CHAPTER-II

Review of Literature
Sociological studies on Mathammas or Jogins or Bassavins are very few. Some ethnographers like Edger Thurston (1909) who have given the description of the culture of Mathammas present a brief account of the origin of Mathammas. However few information was recorded and available in the form of official papers, census reports, district gazetteer, monographs and village records.

But some of the books have been written on the status of women and Devadasis in India.

Women's studies conducted in India may be classified under four categories:

1. Under the first category there are studies that deal with the position of women in society. Most of these studies portray the position of women in the Indian society through the ages. They also attempt to pinpoint the main trends of change. Some of these studies have also tried to understand factors responsible for the change in the position of women. Important among this group of studies are Altekar (1956), Hate (1948), Cormack (1961), D'souza (1975), and Mies (1980).

2. The second area of research in the field of women's studies focuses attention on the problems of the working women. The problem confronting women have been studied from various perspectives and at different levels. Studies on the educated urban working women are abundant. In contrast, however, studies on illiterate women engaged in unorganized sectors and in low prestige occupations like agricultural labour and construction work include Abraham (1980), Nath (1968), Kala Rani (1976) and Mahajan (1966).
3. The third category relates to the women's movement and feminism in India. Studies in this area are very limited in number, because an independent women's movement emerged around seventies and is slowly gaining momentum. This is further accelerated by establishment of All India Women's Organisations such as programmes and 'manini'. These Organisations started propagating the cause of emancipation of women 'Manushi', and other feminist journals have been established. Another pioneering attempt is being made by 'Shakti Books' devoted solely to publish studies on women. A few studies focusing attention on women's movement and feminism are Kaushik (1985) and Everett (1978).

4. The fourth area of research on women concerns itself with certain social issues determining the general status of women in our society. The social issues include dowry, divorce, rape, inheritance and prostitution.

E. Thurston (1909) in his book, Castes and Tribes of Southern India, has dealt with the Devadasi system.

Cooper Elizabeth (1915) in his book, The Harim and the Purdah, observed that Devdasis, who were attached to the temple, were taught reading and writing, and playing on musical instruments and they made themselves attractive and charming to men.

Dubois (1924) in his book, Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, refers to the illicit relationship, which existed between the Devdasis and the Brahmins of the temples.
Davis Kingsley in his book, *The Population of India and Pakistan*, writes that only half of male workers are engaged in traditional occupation. The Census of India, 1921 reveals that Madigas were untouchable castes, tanning was their traditional occupation.

Hauswirth, Frieda (1935) in his book, *The Halla and the Purdah*, states that the duty of Devdasi was to dance and sing once or twice a day before the image in the temple or when it was carried in procession through the streets.

A.S. Altekar (1939) has stated in his famous book, *The Position of Women In Hindu Civilization*, that Indian women in the distant past had a higher status than in more recent times. Women once enjoyed considerable freedom and privileges in the spheres of family, religion and public life, yet, over the centuries, their position changed adversely. This better position prevailed more specifically in the Vedic age, when women played a more active economic role and participated in rituals.

R.N. Dandekar (1953) has stated this and many times he has expressed the contradicting views pertaining to women and their religious status in Hinduism. He states: man's religious life is consolidated to be essentially deficient without his wife's active participation in it. Without a wife the psychological and moral personality of man remains imperfect. She is constant companion in his religious life, preparing for him and sacred articles used in worship accompanying him on pilgrimages, present at all ceremonies and finally, in her role as the mother, woman is regarded as divine, respected many times more than the father and the teacher.
Karkhanis (1959) in his book, *Devadasi: A Burning Problem of Karnataka*, has dealt with the customs of dedicating Harijan girls to family deities as 'servants of god' Devadasis- and then forcing them to prostitution to earn their livelihood.

Patwardhan (1959) in his book, *The Marriage of a Classless Society*, states that sex differences arose at the time of assignment of the married couple within a particular group or a caste. For, it would amount to accepting the pattern of an Anuloma marriage, i.e., marrying of low caste female by high caste male, wherein the children would certainly inherit traits from both the parents but it was more easy to find out the origin of the offspring through the mother rather than the father.

Viyogi Hari (1960) in his book entitled, *Devadasi E.K.Samasa*, wrote on Devadasis in a Hindi Journal Antyodaya and supported the views of Karkhanis and discussed in greater detail the universality of the problem in India, the role of police in its prevention, etc. He suggested concrete measures to prevent Harijan girls and young women becoming prostitutes.

Punekar (1962) in his book, *A Study of Prostitutes in Bombay*, described the significance of dedicating a woman, the object of sexual pleasures, to a temple was to offer such pleasures, to a temple, was to offer such pleasures to the presiding deity of the temple in order to invoke his blessing. Hence a dedicated girl is considered to be the bride of the God of the temple and therefore she is barred from marrying.


Spiro (1966) says according to Manu, *Hindu Caste System*, was mainly divided into four major categories namely (1) Brahmins, (2) Kshatriyas, (3) Vaisyas and (4) Sudras. These caste groups were classified according to their vocation in life.

L.S.S.O. Malley (1968) in his book, *Modern India and the West*, says that Devadasis are in theory a profession of holy women dedicated to the service of some god, to whom they are united in symbolic marriage and before whom it is their duty of singing and dance.

Sachidananda (1971) in his book, *Studies of Scheduled Castes With Special Reference to Change*, wrote that in Madhya Pradesh, the Chamars of Satnami sect took to agriculture in the last century and tried to raise their status. The Satnami movement was directed against the caste system, and often, the authority of the Brahmins. As a result of this the Satnami women began to wear nose-rings simply to spite the Hindu social order as these ornaments were supposed to be the traditional privilege of high-caste Hindu women.

objective of that study are to present a comprehensive historical perspective, of the profession, socio-economic and cultural back ground and attitude of the society towards “Devadasis.”


Bowrey in his book, A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal, refers to the Devadasis. These dancing women have a privilege above all others in these Eastern parts, causeth such multitudes to endeavour to attain to such employs, where they may enjoy earthly pleasures enough without any scandal to themselves or relation.

Bernier says: In front of the chariot, and even in the deities or idol temples, public women dance during the festival days and they throw heir bodies into a variety of preposterous and indecent postures, which the Brahmins deem quite consistent with the religion of the country.

Beveridge in his book, Ma athir-ul-amara, writes that Courtesans whose business in life was to dance in the temple and at public ceremonies, and the prostitutes were the only women who were allowed to learn how to read, sing or dance.

B.R. Patil (1974-75) in his book, The Devadasis, states that the pleasures of these Gods were different. They loved ablutions, ornaments, flowers, good food and above all, music and dancing. It was for the pleasure of these gods and their wives that the temple dancers or the dancing girls were first employed in the temples in India.
James Frazer, (1977) in his book, The Golden Bough, the famed anthropologist, has traced in origin of sacred prostitution to the ancient custom of worshipping earth or Mother Goddess. He concludes, a great mother goddess, the personification of all the reproductive energies of nature, was worshiped under different names, but with a substantial similarity of myth and ritual by many people of Western Asia; that associated with her was a lover or rather a series of lovers, divine yet mortal, with whom she mated year after year, their commerce being deemed essential to the propagation of animal and plants that the union of the divine pair was imitated and multiplied on earth by the real, though temporary, union of the human sexes at the sanctuary of the Goddess for the sake of thereby ensuring the fruitfulness of the ground and the increase of man and beast.

Trivedi (1977) in his book, Scheduled Castes Women: Studies in Exploitation, put forth a similar explanation for sacred prostitution with a slight variance when the quotes Edwards saying. The fertility of the soil depended also upon the periodical marriage of the Mother Goddess with a male consort, the cult of this divine pair is found in varying forms all over India and supplies the basis of sanctified harlotry in vogue at some of the larger shrines. The sacred prostitutes attached to the temples were perhaps regarded as the wives of the God and in their licentious intercourse they limited the licentious conduct of the Mother Goddess, for the express purpose of ensuring the fruitfulness of field and trees and of man and beast.

V.V. Nandini Rao, V.V. Prakasa Rao (1982) in their book entitled, Marriage, the Family and Women in India, discussed the status of women in detail.
B. Joardar (1984) in his book, *Prostitution in Historical and Modern perspectives*, writes that in the Chola period, the institution of Devadasis was very well organized. Most temples employed Devadasis who provided music and dance performances within their precincts. It is mentioned in one of the Tanjore inscriptions of Rajaraja dated A.D. 1004, that he ordered the transfer of temple women from the other temples in the Chola country to the Srirajarajeshwara temple.

F.A. Marglin (1985) in his book, *Wives of the God – King*, writes that the Jagannath temple of Puri too followed the custom of dedicated girls to the Lord and even today there are a few Devadasis there. The Devadasis of Puri are called both ‘Ganika’ as well as ‘Vesya’. Some of them speak of themselves as ‘earthly apsaras’ the ‘apsaras’ being the lovely women dancers and singers who adorn the court of the king of Gods, Indra.

Malik Muhammad Jayasi also refers to a class of public women, who were extremely proficient in playing on veena (a musical instrument). He writes that audience lost its senses and was totally overwhelmed.

Jogan Shankar (1990) in his book, *Devadasi cult*, points out that Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* does have a chapter dealing with superintendent of Prostitutes (Ganikadyaksha), his duties and privileges. A clause states that, “all the rules prescribed for ganikas were also applicable to dancers, actors, singers, musicians and pimps”. But we do not find any mention of temples in this context.

A.K. Singh (1990) in his book, *Devadasi System in Ancient India*, gives an explanation that “the deity of an early temple can be compared to a
fedual Lord, who was provided with all the amenities and pleasures included a big and comfortable house, a host of servants, best of food, choicest jewellery, attractive garments and wives and concubines. The Devadasis had therefore to be employed to give company to the God as wives and concubines.

V. Chandra Mowli & K.C. Tarachand (1991) in their book, Devadasi Custom, Rural Social Structure and Flesh Markets, states that the custom still prevails, Jogawwa or the female devotee carries a copper pot on which rests the silvery image of Yellamma and accepts prostitution in the belief that she is pleasing Parashurama.

It is evident from the review of literature that there are more studies on the status of women and Devadasi women on the contemporary situation in Indian society. But no particular study has been made on Mathammas at the regional level. In view of their lacuna, the present study has become imperative and important. This study on Mathammas though purely sociological in character can not be however, underestimated and belittled. It is likely to prove useful as it covers all sociological aspects of Mathammas. This microscopic study will awaken curiosity among sociologists, social Anthropologists, policy makers and take up further studies and framing policies in respect of eradication Mathamma, an evil social custom in India.