Volume VI, Perspectives - A Peer-Reviewed, Bilingual, Interdisciplinary E-Journal

https://perspectives-jdmc.in/

eISSN – 2583 4762

Hasina Pasina: Examining Work and Its Imbrications Using Three Films as Catalysts

Garima S

Student

Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

and

Carol Blaizy D'Souza

Scholar

Independent

Garima S is an MA student currently based in Chennai. Email: garimathatsit@gmail.com

Carol Blaizy D'Souza is a poet, translator and scholar from Bangalore. A collation of her work can be found at linktr.ee/cblaizd. Email: cblaizd@gmail.com

Abstract

The idea of work takes on many notions and is often implicated in the question of choice, or *choicelessness*. In certain modes of work, the question of choice is complicated through the possibilities of pleasure, violence, precarity, and play. In this essay, using Paromita Vohra's *Working Girls* (2025), Saim Sadiq's *Joyland* (2022) and Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (2022) as starting points, we hope to explore the questions of legitimacy, invisibility, pleasure, and stigma surrounding certain kinds of work such as sex work and erotic dancing. In the sample considered, the mix of fiction and documentary films, their notional separation, we think, will throw an interesting light on the heart of the questions. We hope to look, not so much at the cinematic medium, its choices and their implications, or, for that matter, those of the filmmakers, but at the questions of the notions of work evoked in these films. We want to perform an exploratory exercise of putting together the questions around labour, the absent/present State and gender that move us, and these films that we are moved by, to see the possibilities that emerge when these questions are put in conversation.

Keywords: Work, Precarity, Pleasure, Stigma, Cinema, State, Gender

Hasina Pasina:

Examining Work and Its Imbrications Using Three Films as Catalysts

Garm roti ki mahak pagal bana deti mujhe

Paralaukik prem ka madhumas lekar kya karein

~ Adam Gondvi

The aroma of hot roti drives me crazy

What would I do with the spring of transcendental love?

~ Adam Gondvi

The moment of queer pride is a refusal to be shamed by witnessing the other as being ashamed of you.

~ Maggie Nelson

Work well. We have little else.

~ John Berger

How mingled and imperfect are all our sublunary joys!

~ James Joyce

> If you act all modest and demure, they fold their palms and say, 'Salutations madam'. If you are a bit glamorous and… how should I say this! If you are glamorous, free, like me, they'll give you the eye. But if you wear a saree, flowers in your hair, they'll be all like 'vanakkam'. That is our culture.
>
> ~ P. Kowsalya Devi, Aadal–Paadal dancer

In the 1960s, the tamasha dancer Vithabai Narayangavkar sang in a lavani: *potasathi nachatey mee parva kunachi* (Paik 2017). It translates roughly to: 'Dancing for my stomach, what do I care about anyone?' A popular legend of Vithabai is that she went into labour while performing on stage, went backstage, gave birth and returned to the stage to complete the tamasha performance. At the heart of this anecdote, among others, the following questions echo: What constitutes work? How are choice and consent entangled with pressure and predicament? Here, we posit that work is sweaty business. In her writings, Sara Ahmed (2017) introduces sweaty concepts as descriptions that emerge from not being at home in the world; these points of view are at an angle to what is assumed to be a consensus. They 'sweat' with insistence to make their point against the grain. To read something as a sweaty concept is to trace the trail of the labour and work that, through its perspiring resistance, has constructed a counterpoint. In this essay, using three films — *Working Girls* (Vohra 2025), *Joyland* (Sadiq 2022) and *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (Bhansali 2022) — as catalysts, we want to sweat through and re-examine received notions of work around erotic dancing and sex work.

Before we go further, we would like to elaborate briefly on our choice of films. We have picked them for their contemporaneity as well as for the forms they take; that is, Vohra's *Working Girls* is a documentary that gives us access directly, if creatively mediated, to the voice of the sex workers and erotic dancers; *Gangubai Kathiawadi* and *Joyland* are both

fictionalised representations, but both make a claim to 'reality', albeit of different textures — *Gangubai Kathiawadi* is a popular film that is based on a 'true story', on an actual figure, set in Kamathipura, the infamous red-light area of Mumbai, or Bombay, while *Joyland* attempts to map the inner realities of its characters and their strained relations with the outer world. Finally, we have picked these films for the way in sitting next to each other with entangled arms but separate bodies, the films allow for engagement with the complexity and multiplicity of the questions we've set out to ask from different vantage points. None of these questions — of pleasure, precarity, work, stigma — can be approached in a singular way, as will hopefully be evident through the course of the essay.

Working Girls is a documentary that follows various working women, from folk dancers, erotic dancers, sex workers, to surrogate mothers and domestic workers in different cities in India. While showing viewers a day in the life of various working women, conversing with them about their passions, dreams, struggles, and choices, it intersperses narratives with animations that inform the viewer of contextualising history, for instance, that of the colonial laws governing sex work. The film is a part of a research initiative called The Laws of Social Reproduction Project.

Set in Lahore, Saim Sadiq's *Joyland* is a sensitive depiction of the lives of a cast of characters who, in the stifling rigidity of societal norms, negotiate freedom — freedom to work, love, thrive, and pursue dreams — win and lose along the way, with flair, guile and guts. Mumtaz (Rasti Farooq), who is bright, spunky and tender, works in a salon and narrates the everyday crises at her workplace with animation to her quiet, loving and unemployed husband, Haider (Ali Junejo); who mocked and ridiculed by his traditional father, eventually finds a job; interestingly as a backup dancer to a trans, erotic performer Biba (Alina Khan). Through their entangled and unfolding lives and loves, the film throws tender light on the nourishing pleasures and the suffocating pressures of life.

Gangubai Kathiawadi, with Sanjay Leela Bhansali's trademark flamboyance, follows the story of the titular character, played by Alia Bhatt, through the initial deceit by a lover that lands her in the trade of prostitution to her rise in the profession and reclamation of power, playing the cards she was dealt, well.

Contours of Work: Precarity, Stigma and Agency

Meena Seshu (Seshu and Ghosh 2005), in her analysis of sex work, talks about the 'the difficult and thin space of the politics of the female body', indicating that the politics of control directed at it stems from the attempt to govern the use of the sexual self in a purposeless, that is to say, a non-reproductive manner. In *Working Girls*, Tejasvi Sevekari, the director of the sex workers' network/collective, Saheli Sangh, makes a related pertinent point when she points out that while the names of the laws governing sex work have changed over the years, the word 'immoral' has stayed put in every one of them, from the Suppression of Immoral Trafficking Act to the Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act. This reveals, also, as Vohra argues, that the colonial moral judgements underlying the legal framework not only privilege automatically a notion of respectability, however steep, unreasonable and unfair the price, but also define who can be called a worker. Given this, sex work presents a complex terrain of precarity. The implications of its proximity to trafficking can be glimpsed in *Gangubai Kathiawadi*. So, even as a section of sex workers articulate their work in terms of choice over other forms of work such as domestic work due to higher earnings and, in cases of stronger organised sex work, better working conditions (Gothoskar and Kaiwar 2014; Vohra 2025), the same cannot necessarily be said of the sex workers who have been trafficked and are forced to become a part of the economy of sex work as they do not have any option but to engage in sex work. This choicelessness is a product of the stigmatic shame that is associated with sex work, or even sex itself for that matter, as the women will meet a certain death or complete ostracization even if

they do choose to go back home (Bhansali 2022). But even within these constrained spaces and choices there are moments of agency that the women claim, as evident also in *Gangubai Kathiawadi*. Further, an additional nuance exists in this terrain of forced entry into sex work, as suprihmbé (2019) points out in her work and Tejasvi Sevekari of Saheli Sangh mentions in *Working Girls*, people who may have entered sex work through coercion, fraud or trafficking may at a later point decide to continue to carry on in the trade for various reasons that are a complex mesh of expedience and agency. 'Choice', then, as we later elaborate, is a misdirecting category in a capitalistic society, not just for sex workers, but everybody. Moves, manoeuvres and options available to one are contingent upon forces far outside one's control. Agency, as we see it, is not an absolute category.

The sex workers themselves make a claim to their agential enactment. As seen in both *Working Girls* and *Gangubai Kathiwadi*, sex work is referred to as *dhanda,* which in Hindustani means 'business'. The sex workers living on Margi Lane, Pune, note in *Working Girls*, that the logic of labour and livelihood trumps any other qualms and prejudices held or perceived. Vanita Mane, a sex worker and community coordinator for Saheli Sangh, elaborates: 'No, I will never leave my work, ever. I'll tell you why. When no work could help me survive, sex work helped me to survive…. I certainly won't stop because someone tells me to. And especially not because some man tells me that I'll take care of everything. That's not my scene. Because I'm an independent woman. A woman who has stood her own. I'm not going to sit at home, a mouth to feed' (Vohra 2025). Similarly, Rosy, a cabaret dance artist expresses a similar sentiment in *India Cabaret*, Mira Nair's documentary, when she says, 'Will society feed you? Society only talks. I single-handedly feed a family of 20 in my village, and they will not even let me enter the threshold of the house. You have to, at some point, forget and not care' (Nair 1985). Both employ the language of the popular women's movement in India, which speaks of financial independence of women, of women becoming a part of the workforce.

People engaged in sex work rarely suffer from the delusions of respectability or perfect agency. Writing about the *tawa'ifs* in the *kothas* of Lucknow, Veena Talwar Oldenburg refers to the 'clandestine, devious, intimate ploys of survival and economic independence' (Talwar Oldenburg 2007). Gulbadan, a *chaudharayan* or chief courtesan, tells her in no uncertain terms, 'A woman compromises her dignity 24 hours of the day when she has no control over her body or her money', indicating the substantive irrelevance of 'respectability', and its motivated employment against women in a patriarchal society.

Drawing parallels between erotic labour and domestic labour by housewives, Manjima Bhattacharjya, in her book *Intimate City*, notes that over and above some of the similar imperatives of livelihood and stability driving both, both are devalued and treated as unskilled forms of labour (Bhattacharjya 2021). While both kinds of work are invisibilised, they are done so in different ways. Erotic labour lacks respectability, but there is, however qualified, a sense of autonomy, agency and economic independence. Whereas domestic labour by housewives, while considered 'respectable', is taken for granted, and rarely is any autonomy, agency or money associated with it. In *Joyland*, Mumtaz so despairingly comes up against the limiting, thankless nature of domestic work. It is seen as only natural that, when her husband finds work, she should quit her job and lend a hand at home — a suffocating remit that ends in disastrous consequences in the film.

Devaluing feminised labour is a strain identifiable across different domains of work. It is at the rotting heart of a range of injustices. For instance, keeping the legitimacy of the 'need' of the client and customer aside for a moment, the 'expertise' of the sex worker and erotic dancer in managing expectations, providing pleasure and relief while not overly endangering personal safety is a skill that is rarely recognised as such. These forms of labour — sexual and erotic — though clearly indispensable and crucial to a functioning society, as evidenced by their existence against monumental odds, rarely get their due as skilled work.

Hearing the narratives and self-definition of sex workers, dramatised in a true Bollywood fashion in *Gangubai Kathiawadi* as well as in a slice-of-life fashion (with *tadka*) in *Working Girls*, one cannot dismiss the fact that the dignity of labour, deemed however demeaning by others, is a truth that is impervious to hypocritical morality and its constructions. One sees it again and again in the way the artists and workers hold themselves; in the lift of their chin, in the square of their shoulders, in the way they speak about their labour. Shame exists, but the feeling of dignity of the labour performed runs deeper, and it will not be lightly shaken. Time and again it comes up in accounts, life stories, documentaries, and in how the artists and workers see themselves in relation to the world.

Drawing on these articulations, we argue that agency is not a possession to be understood through the lens of have or have-not, but it is necessarily located, instead, within situational contexts. Attempts at abstracted mapping of agency are likely to end up only as tropes of agency, missing its centrality in the actor's understanding or articulation of it, thus, ironically, becoming a denial of agency in its own way. As Gothoskar and Kaiwar argue, about the stigma associated with sex work, 'This singling out (of sex work as more problematic as compared to other forms of exploitative work) has a lot more to do with perceptions, rather than material realities — perceptions around sex itself and perceptions that are also shared by some feminists' (Gothoskar and Kaiwar 2014).

The Mire of Morality

In *Gangubai Kathiawadi*, if the depicted moral outrage of the clergy is on the one end, even the liberal, open-minded, modern Nehru is not beyond wanting to 'rescue' the women. To an outsider looking in, however sympathetic, the savagery of a predicament that then demands an equally ruthless, adaptable code of conduct and moral compass, is nearly always indigestible (Brown 2006; Batliwala 2010). Selling virginity for money is only one of the many

activities that comes up as a practice beyond the pale across multiple accounts of ethnographers, sociologists and writers (Brown 2006; Faleiro 2011). The seed of moral umbrage or aesthetic affront that betrays itself at the heart of judgements is probably the difference between how the dancers and sex workers assess their own pragmatic decisions, not necessarily dressing them up but also not devolving into moral handwringing, as opposed to how these appear to commentators. Sex workers Molly Smith and Juno Mac find the lens of 'deliberate' sex work more useful, instead of the framework of consent, indicating that there is a distinction between choosing and acting deliberately (Lee 2019).

An ex-hooker and working-class queer organiser Amber Hollibaugh argues, 'Maybe because it's hard to listen to — I mean really pay attention to — a woman who, without other options, could easily be cleaning your toilet?' (Grant 2012). Or as Indian reality reveals, it is not a case of either/or, but of both in that the sex worker is also likely to be the domestic worker, vegetable vendor and so on (Gothoskar and Kaiwar 2014). This detail takes apart the imagined binary between other modes of exploitative work and sex work. The sex workers' negotiating power compared to domestic workers comes from their collective organisation. In absence of acceptability, which would allow for more 'formal' forms of protection, the sex workers organise themselves in collectives, under brothel madams and so on, thus creating a space for negotiating power.

Even so, one of the primary things that comes across in many narratives of the dancers and workers in *Working Girls*, *Joyland*, *Gangubai Kathiawadi*, and others (Nair 1985; Mehta 2004; Ghosh 2013; Bhattacharjya 2021; Sultana 2021) is the double-edged nature of the feelings the women carry (Jamīla 2007). Pride in their work, a relish of the freedom owing to financial independence, the play of wielding power over clients, customers, audience for a brief while vies for space with the stain of the received perceptions about honour that stick to them like soot, difficult to shake, and the precarity in this line of work that can topple a painstakingly

built life at any moment. The common, unsurprising desire for security, stability and uncomplicated respectability runs like an undercurrent in stories that dance artists or sex workers narrate (Soofi 2014) even as they resist the patriarchal conception of respectability.

Pleasurable Difference

Pleasure and joy in precarious lives and livelihoods are an entanglement that will not submit to easy judgments. In *Working Girls*, the *aadal–paadal* dancers in Madurai, a group that perform to provocative songs (not only) as part of entertainment during temple festivals, when asked how they got into this profession and why they continue in it, cite a variety of reasons such as generational work as a dancer, the freedom due to being single/unmarried, being a dance artist paying more than other 9-to-5 jobs, to support family, pay school and medical bills, etc. As Sneha Venkatesan, an aadal–paadal dancer, articulates: 'No, I have a job and my mother works as an assistant professor. But I don't like to go into that kind of field — the IT field. I like to dance. So I like to do dance to explore some places. In Tamil Nadu — Pondicherry, like that'. While their circumstances and pretexts differ, they unanimously agree on one thing, as one of them says feelingly to others' agreement, 'The stage evaporates your pain'.

The idea of occupying a different time-space in performance (Shulman 2022) that reverberates across different forms of performance–labour is also a sentiment reflected in the narrative of erotic dance artists speaking about their dance practice. The pleasure associated with performance for the practitioners despite the depicted precarious personal circumstances can also be distinctly witnessed in *Joyland* in the seriousness and rigour with which Biba, an erotic dance artist, treats her 'interval performance' and the lengths she goes to secure a full show, the effort she puts in to train her background dancers and the pride she takes in a show well done. While a part of an otherwise complex narrative of her life, it is self-evident that

performances are pleasurably gratifying acts unto themselves. In *India Cabaret* too, Vasanti, a cabaret artist, when asked if she ever feels shame, says, 'Never while dancing. But when I am walking on the street, recognising me, when men say, look, there goes the woman who takes off her clothes for other men, then I feel shame' (Nair 1985). This sentiment cuts across the category of gender as seen through Haider in *Joyland*. He has to hide the real nature of his work from his family, except his wife, due to the stigma associated, not only in connection with being an erotic dancer but also in his betrayal of traditional masculinity. The performance-space also allows for him a possibility to escape the bounds of masculinity that his father and older brother seek to tie him to in the household space.

The energy dancing generates, the joy it feeds back into the body, is a self-sufficient loop (Smith 2016). It is only outside of this performance space, when it comes to the apprehending gaze, that explanations need to be proffered. For brief moments on the stage, when the body moves to the beat, an argument can be made that the possibly fraught reasons one is on stage for take a backseat. Pleasure — of the body, of performance, of freedom, and even mistakes — is a portal that the pressures of hard choices and even harder predicaments are unable to close. The artist/worker functions in multiplicities. Some of them may be hard-up economically and socially, but that is not the only thing they are.

It is important to note here that there is a marked absence of articulation of pleasure among sex workers — they stick to the language of 'work'. Which is not to say that there is a complete absence of it, as in *Gangubai Kathiawadi*, there is an instance where Gangubai's fellow sex workers in Sheela *maasi*'s *kothi* are teasing Bilaal, a man sent by the mafia leader Rahim Lala to protect Gangubai from Shaukat, a mafioso in his organisation who had brutalised Gangubai earlier. Gangu's colleagues are enamoured by him as he is a good-looking guy, but another sex worker says, evoking laughter, '*Arre, jis kaam ke paise milte hai, usko phokat me kaiko karna*!' (Arre, the work that we get money for, why do it for free!) This statement is

revealing of assumptions of work and pleasure — it is not that there is a complete absence of pleasure in sex work, but that pleasure is not viewed as an ideal form, in an abstraction of 'pure pleasure'. It is, instead, imbricated with labour. As we see in more detail in the next section, art or sex becomes not a mere act of leisure, a 'pure' act, in that sense, but a form entangled in labour, matters of livelihood.

Complex Terrains

A commonality across the three films is the mundanity of dancers' and workers' lives. Domesticity of people, women involved in these lines of work, when one hears their narration, or sees it on screen, it surprises and challenges commonly held perceptions of what the lives of 'public' women and women in 'public' professions should look like or entail. The spilling over of various spheres of life into one another, the absence of a clear, distinct line between inside and outside, the mundanity, repetitiveness, exertion, and exhaustion of sexual, erotic labour, unlike the overexposed, exaggerated imagination of society at large, is useful to clarify, and mute the noise of presumptions (Shah 2010). Yet another element that stands out is the absence of the linear, monolithic narratives of life and experience of sex workers and dance artists that can be categorised into neat boxes, about which a single, overarching, conclusive thing can be said. Complex motivations, experiences and opinions are as diverse as the people themselves and resist homogenising grand narratives revealing a knotty imbricated terrain.

All three films also show the ways in which the presence of sex workers and dancers, and intimacy and affection sought and offered in the spaces they operate in challenge the traditional notions of kinship, pleasure and work. One suspects that the disproportionate nature of consequences and resistance laid at the door of these professions stems from the knowledge that they possess the power to shake the constructed foundations of society — who can associate with whom? Who is owed what? What kind of work can one charge money for?

Further, at its core, the often practical nature of the imperatives driving the workers and artists presents a disjuncture with the anxiety around women's bodies, the insidious notions of sanctity, honour, purity, and the unromantic or non-idealised uses women put their bodies to (Vijayakumar 2018). The notions the workers involved have of this labour are not always in correspondence with either the rescue narrative or the empowered women narrative or the pleasure-driven, bold sexual woman narrative (Sultana 2021).

This leads us finally to the challenge that sex work and erotic dancing present to the notion of 'pure form'. We have looked at this briefly earlier in the previous section in the context of pleasure, but we will look at it here through the question of labour. Following Brahma Prakash's notion of 'cultural labour' (Prakash 2019), Swathi Sudhakaran and Gita Jayaraj (in a panel) argue that performance, or art, through their appropriation by the social and cultural elite have become disembedded from their social practice as labour (Sudhakaran and Jayaraj 2025). The idea of art for its own sake, which rose in response to Victorian morality, takes a turn where 'art' and 'performance' take on more and more abstracted forms separate from 'labour' or 'work', which also constructs the binaries of 'high'/'classical' art versus 'folk'/'popular' art. The 'high arts', in spite of being equally, if not more, commercial, hide the fact of 'labour', while the popular form such as aadal–paadal, where the mutual entrenchment of art and labour is much more evident, are considered lower, even derogatory forms.

With sex work, as with erotic dancing, the commercial, transactional nature of art forms is rendered legible. The evidence of labour, here, in art as in sex, is immediately suspect — raising questions of the objectification of women's bodies, consent from the feminists paired with the offence to public morality by the guardians of the said public morality as seen through periodic outrages against aadal–paadal and other forms of erotic dancing, and sex work. The question we raise here being that why must it be immediately suspect? If one enjoys, in spite of the objectification of the feminine body, item songs, the expensive-ticketed performances of

Bharatanatyam or critically-acclaimed French erotic cinema — then why, only when bodies of lowered class and caste locations make a claim to this work in a more popular domain, is it considered suspect?

We argue here that because of their proximity to labour, sex work and erotic dancing cause discomfort to those who view art or pleasure in isolation, as pure forms that must be pursued in of themselves. The socio-cultural elite convert, first, these forms of work to activities of leisure, and then go on to look suspiciously at those who do not pursue these forms in moments of leisure but as modes of work. This suspicion stems essentially from purist notions of work, art and pleasure, which conceive them as perfectly separate categories. This attempted construction falls apart when one takes the claims of sex workers and erotic dancers seriously instead of viewing them as merely an oppressed category, revealing work, art and pleasure as entanglements rather than categories.

In Conclusion

Our attempt, in this essay, has been to examine the complicated play of agency and choice involved in work such as sex work and erotic dancing through the voices that emerge from the workers themselves not only in depictions in the films chosen, but also in related visual, popular and academic literature. The sex workers as well as erotic dancers do not constitute a totally disenfranchised category as imagined within popular academia or in general perception, but instead present a case of assertion of their agency in everyday situations, in spite of the conditions of violence and precarity created by the capitalist, patriarchal setting as well as the State. We have further looked at the ways in which sex work and erotic dancing present a complex terrain as a result of the entanglement of work, art and pleasure.

The three films that we have used here as a springboard, as well as a grounding, leave the viewer with much food for thought. As Saira, a tawa'if at Gulbadan's kotha in Lucknow,

referring to what her journey required, says, 'The problem was to forget the meaning of the word *aurat* (woman) that had been dinned into my mind from the day I was born… I would have to break my own mental mould and recast myself' (Talwar Oldenburg 2007). These films and our thoughts on them here, we hope, make the reader think and recast their mould of the notions of a worker and work.

References

Ahmed, Sara. 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Batliwala, Srilatha. 2010. 'The Feminist and the Sex Worker: Lessons from the Indian Experience', *Himal Southasian*, https://www.himalmag.com/archives/the-feminist-and-the-sex-worker-lessons-from-the-indian-experience (accessed on 17 October 2025).

Bhansali, Sanjay Leela, dir. 2022. *Gangubai Kathiawadi*. Biopic, Pen Studios, 02:33:01.

Bhattacharjya, Manjima. 2021. *Intimate City*. New Delhi: Zubaan.

Brown, Louise. 2006. *The Dancing Girls of Lahore: Selling Love and Saving Dreams in Pakistan's Pleasure District*. HarperCollins Publishers.

Faleiro, Sonia. 2011. *Beautiful Thing: Inside the Secret World of Bombay's Dance Bars*. Scotland: Canongate.

Ghosh, Shohini, dir. 2013. *Tales of the Night Fairies*. Documentary, 01:14:32, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ystke5m8now (accessed on 28 October 2025).

Gothoskar, Sujata and Apoorva Kaiwar. 2014. "Who Says We Do Not Work?' Looking at Sex Work', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49(46): 54–61.

Grant, Melissa. 2012. 'Happy Hookers', *Jacobin*, https://jacobin.com/2012/08/happy-hookers (accessed on 17 October 2025).

Jamīla, Naḷini. 2007. *Autobiography of a Sex Worker*. J Devika (tr). Westland Books.

Lee, Lorelei. 2019. 'Cash/Consent: The War on Sex Work', Essays, *N+1*, https://www.nplusonemag.com/issue-35/essays/cashconsent/ (accessed on 17 October 2025).

Mehta, Suketu. 2004. *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*. Penguin Books.

Nair, Mira, dir. 1985. *India Cabaret*. Documentary, 00:59:43, https://mubi.com/en/in/films/india-cabaret (accessed on 28 October 2025).

Paik, Shailaja. 2017. 'Mangala Bansode and the Social Life of Tamasha: Caste, Sexuality, and Discrimination in Modern Maharashtra', *Biography*, 40(1): 170–98.

Prakash, Brahma. 2019. 'Introduction', in *Cultural Labour: Conceptualizing the 'Folk Performance' in India*. Oxford Academic.

Sadiq, Saim, dir. 2022. *Joyland*. Drama Film, Film Constellation, 02:06:49.

Seshu, Meena and Shohini Ghosh. 2005. 'Shades of Grey: Selling Sex - Work, Business, or a Profession?', TARSHI, https://www.tarshi.net/ost/index.asp (accessed on 28 October 2025).

Shah, Svati P. 2010. 'What Kamathipura Means Today', *Himal Southasian*, https://www.himalmag.com/archives/what-kamathipura-means-today (accessed on 17 October 2025).

Shulman, David. 2022. *The Rite of Seeing: Essays on Kūṭiyāṭṭam*. Delhi: Primus Books.

Smith, Zadie. 2016. *Swing Time*. Penguin Press.

Soofi, Mayank Austen. 2014. *Nobody Can Love You More: Life in Delhi's Red-Light District*. Penguin Books.

Sudhakaran, Swathi and Gita Jayaraj. 2025. 'Performance as Method', Panel, IIT Madras, Chennai, September 24.

Sultana, Habibi. 2021. *Towards a Southern Approach to Sex Work: Lived Experience and Resilience in a Bangladeshi Brothel.* Routledge Studies in Crime and Justice in Asia and the Global South, Routledge.

suprihmbé. 2019. 'heauxthots: Defined/Definers: My Thoughts on Common Terminology around Erotic Labor & Trafficking', heauxthots by thotscholar, https://medium.com/heauxthots/heauxthots-de%EF%AC%81ned-de%EF%AC%81ners-my-thoughts-on-common-terminology-around-erotic-labor-trafficking-f9df45ea2b9a (accessed on 18 October 2025).

Talwar Oldenburg, Veena. 2007. 'Afternoons in the Kothas of Lucknow', Between Cultures: A Symposium on the Changing Face of Lucknow, *Seminar*, issue no. 575, https://www.india-seminar.com/2007/575/575_veena_talwar_oldenburg.htm (accessed on 18 October 2025).

Vijayakumar, Gowri. 2018. 'Is Sex Work Sex or Work? Forming Collective Identity in Bangalore', *Qualitative Sociology*, 41: 337–60, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-018-9390-2 (accessed on 28 October 2025).

Vohra, Paromita, dir. 2025. *Working Girls*. Documentary.