



DEVADASI SYSTEM AND ITS IMPACT ON THEIR CHILDREN

KEYWORDS

Devadasi, Victim, Oppressive, Downtrodden

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ABSTRACT

The Devadasi system has existed in India for centuries. It is the practice of ceremonially offering an unmarried girl as a wife to god. Over a period of time this has become nothing more than commercial sex work in the name of god. Children born to such mothers bear the stigma of being 'Devadasi's Children' and lack a father figure. These children are often looked after by their grandparents or care takers because most of them can't stay with their mother. These children miss out on parental care and guidance during crucial periods of their development. There is a need to understand these children's feelings, their opinions about this practice and its impact on them. A purposive sample of three boys and four girls was selected for the study. Unstructured interview was used for data collection. Most of them report that the children got to know that their mother was a Devadasi around the age of 10 years and they felt very sorry about it. They do not blame the mother as they perceive her to be a victim of the system. Themes that emerged in the discussion are these: the children do not want to be labelled as 'Devadasi's children, they want this system to be eradicated and they get perturbed if people ask them about their biological family. Neither the boys nor the girls want their family members to become Devadasi and they feel that it is an oppressive practice. It is certain that there is anger and disapproval towards the society that is responsible for their current downtrodden status.

Introduction

Devadasis are women or girls dedicated to serving the deities as dancing girls at a very young age and are compelled to lead a life of indignity. Devadasis dedicated to the service of gods were regarded as married to those divinities, and therefore obliged to abstain from all intercourse with mortals. Devadasi is a derivative of two words from the Hindu Sanskrit "Deva" (god) and "Dasi" (servant or slave) which has a literal meaning of servant to the god. Women who are into this practice carry a Jag-metal mask of goddess Yellamma in a Paradi i.e., basket on their head when they are out for begging. (Desai, 2012). It is also said that they sing song of the legendary stories of Renukamma and Parashurama which popularly gives the background of origin of Renuka Yellamma practices.

It is called by different terms in different regions such as - Devadasi, Rajadasi, Alankara Dasi, Rudra dasi, Sule, Devasule, Jogathi, Basavi, Nithyasumangali in Karnataka. In Tamilnadu - Devaradhiyar, Nithyasumangali, Chennaveedu, Kannigeyar, Nithyakalyani, Rudra Dasi, Manikattar and Andhra Pradesh - Bhogam Basavi, Sani, Devali, Kalavanthala, Maharashtra - Marali, Bhavin, Kerala - Chakyar, Kudikyar. Orissa - Maharis, Nepal - Dhuki, Madhyapradesh - Bhavin, Kulavanthin .

Prevalence

Current review suggests dearth of research in this area and also poorly documented information about the girls who get into Devadasi system. It has been estimated that there are 25,000 jogins in Andhra Pradesh alone (Council for Social Development, 1990). The number of girls dedicated each year is difficult to know. Most recent documentation available is only of Bassey, (2008), and according to him approximate number of girls dedicated each year ranges between 5,000 to 15,000. According to Desai (2012) at

least one thousand girls belonging to backward community are initiated into Devadasi system every year and over a period of time are pushed into commercial sex work.

Reasons for dedicating a girl child as Devadasi

The girl is born Blind, deaf, dumb, crippled, or has skin ailments or for the wellbeing of the family, poverty, mother was a Devadasi and it is followed from generations, As a religious ritual, father has undergone a successful operation and vowed to dedicate his daughter as Devadasi, if the parents were childless they vowed to dedicate their first child if it happened to be a girl, if there were no sons in the family, the girl child was dedicated and could not marry as she becomes a 'son' for the family earning the family's livelihood (Jaganathan,2013).

Life after dedication

She has to take bath everyday early in the morning and should present herself in the temple during morning worship of Yellamma. She is not allowed to enter the Temple. But she will bow to the deity from outside. There after she sweeps the compound of the temple, every Tuesday and Friday she goes for joga (begging) along with senior jogatis (Shankar,1990). When a girl is dedicated to the shrine of Yellamma after many religious rituals, she is sent to a man who is waiting for her in the shrine of the temple for union. It is believed that from that day the family which has gifted the girl to the deity starts getting the grace of the deity and prosperity. (Jaganathan.,2013). This is also called as Uditumbuvadu or Deflowering ceremony. The deflowering ceremony is conducted after the girl's first menstruation period. One who deflowers her gets right to her over others for the rest of her life but neither she nor the children of such union have any right over him or his property (Desai, 2012). Forbidden to marry or work outside the temple they spend their lives collecting coins from worshippers to support themselves and their religious work (Ghatage.,

2012).

Existence of Devadasi Practice in South India

In Karnataka the practice is found to exist in 6 districts- Raichur, Bijapur, Belgam, Dharwad, Bellary and Gulbarga. In Andhra Pradesh it is prevalent in 14 districts -Karimnagar, Warangal, Nizamabad, Karnool, Hyderabad, Medak, Ananthapur, Adilabad, Chittoor, Rangareddy, Nellore, Nalgonda, Srikakulam and Mahaboobnagar. In Maharashtra the devadasi culture exists in 10 districts- Pune, Sholapur, Kolhapur, Sangli, Mumbai, Latur, Usmanabad, Satara, Sindhudurg, and Nanded. The devadasi community is most marginalised and discriminated group. The practice is historically related to the worship of deities particular by the lower, Madiga caste (Schedule Caste). Extreme poverty and routine discrimination experienced by Madiga families further increases the incidences of dedication (Prasannakumar et al., 2012).

Need for the study-

Devadasi community is a part of our society and the issues related to the Children of Devadasis are not much explored. Most of the studies done in this area are from a sociological and anthropological perspective, the present study makes an attempt to understand their views about their mother, the devadasi system, their aspirations and concerns from a psychosocial perspective.

Methodology of the Study

Objectives -

To understand the views of children of devadasis about their mother, devadasi system and their aspirations.

Research design -

In depth unstructured interview was carried out to prepare the Narratives.

Sample -

Purposive Sample consisting of seven—three boys and four girls was selected. Age range of the subjects was 10-16 years. All the participants were Studying in secondary school at Vimochana School of Rehabilitation, Athani Belgaum District. All the participants were staying in the residential school and during vacation they go to their maternal grandparents' home and these houses invariably are small and about seven to eight members stay in those houses. Mother visits them occasionally and the children are not informed about the mother's whereabouts during her absence.

Data collection procedure -

Data was collected in a single session of 90 minutes. The responses were written verbatim. Observations were documented. Analysis was done using Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Themes that emerged are as follows:

- Sad to know that the mother is a devadasi
- Concern/love for the mother
- Confusion/curiosity to know about the father
- Disapproval of Devadasi system
- Ambiguity about Devadasi system
- A definite career aspiration/goal

Narratives:

The following tables consist of participants narratives which illustrate many of their views on their mother, their aspirations, and their views on the Devadasi system.

1. Sad to know that the mother is a devadasi

Participant	Narratives
Participant 1	When I got to know I was 8 or 9 years, I felt sad as well as bad about it
Participant 2	I was around 8 or 9 years when I got to know First I felt sad about it.
Participant 3	At the age of 8 years I got to know and I felt sad
Participant 4	I was 8 years old when I got to know regarding my mother. I felt sad and also I was upset
Participant 5	I was 9 years old When I got to know I was worried and thought as to why it had to be so.
Participant 6	I was 8 or 9 years when I got to know that my mother was a devadasi, I feel pained when I think of her
Participant 7	I was 9 years old, I felt bad when I got to know that my mother was a devadasi

2. Concern/love for the mother

Participant	Narratives
Participant 1	My mother passed away 2 years ago due to illness but she was caring & loving
Participant 2	She takes care of me very well I don't have any problem
Participant 3	She takes care of me & once in a month she comes to see me.
Participant 4	She gets me clothes & eatables when she comes and wants me to study well
Participant 5	She looks after me well and she works as a sweeper
Participant 6	My mother takes care of me and she loves me
Participant 7	My mother is very caring & wants me to take up a job after I complete my education

3. Confusion/curiosity to know about the father

Participant	Narratives
Participant 1	I asked my grandmother she said he does business in Bombay but I have never seen him
Participant 2	I have been told that he died before I was born
Participant 3	I have been told that he was a Muslim. he used to work in a hotel and he passed away when I was a 15 day old child, as he was not well
Participant 4	Yes he is in Mumbai; my mother legally got married to him one year ago.
Participant 5	I have never heard about my father.
Participant 6	Some times when people enquire about my father I cannot answer, I am confused and do not know what to reply.
Participant 7	I have one, but society won't accept him as father, as my mother is his second wife

4. Disapproval of Devadasi system

Participants	Narratives
Participant 1	The devadasi system should stop
Participant 2	I will ask people not to call my mother Devadasi, because it hurts

Participant 3	I don't know anything about devadasi system.
Participant 4	No ,I don't like
Participant 5	I know we worship yellamma, but I don't know more about this.
Participant 6	I want this system to stop
Participant 7	I don't want others to suffer from this, hence it should be stopped

5. Ambiguous understanding of the Devadasi system

Participant 1	The one who worships god yellamma is called as devadasi it is a practice in my family
Participant 2	I got to know from my friends that, If husband has died she is called as devadasi
Participant 3	I don't know about devadasi system
Participant 4	The one who is given to god will worship yellamma then onwards she is called devadasi
Participant 5	The one who is given to god is devadasi
Participant 6	The girl given to god yellamma is called as devadasi
Participant 7	The one who is given to god due to family practice.

6. A definite career aspiration/goal

Participant 1	I want to become a nurse
Participant 2	I like to become a police.
Participant 3	I want to become a scientist
Participant 4	I want to be an engineer
Participant 5	I like to be a teacher
Participant 6	I want to become a tailor
Participant 7	I want to become a beautician

Conclusion

The children were confused and shocked to know that their mother was a devadasi though they could not comprehend the system in its entirety. The participants have a desire to know who their father is. They have missed out on parental care and affection. During young age they were often looked after by their grandmothers as neither parent will be with them. Neither the boys nor the girls

want any of their family members to become Devadasi and they feel that it is an oppressive practice. There is sure anger and disapproval about the society which is responsible for their current downtrodden status.

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