



# “Prostitution in the name of Devadasi System”

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## Abstract:

In 6th century AD a traditional system was started called devadasis in India, devadasi means Temple slave. Devadasi system is followed by certain group of people in India. This practice has been a part of some Hindu societies for centuries. The ancient tradition of dedicating young girls to the God or deity Yallamma. In the state of Karnataka these rituals happen in the Yallamma Temple in Saudatti village, certain people who believe this system from all over the state and also from neighboring states visit and practice at this temple. There are many people which follow this medieval traditional system. There are also other names for Devadasis: Basavi in North Karnataka, in areas like Bijapura, Kalburgi, Bagalkote, Bellary and Koppala. Also in places such as Matangi in Maharashtra, Kalavantin in Goa, Kalavatinin in Kerala, and in few other countries Devadasis are called Parameshwaray in Nepal, They are also known as Jogini in some other states. Now in today's time though the devadasi system is banned by law it is still in practice illegally. This creates huge problem in the society especially for young female children who have been exploited in the name of tradition, they end up sacrificing their lives right from childhood, they also lose their health being exposed to severe diseases such as AIDS, STDs, and mental illnesses.

**Keywords:** Devadasi. Yallamma. Muttu kattu. Brahamins.

## INTRODUCTION:

Devadasi means God's servant, women of God or slave of God. The name is given to a girl who is young, married to the deity thereby dedicated to this system. Such rituals are done before she attains puberty. After these rituals they are considered that she's married to the deity and they should not marry a mortal for the rest of the life.

Devadasi system is a very old practice, its also a profession for some people and female children are trafficked into this system by their parents and family forcefully. When a girl is just 5 to 10 years of age they are dedicated to the deity or goddess. Normally in such family the first daughter is married to the God, If that particular family do not have girl child then the boy child of the family gets married when he gets a girl child that girl child will be dedicated to the God. This ritual is done on a special day once a year, mainly in South India. This practice happens in ceremony similar to a marriage and is called Muttu kattu or Puttu Kattu.

## Who is Devadasi

Deva means God, Dasi means a female servant, a slave of the God. In Ancient Times Devadasis used to be dancers, artists and singers who were performing only on the festival days in temples. They had a huge respect before some people used to touch their feet and were taking blessings from them. Devadasis were only dedicated to the god or to worship of the God, and she have had to spend her whole life to the god by doing worship and perform on not only occasion but also community feast, making God happy by her beautiful dance and singing and working in a temple being married to the God. They used to perform on temple rituals. These women also learned and practiced classical dance such as Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi etc.

## Changes in the Devadasi System over time

Traditionally Devadasis were categorized into ritualistic and non-ritualistic performers i.e., upper caste Devadasis did cultural activities and were dancers, singers who are only used to perform on special days like festival or on special occasions in the temple. Lower caste people who did non ritualistic duties and were those who were washing, cleaning the temple and fanning the deity and eventually the first who were forced into prostitution.

Eventually the practice shifted only to lower caste communities where only Dalit girls were dedicated to the temple deity and later it became only specifically to the people who did the housekeeping rituals & those being exploited.

#### Transformation from traditional temple rituals to to Devadasi System

Traditionally Devadasis enjoyed a high status in a society as music and dance were integral parts of worship in temples. They were considered auspicious as they were committed to the deity. After the decline of the Mauryan Empire, in the 4th century AD, when the Puranas were written, in several Puranas it was recommended that arrangements such as singing of girls at the time of worship at temples. And they even recommended the purchase of beautiful girls and dedicating them to the temples. The Brahmins considered themselves to be the upholder of knowledge, faith religious and traditions through this political influences and economic power was sought to be concentrated in the hands of Brahmins. Temples became an important source of revenue, that is why having the presence of Devadasis increased the attraction of temples.

#### **How girls were forced into the System**

The first reason, is that it has been practiced from generations and very traditional practice in the regions. The second reason, they have been forced by their parents to fulfilment and needs of the parents due to their poverty. The third reason is illiteracy, due to these reasons without their knowledge they are still following the system though it is illegal. People believe that when a young girl is dedicated to the goddess, the more the Goddess will bless her and her family. Sometimes girls will enter to this system voluntarily or by force of their parents. Most of the girls when they are dedicated to this system they do not have a choice because a girl did not have the freedom to choose her life and her parents chose her life. Devadasis are isolated, discriminated and are living as a secluded community.

#### **How many Devadasis are there in India?**

According to the National Commission for Women (NCW) 44,000 Devadasis are active in India. specially in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka. According to the recent census report of Karnataka State Women Development Corporation shows that the majority of active Devadasis are in Karnataka. (22,491), Andhra Pradesh (16,624), and In Maharashtra (2,479). Approximately there are 9,733 devadasis are there in the villages around Hospet in Karnataka. According to a report there are around 20 to 30 Devadasis in every village in the aforesaid area.

#### **The process of making a girl into a Devadasi, what is the ritual called?**

The process of dedicating Devadasis to the goddess involves traditional ceremony and completing certain rituals. Its called marriage rituals by dedication of a Devadasis to Yallamma goddess, practice varies in different states, in Karnataka this ritual will be done in Yallamma temple at Saudatti, people from many states come to do rituals in this temple. This rituals happens once a year during a Saundatti carnival festival. Firstly the Devadasi Pooja or marriage starts, then they will take the girl to the temple who is very young around 5 to 10 years, they will give bath to her and maker her sit in a clean place and old Devadasis start making this pooja firstly they will apply arishna, kunkuma (tuermeric and vermilion) by old Devadasis to her neck and hands and her legs as well as. Then honoring with light (Arati) and singing and dancing for the God after this she had to wear neem leaves to her waist band and she had to place these neem leaves in mouth and head then the ceremony will be done by last step “puttukattu or muttukattu.” by tying a pearl necklace to the girl.

#### **The Devadasi practice in the modern day.**

Times have changed and corrupted the practice, The traditional System has lost it actual form and varied from its original form. The traditional respect has vanished. The original customs have also disappeared. The modern practice of devadasi is significantly different from its historic form. There was a time, people used to respect them, like people used to touch their feet and take blessings from them. But it has been changed now today Devadasis have been made sex slaves and prostitutes, they are forced to give up their respect & bodies to earn money. Devadasis used to perform only at the temple during festival, and they had learnt many things like dance and singing also they sacrificed them to the God and not to have any other relationship with anyone else. She had to work for God her whole life. Later it has become worst, this caused to promote the sexual exploitation of the lower caste people. Instead of dancing and singing at temple it turned as a sex worker which is still happening in most of the places in India. In modern days Devadasis they started working as a sex worker because after involvement of Mughals and Bruisers in

the country, many temples were broken and their status in the society deteriorated and they were being exploited and degraded. Their own parents will provide everything to the customers to make them happy. If the house is small they make way and wait for the girl to return with some amount which is given by the customer that is how she earns money to lead her & her family's life. There is other kind of practice which means Devadasi who work for only particular people means who are very rich in that village called Ooru Gowdru (village leaders) and they will be taking care of their family and some financial things like giving them some of the rewards like money, clothes, shelter, grains etc. The other problem is that most of the people are not worried about their health when they do not take care about precautions the Devadasis will become pregnant they will get children again the same system they will follow to those kids also because when they think about sending their children to the school the school authorities will ask the father name but they are not sure about it so that time those kids will face difficulties because of that they considered as some Devadasis children. This will effect even the Devadasi kids in the school and makes it difficult to mingle with other children. On the other hand, they earn money only till the age of 40 years after that they stop earning money, them continue as beggars begging at the temple. The system is affecting many people's health not just Devadasis and their family but also the customers such as villagers, truck drivers etc., and their families by spreading dangerous diseases such as HIV and AIDS.

### **The problem faced in 19th Century**

In 19th century Kerala had a breast tax levied on lower caste women. Lower caste from Travancore were not allowed to cover their breasts unless they paid a tax. This tax was determined by size of their breast, the bigger the more tax they had to pay. The upper caste Brahmin society of Travancore were behind the introduction of this tax. Women were tired of this, the tax was aimed at Nadar and Izara women this was repeatedly showing them of their low status. Many nadar women converted to Christianity to avoid this humiliation. But one izhava women is known to have cut off her own breasts in protest of this tax, her name was Nangeli she then died from loss of blood. The story of Nangeli and her sacrifices set off a series of events that eventually led to the abolishment of this horrendous tax. Between 1813 and 1829 Nadar and Izhava women came together and campaigned to be granted the right to cover their breasts. This was eventually successful.

### **The benefits available for Devadasis**

The government has been taken some action and have initiated about Devadasis marriage, a man who marries a Devadasi will get Rs. 10,000. The formers Devadasis who reached 45 years, get monthly pension of Rs. 500 and they get subsidy and loan up for starting any small business ( buying cow and hence) for self-employment. And for any legal help, the Devadasis are free to visit the authority office. Education necessary for the welfare of Devadasis literacy plays very important role in the welfare of formers Devadasis. A district family court judge said that while education helps them in understanding their rights, enables their children find a better and dignified life. The Government has brought the practice of Devadasi under unlawful activities, and the government has introduced several welfare schemes to bring Devadasis into the mainstream of the society.

### **Abolition of Devadasi system**

The two Acts then existing were replaced by the Karnataka Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act which was adopted by the State Legislature in 1982 and was notified by the Government through its Gazette in 1984. The new Act declared dedication as Devadasi to be an unlawful practice. As was held by the Act of 1934, the new Act also seeks to declare unlawful the very act of dedication, whether the dedication is done with or without the consent of the dedicated woman. Urgency was shown by the Bench when Supreme Court advocate V.K. Biju, representing the Kerala-based NGO, S.L. Foundation, drew the court's attention to the lackluster approach of the State authorities and the police forces of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu to the problem. He contended that neither were the police enforcing the law nor were the State governments properly utilizing funds allocated for the rehabilitation of girls who were pushed into the Devadasi system. Additional Solicitor General Pinky Anand claimed that State-level legislation such as the Karnataka Devadasis Prohibition of Dedication Act, 1982, and Maharashtra Devadasis Abolition Act, 2006, had completely abolished such practices. Section 372 of the IPC, which prohibits selling minors for purposes of prostitution, and the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956, also makes prostitution an offence in or in the vicinity of public places. The 1982 Act strengthens the penal provisions that were hitherto

available under the 1934 Act, first law that came up to abolish this was The Bombay Devadasi Protection Act, 1934. The maximum punishment was increased to three years imprisonment and maximum fine was increased to Rs. 2000-. If the guilty was found to be a parent or guardian or relative of the dedicated woman, the penal provisions are even stronger. Imprisonment in such a case can extend up to five years with a minimum term of two years and the fine can be up to Rs. 5000- with the minimum fine being Rs. 2000-. Later the Madras Devadasi (Prevention of dedication) Act was passed in 1947

## CONCLUSION:

The process of dedication begins in a temple and ends in sexual exploitation. This system made so many people to suffer with diseases like HIV, AIDS etc... and due to poverty. My opinion is that government should provide even more facilities such as providing minimum free education to all children till 14 years and must be mandatory and compulsory. Also high school education should be provided for the children, also monitoring should be done to check the progress and working whether that scheme is working properly or not and also they should give more attention on those people to abolish this Devadasi system though so many laws came into force against this system many people are secretly following this practice. Strict action should have taken against such people. Poverty is another main cause, so the government should recognize such poor areas and provide them basic amenities of food and shelter and pension for who those crossed 50 years, these action will help stop the future generations from continuing this bad & inhumane practice

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