1.1. Introduction:

Followers of many religions in India as other civilizations worship many gods and goddess as a part of their culture. These gods and goddesses are mostly worshipped by a group of people who are gathered in a place by building an abode such as temples, shrines beneath any tree or above any platform with or without roof. These people consider the deity of the concerned place as their own guardian deity or the one who protects the village from illness and who helps them in their prosperity and goodness of their place.

Though in many places, male gods predominate the settlement, there will be a goddesses in most of the villages as the village deity, also can be called as local deity or Gramadevata. Though there will be “great gods” such as Vishnu and Shiva as the deities in the villages, there will also be a Gramadevata who is considered as one who protect of the village from evil and bad happenings, often these village deities will share the names the deities from the Sanskritised form and will be identified with these deities. This is not necessarily meant that village deity or local deity does not bear any similarities to the “great gods” (Arun Jaganathan, 2013).
A number of goddesses are worshipped in and around villages of South India. They all have several similar characteristics such as they mostly will be female who guard the village, represented by any uncarved stone, tree or a small statue in a small shrine, having direct association with the villagers, non Brahmin priests, curing disease, calming calamities etc. Mostly their names end with “Amman” or simply “Amma” meaning mother. Almost all these goddesses have same kind of myth, cult and worship in one or the other way. Even though there are many types of village goddesses worshipped in the villages of south India, all these seems to have a common base for their origin based on the Renuka myth described in Puranas or any other stories mostly having connection with this myth (Arun Jaganathan, 2013).

Sri Renuka devi or Yellamma devi is famous goddess as the wife of Jamadagni and the mother of Parasurama and her temples are located at Saundatti in Belgaum district and Chandragutti at Shimoga district of Karnataka. The famous temple of Sri Renuka Yellamma in Saundatti at Belgaum district in Karnataka deals with Devadasi system.

Literally, Devadasi means ‘Servants of God or Goddesses’ and the practice of Devadasi was prevailed in ancient India. Currently, though it is banned by law, it is prevailed in North Karnataka, South Maharashtra and South-Western Andhra Pradesh. Under Devadasi practice, girls are
Most versions of Devadasi share key common features. These consist of the dedication of the girl, usually at a very young age; her subsequent ‘marriage’ to the deity; her deflowering immediately after the ceremony or at puberty, usually by a caste elder or a man who has paid for the privilege; and her subsequent availability for sexual use until she becomes too old and unattractive. Devadasi also assume particular roles
in rituals and festivities, including dancing and singing in folkloric or classical traditions. They are excluded from regular marriage (for all practical purposes, despite changes in the law), as they are known as Sumangali, a word meaning ‘already married’. Thus, although they have been through a form of marriage and wear insignia to show this, they are not accorded the status of respectable wives or mothers. Any girl who has been dedicated is vulnerable to sexual exploitation and trafficking; that she is sexually available and free in her favours is socially assumed (Maggie Black, 2007).

When a girl is dedicated to or married not to a mortal man but to an idol, deity or object of worship or to a temple some rite is performed. This dedication ceremony is more or less similar to the marriage ceremony. It is called as Muttu kattuvadu (tying the beads) or “Devarige Bidavadu” (dedicating to the deity). Auspicious days for dedication ceremony take place on full moon day of these months. Unlike old times, such ceremony are now-a-days performed rather secretly without much fanfare at smaller temple or local priests’ residences rather than big temples like Yellamma at Saundatti or Kokatnur to avoid the expenses and also to escape clutches of law. The expenses are borne either by the would be companion or paramour or the “Gharwalis” mistresses of urban brothel where these girls would be expected to join their brothel, (Jogan Shankar, 1994).
Though Devadasi was begun as religious practice, it was become providing service of unmarried girls to the rich and high caste people. Due to modernization, it lost its importance. As such, many of the present Devadasis are working as sex workers or prostitutes in cities. As stated by Ghatage (2012), Devadasi system is not only exploitation of men, women and impotents but it is the organizational exploitation of lower castes Dalits in the religious rituals. Sanction given to prostitution of helpless economically and socially deprived young girls and women; It is the glorification of humiliation of women. Inherent in this system is the fascistic belief that a certain section of human population, the lower caste, is meant to serve the “higher caste’s superior men”. Inherent in it is the feudal-lord-temple-priest-nexus, where the priest, already having a psychological hold over the minds of simple people to the point of dictating their way of life, uses his power to give “religious sanction” to the practice by declaring it “sacred”, and thus cajole and lure simple minded villagers into this worst form of prostitution.

Devadasi practice causes set of social problems to Hindu religion. The original religious nobleness of the tradition, however, has given way to sexual exploitation of young females and the tradition has degenerated into a malevolent social practice. The tradition also acts as a conduit for the supply of young girls and illicit sex trade. Mostly the young men and women from backward castes, illiterate, poor or physically handicapped
are fall victim to the Devadasi tradition. Literacy, poverty, superstitions are the major causes for the continuation of the tradition. Though Devadasi practice is banned legally, still, it is prevailed in different parts of India. The status of Devadasis is vulnerable as they are exploited and harassed sexually in society and even their children are also humiliated and deprived in education due to social stigma associated with Devadasi practice. Hence, the present study is made to explore the problems and challenges of Devadasis by making survey of Devadasis in Bijapur district.

1.2. Operational Definitions:

A few of the terms and concepts used in the present study are defined as under.


Problem : 1. A question proposed for solution or consideration;
2. a question, matter, situation or person that is perplexing or difficult;
3. presenting a problem of human conduct or social relationships

Sociological/ Social : 1. Of, or having to do with human society, its organisation, needs, development, etc.
2. of sociology.

1.3. Statement of the Problem:

Though Devadasi was begun as religious practice to serve the god or deities, by dancing and impressing gods, it was later turned as social
evil. The rich class and elites have misused this practice and exploited the dedicated girls. In this way, the Devadasis have become prey for sexual desires of the rich class and forward castes. Without any occupation for their livelihood, the Devadasis later have turned as prostitutes and many of such Devadasis were exploited and sexually harassed at brothels. Hence, their living has become living hell. Even their children, without father are also facing many of the problems. Realizing this problem, the Government has promoted marriage of Devadasis and formulated Devadasi Rehabilitation Programme (DRP). Further, the Central Government was also banned this practice and the Government of Karnataka was also banned this practice in 1982. Still there is dedication of girls to temples secretly by the weaker sections of the society due to religious belief. Hence, the Devadasis are facing many problems and challenges in society and to look into their problems, the present study is made under the title “Problems and Challenges of Devadasis: A Sociological Study of Bijapur District”.

1.4. Significance of the Study:

Many of the social evils such as Dowry, Child marriage, Devadasi, etc are though banned legally, still they are prevailed in Indian society due to religious beliefs. The lower castes such as scheduled castes and tribes and women of these castes are most exploited by these practices. As such, Devadasi is also such an evil practice, which was started during ancient
times with holy purpose to serve god by girls, by the time it was turned as licensed prostitution in the name of social custom. As such, women from scheduled castes and tribes are sexually exploited by this custom. Realizing this fact, the Government has passed legislation to ban the practice, still the Devadasi is prevailed in society due to religious faith. Even the Devadasis are facing and suffering many of the problems and challenges such as exploitation, discrimination, sexual harassment, domestic violence, children’s deprivation in society, etc. Hence, the present study is proved as significant to explore the problems and challenges faced by Devadasis with special reference to Bijapur (Vijayapur) district.

1.5. Objectives of the Study:

The present study is made:

1. To look into the social and educational background of the Devadasis in Bijapur district;

2. To study the economic status of the Devadasis;

3. To study the self-employment or income generating activities engaged by Devadasis for their livelihood;

4. To look into the problems and challenges faced by Devadasis in Bijapur district; and
5. To study the welfare schemes and rehabilitation programmes of the Government of Karnataka and benefits gained by Devadasis from these schemes and programmes.

1.6. **Hypotheses:**

Following hypotheses are formulated for the present study.

1. Devadasi Practice is disappearing slowly as there are more Devadasis from middle age or old age compared to young age.

2. Devadasi practice is more prevailed among Weaker Sections such as SCs, STs and OBCs.


4. As servants of god, Devadasis are getting more or holy respect in society and having higher status in society.

5. Devadasi practice has become major obstacle for the education of Devadasis.

1.7. **Scope and Limitations:**

As discussed in the methodology, the study is limited to the Devadasis in Bijapur district. As it is not possible for the researcher to select and interview all the Devadasis due to limitations of geographical area and limited time frame, the study is based on sample survey of
Devadasis in Bijapur district. The present study is based on survey total 400 Devadasis in Bijapur district and of which 250 are from rural areas and 150 are from Bijapur city and the other four towns located in the district. The selection of sample, collection of primary data, sampling, etc are discussed in the fourth chapter under the title ‘Universe and Methodology’. Thus, the present study is limited to 400 Devadasis in Bijapur district.

1.8. Chapterization:

The present research report is structured into seven chapters with two appendixes as under.

The first chapter provided brief background information to the research topic. Here research problem is clearly defined. The importance of the study is discussed. The clear aims and objectives are discussed. The scope and limitations are set in this chapter. The list of hypotheses is given. The first chapter will be written under the title “Introduction to the Study”.

Before conducting the present study, it is necessary to know about the research gap in the studies that are already conducted. Hence, the studies already conducted and published already in the secondary literature such as research papers, books, journals, articles, conference and seminar
papers that are published are reviewed in the second chapter under the title “Review of Literature”.

It is essential to study the Devadasi practice since ancient times and also needed to examine the present conditions of the Devadasis in India. Hence, based on the studies, which are already made are needed to be used to write theoretical background. In this regard, third chapter is written under the title “Devadasi Practice in India: An Overview”.

Location or Area or universe plays an important role in the status and development of the people. As such it is also applicable to the Devadasis in Bijapur district. Hence, there is need to study on the Bijapur district in particular. The fourth chapter covered the area, demography, population, literacy, education, employment, occupation, environment, etc of the Bijapur district. Further, it is essential to present the step-by-step methods and activities that are followed while conducting the present research study. These steps and stages that are followed during the present study are also need to be discussed. As such, fourth chapter covered these aspects under the title “Universe and Research Methodology”.

The present study is sociological and made to look into the social problems of Devadasi. Hence, it is essential to analyze the social background of the Devadasis in Bijapur district. In this regard, the
collected primary data on social background of the Devadasi is analyzed and discussed in fifth chapter under the title “Social Background”.

The prime focus of the present study is analysis of problems and challenges faced by Devadasis in Bijapur district. Hence, the problems and challenges related to socio-economic, health, education, religious, etc of the Devadasis in Bijapur district are collected. The collected primary data on problems and challenges of Devadasis are analyzed and discussed in sixth chapter under the title “Problems and Challenges of Devadasis”.

After the analysis and interpretation of the primary data, certain findings are derived from the study and summaries of the study should be stated. Useful suggestions are given for the development and rehabilitation of Devadasis in Bijapur district. Further, the research study is concluded. Hence, the seventh chapter is written under the title “Findings and Conclusion”.

Apart from the above stated seven chapters, two appendixes are given at the end covering Bibliography and Interview Schedule. The research papers, books, Journal articles etc. that are used and relevant to the present study are listed in appendix-1 under the title ‘Bibliography’. The Interview Schedule used to collect Primary data is given in appendix-2.
1.9. References:


