CHAPTER V

DEVADASI CUSTOM AND SOCIETY

In this chapter an attempt is made to understand the attitude of the society towards the Devadasis, the custom, practices and its consequences. The measures taken by the society through voluntary and government agencies to eradicate the custom and to rehabilitate the Devadasis and their dependents for a better life, are also discussed.

Devadasi custom is an age old institution with secular and ritual roles. It also has the sanction of the society. The benefits enjoyed by the people involved in the custom are mutual and so eradication of such a custom becomes very difficult. However, since long, efforts have been made to eradicate the custom and rehabilitate the persons involved in it.

It has been alleged that the feudal system promoted Devadasi custom. No doubt, the feudal type of society which prevailed in this part of Karnatak in the past, certainly
promoted Vedic custom, like the land, anything good and
beautiful was claimed by the feudal lord. He was the lord
of his estate, and whatever he did was the law and his serf
did not have any voice to resist or oppose it. Anybody who
violated this law was either banished from his estate or
killed. This type of situation continued till recently,
since there were no laws to check such feudal lords and even
the ones which existed were not enforced strictly. Added to
this, was the poor socio-economic condition of the rural
masses. Though they got the political freedom, it took
several decades to get themselves free from the social evils
such as illiteracy, poverty, ignorance, superstition and so on.
Though there were laws and government support, owing to their
own instability and ignorance, they could not take benefit of
the same. It is very recently that the so-called socio-economic
backward castes have begun to resist such an enervous
position.

We have learnt from our data presented in previous
chapters, that the Bvadesi custom has been in existence in
Hindu society from the post Vedic period. We also knew that
it is practised and perpetuated by the socio-economically and
ritually low castes who still observe non-sanctic prac-
tices. Ignorance and poverty on the one hand and exploiting
groups in the society on the other, have checked the attempts
made to eradicate the evil custom. However, a few attempts
have yielded good results.

Any attempt to eradicate the Dowademi system makes it
essential to study in depth the Hindu society and its various
customs and practices. Further, a deeper study of the values
of the people among whom the custom is prevailing and also
the factors which contribute to the failure of legislations
enacted to abolish the custom, needs to be made. Each and
every civilized society has its own legislations to check
and control the anti-social activities. But, in some cases,
law becomes totally ineffective because of the deficiency
in it, and also because of the insufficiency and selfishness on
the part of the law enforcing agencies and lack of co-operation
or lack of involvement on the part of the society at large.
This is actually what is happening to the legislations enacted
to prevent women’s going wayward or entrap. A number of legis-
lations have been enacted to check the trafficking in women
and girls since the beginning of this century. Since it is
alleged that the Devadasi custom promotes commercial prostitution, it has also been legally banned. But, owing to lack of clarity in the act, and co-operation and co-ordination between different governmental departments and agencies the legislations have become totally ineffective.

Though the Devadasi custom has its own evil effects on individuals, family and society at large, there are a few who argue that the custom has its own good things. But now the times have changed. In the past the custom helped the backward and low castes among it which mostly prevailed, in a number of ways. The links that established between the Devadasis and the upper caste men, brought a lot of concessions to the low castes. They can be classed into three categories - economic, social and religious. Economically speaking, in the feudal type of society, which existed at that time, and at the village level, the custom helped the low castes to make a peaceful living. The Devadasis who were sex-objects, used their special status to get help and links for their families and castes. A few, who had settled as concubines to individual men also got property from their men in the form of ornaments, house and cultivable land, which they could not
have dropped off coming other wise. By this, the castes which could not own any property traditionally, could own something through the Devadasi custom. This type of earning by them did not also affect their socio-religious status, because they earned it by performing their religious duties.

From the data presented in chapter Three we learn that in rural Karnataka, where folk version of Hinduism dominates the religious life of the masses, even today the Devadasis have a number of ritual roles to perform at family, caste and community levels. For attending to these duties they are provided with basic amenities by the community. The temples, to which they are dedicated, also gave them some income in the form of food, alms, clothing and so on. A few communities wise gave land-grants to their Devadasis and above all, a few ritual roles to play at community level.

Socially also, the Devadasi custom helped the lower and poorer castes very much. India is land with a caste based society which is arranged hierarchically, on the rules of commonality (Mayer, 1960). The social mobility of castes was totally denied. The opportunity to have normal contact...
with the upper castes and also to play any role in the religious activities at the community level were also not there. The only opportunity they had was through their Devadasi women, who were close to the temples and upper caste men. This linkage between the upper and lower castes provided an opportunity to the latter to improve their status. As a result, they could also educate their children, which others could not do in their caste. A glance at the background of the low caste elite today reveals that they came from this background.

Another advantage of being a Devadasi was that they were considered the wives of the deity. So, they never became widows, and always enjoyed the status of married women whose husband was eternally alive (Chiramuthaide). Further, the children born to them are also considered legitimate, since their mother is married. This improved their socio-economic status and made them think of elevating themselves. In this way, the Devadasi custom helped the people of lower strata to overcome the inferiority complex and enjoy a better social status.
In the past, these socio-economically and ritually backward castes depended totally on the ritually higher, learned and well-off upper castes for their day-to-day ritual requirements. Owing to strict asceticistic rules, the priests, who belonged to upper castes attended only to the rites and rituals, which did not bring any pollution to them. The polluting ones were, however, attended to by their ritual functionaries or by receiving holy objects such as holy water, rice etc. Today the Devadasis are considered religious leaders by their respective families, clans, castes, and communities, so, they are invited to all their religious needs. Earlier to this, these castes were forced to depend on the upper caste priests, who in the name of purity and pollution, humiliated, insulted and ill-treated them by not physically attending to them. The Devadasi custom solved all these problems and, to this extent Devadasis have become independent.

The Devadasis also have their major roles to play in recreational activities. The temple dancers of Tanjavore, Trichur, Madurai, Thiruvaneswar, Solur and Halebed and temple singers from Coz, etc., were all Devadasis. Many of them later made a name on stage and silver screen as dancers, singers and
play back singers. Even today a few of them are still
heading the tradition.

A few of them were even used by their ancient rulers
to spy on other rulers. As artists, they gained entry into
every temple easily and later collected valuable information
by becoming pets of the influential persons in administration.
A few were even used as assassins. The institution of "Vishak-
hamya" was well known in history. A beautiful girl trained
in the art was also fed with poison in little quantity from
childhood and gradually, the dose was increased as she grew
old. By the time she was ready for duty her kiss or sexual
contact was sufficient to kill the victim.

The Devadasis from villages around Gadiga, in Bellary
district (where we studied) were wellversed in theatrical art
and accept stage appearances on contract basis. Since they are
trained singers and dancers, they charged a minimum of Rs.350/-
per show. As a tradition, they received training from their
young age from masters, who were also linked with the profes-
sion. Naturally stage appearances became one of their important
sources of income. Going to all these reasons, the Devadasis of
Fudligi area opined that the Devadasi custom had done no harm to them. As Devadasis, they also had the privilege to go into the society to beg in the name of their deity. This liberty to move around in the society on religious purposes, even gave them an opportunity to propagate the custom by grooming girls for Devadasihood. Though immoral and illegal, this source also brought them some income.

If the benefits and advantages of Devadasi custom are many, the disadvantages are very many. No doubt, the custom gave the woman and her people an opportunity to make a living and brought some socio-religious and economic advantages. But the price paid for this in terms of exploitation, suffering etc., was very high.

The girls dedicated as Devadasis normally came from the customarily designated families. Their traditional roles were to provide both body and stage pleasures to the deity. Though both the categories of women ultimately practiced prostitution, the former group earned its living mainly through prostitution. Today even this discrimination between the two categories is gone. As a result, the Devadasi custom has become a major contributor to commercial prostitution.
findings from the study of one hundred commercial prostitutes in Belgaum city proves this statement, since as many as 39 per cent of commercial prostitutes there were Devadasis. Among the Devadasis, who went to Bombay, Pune and other commercial centres, to practice prostitution, only a few could save money. But others returned home empty-handed and were also robbed of their youth, health and mental peace. Most of them had even become victims of venereal and other diseases and so become a burden to their families.

We have known the traditional type of status and roles of Devadasi, and now let us know the type of status, roles and community life they and their children have today in the society. Though a devadasi is married to a deity, she will not and can not have the status, roles, duties and life of a normal married woman in the society. This is because, for Hindus, though marriage is a sacrament and a ‘must’, the worldly benefits are sex, company, protection, security and status, which the marriage brings to her and her children. When a normal marriage is arranged, the parents of girls will look for an healthy, well-to-do and well behaved man coming from a good family background. They look into these things,
thinking that their daughter and her progeny will be happy and well placed in the community or society. To achieve this, they make a thorough search among their caste members and also by travelling around. To see that their daughters are well settled, they use all possible connections and means. Among them, the payment of dowry to the boy and lot of gifts to the girl are common. Then this is the situation prevailing in the society today, what makes the parents of a few girls to dedicate them to a deity and see that they had such an immoral and low life, is still a mystery. The only possibility is the devotion to the deity. Of course poverty, ignorance and lack of means play their own relative roles in this matter.

When a girl is dedicated to a deity, it is understood that she cannot have the company of her divine husband in any manner. What she can at the most get is the status, as a Devadasi. Using this ritual status she has to make her life as comfortable as possible. She has also to see that this will help her family, caste, community, and, of course, herself and her children. All this can be achieved if only she gets the support of a good man, who takes her as his life partner.
This again depends upon the type of men who take the women for extra marital sex life. We have already learnt several types of Devadasis meant for religious services. It is only those who are initiated to become prostitutes are available for free sex life. Among the two types - Garati and Sale, the former go as concubines to men who keep them lifelong, like their wives, providing a separate home and maintenance to them and to their children. They live like men and women for life and devote to each other, till death or some such thing separates them. In a few cases disloyalty to each other also bring separation. Similarly those, men, who are rich but have an unhappily married life or have an ailing wives, want to indulge in extramarital life and so on, take a concubine like this.

The society around Soundatti is still traditional, feudal and backward politically, economically and so on. Here the feudal type of families gives more importance to family name, status, friendship etc, in establishing marital relations to their children. The opinion, likes and dislikes of individuals involved, become immaterial. So, far property, respect
for parents and family honour, the children marry the person chosen by their parents - whether they love and like each other or not. Naturally, such a marriage may turn into an unhappy one. Later such men, who can afford and from feudal background, take concubines and keep them in their own or separate houses and visit them regularly. In fact, they spend most of their time here and are also visited by their friends here only.

A few men, who want both sex and sex play resort to taking concubines and maintaining them. They do so since they cannot have the same (sex play and company) with their wives, who come from equally orthodox and feudal background and always remain indoors in the seclusion. In this situation, a man and his wife rarely see and talk to each other during the day time. So, this makes the man to seek the female company and pleasure elsewhere and a concubine comes handy. Unlike his wife, one can select a concubine of his choice for her health, complexion and ability to please him etc. Unlike his wife, a man can visit his concubine any time in a day he wants to and demands sex and her company. In an orthodox and feudal type of society where privacy in any matter can not be had, it
is unimaginable to have sex during day time. It is even considered a shame to close the main door of the house during day time. Since a concubine knows that her relation with the man depends on how much and how well she pleases him, she responds to all his demands at whatever hour and manner he wants.

Similarly one cannot even talk directly to his wife in the presence of elders at home. One cannot also take his wife out to a nearby town to see a movie or to have private time for themselves staying in a lodging house. But a concubine can do it and the society accepts this by saying "who can do such things other than a concubine". So the men who are modernised, educated but coming from feudal and rich background try to derive such intimate pleasure from their concubines. They find a girl of their choice, arrange for her initiation and take her as a concubine. Since she is a Devadasi, the children born of this union does not get a right to landed property nor his name. After his death, his family will not also have any obligation to provide for her. By the time a Devadasi going as a concubine grows old, she will have received a few ornaments, landed property, etc., as
gifts from her partner. As she gets old and the man becomes financially dependent on his sons, the concubine with or without children, may move away from him. In any case she will do this after his death. In old age, it is customary for a Devadasi to become a religious mendicant (Jogti) to earn a living. In return, she has to go around the society and propagate the glory of her deity. A Devadasi, who was a concubine, irrespective of her age, may become a Jogti after the death of her supporter. She does so out of respect, love and loyalty to him. If her supporter has gifted enough property, to her there will be no need for her to beg for alms. However, she remains a religious person throughout her life since she is a Devadasi and also observes all the rites and rituals concerned to the tradition and visit the shrine of her deity regularly as per prescription.

Apart from the Devadasis, who go as concubines of well-off persons a few among the poor and low castes, will also go as "concubines" of men who are their kin. They are locally known as "Nelagada Baaayi". This type of dedication takes place owing to the wrath of the deity on a family, caste or a person. When a deity "Gesands" a girl for her service and
If the family has no girl to offer since all the girls in the family are already engaged or married, the family will be in trouble. They cannot ignore the call of the deity and also break the marriage agreement with the family. So, they come to an agreement wherein the engagement is formally broken with an understanding that the girl, after dedication and performing her required religious obligations, goes to the life "partner" of the man to whom she was already engaged. After that also, she continues to perform all the duties of a Devedasi, and visit the temple, go for formal collection of alms, keep a shrine at home and attend to ritual activities conducted by families. After the death of her "partner" she too will become a Jogti. Her lineage and clan membership will also not change. By this there will be loss of members to her "husband's" family since she and children from her, continue to belong to her father's clan. Inspite of all these losses, her "husband's" family still accepts her because she is their kin. Above all, they too belong to the same faith and ritual tradition, and know the consequences of any violations to her status and action. However, her loyalty as a sex partner, contributes to the family in terms of her labour and earnings go to her "supporter". All these create
a lot of problems in the society in terms of control,
group membership etc. But the strong faith, close kin
marriages, make good all these losses. Like this the
society perpetuates Devadasi custom and do not co-operate
with the government in eradicating it.

Let us take our law enforcing agencies such as
police and law courts, and try to know their involvement in
the very task of eradicating the Devadasi custom. Our police
personnel book cases under S.1.7. Act, against women and men
when found practising prostitution. But they do not take an
active interest in checking this anti-social activity by
conducting raids on evil places and by motivating these
persons to give up this profession. For example, in the city,
where we lived for a period of seventy five days during the
months of September, October and November, 1983, to do the
field work, we found not even once the police raiding the
brothels, shady lodgings and private houses, when we brought
this (fact) to the notice of the concerned authorities, they
avoided the subject. When we actually met and interviewed
prostitutes and Charwales, we came to know that a portion
of their (prostitutes) earning regularly went to the police.
With their hands geared, the police naturally do not take any action to solve the problems of the fallen women.

The police, it is alleged by the prostitutes, instead of enforcing the law to eradicate prostitution, are actually encouraging it. They do so since it brings them extra income. However, now and then, they book a few cases against prostitutes, and produce them in the court of law in the implementation of the S.I.T. Act. If we observe their entire activity we learn that the whole thing is done with utmost insincerity. When they produce the offenders before the court, they do not produce adequate evidence to support their case, and thus allow the court to send the women to the state home for women. This institution is the centre where the rehabilitation of offenders, undertrials, prostitutes, fallen women is undertaken. Here women are trained in different activities based upon their skill and intelligence, such as weaving, basket-making and such other crafts. Since the facilities at these homes are limited, the police and the law courts avoid sending a large number of them there. To facilitate this the police book cases for minor offences and help them get away from the clutches of the law by paying a fine, ranging from Rs. 5/-
to Rs. 25/-, After paying the fine and bribing the police, the prostitutes have to earn it back and so they, once again, indulge in the profession.

Another reason for the failure of the S.I.T. Act is that a large number of police personnel themselves are regular customers of these prostitutes. We noticed this when we did field work among the prostitutes. The police personnel regularly visited these women, sometimes with their visiting friends, for entertainment. Like this, the law enforcing agencies show a lapse in their duty.

Now let us discuss the other measures adopted by the society to eradicate the Devadasi custom and their progress. A stricter legislation to ban all Devadasis including the old and senior ones from moving freely in the society is one of the important steps which can help in eradicating this vicious system. As of now, the Devadasis move freely in the society under the garb of religious functionaries. But actually most of them work as agents to priests to the shrines and the brothel-keepers in cities, grooming girls for the business. They do this since they do not have any other means to make
a living, when they were youthful everybody — members of their family and caste and village leaders, lovers etc., cared for them. As they became old, they lost interest in them, and thus making it difficult for them even to feed themselves. When they sense this, they start grooming juniors under them to regain hold on the business. This type of indulgence by the older Devadasis can be checked by detaching them from religious work and rehabilitating them through institution such as State Home for Women and so on.

One more step to eradicate the Devadasi custom is through proper distribution of means of production. To apply the Marxian theory of economics, whenever the means of production are in the hands of a few non-producers, there will be exploitation. From the history of the area where our field data were collected, we learnt that the important means of production — land, water and even now owned by a few persons when compared to the landless masses. The feudal type of society propagated by the British rulers, further led to many social problems. Land was granted to those who were loyal to them and also to those who agreed to pay royalty or tax
to them. As a result, such feudal estates such as Vasis, Deshpande, Innadare, Sir Vasis, Nadagouda, Patil, Kulkarni, Joshi, came up. Vast extent of land was granted to them by the colonial government on payment of tax. They in turn, rented the land to tenants. The rich tenants engaged the landless persons to till the land and collected the lease amount for the landlord, and paid it to them.

Since hundreds of acres of land were granted to these feudal lords, they virtually ruled the territory. Above all, by establishing marital relations among themselves feudal lords formed a class by themselves. Naturally, serfs from one territory were not entertained in another since it came in the way of good and co-operation of the kin ties. As a result, the poor tenants and landless labourers could not migrate to other territories to make a decent living or to evade the despotic rule of the landlord. It is only with the coming of the Portuguese in Goa that a few could migrate as labourers. Many of them were taken by the contractors to work in the British-run railway and construction of roads, buildings and textile and jute mills in industrial and commercial places such as Bombay, Pune etc. Here again, they
went to these places through a feudal lord and could not violate the contract, since their families lived back in villages.

The poor, landless persons, who worked as petty tenants and labourers, were ultimately reduced to the status of bonded labourers. This happened since without sufficient means of earning they were reduced to the state of constant borrowing, and, without any other means to make a living, they sold themselves to the feudal lords, as bonded labourers. Though the government had enacted Tenancy Act as back as 1950s, in Bombay state, by the time the Act came into force the weak tenants were evicted by their land-lords. Even those who got a few acres of land under Tenancy Act, were later forced to sell their land to the feudal lords. Owing to perennial drought conditions, small holdings, cost of operation and so on, they could not survive even one or two drought years. Death, disease, marriage, and court cases virtually reduced them to bankruptcy. Since there were no other agents to lend them money, they borrowed it from the landlords, sometimes, paying a very high rate of interest and also pledging the land. Owing to drought conditions they could not repay.
the loan and they were charged compound interest. It was added that within five to six years they were left with only one choice, i.e., to sell the land to the landlord.

By the time the land ceiling Act came, the landholders had made proper arrangements to transfer it to others— their kin and so on. Consequently the poor, landless could not derive the benefits supposed to be conferred on them by the Act. Similarly, by the time the Acts to remove rural indebtedness, emancipate bonded labour and to put a ban on buying land from artisans and scheduled castes came, the shrewd intelligent and educated upper castes had made proper arrangements to evade the law. Like this for decades, the society, government and even the feudal lords exploited the rural poor. They wanted to compromise with the situation and make a living and so they used their women for this. This is how the economic condition of the poor and the low castes propagated the Feudalism custom in this part of the country.

One more important step suggested to eradicate this age-old institution is through socio-economic development. It is a well-known fact that poverty and financial insecurity
drive the poor to trade in flesh. From the statistics on droughts, famines, epidemics, unemployment, migration of landless poor from place to place in search of employment, etc., show the rapid increase of prostitution among the landless poor. In the districts of Bijapur, Belgaum, Raichur, Dharwad etc., one can see the extent of financial problems faced by the rural poor. For generations these people have been denied the opportunities to own land, receive education and take gainful employment. All these have left them with only one alternative viz., to make a living either by migrating out in search of work or to get financial help and concessions from feudal lords by seeking their demands, by making their women their sex objects. Here, the age old institution of Bevedasi came handy to them. As known, for the past 35 years, the Government of India has been trying to improve the conditions of the rural poor through a number of development plans and programmes. So far, all these programmes such as compulsory education, adult education, health and nutrition, women and child welfare schemes etc., have failed because of lack of economic development. Chronic droughts, exploitation by the money-lenders, failure of the
co-operative societies and programmes for the small and marginal farmers, lack of new and appropriate agricultural methods to suit the drought conditions, have all forced them to constant borrowing, helplessness and fear. Unless the economic condition of the so called economically, and socially backward castes improve, the eradication of Devadasi custom becomes a difficult task.

Since Devadasi custom belongs to folk or little tradition, it is argued that senscritization of the tradition can help solve the problem. No doubt, senscritization has solved a few problems, which were in the form of lower customs, such as offering of animals or blood and liquor to the deity, inflicting bodily pain, obscene dances and songs before the deity. With the senscritization, naturally comes the senscritic rites and rituals and priests. But there is no such guarantee here also since we can see the misuse of this also. Unless the masses are educated and developed economically, we cannot expect them to come out of this plight. Without this development if we try to senscritize the tradition, it can only result in the duplication of rites and rituals, and exploitation of the masses by both the traditions which are now
practised together. A good example is the Soudatti shrine. 
This temple earlier, belonged to the little tradition. Later, 
efforts were made to saneritize it. As a result, we still 
find the custom such as Devadasi, wearing of matted-hair, 
etc., continue. Only change we can see over the years in 
the shrine is in the name of the deity from local to saner- 
tic. The other difference, is in place of the priests belong- 
ging to little tradition the priests belong to the great 
tradition perform the priestly duties. By this the devotees, 
who do not strictly know the rules of great tradition, are 
kept away from the temple in the name of purity and polio- 
As a result, they have to be satisfied with the rites performed 
to minor deities or religious objects at the shrine. Apart from 
spending on those rites, they are also compelled to pay for 
the up-keep of the shrine, which now belongs to the great 
tradition. Since the masses are considered ritually lower 
they are kept away. Like this, the conversion of a shrine or 
god belonging to the great tradition cannot solve the problems 
brought about by the Devadasi custom.

One more important suggestion made to eradicate the 
Devadasi custom is through education. The rural low castes are
ignorant, poverty stricken, superstitious in nature. It is possible to minimize if not eradicate the Devadasi custom completely, by educating the Devadasis, their children, their dependents, their well-wishers about the evils of the custom. So, the Government and other welfare agencies have now come forward to educate the Devadasis, their children and dependents to lead a better life. However, there is already the provision in the Indian Constitution (Part IV, Directive Principles of State Policy) to give free and compulsory education to all children upto the age of 14 years without any discrimination of caste, creed, race, sex and so on. However, it is yet to be achieved. The Government should see to it that the programme is strictly implemented and without any delay. By this one can put an end to some of the age-old institutions such as the Devadasi custom.

The Karnataka State Government has taken several measures to eradicate the Devadasi custom and rehabilitate the Devadasis and their dependents. As an effective step in this direction, the State Government enacted an Act entitled "Devadasi Prohibition Act", which came into force on 11th January 1984. The act has brought several restrictions on the
people who are involved in this profession. The gist of the Act is as follows: The Act is called the Karnataka Devadasi Prohibition Act and it applies to whole of Karnataka State, and considers the dedication of girls to Devadasihood illegal and unconstitutional. Devadasi is allowed to get married and the children born to her are considered legitimate offspring to both her life partners. Penalty and punishment prescribed by the Act are also severe. Those who inspire and influence the parents or guardians of the girl to dedicate her for Devadasihood are liable not only for fine but also for imprisonment. The extent of punishment varies from Rs. 2,000/- fine and three years' imprisonment to Rs. 5,000/- fine and five years' imprisonment. In case the parents and guardians of a girl force their daughter to get initiated to Devadasihood, they too become liable for rigorous punishment which is not less than Rs. 2,000/- fine and three years' imprisonment. Apart from the parents, guardians and relatives of the girls, those who come in the way of enforcing the law, also become liable to be punished with the above mentioned punishment.

However, the Act allows the initiation of girls to divine beings as ritual functionaries provided it is sacred,
noble in character and free from sex. Though the anti-
devadasi custom law was enacted during 1984 with the sole
intention of eradicating the custom, the girls are initiated
even today. This is because of the loopholes in the Act and
lenient methods adopted in its implementation.

The Karnataka State Government, apart from enacting
the law has also taken a number of other measures to eradi-
cate the Devadasi custom, and rehabilitate the Devadasis and
their dependents. The Government provides free boarding,
lodging and training facilities to the Devadasis and their
dependents, when they learn arts and handicrafts, to get an
alternative means to earn a living. An institution was especi-
ally established to train such persons at Athani, in Belgaum
district. To provide educational facilities to the children
of Devadasis, a residential school was started at Gundatti,
in Belgaum District. To improve the economic and social
conditions of the Devadasis, preference is given to them for
employment in developmental projects started by the State
Social Welfare department. Financial help up to Rs. 3,000/- is
being given to persons who marry Devadasis and take them home
as their wives. Financial help is also provided to private
institutions and agencies which come forward to provide training to Devadasis and their dependents in weaving, embroidery and tailoring. The government through its social welfare department and also through its information and publicity department are doing their best to give information and education to the Devadasis, so that they can become self-employed. Pension is given to all elderly devadasis to prevent them from depending on the evil custom for living.

Many voluntary agencies have also made sincere efforts in educating and rehabilitating the Devadasis. Among them the Joint Women Programme Committee (Bangalore) is one. Since the day of its establishment, the agency has been struggling hard in Karnatak State as well as outside, to improve the living conditions of the Devadasis. The Committee under the chairmanship of Ms. Jyothsena Chatterji (Assistant Director, Devadasi Vimuktchi Vimani) submitted a report to the Karnatak State Government to take necessary steps for the eradication and rehabilitation of Devadasis and their dependants, especially their children. On the basis of this report the Government has been making special efforts to rehabilitate the Devadasis.
Few with the frequent interference by the voluntary agencies, social workers and the implementation of Devadasi Prohibition Act (Karnataka), most of the Devadasis, their relatives and guardians and also the general public, have become aware of the evils of Devadasi custom. Many of the Devadasis themselves have rebelled against the custom for its evil effects on them, their children and dependants and community at large and have started protesting. Among them Mrs. Govrabai Sarwade \(^1\) of Gadhingalega is note-worthy.

As a result of mass awakening and alertness, mass marriages of Devadasis have been also organised jointly by the social workers and police personnel. During 1984, marriages of 53 Devadasis were conducted at Nevalingpar in Bijapur district. This was attended the high government officials, religious leaders and social workers.

Now for the first time in the history, the Devadasis have established their own co-operative institution by the

\(^1\) Govrabai Sarwade submitted a memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner of Religion during his visit to her home town at Hippensi, to take strenuous measures to put an end to this evil custom and urged him to provide an alternative employment to them (Samyukta Karnataka daily, page 11, Gated 8th February, 1981).
The main object of this co-operative society is to free all the Devadasis from the clutches of the money-lenders and also the Charwals. According to Smt. Shailini Jayant's Karade, the promoter of this co-operative movement the other object of this institution is to make the prostitutes give up their profession gradually. For this, if they need any financial assistance, it is provided to start a new employment and respectable life.  

You let us take other aspects of the life of a Devadasi such as her brothers' children and dependents. In a patriarchal society woman belongs to men though he may be her father, brother, husband or even son. So are her children and earnings. Labour here in this context includes her sexual gratification. As a Devadasi is married to the god, she still continue to be a member of her father's lineage and family. This can be seen in the act of not performing the important rite of separation ("Parikshiyavudu") at the time of a marriage. The rite refers to breaking or cutting "her road" or link with

---

her lineage. At any marriage ceremony, there are two sets of rites each conducted and paid by the two groups—natal and conjugal. The bride dressed in a new sree given by her natal home, is led by her people to the wedding pandal for the rites. After performing a few rites of permanent separation (c.f. Cennap 1960) she is brought to the wedding booth where the priest and the bridegroom are waiting. After receiving her, the priest performs the wedding rites by making the men tie the wedding necklace (Mangalamatra) to her. After this the bride is made to go and change the sree given by her parents and wear the one brought by her conjugal family to symbolise that henceforth she is their ward. But in case of a Devadesai, only the wedding rite takes place, and not the separation and reunion rites, and this is symbolised in not changing the wedding sree. Even after the marriage, she continues to live with her parents.

The Consummation rite of a Devadesai's marriage symbolises her status and also residence after initiation. As per the customs only the Garati type of Devadesai of Jelmaan go with her nuc mate to his house and the marriage is consummated
outside her parental home, whereas the consummation of marriage of other types of Devadasis — the Hule type — who go as commercial prostitutes, is performed at the residence of her parents. Though the man who wants to consummate the marriage of the woman, pays for the rite, it is symbolic and nominal. Since the tradition requires that the consummation ceremony should be performed before she goes for commercial prostitution, it is performed at the natal home of the woman and man paying nothing except a feast to the community.