

Devadasi System in Chalavadi Community

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Abstract – The Chalavadis are a sub-sect of the Holayyas, Among them, the Devadasi system appears to be the norm. Devadasi means worshipper of God, servant of God, servant of the temple. The Devadasi system of offering females to the temple has an ancient history. In India, there have been instances of this practice from the Vedic period. In Skandapurana, Shiva Purana there are references of Devanarthaki and Ganika. This practice was in existence in Kerala, Assam, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh as well as in Karnataka also. In Andhra, these were called as the Bhogamagalulu means the woman for lust. In Kerala, these were called as maharis, in Asam natis, in Maharashtra muralis, in Karnataka as jogatis. This practice was not limited to India but was also practiced in Africa, Syria, Babylonia, Egypt, Greece, Peru, Mexico, Japan and Rome. Worship of the deity was common in all these countries, as a symbol of fertility and there was a belief that the whole flora and fauna will be protected by this practice. The temples were supposed to be the site of the great work of regeneration. It was an agreed ritual to sacrifice these female angels. Offering girls in temples as a symbol of fertility and sacrifice and using them for sexual service was the norm. Thus the prostitution, which was closely associated with the temple, was sanctified. (Prof. R Sunandamma, page no. Mahila Kanunu Parihara, 2017)

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the practice of Devadasi has gradually transformed into a system of exploitation of women belonging to certain backward castes.

If a child has some odd tangle in her hair, or somebody in the family got sick, or if the girl was the only child in their family, there was a hidden intention of sustaining her in their family, or the family got a disabled child, or if the family had no male child, they gave their girl child to the temple or leaving the child as devadasi. This was a very bad system and now a days also, this system is in existence. In some of the temples, in this system, the worshipper or the pujari, will tie pearl in the child's neck. This is called as Muttukattu. From that day the girl will be left for God. Women who are devoted to God cannot marry. The upper-caste males who perform this ritual of worship, may have a relationship with the woman. Children born out of that relationship cannot get his name or property. As long as they have a relationship, they get a little money and the necessary things. The relationship can be broken at any time. If the man leave her or die, she can have another relationship. So, many women will satisfy the people with sex and make money for their living. To study and report on the status of sex workers, the committee was constituted by the Government of Karnataka under Jayamala's presidency. The quote in the report given by that committee is relevant here.

"In all societies even though the sexual relations are in force, there is a variation depending on the nature and nature of society. In our society, caste based hierarchy is in force. So, in the lower castes there is a very high proportion of sexually abused women. The Devadasi system of offering the daughters of the clans of Madiga, Holey, Nayaka castes have been in force since ancient times. Girls who have become Devadasis after the ritual of Muttukattu at a very early age cannot marry. It is customary for the upper caste men of the village to make her the ritual uditumbu upon her puberty. If he left her for some causes, she has to lead a life on sex business. In the present situation, the ritual of muttukattu is like a permit for sex business. Countless low caste females have come to this quandary without becoming devadasi..." (P. 57, Study of the Status of Sex Workers, Report of Dr. Jayamala Committee, 2017)

Despite years of implementation of the Devadasi Act and several plans and programs for their rehabilitation, this practice is still alive in some lower castes. The studies of the situation of women in chalavadi community who have undergone devadasi practice are as follows:

Table-1: Devadasi system among the Chalavadi Women:

Sl. No	Existence of Devadasi System	Number	Percentage
1	Yes, exists	51	10.2%
2	Not exists	449	89.8%
	Total	500	100

The table shows that out of the 500 chalavadi women interviewed for this study, 10.2 per cent of the chalavadi was in the Devadasi system. This study reveals that poverty, lack of education, and superstition still persist in the community which leads these people to accept the devadasi system. The following two case studies reveal the status of devadasi women in the chalavadi community.

1. The case

Forty-five-year-old Shivamma is from Kannur village in Bijapur taluk. Her father and mother had no children for about five years after their marriage. A daughter was born from the grace of God, they prayed. After that, they got another male child. Shivamma was beautiful to look at. So Shivamma's aunt, who was a gharwali in Bombay, asked her mother to send her when she was three years old. Since the couple has got a daughter after so many years of their marriage, her mother was not intended to send her and she also know what would happen to her daughter. Her husband, however, is reluctant to send his daughter to her older sister. When she was 10, her aunt tied pearl in her neck and made her a devadasi. The Gowda of their village also was interested in this bad deed. Even her parents also were discouraged by their poverty.

Shivamma's aunt forced her to engage in prostitution in Mumbai at her tender age of 12. Shivamma, has spent four years there, could tolerate the violence of the men. She came back to her hometown and stayed with her father and mother. But due to family finances, she, again, involved in the prostitution in the Almatti dhaba, where the devadasis of her own town were engaged in prostitution. There she had a relationship with an employee of a transport company. He preferred her to marry. But he was a married man and also has children from his first marriage. She agreed to be with him alone. So, she left the profession and was living with him from so many years. Now, she got four children by this relationship, three female and one male children.

Shivamma sent her daughters to school, though it is difficult in her financial status to send. Two of the three daughters have read up to SSLC. The third was dropping out of school for class 9 as she fell ill repeatedly. The son, who was not interested in going to school, now is working as a labour. She wants her daughters to tie in a relationship of marriage. But grooms were not coming forward to marry her daughters, because she was devadasi. After much

effort, one of her daughters got married. Her remaining two daughters were married to the sons of Devadasi. Her son also got married. Shivamma has taken a loan from the Sangh and also from another source in order to marry her children.

The man who has got marital relationships with her has done nothing but make a little financial contribution to the cost of housing and education. Neither did the children get his name, nor did he participate in the marriages of the children like a father. He is a drunkard also and he quarrels with her every day and night. Still she is carrying life with him. She has built a house from the help of village panchayat. She works as a labour and is accompanied by her mother, brother and his wife.

2. Another case:

Sunanda lives in the village of Tikota in Vijayapura. She is the only daughter for her parents. When she was seven, her father passed away. At the age of 9, her mother made her daughter devadasi and tied the pearl in her neck. She thought that if her daughter marries to somebody else and goes away with him, who is to look after her? Who would have been with her? So in the selfishness she destroyed her daughter's life. A zamindar of the Gowda caste of the same town, got marital relationship with her. In that relationship she gave birth to two sons and two daughters.

She has educated all children by her own ability. One daughter has got education up to PUC, and another daughter to SSLC. One son passed his graduation, and another son up to PUC. Son works at a seed shop in Bijapur. Another son works as a car driver in the same town. All the four children got married. The person, who involved in this marital relationship, gave only a small amount of financial help, such as house hold, education and marriage.

Sunanda is a member of the Devadasi rehabilitation center. She advises the devadasis not to go to the cities and villages to perform the ritual. She introduces all the plans of the government which are beneficial for these women. Devadasi women from the village panchayat have allotted their own houses. Under the Self Employment Scheme, they got loans for buffalo and sheep farming. Devadasis have made available pensions and other facilities. Devadasis are encouraged to quit from their profession and live self-sufficiently. Awareness campaigns have been organized in seven villages in her leadership.

She suffered a lot at her early childhood, by the ignorance of her mother's disgrace as a servant of God, devadasi, she is convinced that no other woman like her should suffer such pain.

After glancing at both of the above cases, it has seen that these girls, at their early age, they had to

suffer a lot by the system of muttu kattu, and become Devadasi. Due to poverty, lack of education, and the patriarchal values of marrying a daughter and sending her to her husband's house-all these causes made the parents to make their daughters devadasi. In the first case, the father's willingness to send his daughter against the mother's wishes is also of male promiancy. Poverty is also a cause for this concern. Even the males who are willing for cohabitation, only eager for the sexual affair with the female, but not so eager to pay for their children or the family expenses. They do not take any other responsibilities, like naming ceremony of the children, or the marriage etc., except a small amount of financial assistance. Here, there is only one advantage. The woman can have affair with only one person. The Devadasi system is a repressive form of the male dominant system, reflecting the caste system.

SOURCE TEXT:

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