



Panel Discussion

॥ न्यायस्तत्र प्रमाणं स्यात् ॥



SEX WORK AS "WORK": SOCIO-LEGAL DISCOURSE

About

“Voluntary sex work is not illegal,” says our Supreme Court. How does this complex interpretation engage with the constructions of morality, sexuality, dignity, and our understanding of work? Outside the Courts, is sex work a symbol of patriarchal domination and commodification or a form of labour, business, and a site of expressing sexual agency. Where is the discourse heading? Most importantly, what does a sex worker think?



Thursday, 17th November 2022



3 P.M. TO 5:00 P.M.



Room 506, Academic Block, NLU Delhi



cllra@nludelhi.ac.in

Panellists

Prof. (Dr.) Anuja Agrawal,
Professor, Dept. of Sociology,
Delhi School of Economics

Adv. Tripti Tandon,
Lawyers Collective.

Ms. Lalita,
Aakansha Samiti, Delhi

Ashley Tellis
Independent Researcher and
LGBH Activist

MODERATOR

Dr. Sophy K.J.,
Associate Professor and Director,
Centre for Labour Law
Research and Advocacy (CLLRA),
National Law University, Delhi.

Coordinator : Saumya

OPEN FOR ALL
Register here:



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PANEL DISCUSSION

ON

SEX WORK AS “WORK”: SOCIO-LEGAL DISCOURSE

Organised by:

CENTRE FOR LABOUR LAW RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY

At:

NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY, DELHI

On:

THURSDAY, 17th NOVEMBER, 2022

About the Centre:

Centre for Labour Law Research and Advocacy (CLLRA), at National Law University, Delhi, is established to reinvigorate the constitutional philosophy of ‘decent work for all’ by ensuring dignity at work and enjoyment of equal social, cultural and economic opportunities for workers. We focus on understanding the labour policy paradigm from an interdisciplinary perspective and converse with social realities to undertake meaningful advocacy and outreach initiatives.

With the objective of bringing forth interdisciplinary areas in labour before the students and other interested participants, we organise discussions and debates on various aspects of labour. Under our *Labour Law Discussion Series*, we are organising a **panel discussion on sex work**, with a special focus on sex work as a form of labour.

About the Panel Discussion:

Sexual labour has been a controversial subject of legal, social, and political discussion for a long time now. Per popular opinion, sex work has been recognised as a profession by the Supreme Court recently in a *suo motto* PIL on the rehabilitation of sex workers;¹ though the actual legal position is not as clear. The Court carefully treads the moral, social, and legal tightrope by opining that “voluntary sex work is *not illegal*,” and that sex workers “should not be arrested or penalised or harassed or *victimised*”² (emphasis added). Other organs of the State do not agree. What is the hidden message in this legal grey-zoning of sex work? How does it engage with the constructions of morality, sexuality, autonomy, violence, dignity under Article 21, and the understanding of *work*?

Outside of the court, there are more complex debates revolving around the intersectional vulnerabilities of sex workers. Their positionality is a function of diverse socio-economic elements, including caste, class, gender (not limited to female), community practices, migration status, educational status, access to financial and material resources, social constructions of morality, control over sexuality, the State’s attitude towards them, and their own perception of selves. The complexity of debates can be gauged from the varied opinions on sex work – from it being a symbol of patriarchal domination, caste-based slavery, violence, and commodification of the body, to the idea that it is a form of labour, or business,³ throwing open the question of sexual agency. How do the ongoing legal proceedings and the idea of “rehabilitation” of sex workers engage with these social complexities? What does the evolving discourse on male sex workers tell us about sexual labour? What is the broader picture in the making?

We hope that the panel of legal and academic experts would help us engage in extensive understanding and knowledge exchange on the issue.

¹ Budhadev Karmaskar v. The State of West Bengal, Judgment dated 19th May, 2022, in Criminal Appeal no. 135/2010.

² *Id.*, p. 10.

³ Meena Gopal, ‘Caste, sexuality and labour: The troubled connection’ (2012) 60(2) Current Sociology 222.

Eminent Panelists:

1. Prof. (Dr.) Anuja Agrawal, Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi.
2. Dr. Ashley Tellis, Independent Researcher & LGBH Activist.
3. Adv. Tripti Tandon, Lawyers Collective.
4. Ms. Lalita, Aakansha Samiti, Delhi.

Moderator: Dr. Sophy K.J., Associate Professor and Director, Centre for Labour Law Research and Advocacy (CLLRA), National Law University, Delhi.

Other details:

Date & time: Thursday, 17th November, 2022, 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm.

Venue: Room No. 506, Academic Block, National Law University, Delhi.

Registration Link: <https://forms.gle/hYtPKFKz9EuNSbLU6>

For any queries, contact: cllra@nludelhi.ac.in