



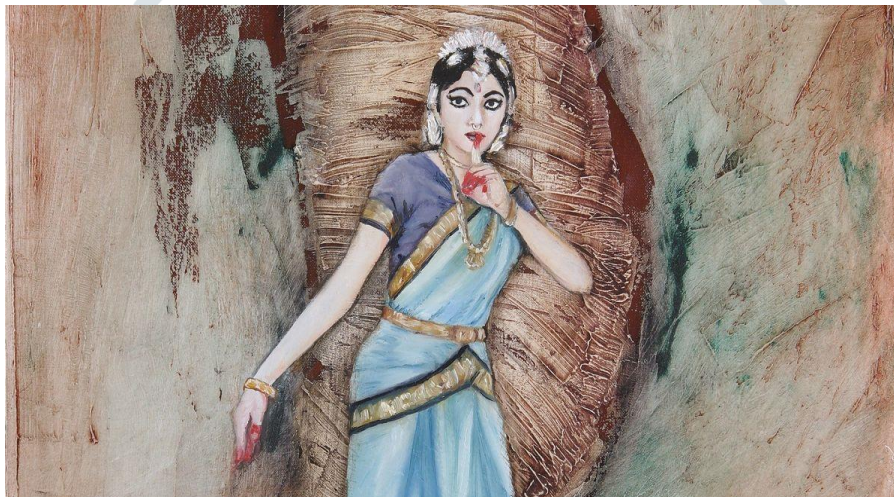
WOMEN'S EXPLOITATION AS DEVADASIS AND ITS CORRELATED EVILS: A REVIEW.

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Abstract:

One of the greatest rates of child sexual exploitation worldwide is found in India, the second most populated country in the world. Though a great deal of study has been done on child sexual exploitation in India and other South Asian nations, there is a notably dearth of legal knowledge on particular practices on the subcontinent. By introducing, clarifying, and making an effort to offer remedies for the devadasi tradition, this paper seeks to close that gap. Low-caste girls, as young as five or six, are "married" to a Hindu goddess and sexually abused by temple clients and people of higher rank in the devadasi tradition. Literally translating to "female servant of God," the Sanskrit term devadasi. The behaviour is especially fascinating and challenging to stop since it results from the intersection of poverty, religion and social standards. In order to address this practice, the paper does the following: (i) examine the historical and cultural foundations of the devadasi system; (ii) discuss the system's evolution to the present day; (iii) concentrate on the reasons why the devadasi practice violates both domestic and international law; and (iv) explain what judges can do to effectively combat the devadasi practice in light of India's current focus on sexual crimes and exploitation in the wake of the 2012 Delhi tragedies.

Introduction:

In India, the Devadasi system is a sociocultural practice with a long history. The Devadasi system was widely demanded to be abolished in the years leading up to Indian independence by Reformists and Revivalists. The British colonial government's anti-Nautch campaign was the catalyst for this. The devotion of young girls as devadasis is still practiced today, despite the fact that several states have since made it illegal. As a result, there is a clear disconnect between official figures and actual circumstances. This article aims to explore the Devadasi system's practice in modern India, particularly in areas like Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, using a combined

descriptive and evaluative analysis. The study also focuses on the negative aspects of the Devadasi system, specifically prostitution as well as begging. In Indian mythology, the devadasi has taken on diverse forms throughout history. As the "handmaiden of God," a devadasi lived up to her name by being respected and esteemed in society. However, because the Devadasi system highlighted a societal practice that was morally repugnant, the societal Reform Movements aimed to remove it. The removal of royal patronage and temple subsidies accompanied the clarion cry. The devadasis were compelled to choose alternative careers due to this economic factor. Because prostitution and begging were accepted and sanctioned professions under the Devadasi system, they were widely adopted. In modern India, the devadasi is represented by a corroded form that conceals her creative and intellectual achievements. The Sanskrit word "devadasi" refers to a female deity's servant or handmaiden. In various parts of India, they are referred to by different names, including "Maharis" in Kerala, "Natis" in Assam, "Basavis" in Karnataka, and "Bhavanis" in Goa, Jogini or Bogam, in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, "Kudikar" is found on the west coast; in Tamil Nadu, "Thevardiyar"; in Maharashtra, "Murali," "Jogateen," and "Aradhini." According to Pradeep and Manjula, in Karnataka, younger devadasis are referred to as 'Basavi' and older devadasis as 'Jogati'. The word Devadasi means "servant of God" in literal translation, and it has a long history as a sociocultural practice. The mythology surrounding Renuka, the mother of Parasurama and the wife of Sage Jamadagni, also dates back to prehistoric times. It is an unbroken legacy that stretches from myths to historical accounts to the present day. But throughout the ages, the devadasis' elevated social status has eroded, and the accomplished divine and royal courtesans have become little more than lowly prostitutes and beggars.

Key Words: Exploitations, Devadasi, sex, Caste, Prostitutes.

Devadasi System Worldwide:

In 611 AD, the temple was attended by seven dancing girls, eleven vocalists, and four violinists, according to the Ankor Borei Inscription of Cambodia, also known as ancient Kambuja. It was customary for the aristocracy of Arsmenia to use their single daughters to serve the goddess 9 Anaitis. Information regarding the Babylonian devadasi tradition is available. The goddess was named Ishtar, and devadasis were chosen to represent her. Girls are designed to sit in the temple, where anyone can toss silver dollars and take the girls with them. At that point, the girls belong to the man purchasing them, and he has the right to engage in a relationship with them. Additionally, Marco Polo mentioned that their parents had devoted them to the gods. He claims that "up to that marriage, the parents kept their daughter with them for dancing rituals in the temple on significant festive occasions. The practice of marrying girls to the god "Amman" was also common in Missore, which is regarded as one of the world's oldest civilised nations. "There was a document called Great Harris Papyrus in which there was description that Ramesis III donated 84,486 servants and devadasis, etc. And many landed properties to the temple of Amon,". The devadasis were invited to the Temple of Apple and Sun God in Greece, where they performed a dance that was appreciated by the temple officials, monarchs, and other influential individuals. Evidence suggests that dancing girls were present at the temples dedicated to Juno, Venus, and the Jews in Rome, where the system was also in use (Mishra, 2014). Temple ritual dance has a long history of being performed during religious services. The practice began and flourished in India in the early mediaeval era, but it was in place in Mesopotamia (Iraq), Egypt, and Greece several thousand years earlier. Dancing females swarmed the temples of Osiris and Isis in Egypt. In Corinth, Greece, the shrine of Aphrodite was linked to thousands of women. This was a common practice in Cyprus, Babylonia (Iraq), and other nations. Every temple in Sumer, Iraq, had lovely women affixed to it, representing the god's family.

Pan-Indian Presence of the Devadasi System:

As early as 300 A.D., some regions of India were home to the Devadasi system, which involved dedicating young girls to temples. It emerged as a recognised establishment in Hindu by the year 700 A.D. (Basham 1959:185–86). The Devidasi system dates back to the fifth century AD. Some allusions can be found in Skanda Purana. It is certain that devadasis were there and that they used to serve the gods by dancing at festivals and rituals according to the "Purushottam Ksetra Mahamtya" found in the Skanda Purana and Bamadeva Samhita. A devadasi was a complex character in ancient times, having occupied the roles of "priestess of love," "surrogate of earth mother," and "respected for being close to godliness." (Kopf, 1993). The functions of a Devadasi in daily life and in temple rites are contextualised by Saskia C. Kersenboom in her landmark study,

Nityasumangali: Devadasi Tradition in South India. Kersenboom highlights how a Devadasi balances two opposing forces of a "life enhancing, fertile" and auspicious aspect as a nitya sumangali and a "life destroying, deadly" component as a ceremonial woman, citing the Devadasi as a multivalent idea. (Kersenboom, 1987). The Vaishnavites referred to devadasis by the term Emperumandiyar before to 966 AD. The term appears in the inscriptions found in the 1230–1240 A.D. Vishnu temples. Devadasis were connected to the decline Buddhism's decline, and there are numerous claims that the Buddhist nuns were devadasis. "The belief is that the Devadasis are the Buddhist nuns who were reduced to the status of prostitutes when Brahmins took control of their temples during the period of their rebirth following the fall of Buddhism." (Colundalur, 2011) But since this claim hasn't been supported, its applicability is under doubt. There are descriptions of the dance ceremonies in several Indian inscriptions. King Haribraman of West Bengal employed dancing females at the Ananta Basudev temple. In Yogimara's stone inscription Cave (3rd century B.C.), Bhujabeswar Temple (975 A.D.), Kalipadaswami Temple (1018 A.D.), Brahmeswar Temple (1053 A.D.), Megheswar Temple (1070 A.D.), Sovaneswar Temple (1080 A.D.), Narendreswar Temple (1083 A.D.), Mukhalingam Temple (11th century A.D.), Jaladiswar Temple (1144 A.D.), Agastiswar Temple (1158 A.D.), Laxmi Nrusingha Temple of Simanchalam (15th century A.D.) and Sri Jagannath Temple (16th century A.D.) there were some evidences of dancing rituals or the devadasi traditions" (Mishra, 2014).

Devadasis Categories:

Traditionally, there were seven categories used to group them. They are as follows:

1. Alankara 2 Gopika 3 Rudraganika 4 Dutta, 5 Hruta, 6 Bikrita, 7. Bhrutya.

These classifications show the Devadasis's status and place of origin. She is referred to as a "Dutta Devadasi" since a holy father offered his daughter to a temple as a Devadasi. However, a woman who was abducted and then hired by a temple is referred to as "Hruta Devadasi." A woman may be referred to as "Bikrita Devadasi" if she was sold to a temple administrator or priest. A woman is referred to as a "Bhrutya Devadasi" if she willingly worked as a Devadasi at a temple. "Bhakta Devadasi" are women who have selflessly donated their services to the temple out of devotion.

The Devadasi System and Indian Domestic Law:

In 1924, the Indian government made the practice of dedicating girls for the purpose of Prostitution is prohibited. Since then, some Indian states especially those in the South have enacted a number of laws that are expressly directed against the devadasi system. The Bombay Devadasi Protection Act (also known as the "Bombay Act") was the first regulation to be targeted. It was passed in 1934. Regardless of whether the girl was consecrated with or without her consent, the Bombay Act made the practice illegal. Throughout the 20th century, similar regional bans were passed in various parts of South India, such as the Karnataka Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act of 1947 and the Madras Devadasi (Prevention of Dedication) Act of 1947. The Maharashtra Devadasi (Abolition of Dedication) Bill of 2005, which was most recently passed, followed by the Andra Pradesh Devadasi (Prohibition of Dedication) Act of 1988 in 1982.⁵³ With regulations targeted primarily at regions of the nation where the devadasi practice is still prevalent, these Acts essentially criminalise the practice nationwide.

Present Situation of Devadasis:

Prostitution is described as "the act or practice of a person, female or male, who engages in sexual relations with a number of persons, who may be of the opposite or same sex, for some kind of reward monetary or otherwise." (Nag, 2001) Singing and dancing in the temples gradually became less common, and devadasis were closely associated with prostitution. Following the devotion, some devadasis entered the prostitution business in their homes and villages, while others entered the commercial sex market. The Joint Women's Programme for NCW conducted a survey among 375 devadasis in Bangalore, and the results show that 63.6 percent of adolescent girls were coerced into becoming devadasis because of the 38 percent of respondents said there was a history of devadasis in the family. Forty percent of the devadasis worked in the commercial sex sector, while the remaining individuals were employed in the communities. In their villages, these devadasis were regarded as "Public Property." Sixty-five percent of devadasis were linked to their patron, and the bulk of them were single. Remarkably, 95.2 percent of Devadasis are parents, and 95% of them were unable to register their

patron's name as the child's father at the time of the child's school entry. Most Devadasis make less than Rs. 1000 a month. According to historical research, the Devadasi system was a component of the society. In order to appease the gods, many impoverished people pledge their daughters to the Devadasi system, which is becoming a kind of open prostitution (Colundalur, 2011).

Contributing Factors:

Every social issue has a few elements that make it easier to solve, and these elements come from society as a whole. These elements, in general, come under economic, social, cultural, and religious circumstances. Numerous causes contribute to the dominance of the "Devadasi system," one of the worst societal evils. Each subsection discusses the literature that has been written so far about the important elements. The severity of the contributing elements determines how they are arranged.

Caste System:

The Devadasi method is mostly used by members of lower castes.

The literature also demonstrates that poverty and lower caste are strongly correlated, compelling parents to commit their daughters as devadasis. According to Evans (1997), the Devadasi system is perceived as a societal issue that primarily affects the Scheduled Castes, and the majority of non-Brahmin communities practise this dedication. Still, some individuals from higher castes dedicate their daughters as devadasis. Upper class women occasionally committed themselves to avoiding becoming widows (Rout, n.d). According to Anil (2002), devadasis are often either from a caste or society that practices the Devadasi system as a way of life, or they come from a family where dedication is a generational habit. According to a study referenced in Omvedt, G. (1983), dalits make up more than 90% of devadasis who engage in prostitution. According to the National Commission for Women's (NCW) report, which was quoted in Colundalur (2001), Omvedt (1983) was supported by the results of this survey, which estimated that there were 2500 devadasis all of whom are dalits living along the Karnataka–Maharashtra border. Only certain subcastes of the Dalits continue to practise the devadasi heritage. Particularly, among Schedule Caste girls, the Holers, Madars, Sambars, and Madiga subcastes along the Karnataka–Maharashtra border consecrate daughters as devadasis. The Schedule Tribes and Schedule Castes comprise the majority of devadasis. Additionally, the survey shows that 7 percent of respondents are from Scheduled Tribes and 93% of those questioned belong to Scheduled Castes (Black, 2007). According to "Jogan Shankar," a pioneer in the study of the Devadasi system, the higher class developed the system in order to take advantage of the lower class (Colundalur, 2011). In the Dalit community nowadays, the custom is widespread; only women from Dalit households are devadasis. Upper class people were also heavily influenced by the Devadasi system in the past, but in the early 1900s, educated upper class people rebelled against the system (Law Making, Cultural Shifts and Life of Devadasis, n.d).

The state of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Plans for devadasis are few in (Andhra and Telangana). Nonetheless, the Andhra Pradesh Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act, 1988 outlawed the devadasi practice. The Act makes dedication a crime that is punishable by law and is not subject to bail. The Act also specifies the district management's responsibilities with relation to prevention. In 2015, a comparable law known as the Andhra Pradesh Devadasis Prohibition of Dedication Rules 2015 was passed. The Act includes provisions for devadasis relief and rehabilitation, unlike the previous one. According to the Act, the government must finance preventive initiatives and give devadasis access to housing, education, and other resources.

Conclusion:

Devadasi, a woman who serves the patron god of the major temples in Eastern and Southern India, is part of a group of women who make this commitment. The majority of the temples used the Devadasis system. To marry gods and goddesses and dedicate oneself to them and their rituals for the rest of one's life is to become a DEV (GOD) or Dasi (slave). In addition to aiding in temple rites, Devadasis have existed from the time of the Ancient Vedas. They were also known to praise the gods by dancing and singing. A family gave their younger girl kid to the temple as part of this religious tradition. Devadasi had a high social status and were referred to as "divine girls." As time went on, the system evolved and they came to be employed as sex obligations for

members of upper castes and classes. A significant portion of females from lower castes and tribes are compelled to participate in this practice under the guise of religion, and some do so because Devadasis ran in the family.

The women who provided this kind of service gradually started to be seen as members of a different social class. A few of them devoted their entire lives to serving their masters, who provided for them. They gradually gained proficiency in dancing and other fine arts, to the point where music and dance were included in temple rituals as a way of serving the gods. This system of presenting oneself to the world as followers of God and their own rulers in everyday life did not originate in any one nation or area but rather took on global dimensions. Throughout history, this approach has been popular in many regions of the world.

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