We have thus far outlined the sociological and anthropological debates which provide a theoretical context for an understanding of the devadasi institution. Before looking at the historical contexts within which this institution existed and changed over time, it will be useful to provide a descriptive account of this institution as it comes across largely from post colonial scholarship and to a limited extent from early historical accounts. There are two reasons why this descriptive account is necessary. First, it gives us the "essence" of the institution in practice. Second, and more important, it demonstrates the necessity of foregrounding the historical context, without which a pure anthropological documentation tends to homogenise historical experience and regional and other variations.

What were the ritual obligations that a devadasi was expected to fulfil? Paes describes the devadasis of a Ganesa temple as follows:

"They feed the idol every day, for they say that he eats; and when he eats women dance before him who belong to that pagoda, and they give him food and all that is necessary, and all girls born of these women belong to the temple. These women...live in the best streets that there are in the city; it is the same in all their cities, their streets have the best rows of houses. They are very much esteemed...any respectable man may go to their houses without any
The ritual obligations that these women were expected to fulfil in the temple in the early twentieth century from colonial government accounts were few and clearly specified. A look at the nature of their duties in the temple provides us with interesting insights into what constituted women's work generally, and whether and to what extent devadasis stood outside the definitional frameworks that applied to married Hindu women of different castes. Tooppu and deepakudamurai were functions women serving in every temple in Ramnad district in the early twentieth century, were expected to perform. Of these, tooppu, literally sweeping, appears to have been their primary function. These women were expected to sweep the inner precincts of the temple (except the sanctum sanctorum and kitchen). In addition they were to carry the utensils used for burning camphor, the oil lamps and plates on which these lamps were placed, to the major shrine as well as the many minor shrines within the main temple precincts every morning and evening before the commencement of puja. During the puja these women were to circumambulate the shrine with the lighted lamps in their hands, in other words perform their second duty in the temple, the deepakudamurai. Finally, they were responsible for
the cleaning of the utensils used by the temple.[2]

We have more detailed accounts of the duties these women perform in contemporary south India. Cayaratcai Puja [dusk puja]. This puja is performed between 4 and 6 pm. The ritual participation of the devadasis in Tamilnadu were concentrated on this puja. The morning and dusk sandhis are diligently observed by housewives too. The dusk sandhi is believed to be particularly portent. At this charged moment, the devadasi was to wave the pot lamp [kumbhadipa] to dispel the evil eye [dristi] from the image in the temple. This lamp should be waved as the last and all other lamps should be extinguished in it. The right to become a devadasi fit for this task and to enjoy the use of the house and lands attached to it was a hereditary one. This task would be assigned to each devadasi family by turns. Each turn generally lasted a year. During the year, that a particular family was responsible for the performance of this ritual, it had to ensure the absolute ritual purity of its house. The devadasi responsible for performing this ritual would also have to observe the rules of purification to the last detail. She would be required to wear the nine yards sari the brahmin way, kumkumam and vibhuti on her forehead, a great number of black bead strings and
her hair tied in a knot. She will then receive the kumbhadipa that has been purified by the priest, rotate it both around the main deity as well as in the other shrines within the main temple precincts. This ritual is performed to the accompaniment of singing of mangalam by the other devadasis of the temple. After the offering of the kumbhadipa, another devadasi would dance the puspanjali [flower salutation]. During this worship devadasis would fan the deity with a fly whisk [chamara].[3]

The evening ritual in the Jagannatha temple in Puri is performed only by the devadasis of the inner division. This ritual, the last in the day before the temple doors are closed, is called the pahuda alati.[4] Three decorated beds are taken out of the storeroom and placed in front of the images of the three main deities on the dais in the inner sanctum. A small portable metallic image of a deity called Sayana Thakura [Lord of Sleep] is also taken out of the storeroom and placed on the bed. The devadasi standing at the entrance of the inner sanctum begins to sing songs from the twelfth century Sanskrit poem Gita Govinda. This poem belongs to the srungara kavya genre and the deities are dressed in the srungara besa. The evening ritual is part of a larger evening ritual that commences with the evening
meal called bada srunagara. While the devadasi is singing, the image of the Lord of Sleep is taken by two brahmins and brought to the gate leading to the dance hall. The icon is that of the ardhanaarisvara. Here the icon is placed on a wooden stand shaped like a damaru [the double-headed drum of siva]. The brahmin priests offer flowers and lights to the image and all the while the devadasi continues to sing. During the whole ritual the lights in the temple are gradually extinguished. The image is then taken back to the storeroom, everyone leaves the temple, and the doors are sealed for the night. The devadasis of the inner division can begin performing this ritual only after puberty. Before puberty but after their consecration to temple service, all devadasis both of the inner division and the outer divisions start performing the dance ritual at the morning meal.[5] To conclude this account on ritual let us look at the agamic account as it is seen in Sadyojatasivacarya's commentary on the Kamikagama. This text distinguishes between three types of devadasis: rudraganika, rudrakannikai and rudradasi. The rudraganika was required to perform the following tasks in the daily ritual. "She must sweep and wash the prakara [circumambulatory] from the mahamandapa to the garbhagrha; adorn it by drawing clearly [a
pattern] with five mixed powders. At the time of diparadhana she should perform the *suddhanrttam* joined with thirty different arts... According to truthful enunciation this is called diparadhana...

At the end of the diparadhana it is necessary to extinguish all lamps in the *purnakumbha*. The *purnakumbha* is the most important of all lamps. It is necessary that a well ordained *rudraganika* performs *lingalayam* [dissolution/absorption of the linga] by means of a black stone that is present. If this is omitted the puja will obtain destruction; the king and the country will perish, *bhutaloka* will come into existence. The lamps should be disposed off via the *acarya* who stands at the side of the *rudraganika*. Thereafter the *rudraganika* must perform *suddhanrttam*. [6]

While one can assume certain continuities between early accounts of this practice and contemporary accounts, the intervening period has been responsible not only for significant changes in the political structure but also for changes in modes of social organisation that must be reckoned with conceptually as well as analytically, precisely because they have preserved the form and hence the appearance of an eternal unchanging structure whose apparent permanence has become its defining characteristic.
Also, contemporary accounts are weighted heavily towards interpretations of the ritual structure. This would at one level be representative of the 'true' content of the ritual but more basically it skirts the question of the socio-political content of ritual.

Puberty Ritual among the Devadasis

On the first sight of menstrual blood the girl is confined in a room for six days. During this period she is on a restricted diet and is considered an untouchable for this period. She does not comb or oil her hair or wear any signs of marriage. There is a specific taboo on her seeing the face of any man. The old woman of the house brings her food and, after the fourth day, bathes her every day.[7] The diet of the girl during this period of seclusion consists of fruit, milk, flattened rice, molasses and no salt.[8] On the morning of the seventh day, the girl goes along with the other devadasis (in the case of non-devadasis the girl is accompanied by married women) to the tank (or a river) in the city. The other devadasis carry with them mahaprasad, bananas and coconuts cut in small pieces, and they also carry turmeric and oil in a pot. At the tank the girl is bathed, and her body is rubbed with oil and turmeric.
She wears all the signs of marriage, and her old garment is given to the wife of the washerman. The food brought is distributed by the other women to children. Everyone then returns to the house of the girl accompanied by drumming and the fifing of the sweepers and the hula huli of the women. At the house the women do a waving lights at her and throwing rice and a kind of grass. Then there is a feast to which all the persons in the devadasi group men and women are invited.[9]

We will now examine dedication rituals from three different contexts to trace both the commonalities and the points of divergence.

The dedication ceremony in the Jagannatha temple at Puri: The ceremony of dedication to temple service is known as the sadhi bandhana.[10] This ceremony is common to all temple servants and is an essential prerequisite for temple service. The consent of the king must be obtained prior to the performance of this service through a petition to the effect. Every new initiate must be introduced by a devadasi in whose name the petition is made out. If the mother of the girl is herself a devadasi, she will petition on behalf of the daughter. In case the mother is not a devadasi, one who is officiates as her mother, or in other words assumes the position of
the foster or adoptive mother. The petition must be accompanied by fifteen rupees. The king’s officers then send out notices to various persons of repute to vouch for the girls’ conduct, knowledge of the performing arts and her caste. If the girl is not the natural child of a devadasi mother, it will be ensured not just that she is not the natural offspring of untouchable parents, but that she is not the offspring of pani sprusya parents, or parents who belong to a caste from which brahmins will not accept water.

Once her eligibility is ascertained, the date for the dedication ceremony is fixed on an auspicious day. "That day the girl takes a bath early in the morning, rubs her body with turmeric, and fasts. She wears new bangles, a new sari, new ornaments and a new blouse. She must then receive an initiatory mantra from the devadasis’ guru. This is called guru dikhya. The girl and the guru sit close together and are covered by a single new cloth. Thus hidden, the guru whispers a mantra in her ear...Her body is purified by this initiation. Without the guru dikhya, the sandal paste mark on the nose (chitta) which has to be worn during the ritual cannot be given. She is then taken to the temple by other devadasis, these being her mother, mother’s
The devadasis considered themselves married to Jagannatha. From that day on they wear all signs of the married woman. Their gotra is the same as that of Jagannatha.

The diksha or initiation seems to have been essential for devadasis who were trained in the performing arts.

Sadyojatasivacarya gives the following instructions for the performance of initiation, marriage and dedication of devadasis.

"The rudraganika should wear her hair in a knot above the collarbone; her waist should be adorned by a saffron cloth that is arranged in the ritually pure way. She should wear the Siva-mark of three stripes of holy ash and the rudraksha as the sole ornament. She should wear a silken blouse. In this way the rudraganika (...passage unclear) the acarya tells: She should endure the casting off of ties; through Sivadiksa she should be released of earthly entanglements. Sivadiksa is a samskara that is performed mutually inside the shrine of Siva while Samayatalam, visedatalam and nirvanatalam are sounded in proper order. He teaches her the pancaksara and ties the golden sign of the linga after having joined it to the tali by way of support. The acarya performs puja for Sadasana, then a two-fold puja, then arcanas by invocation etc. of Paramesvara; he offers dhupa and dippa to the goddess, performs a pradaksina around the villages accompanied by all instruments, and then, after having arranged ten mandalas in the middle of the mahamandapa in the samādi, and having placed the rudraganika with her face to the North, the bottu-that was worshipped as described above should be tied around her neck in an auspicious moment. According to the tradition of he being her guru teacher she should not consider the acarya who has tied the bottu in this way as her own husband; instead, she should place her trust always in the mental image. The bottu should not be tied if there is abundance of rudraganikas in this prakara. If the bottu is tied because of lust, 'heat' in the king, destruction of the king, famine and death will arise. Next day (after tying the bottu) it is necessary to perform aradhana for Paramesvara as referred to above."[12]

This diksa was supposed to be performed before the girl reached the age of eight years.
A contemporary account of the dedication ceremony from Tamil Nadu is as follows:

"When a girl would reach the age of 16, an application to be allowed to become a devadasi would be sent to the king of Karvetinagar. Such a petition...would have to be countersigned by ten priests and ten devadasis employed in the temple which the girl wished to enter. Generally it would take six months before such a petition would be granted. During that time the girl was guarded very strictly; she would not be allowed to leave the house, so that no man could cast an eye on her. The training in dance, song, bharatam and languages would continue indoors. In those days the admission was very strict...After permission was granted, an auspicious day would be fixed for the function called muttipirai [ftnt: lit. branding]...One month before this function the house would have to be kept in an absolutely ritually clean state. If the girl would have her periods within that month, she would have to stay in the house of a relative under constant supervision. Only after her bath (that concludes the unclean period) she was allowed to return home.

Five days before the actual muttipirai another function would be held: gajai puja (worship of ankle bells). This puja would conclude the girl's training in dance. For the first time she would dance with all musical accompaniments, wearing her ankle bells. The dance-master would receive his final fees, and auspicious presents like betel leaves would be exchanged. Food would be served to everyone. Professionally speaking, the girl was now qualified to be accepted in the service of the temple.

On the day of the muttipirai function, the girl would have to observe a fast. Elderly ladies [who have reached menopause] would take presents for the bridegroom to the temple. Among these presents there would be a small cloth for the god...They would be accompanied by musical instruments. The ladies would offer presents to the utsava murti Velayudha, and receive the cloth and flower-garland that was worn by the god from the hands of the priest. From the temple they would bring the kattari (sword, spear, trident) to the home of the girl. All musical instruments would accompany them. The kattari would be taken inside the house and should be installed in a room that was kept especially ‘clean’. Now, the girl would enter, dressed like a bride; she would be given the kattari. Both would be invited to the bridal platform that had been arranged in the house. All traditional marriage rituals would be performed, and finally, an elderly devadasi would tie the ‘tali’...around the girl's neck...After the distribution of rewards for the ritual services the function was over, and the kattari was taken back to its proper place in the house. In the meantime the nattuvanar would have arranged in the hall of the house a navagraha puja. The girl would now appear in a new sari, wearing the pyjama that is used for dance, and adorned by a Kasi potti (marital sign made with sandal paste on the forehead of women, indicating their marital status). After diperadhana the girl would dance regular concert items. After her performance the guests would be offered festive food...
At 19.00 p.m. [sic] the girl would be accompanied to the temple. There, she would dance for the first time puspanjali, followed by a full dance concert, all as part of the diparadhana of the Cuyaratcai puja. Hereafter the mark of the trisula would be branded onto her upper-arm. The guruukkal would hand over the kumbhadipa to the newly ordained devadasi, and she would wave it, for the first time, before the main idol. The function of dedication to the temple would be concluded by the bestowal of all honours on the girl by the temple: she would receive a silken head-cloth... which was tied around her head, a coconut and other prasadam. Finally, she would be escorted home by the full melam (band) of the temple.

At home, the kattari was still in its proper place. In a ritual called garbhndana ('giving of an embryo') the kattari was placed next to the girl on the nuptial bed, while santihoma would be offered by brahmin priests before the nuptial bed, as is usual in all regular marriages. Till the end of the ceremonies the girl would remain fasting. Songs of lali and malanku were sung and sandal paste was offered.

Next morning an elderly lady would first bathe, and then place the sword back in its proper place. After a bath the girl would be allowed to break her fast.” [13]

This would be followed by some more ceremonies.

The girl would then have to wait a month before deciding on her future: Whether she would accept a steady ‘husband’ or would prefer to be a mistress of some patron for a specified period.

Smt Venkatalaksmamma of Karnataka provides us with the following account of the diksha ceremony: At the commencement of the training in dance, the sadhaka puja was held in the house of the guru. The pupil would be between five and seven years old. She would have to bring a new set of pyjama, blouse and half sari; articles for worship of the kuladevata [family gods]. The floor would have to be cleaned, and five shares of paddy would be spread out, drawn in the shape of a swastika. A white cloth would be
spread over the paddy. The guru would lead the child to the white cloth, place her on it and make her perform five dance steps. After this a three fold pradaksina would be made, and a prostration for the guru. At the close of this function the guru received one third of the total of his tuition fee, and sweets would be distributed to those present.

The second stage in the training was marked by a function called otikai [held when the pupil was between seven and nine years old]. For this puja the worship would concern first the musical instruments that accompany the dancer. This would be the first occasion for the girl to dance to musical accompaniment. Only in the following puja would the girl be given her ankle bells or gajjai. The gajjai puja had a two fold purpose. On the one hand it qualified the pupil as a mature artist, and on the other, it introduced her to the life of either a secular, professional artist, or to the dedication as a temple dancer.

Smt. Jejamma gives us the following account of the dedication ceremony in the Siva temple at Muhur. The training in dance was started in the fifth year. This function was called the sadhaka puja. This puja was followed by the Onam puja. Hereafter, dance, music, languages and several other accomplishments
would be taught. After completing the set of basic steps and the first composition called alarippu, another puja was arranged: alarippu puja. This would enable the girls to learn more complicated compositions. The gajjai puja is performed once she has mastered the full concert repertoire. This is the wedding-cum-initiation ceremony which is performed with the assistance of five women who have themselves undergone the gajjai puja. If five such women are not available, sumangalis would perform this ceremony. Amidst a gathering of learned, respectable people of high status, the girl would be made to worship the gajjai placed at the foot of the temple deity. This done, the procession would return home and the gajjai would be tied to the feet of the girl by one of the five women. The girl would then be required to circumambulate the musical instruments and offer the gifts she has received to her guru. The tali or toe ring were completely absent from this ritual.[14]

Finally, let us look at dedication rituals among the 'untouchable' communities in contemporary India. A significant characteristic of the institution of dedication among the so-called unclean castes is that the women are dedicated to goddesses, unlike the same custom in the sanskritic tradition where the women
are believed to be married to the god. Dedication among these castes has attained high visibility in the post-independence period. It is most rampant in Karnataka, parts of Andhra and parts of Maharashtra. In Karnataka, the untouchables are divided into four castes: Samgars, Dhors, Madars and Holeyars. This division is primarily based on occupation. The Holeyars and Madars were scavengers and as part of their caste obligation they were required to dispose of dead cattle. The Samgars tanned the skins of dead animals and the Dhors were cobblers by profession. In the Andhra areas, these women, known as Joginis, belong to the Mala and Madiga castes, and sometimes to the fisherman caste called the Goondla, and the Dommara castes. They are spread all over the Telangana areas of Andhra -- Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Warangal, etc. In Adilabad, Nizamabad, Warangal, Ranga Reddi and hyderabad districts, they are known as Joginis; In the districts of Karimnagar and other places, they are known as Parvathis; in Rayalaseema districts, and parts of Andhra bordering Karnataka, they are known as basavis; in some other districts, such as Nellore and Chittoor they are known variously as Mathamma, Thayamma etc.[15]

While the name differs from place to place, the practice is almost identical. Under the system, the
young girl is dedicated to the services of either Yellamma, Poleramma or some other village goddess. The dedication of a girl is similar to a marriage, like in the case of high caste dedication. The girl in most cases is dedicated before she attains puberty. On the appointed day the other joginis in the harijan colony of the village gather in the girl's house. The girl anoints herself with oil and bathes with water drawn from a well known as Jogula Bavi (jogini's well). She then serves food to all the other women in their begging bowls. Wearing new clothes, she is taken to the temple in a procession. After the priest conducts the worship of the goddess (on payment of certain fees), he gives the arati to her and blesses the 'tali' or mangalasutra which he may or may not tie around her neck. Then the assemblage returns to the girl's house and five glass beads forming part of the 'tali' are tied around the girl's neck. All other women then throw akshata (yellow raw rice) at her like in any other marriage ceremony. The bridegroom's place throughout these ceremonies is taken by a sword.

It would not be true to say that girls from the lower castes were dedicated only to village goddesses. The gods to whom women of the same castes are dedicated are Hanuman, Ganesha, Jamadagni and
Parasurama.[16] 'Kaka' Karkhanis reports the practice of dedication to Hanuman as follows: "...The girls dedicated may not be major. On the day of dedication, the other prostitutes in the Harijan colony are invited to the girl's house. The girl anoints herself with oil and bathes. She then serves food in the begging bowls of all prostitutes. She is then taken to the temple. In the temple some fixed fees are paid to the temple priest. He then worships the deity in the presence of all and gives the Arati. In the Hanuman Temple, the worshipper presses a hot 'mudra' (brand) on the left arm of the girl as a sign that the girl has been dedicated. In some cases the girl is branded on her breast. The crowd then returns to the girl's house and five glass beads resembling pearls are tied around the girl's neck as a sign of her dedication. In the evening the parents of the girl feed the whole community and thus the ceremony is just like the marriage ceremony, the bridegroom's place being taken by the sword. Once she is dedicated the girl is barred from marrying."[17]

We must however be extremely careful in interpreting the lack of divergence not as evidence of the universality of the institution, but as evidence of the fact that the markers and determinants of this institution are located not just
within the ritual structure of the temple, but more importantly in the wider socio-political context. The striking difference between the dedication of Harijan girls and that of upper caste women is that the duties of the former center around death rituals [they are expected to dance before the corpse, before it is taken in a procession to the crematorium], while the latter are indispensable to marriage ceremonies among the upper castes.

The other difference is expressed through the story of Yellamma, a patron deity of the joginis. "A young beautiful Yellamma was the first unwed mother of Indian Lore. As she could not name her husband, her enraged brothers had driven her out of their home. She took refuge in an outcaste community, and for her behaviour and piety, she was admired. She bore a male child who was strong and handsome. Her brothers tried to kill her and her child. Miraculously she escaped their wrath."[18] This escape convinced the community she took refuge in of her divinity, and she began to be worshipped through the dedication of young girls to her service.

Devadasis fall very much within the defining frameworks that circumscribed the existence of married women. The fact of "freedom" or "liberty" cannot be held to hinge on multiple sexual
relationships or freedom of artistic expression. The kinship system among the devadasis, also a matrilineal group, seems to work on similar principles. The important fact about the kinship system of the devadasis however is that matriliny in this group is supported not by polyandry but by a combination of a fictive monogamy and polykoity.

Let us take the instance of devadasis of the Puri temple in Orissa. The kinship system of this group can best be illustrated in contrast to the kinship systems of other temple servants, especially the brahmins. In an exercise of this kind, Marglin sets out the differences between kinship systems of the devadasis and the brahmin pandas in the temple of Lord Jagannath at Puri.[19] A brief consideration of her account may help further our understanding of the complexities and networks that this system is part of.[20] All brahmin temple servants in Puri constituted an endogamous group. Although daughters could marry anywhere in the group except in their father's clan or kula the group was divided on the basis of ritual role which constituted further endogamous divisions. The endogamy of 'the brahmin group' therefore, it turns out on closer examination, is merely a theoretical possibility.

In all there were about ten main ritual divisions
among brahmin temple servants [niyoga] each of which was further divided along lines of kinship principles into at least two clans. The subdivision of each niyoga into clans is probably because birth and death pollute all members of the clan, temple service being prohibited during the period of pollution. This arrangement could therefore be to ensure continuity in temple service. At a practical level the clan becomes relevant only in event of pollution and matrimony.

A temple brahmin household consisted generally of the priest, his wife, married and unmarried sons, their children, unmarried daughters and the concubine of the priest. The last seems to have been a fairly common and accepted part of the household structure and antagonism between the wife and the concubine was not inevitable, suggesting that when there was antagonism, it could very well have been due to incompatible personalities.

A generation ago pre-pubertal marriages were the norm for girls in these brahmin families in Puri, but now there has been an increase in the age of marriage although girls are still married very young, within a year or so of attaining puberty. Marriage plays a role in the lives of hindu, especially brahmin women that cannot be understressed. Marglin's data from
Puri demonstrates that the married state was an equally crucial status marker and symbol of auspiciousness for the men. This has to do primarily with the ritual roles of brahmin men.

Funeral offerings are made three times in the year: on the death anniversary of the father, of the mother and during the dark fortnight of the ancestors in the month of Aswin (Sept-Oct) which is called pitru pakhya. A prerequisite for performing these ceremonies is a wife who will do the cooking.[21] The role of the wife centres on feeding the household and cooking for its ancestors. The welfare of the group depends on her 'proper' behaviour -- by which is meant her safeguarding her chastity. Unchaste behaviour on the part of the wife, is said to cause calamities like natural disasters, disease, fire accidents etc. The wife maintains the household not just through her cooking but also because she is the means by which the kula of her husband will be maintained.[22] It is only after a woman gives birth to a son that her father will accept food in her father-in-law's house.[23]

Viewed in these terms the devadasi immediately becomes unambiguous and can easily be situated within the context of hindu ritual and culture. The absolute devotion and service to the husband that is
required by Hindu scriptural law while excluding women from Vedic ritual on the one hand, on the other redefines women's ritual roles as being her domestic duty/service to her husband/lord. The seed and earth symbolism will here explain the relative 'laxity' [rather legitimate polygamy] on the part of some women -- any man of appropriate station or birth can sow the seed on behalf of god. In serving god their husband, or their husband their god, they are only fulfilling their stridharma. If women allow themselves to be controlled by their ordained function as wives, the condemnation reserved for women no longer applies.

The real beginnings of the devadasi institution can be traced back to the ninth century AD with the establishment and consolidation of the temple institution as a locus of politico-religious control and authority in South India. The antecedents of these temple servants, especially the temple dancers can, according to Kersenboom-Story, be traced back to the bardic performances of the Sangam age. Sangam literature reveals a vision of man's experience with the world he lived in. The direct experience of life, which was the main concern of the poets of this time, could, she says be viewed from two angles: "the inner world of feelings, sentiments and development..."
called *akam* (lit. 'inside, mind, house, sexual pleasure'), and the outer world of human political and social behaviour called *puram* (lit. 'outside, valour, heroism').[24] Both these genres of poetry were recited by professional bards who were employed in the courts of chieftains and kings.[25] Bardic literature provides us with considerable detail on the various kinds of performing artists who existed during the period. Kersenboom-Story traces the antecedents of the devadasis who danced and sang in temples in medieval south India, to the *virali* and *patini* who sang in praise of the bravery of the king in return for which they received presents of "golden lotuses and garlands apart from sumptuous food, drink and clothes."[26] Apart from this they also sang love poetry and at a later stage became couriers of love between the hero and the heroine.

The *virali* and *patini*, the most likely antecedents of the devadasi, were indispensable to the king's fame, strength and erotic life. The transformation of these female bards into professional artists is linked, according to Kersenboom-Story, to a change in their old bardic milieu. It is also possible to trace antecedents of devadasis to the broader category of bardic performers found in Cankam literature."[27]
The violent and aggressive expression of devotion in the Sangam age gradually underwent a transformation and by the eighth century AD, bhakti or devotion began to be expressed through artistic performances rather than aggressive self-sacrifice. This transformation coincides roughly with the emergence of the devadasi as artist. By the early thirteenth century AD both court and temple ritual acquired a theatrical quality that is exemplified in the following account:

"At state banquets both the prince and four court ministers salaam at the foot of the throne. Then the whole company present break into music, song and dancing...; for [the prince's] table and escorts he employs fully a myriad dancing girls, 3000 of whom are in attendance daily in rotation."[28]

Similarly, by this period, temples employed hundreds of women and other classes of servants.[29]

This elaborate temple service which centred as much around the king as around god, continued through the Chola into the Vijayanagara period. Domingo Paes has left us a travel account of the nine day Navaratri festival held in the court of the Vijayanagara ruler around AD 1510.
"There the king sits, dressed in white clothes all covered with [embroidery of] golden roses and wearing his jewels -- he wears a quantity of these white garments, and I always saw him so dressed-and around him stand his pages with his betel, and his sword, and the other things which are the insignia of state. Many Brahmans stand around the throne on which rests the idol fanning it with horsetail plumes, the handles of which are all overlaid with gold; these plumes are tokens of the highest dignity; they also fan the deity with them... In all this portion of the day nothing more is done than this wrestling and dancing of the women, but as soon as ever the sun is down many torches are lit... When the cars have gone out they are immediately followed by many horses... in front of these horses goes a horse with two state-umbrellas of the king... In front of this horse goes another caroling and prancing... being trained in that art... As soon as they are arranged in this way and are all quiet, there goes out from inside the palace a Brahman, [carrying] in his hands a bowl with a coconut and some rice and flowers... and after performing his services he returns to the palace. After this is over you will see issuing from the inside twenty-five or thirty female door-keepers, with canes in their hands and whips on their shoulders; and then, close to these come many eunuchs, and after these eunuchs come many women playing trumpets and drums and pipes... and viols, and many other kinds of music, and behind these women will come some twenty women porters, with canes in their hands all covered with silver, and close to them come women clothed in the following manner... They carry vessels of gold each as large as a small cask of water; inside these are some loops made of pearls fastened with wax, and inside all this is a lighted lamp. They come in regular order one before the other, in all perhaps sixty women fair and young, from sixty to twenty years of age... In this manner and in this array they proceed three times round the horses and at the end retire into the palace." [330]

It must be stressed at this point that the women spoken of in the foregoing paragraphs belong to the upper-class upper-caste cultural context. This is evident to us not only from the description of the women themselves but also from the description of the contexts in which they are situated. Then as now, there were fairly definite caste hierarchies that the literature of the period gives us glimpses of, and it is assumed here that these hierarchies would have
structured the practice of dedication of men and women to deities as much as they do now. Old Hindu works mention seven types of dasis.[31] They are, according to Thurston, Datta [one who gifts herself to the temple]; Vikrita [one who sells herself to the temple]; Bhritya [one who offers her services for the welfare of the family]; Bhakta [one who joins the temple out of devotion, bhakti]; Hrita [one who is enticed away and presented to the temple]; Alankara [one who is accomplished in her profession and decked with jewellery and is presented to the temple by the royalty or nobility]; and finally the rudraganika or gopika who receives regular wages in the temple and is employed to sing and dance.[32]

**Temple Women and Caste**

Although in the above account there is no specification about which kind of devadasi belonged to which caste [or group of castes], it is recognised that there are those women who belong to the right hand division and those that belong to the left hand division. The chief distinction between them according to the 1901 census report,[33] was that the valangai [right hand] dasis would not associate themselves with the kammalans or any of the left hand castes. Both divisions however were to abstain from
any dealings with the lowest castes.

The parallel castes from which these women came from the Telugu areas were the nagavasulus, palli and yerukulas. There were two types of temple women in the telugu areas— the bogams and the sanis. The primary difference between these two classes was that sani men did not provide musical accompaniment to the women while they danced.

The devadasis of Puri are known as maharis and do not appear to have a caste name, although for census purposes this caste, was labelled 'devadasi'. It is significant however, that these women are never referred to as ajatiya, or women without a caste. They did retain a caste status that like their own position was ambiguous. According to devadasi informants in Tamil Nadu, there exists a devadasi vrtti or a devadasi murai but not a devadasi jati. It seems probable that the right to become a devadasi was hereditary. The social position of the devadasi of the twentieth century could perhaps be described as follows: "a woman of melakkaran caste, who has actualised her hereditary right to become a devadasi by the necessary initiation and marriage ceremonies. Hereafter she fulfils all traditional and obligatory tasks in the temple ritual and she enjoys the rights which the
"temple owes her both during her lifetime and at the event of her death."[36] Apart from these women who belonged to the clean castes, there were also women who were dedicated to the lesser gods of the non sanskritic tradition. These women usually belonged to the Madiga caste and are called joginis or jogtins.

Official records of the late nineteenth century, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, make specific mention of these devadasis. The disappearance of this division of classes/castes in the discourse of the movement for devadasi abolition and its reappearance in post colonial society requires serious consideration. The important difference of course is that upper caste devadasis gradually began to converge into a single group towards the end of the Vijayanagar and through the Nayaka rule. What the British found when they came to these areas, therefore is the existence of a fairly cohesive group or "community" of women who were dedicated to temples and for whom there was a proscription on marriage.

This was a historical development that excluded women from "untouchable" castes. Therefore, in early colonial records, we find two communities of women dedicated to temples: the upper caste devadasis and the untouchable devadasis. It is a matter of further
significance that among the lower castes in contemporary India as well as among the class of people sold in bondage to the temple in the middle period, men are also dedicated to the temple.

Again this assertion applies as much to the early historical context in which this institution was located as to the contemporary period. We have numerous instances of men offering themselves and their families in perpetuity to the service of god either as a mark of their devotion to god or in order to clear off their debts, in epigraphic records of the middle period. In contemporary accounts of dedication of women as Joginis, a statement that is made and then rendered marginal to the description of the practice is that men are also dedicated.

In the entire reconstruction of the devadasi system this is one important aspect that has not entered into the analytic framework of power and the nature of control over the bodies and persons of both men and women through history and the role of and coalition between religion and the state in maintaining and perpetuating this control. This factor if considered will also alter our understanding of the nature of patriarchy, from a form of dominance that structures relations between the sexes to a form of dominance that structures, far
more importantly the relations between castes. The difference that we can posit between the dedication of men and that of women is that the control of women involved a control over their sexuality, while we can make no definitive statement on the control over the sexuality of men.

But, did conceptions of gender hierarchies hinge on this difference? Gender, without doubt was a determinant of the various hierarchies that structured society through history. The important question we need to ask at this point is, did configurations of gender necessarily involve the setting up of a universal opposition between men and women, or did they on the other hand set up a series of oppositions between people and groups of people based on dominance and subordination, the opposition between men and women being neither universal nor inevitable? Definitions of masculinity and femininity are not merely coextensive with 'men' and 'women', but extend to include every relation of superordination and subordination. Caste structure then, for us, expresses a series of masculinities and femininities along a series of axes. In conclusion, we can illustrate this series in a set of dichotomous oppositions that are really oppositions between the masculine and the feminine, especially in the nature
of power vested in the categories on the left and the modalities of its exercise:

Upper caste male: Upper caste female
Upper caste male: Lower caste male
Upper caste male: Lower caste female
Upper caste female: Lower caste male
Upper caste female: Lower caste female
Upper caste adult: Upper caste child
Upper caste adult: Lower caste child
Lower caste male: Lower caste female
Lower caste adult: Lower caste child
ENDNOTES


2. See chapter 4.


5. ibid, p. 72.


7. This is not the ritual bath that she is expected to have to mark the end of her polluted state.

8. The absence of salt is interesting. In the wedding ceremony the bride is made to sit on salt and mustard seeds, and during the ritual itself on the wedding platform the bride throws salt and mustard seeds on the groom. The absence of salt in the puberty ritual can therefore be interpreted as indicative of the unfitness of the girl for sexual intercourse. See Julia Leslie, *The Perfect Wife*, pp. 73-74.


10. Literally, the tying of the sari. See ibid.

11. ibid, pp. 68-69.


13. ibid, pp. 187-189.

14. cf. ibid, p. 201.


16. Banhi, p. 11.

17. ibid, p. 12

18. ibid.


20. Although Marglin's account is essentialistic and ignores
the fact that this system is rooted in historical processes and structures of dominance, especially patriarchal, it is rich in ethnographic detail. See ibid.

21. ibid, p.51.

22. ibid, pp. 53-55, passim.

23. ibid, p. 55.


25. ibid, p.6.

26. ibid, p.11.

27. ibid, p.16. For example, atumakal, kontimakalir, mutuvay pentir. For a detailed account of these categories of performing artists, see ibid. pp.12-16.


29. Kersenboom-Story posits a difference between temple dancers and court dancers, that to my mind appears artificially constituted as records right up to the Vijayanagara period point to the fact that women were constantly shifted back and forth from temple to court at the will of the king. A detailed treatment of this aspect is presented in chapter 2.


31. It is important to note that this information is available to us through colonial scholarship, and therefore carries with it the limitations of that scholarship.

32. Thurston, *Castes and Tribes of South India*, p. 125.

33. *Census of India*, 1901.


35. Kersenboom-Story, *Nityasumangali*, p.180. Interestingly, the marumakkattayam system for the Nayars, according to Moore, is a sampradayam --an equivalent of the tamil murai. See Melinda Moore, *"A New Look at the Nayar Taravad"*, p.527.