



Gender and Sexuality in India: Selling Sex in Chennai (Routledge/Edinburgh South Asian Studies Series)

Salla Sariola

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India has one of the highest numbers of HIV carriers in the world. HIV has remained associated with sex work, and large sums of money provided to fund public health interventions have come from global institutions such as UNAIDS, the World Bank and USAID. In the midst of these processes, however, sex workers and their everyday lives have been hidden behind the rhetorics of control and prevention.

This book offers a detailed analysis of the experiences of sex workers in Chennai. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, it draws out themes of agency; notions of gender and sexuality; and the HIV prevention industry. While the women's experiences are closely knit into the medical discourse regarding sex workers, sex work emerges as a complicated knot of poverty, desire, women's oppression, love, co-option, and motherhood. The author examines how the sex workers actively negotiate the risks of their industry and suggests alternative discourses on women's sexuality, sexual behaviour and desire, arguing that unless the power imbalances affecting women are addressed, such policies and activities will have little impact. She brings attention to the problems of current policies, discourses and attitudes regarding HIV, sexuality and sex work, and shows how new policies could help to reduce vulnerabilities not only for sex workers, but perhaps for all women in India.

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