

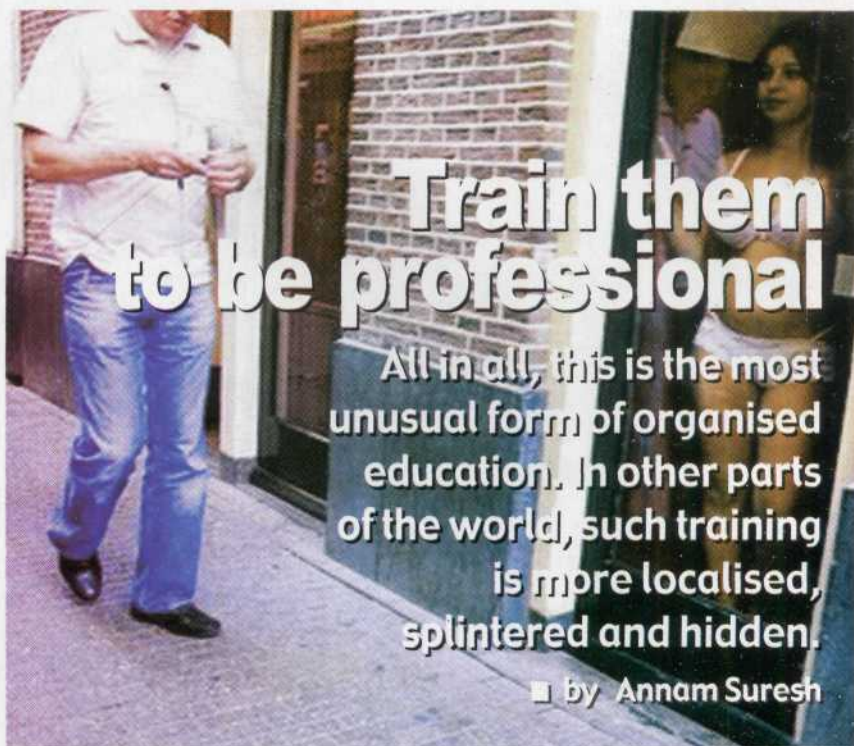
Amsterdam has one of the highest tourist traffic in Europe and more than 80% of adult tourists visit the red-light district, De Wallen, at least once – even if (as they claim) it is just out of curiosity. This pleasure zone is not a discreetly tucked-away or grossly sleazy part of the town – even though there is enough of sleaze for those who like it.

Prostitution happens bang in the middle of the city, with some of the houses of prostitution situated among middle-class homes or on streets leading to schools. Hence, it is not surprising that information and literature for tourists are available easily. What is impressive is that, with a thriving, legally-sanctioned prostitution industry, there is training available in plenty for the sex-workers too – both for novices as well as those who wish to upgrade their skills.

These are usually through workshops conducted by retired or semi-retired sex-workers, either individually or through prostitution networks, such as recognised and respected information centres as well as loosely-formed groups. These short courses include lessons imparted through detailed books in simple language, heavily-illustrated booklets and comic-strip-type brochures. They handle everything from how to use a condom, how to negotiate with a client and how to look for tell-tale signs of sexually-transmitted diseases in a client or in oneself; to how to perform various acts of sex – missionary, vaginal, oral, anal and group; the risks associated with each of these, along with the kind of precautions one can take.

Since prostitution is legal in Amsterdam, there are legal requirements for anyone wishing to ply the trade here. There are licences, taxes, health and fitness certification, minimum age, do's and don'ts. Hence, these courses include instructions on how to go about getting these clearances.

Apart from such essentials, the



classes also impart lessons on different kinds of prostitution; the kind of business opportunities each of these offers; the kind of investment required for them; and identification of different kinds of brothels, based on typical external signs or symbols. For instance, a red light indicates a regular 'vanilla' brothel, one sporting a blue light indicates services of transvestites or trans-sexual.

Helping hands

Novices are also informed of organisations and agencies – both government and non-Government – they can approach in case they have been trafficked or face any kind of harassment or violence. They also get to know of agents (known as pimps in other parts of the world) and the rates they charge for different services. In addition, they are given a recommended (not binding, but generally accepted) services and rate chart.

Not all classes are alike – there is a fair variety to choose from. There are mid-week classes (weekends are peak business periods) on various kinds of

sexual practices; how to initiate these, how to do these safely etc. For instance, there are step-by-step demomonstrations on how to discreetly put the condom on a client halfway through oral sex, without loss of tempo or excitement! Incidentally, this is the most common kind of service and hence this is one of the early lessons.

There are visits to various kinds of brothels, introduction to and demos of various kinds of gadgets, like dildos, saddles, whips, special high-heeled boots (collectively referred to as leathers), sex toys, drugs (some narcotics are legal in Amsterdam), intoxicants and aphrodisiacs.

There are also mock sessions on how to deal with a client who insists on sex sans a condom; how to deal with a drunk, doped or violent client; and who to seek help from.

For instance, the women are advised to quote an outrageously exorbitant rate for sex without a condom so that the client is forced to drop the demand. And, if the client unfortunately does agree to the rate, they are taught techniques to seduce him and then surreptitiously slip on a condom

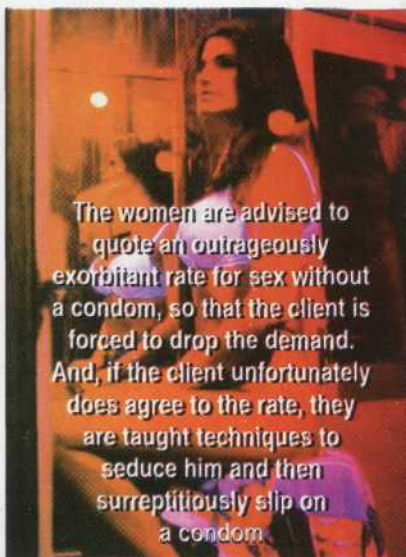
without him even noticing it and remove it just as skillfully, after the act.

In addition, they are trained to identify signs of any disease. Of course, these are not foolproof, they are warned, but still it is an added precaution. And they are told how to use a female condom, which is demonstrated to them step by step, just in case they do not manage to put a condom on the male.

Practical training

They are also taken to various clubs, where they can witness different kinds of professionals at work and incorporate these methods into their own acts or corroborate with these clubs or experts.

Many sex-workers walk the streets rather than work from a brothel, particularly those that do not live in Amsterdam but commute to the district daily. They are, therefore, taught how to solicit – both from



windows, as is the practice in most European brothels, as well as on the streets. The skills required for either are very different.

Not all the courses cover everything, and different packages come with different 'fees'.

In addition, there are legal and

health awareness classes on the rights and responsibilities of the sex-worker and her client, as well as the laws that govern the red-light district.

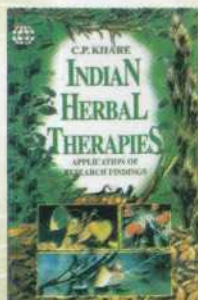
Health education includes safe sex, sexually-transmitted diseases – identification of signs and symptoms, prevention and treatment options – contraception, visits to or by doctors and health check-ups.

Although most students are young women, it is not unusual to find a small sprinkling of men, transvestites and older women. Women, who have retired or are close to retirement, usually wish to pick up skills to train novices, while men could either be sex-workers or pimps. A few, like the 38-year-old Paul, run classes in nearby countries on the sly.

All in all, this is the most unusual form of organised education. In other parts of the world, such training is more localised, splintered and hidden. All that is missing is a recognised certification!

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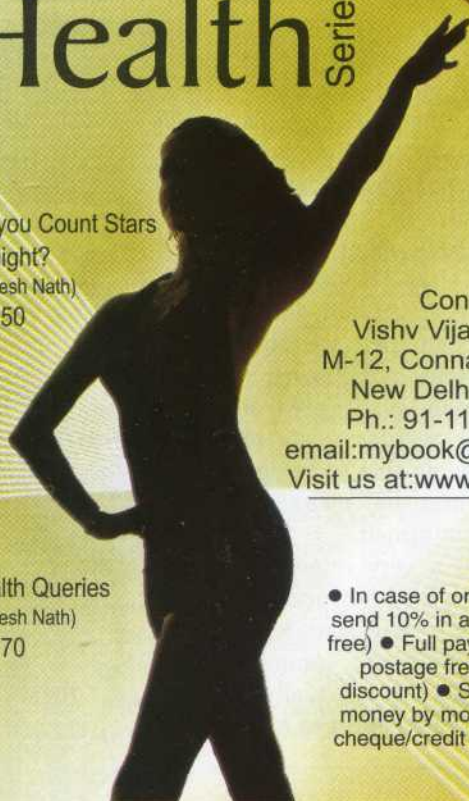
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