris and Thakuris). The middle category is known as *matwali*, and includes all of Nepal's indigenous tribal groups, including the Tharu (a tribe of Mongolian origin who live in Nepal's southern *terai* belt and speak an Indo-European language). The lowest category is known as *pani na chalne* and includes all the untouchable castes. However, while the Tharu are ranked more highly in Nepal's caste system than Badi, both groups are in many instances equally discriminated against by high-caste (*tagadhari*) Nepalese.
11. I was fortunate enough to be able to talk at length with both Jamuna and Prakash, and Sunil and Pravina. In most other cases of relations between Badi women and high caste men, I was only able to get the women's description of the relationship
12. Apart from Jamuna (Prakash's lover), I only met one other Badi woman who had used birth control. She had had herself sterilized following the birth of her third child.
13. One possible reason why so many Badi women have only one or two children is that scar tissue from sexually transmitted diseases builds up in their fallopian tubes, preventing further conception.
14. Several of these women have parents or brothers and sisters, who have also helped look after the children.
15. Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage (i.e., when a man marries his mother's brother's daughter) is the norm for Badi men who marry women from their own caste. Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is also found among some other untouchable castes-including Damai, Kami and Sunar (Goldsmith)-in west Nepal.
16. I also encountered a case of a Badi man with a Magar wife (the Magar being a Tibeto-Burman tribe who live in the middle hills of west Nepal).
17. The available data on Beriya and Kolhant is rather old. It is possible that prostitution in these two societies has decreased in recent years, or that the societies have changed in other ways.
18. Periodically the police in Nepalgunj crack-down on Badi prostitution, raiding Gogangunj (the area of Nepalgunj where Badi prostitutes live and work) on a daily basis to arrest clients (only occasionally do they arrest Badi prostitutes). The crack-downs last up to two months, during which time clients often stop coming to Gogangunj, thus forcing the Badi to live off their savings or sell their possession or both. The sporadic crack-downs have thus far not decreased the number of Badi prostitutes working in Gogangunj.

19. The Badi who received agricultural land have continued to engage in prostitution to the same extent as before.
20. This school was established as part of a joint agreement between the Nepali government and Danish Volunteer Service.
21. In Nepalgunj there are four teenage Badi girls (from a total of thirty-five households) who are currently studying in local schools and not prostituting themselves. In Tulsipur there are only two teenage Badi girls (from a total of 15 surveyed households) who are currently studying in local schools and not prostituting themselves.
22. The prevailing orthodox high caste attitude that Badi women exist only to provide an essential biological need (i.e. sex) is reflected in the way Brahman, Chetri and Thakuri men interact with Badi prostitutes. High caste clients often (but certainly not always) go in a group to a Badi prostitute and take turns having intercourse with her. In other words, they don't usually "romance" Badi prostitutes, but interact with them only to the extent needed to satisfy their sexual urges. Another reason why high caste clients often take turns with a single girl is to save money, since Badi prostitutes often charge for a fixed period of time rather than on a per client basis.
23. In Nepalgunj about 50 percent of Badi prostitute clients use condoms, while in Tulsipur the rate is less than ten percent. When I asked men in Tulsipur why they did not wear condoms, the usual answer was "this town is too small. If I buy condoms, the shopkeeper will tell other people; everyone in Tulsipur will know I am consorting with prostitutes, and my reputation will be ruined." Nepalgunj, on the other hand, is a larger and more populous city where men can buy condoms anonymously. Thus, condom use among Badi prostitute clients in Nepalgunj is more prevalent.
24. Eugene Vadies (World Health Organization, Global Program on AIDS) and Dr. Puspa Bhatta, Medical Officer, National AIDS Prevention and Control Program, personal communication.
25. Statistics on HIV positive cases in Bombay come from Dr. Jacob John, a WHO consultant.
26. Dr. Pushpa Bhatta and Eugene Vadies, personal communication.
27. The fact that the Badi's patron deity, Bageshwori, is a goddess of speech, could be connected to the Badi's origin as singers, story-tellers and dancers.
28. My informants told me that the Jajarkot Badi have their own patron deity, a local god known as Barma, which is worshipped only by them and not by Badi from other places.

29. My informants told me that until five years ago, the *Patan Mella* was a relatively peaceful, crime-free event, but that now it is plagued by pickpockets and armed robbers. As a result, the number of Badi attending the festival has declined significantly.
30. The caste system defines a particular social identity and way of life for the Badi (as well as for members of all other castes). In the West however, individuals must search for and create their own social identity, a process which can bring with it a profound sense of insecurity and uncertainty that is not found - to the same extent - in Hindu caste societies.

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