CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Devadasi custom, wherein a woman is dedicated to a deity or a sacred object, is under a lot of discussion now days. Both scholastic and journalistic studies and publications on the subject have appeared in abundance, but they seem to lack a deeper understanding of the custom and also its effects on the person, society and so on. Our study made on anthropological lines and presented in the following pages, aims to understand what this custom is, who these devadasis are, what their background is, why they are dedicated, what the effects of the custom - both good and bad, are.

"Devadasi" means a woman enslaved for the service of some deity or sacred object. The term in the feminine form of "Devadasi" a man who is enslaved for the service of a deity. Though the term has its origin in Sanskrit and means "god's-slave", the prevailing custom is in no way related to the gods or deities mentioned in the sanskritic literature. To-day there is not a temple in any part of the country without a Devadasi.
attached to it. In fact, a few temples have more than one Devadasi attached to them to render several types of services to the deities and sacred objects.

Several factors are responsible for the origin of the Devadasi custom. One among them is that a few deities demand whole-time devotees for their service. Another custom is that the devotees themselves "offered" men and women to a deity for the service, expecting in return His/Her favour. Still another practice is that one section of the society brought this custom into vogue to exploit another, since the 'Devadasi' ultimately becomes the sex and economic object of the dominant persons or groups. Another factor is the frequent wars among different rulers belonging to different Hindu sects, which believed that their belief was supreme and led to the enslaving of the captured and helpless women of the enemy to this status. So our study aims to probe into these aspects of the origin of the custom.

The Sanskritic term 'Devadasi' denotes that a particular woman is enslaved for religious work. Locally, however, they are known by different names such as "Pasaavi", "Sayakasani".
"Sangaseeni", "Gangaseeni", "Muttukattikondavalu", "Kasoti", "Nareke Kottevalu", "Tevara Sule" and so on. These terms differ from tradition to tradition and region to region and, as a result, a long list of terms has come into existence. Those who have studied the custom were amazed at the types of "Devadasis" found to-day. Devadasis are dedicated to different deities to render different types of services. So also they come from different castes. The reasons for their dedication also differ. Naturally the study of the custom complicates the issue.

There is a cry that the custom of Devadasi has degenerated. Others say that the custom has been rejuvenated after the independence of India. It is therefore rather a difficult task to study this state of the custom. However, it is true that, today, the custom has got much publicity. As in the past, even today, girls are dedicated to deities as Devadasis. The practice in the case, the castes which dedicate the women are the same and the deities are also the same. The only difference is that the whole activity has become a bit specialised, secretive and mechanised. In the past, owing to lack of transport and communication facilities, things moved rather slowly. Further, the
social consciousness created among the exploited groups has increased. The newspapers, and the social welfare agencies - both government and voluntary try to rehabilitate these exploited groups. Political and ideological rivalry too has played its role. As a result, to-day, the Devadasi custom is such in news.

Another avenue of Devadasi custom is commercial prostitution. Owing to colonization of India by the British, the Portuguese, the French and other foreign powers a few Hindu customs and manners became degenerated. Some colonial officials and Christian missionaries misinterpreted a few Hindu customs as evil and tried to solve them in their own way. In the other hand, the colonization of India led to establishing industrial, commercial and administrative centres, including stationing of military in strategic places. Stationing of a large number of able-bodied young men at such places, away from their homes generated a crave for deprived women. In the beginning, the administrators mobilised these commercial prostitutes and shifted them to these places. Later, owing to the monetary benefits they got, these women themselves shifted their homes to these places. As a result, the red localities of today have
come into existence. Driven by poverty and social and moral insecurity, a few women took to open prostitution to earn a living. The subject of prostitution is a vast and specialized field of study. We, therefore, do not venture to study it in detail. But to know to what extent the Devadasi custom has contributed towards commercial prostitution, we have studied that profession. It is generally alleged that most of the Devadasis end up as commercial prostitutes in brothels at commercial and industrial centres. Since a detailed and scientific study of this aspect is not available we studied the commercial prostitution to determine the extent to which the Devadasi custom has contributed and in what form. For this, we studied one hundred commercial prostitutes selected at random, from a nearby city and interviewed them as per the prescribed schedule. We hope to use this data to support our findings on the Devadasi custom, in general, in this part of the state.

The Devadasi custom which has religious and ritual connections had, at one time, a very prestigious status. The Devadasis, who were drafted from the leading or ruling families
in a community, had the status of the wife of the patron-deity of the community. As an obligation, the temples and the society maintained them. The Devadasi were also persons of such skill and ability and were good dancers and singers. Temples in Goa, Tenjewar, Madurai, Travancore, Myalore, Bhuveshwar and so on, provide good examples of prevalence of Devadasi or Temple singers and dancers. Such a custom gradually degenerated to a very low status. There are a number of explanations given for the degeneration of devadasi custom. It is said that the foreign invasion first by the Moghals and then by the British, secularization of the indigenous fine arts and the fall of native princely domains, which patronized the custom of Devadasi are given as the main reasons for the degeneration of this practice. Our study also aims at tracing the various factors responsible for the degeneration of the custom, so that the present status of Devadasi can be better understood.

Theoretically also, our study aims at contributing to the understanding of the concept of marriage union, lineage, inheritance, family leadership, status, authority and so on. Though monogamy, polygamy and polyandry are well-known to the
anthropological world, the marriage of women and "god" in the Devadasi context, creates some theoretical problems with regard to the definition of "marriage" and "family". The classical examples of Nuer, Nayar and so on, are brilliantly discussed by Evans-Pritchard (1960), Cough (1959) and Jarama (1975). When compared to these two situations, the marriage union between the god/sacred object and a human being under Devadasi custom is different. Under Devadasi custom, women are married to a deity, whether male or female, or even to a sacred object, such as a sacred lamp post, flag post etc. The women are dedicated to these gods/objects either by their family or the community expecting some benefits in return, or to ward off the evils. The women so dedicated are deemed to be married to the deity. They are brought to the temple like brides, well-dressed and adorned with ornaments and suspicious objects. Accompanied by their kith and kin and holy music, they are taken into the temple. After an elaborate ritual the priest of the deity ties sacred necklace around their neck to symbolise their marriage with the deity.

On returning to their villages from the shrines, the family finds a suitable partner for the Devadasi to live with.
In a few cases, the men came from the upper castes and are also rich. They are already married and have children. A few others were unmarried/widowed. A few took them away from their parental home, and others left them with their family but, provided maintenance to them and visited them regularly. The children born of such women, naturally, belong to the women's family and lineage. They got the company of their partner/lover only during the night, when they visited them, and could not see or meet him elsewhere. Naturally, the children born of this union, did not have the company and support of their fathers, except that of finance. They never addressed him as "father". Though the women got their maintenance from the men, they or their children could not claim a share in the family property.

So, the definition of marriage given by *Notes and Queries*, Gough or even Evans-Pritchard do not include this type of "union". So, we propose to examine the definition of "marriage" available in the literature and, if possible, offer a new one. This type of marriage has been termed as "theogamy" in the anthropological literature. The relation between the men and the women, her status and her children etc., needs a new definition and explanation. This will be discussed with the help of fresh data, collected from the field study.
So society, however primitive or modern, is without a religion. "Religion" is one of the most important aspects of culture studied by anthropologists. Religion is not only found in every known human society but also significantly it interacts with other cultural institutions in the society. It finds expression in material culture, in human behaviour and in value systems, morals and ethics (Meek 1966:1). Historians, philosophers, linguists and psychologists have analysed "religion" but each with his own methods and viewpoints.

Religion, like culture itself, consists of systematic patterns of beliefs, values and behaviour, acquired by men as a member of his society. These patterns are systematic because their manifestations are regular in occurrence and expression. They are also shared by the members of a group. In all religions there are differences of interpretation of principles propounded in them. There are also dissenters and believers, innovators and traditionists. In small and simple societies, all members share the same cultural and religious traditions existing side by side and often correlating with ethnic background or social status.
As a cultural institution, religion has its origin in man himself. Importance and attachment given to it differ from people to people, depending upon their belief system. Religion, as an institution, has been systematically studied by many scholars and from different angles and for different purposes. The credit of having laid the foundation of an anthropological study of religion goes to Edward Burnett Tylor.

Tylor (1871) in his well-known book "Primitive Religion" has put forth his theory of origin of religion. The essence of primitive religion, according to him, is animism. Beliefs in spiritual beings, he shows, originated in a mistaken but consistent interpretation of dreams, visions, hallucinations, catatptic states and similar phenomena. Reflecting on these the savage philosopher was led to distinguish human soul from the body. Now the soul obviously continues to lead an existence after death, for it appears in dreams, haunts, the survivors in memories and in visions and apparently influences human destinies, and thus originates the belief in ghosts and spirits of immortality and in a nether world (Malinowski, 1954:18).

Tylor (1871) showed animism as involving a belief in souls capable of existing after death or the destructions of the body, and as also involving immaterial spirits and deities capable of influencing events in the material world.
James Frazer (1922) in his classical work on religion "The Golden Bough", denied that animism was not the only nor even dominating belief in primitive culture. According to him, the early men sought above all, to control the course of nature for practical ends and he did it directly by rites and spells, compelling wind and weather, animals and crops to obey his will. Only after a sufficient period of time, knowing the limitations of his magical power, the primitive men might have started propitiating the evil spirits.

William James (1951:42) defined religion as "the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine".

Malcolm Spence (1976:96) defines religion as "an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated super-human beings". In the analysis of the definition given by Malfrid Spence we come across two words, viz. "institution" and "interaction". Religion is the attribute of social groups comprising a component part of their cultural heritage; and that its component parts are acquired by means of the same enculturation processes, as the other variables of
a cultural heritage are acquired. This means that the variables constituting a religious system have the same ontological status as those of other cultural systems. Its beliefs are normative, ritual collective and values prescriptive. Religion has the same methodological status as other cultural systems i.e., religious variables are to be explained by the same explanatory schemes historical, structural, functional and causal by which other cultural variables are explained.

Origin of Belief System:

Religious beliefs and practices are those that have something to do with relationship between human and supernatural forces or beings. The origin of belief system is as old as the appearance of men on earth. The early men was a savage and an ignorantus totally depending upon the nature of his survival. There was also a time when the natural calamities such as floods, famines, diseases, etc., were playing their own roles in troubling the mankind. So, the primitive man was affected very much by these havoc. In order to escape from these disastrous consequences, he developed in himself a sort of faith in and fear about these supernatural forces. Since then, he started worshipping the supernatural beings and to please them he began offering them
locally available roots and fruits. Tylor (1871) also pro
duces in his "Primitive Religion" that the early men was having
his own notion about the other world and about those superna
tural forces. For each and everything, the early men was totally
depending upon the whims and fancies of nature.

The Practice of Religious Belief:

The religious actor believes not only in the truth of
the propositions about the superhuman beings, but in the exis-
tence of these beings. He trusts in God; he fears evil and hates
Satan. Likewise, he believes not only in the efficacy of the
ritual but also in the performance of the rituals. Much of the
work of religion is done by ritual. Ritual is not an arbitrary
programme of meaningless acts. On the contrary, the acts that
compromise the ritual are highly meaningful. That makes these
meaningful in the system of beliefs that rationalizes rituals.
Wallace (1966:172) is of the opinion that the supernatural forces
also comprise of good and bad elements. So, to get rid of the
bad elements, men take vows, and, to fulfill them they worship
them and make offerings to them.

Offering something to please the supernatural being and
to get his/her favour is prevalent in all societies - primitive
or modern. To fulfil their will/desire, the devotees take
vows to offer sacrifices, which include food, service, pleasure,
wealth, animals and even human beings.

It is not known how and when the custom of dedicating
humans to divine beings started. It is possible that the human
being designated to be sacrificed to the deity, was saved and
enslaved for temple work and his or her labour and income became
a part and parcel of temple property. This is how, like any other
object offered the girls offered to the deity also became the
property of the temples.

The custom of dedicating girls to the service of divine
beings developed fast and became very popular in Indian society
after the post Vedic period. These girls, who attended to such
different duties in temples as washing, sweeping, collecting
flowers, sounding bells, dancing, singing, serving the deity
came to be known as "Nevadonia". Finally, in the name of "divine
union", they were used also as sex objects by the "representatives
of God on earth" and, later, by others.

Women have been exploited in many ways and in the name
of many age-old customs and traditions from time immemorial.
Among such customs and traditions in India, devadasi custom is one. The institution of devadasis, though purely religious in nature, noble in character and free from sex (c.f. Patil; 1975), over the years lost all its active religious and ritual functions. It gradually developed as an institution where girls were induced into prostitution under the garb of religion to eke out a living for them and to support their family.

The Sanskrit word "devadasi" refers to "women dedicated to a sacred object or god, for service". This type of women are to be found not only in India but also in other countries. The historical and ethnographical material gives us the clue that a similar institution existed in the past also.

Dedicating something to a sacred object is one thing; dedicating a human being is another. Again dedicating only the women, that too virgins, has a special significance. There are many theories put forth to explain the origin of the custom of dedicating women to deities. James Fraser (1936) likens the origin of dedicating women to the ancient custom of worshipping Mother Earth or Mother Goddess, with male consort. The cult of divine pair or marriage (theogamy) is found in varying forms all over India, and supplies the basic for the sanctified harlotry in vogue at some of the larger shrines. The sacred
prostitutes attached to the temples are regarded as wives of the "god" and with their licentious intercourse initiated the licentious conduct of the mother goddess for the express purpose of ensuring the fruitfulness of fields and trees and of men and beast (c.f. Trivedi 1977:76).

James Frazer (1925) cites the case of Dionysus, the Greek God of wine, who was married annually at Athens to the queen to ensure fertility of the vine and other fruit trees. A similar custom is also witnessed in Sweden where every year, the image of god of fertility (Frey) attended by a beautiful girl considered as his wife, was taken in procession through the country in a wagon with all colour and pomp. She acted also as priestess in his great temple of Upsala. The people in general and the devotees in particular crowded to meet and offer sacrifices to the image of god and his blooming young bride for a fruitful year (Frazer 1925:145).

According to the known earliest history theurgy was in existence in Sumerian city states. The Sumerians who lived in the city states believed in pleasing their city patron deity by offering the most beautiful things of the state, which also included women, to get his good will. In many cases the ruler of the land dedicated his own sister/daughter to the deity to look
after the religious affairs of the state as priests (Linton 1961:301). The ruler also depended upon the patron deity for advice in the day-to-day administration of the state, and especially when important decisions pertaining to the state administration and welfare of the people had to be taken, the king himself slept in the temple the previous night to get the consent of the god. By dedicating his own sister/daughter to the deity the ruler becomes the nearest and dearest kin to the god and the ruler used this kinship to get favours. Like this, dedicating girls to the deities to get their favours was in existence in the past, and it is possible that over the centuries the custom reached Indian soil through migration and/or diffusion.

**Universality of Dedication:**

The idea of dedicating something to the divine to get goodwill or to ward off effects is not a new phenomenon. It existed in the past in all societies and at all times, irrespective of the nature and composition of the society. Hindus are known for their unflinching belief in or devotion to supernatural beings. This is because the very environment surrounding a Hindu makes him to be loyal and faithful, and creates faith
in supernatural beings. But the means by which a Hindu pleases the god and goddess is/was not one and the same.

Till recently, offering of blood including the human blood, to the deities was common. Then the senecritization process started, the sacrifice of the human being was stopped, and instead his/her services were taken. At one stage of Hindu religion, when the concept of purity and pollution ruled the religious belief, the girls were banned from serving the temple. Again the conquest of one shrine by the another Hindu sect, forced out of their home the women dedicated to the deity. These factors ultimately reduced these women to the status of sex objects.

In India the custom of dedicating human beings to divine services is prevalent in both senecritic and folk traditions. Both men and women are dedicated for divine beings for various reasons: to get reward, to please the deity, to avert a disaster, etc. Depending upon the nature and faith and the deity either a man or a woman is dedicated. These men and women are dedicated, when still unmarried, in the belief that they are not defiled bodily and mentally. Secondly, they are either dedicated totally or partially for the services of the deity. Among many favour
sought from the deity by dedicating a near kin, property, good health and attainment of heaven (moksha) are important. The Hindu epic "Rajavamsa Purana" held it highly rewarding for a person seeking heaven to dedicate girls to temples, and it was also stressed that those, who did not have girls in the family for this purpose, were required to purchase them from those who had them and dedicate them (c.f. Patil 1975:378).

**Devasasi Custom in Other Religions of India:**

In the medieval period it was found that the Devasasis were attached not only to Hindu temples but also to Jain temples and Buddhist temples. According to Che-su-kwe, a Chinese traveller, there were 4,000 Buddhist temples in Gujarat area in which over 20,000 dancing girls sang twice daily, while offering food and flowers to the idol of Buddha (Panzer 1924:241). The custom had also been in existence in South India since ancient times. The Kannataka inscription of 7029 A.D. shows that, after a famous temple was built, as a custom, the ruler of the land presented in hundreds the most beautiful girls of the land to the temples.

Travellers from foreign countries, who visited the ancient kingdoms, have also left valuable information about the
Davadesais attached to temples and the state. About 1290 A.D., Chor-Ju-Swa was on the coromandel coast, describing the inhabitants of the province of 'Melabar' (i.e. Tanjore). He says that "They have certain abbeys in which are gods and goddesses to whom many young girls are consecrated, their fathers and mothers presenting them to that of idol for which they entertain the greatest devotion". Abdul Reazshak, Ambassador from Peries, visited, the Vijayanagara Kingdom, which was very famous for its glory and splendour during the reign of Krishnadevaraya (1509-30). He made the remark that the prostitution of dancing girls was a great source of revenue to the kingdom, and out of the income of the dancing girls, the entire upkeep of the police force was paid. Like this, other shrines of South India had a good many number of Davadesais attached to them. For example, the great temple at Thanjavur, which was built by the Chola King Raja Raja the Great, had one thousand girls gifted to the temple as Davadesais.

The custom of dedicating girls to temples did not flourish so well in North India, because of the Muslim rule. The whole of North India was similarly affected by bloody battles, enforced slavery, terrible tortures and complete destruction of
Hindu temples and other public buildings. The Mohammedan
Sultanate rule of Delhi clearly shows that the great upheaval
so caused made any continual religious practices of Hindus an
impossibility. Khafi-Shan, a famous historian, says about the
pathetic story of the Devadasis of South, especially of\aurangazeb's court. "Aurangazeb had issued public proclamations
prohibiting singing and dancing by women and at the same time
ordered all the dancing girls to marry or to be banished from
the Kingdom" (Pomper 1924: 239).

Even after Aurangazeb, the Moghal ruler, the Mohammedan
Sultanate rule continued and lasted till the coming of the
British to India. During this time the standard of morality of
princes and public men sank lower. Prostitution had increased
to huge dimension and appears to have been entirely secular.
Owing to foreign conquest and partly to the spread of immorality,
the religious elements in the temple dancers were dropped out
and they became mere prostitutes and danced whenever occasion
demanded.

Very little literature is however available on the
Devadasi custom in Central India. The earliest reference to the
Devadasis were made by Cha-Ju-Kwe, a Chinese traveller. In his work "Chu-Jan-Chi", dealing with the Chinese and Arab trade of 12th and 13th centuries, he also mentions about the Devadasi custom which existed here in temples, including the Jaina and Buddhist ones (Penzar 1924:340).

About Eastern Indian theology, Ward, a Baptist missionary, wrote that in the famous Jagannath temple of Orissa at the beginning of the 9th century, a number of females of infamous character were employed to dance and sing before the idol of God. They lived in separate houses and not in the temple premises. He went a step further to say that the officiating Brahman of the temple continually lived in adulterous connection with them (Penzar 1924:242).

In South India the cult of devadasis began to flourish from 6th to 13th century A.D., especially during the rule of Pallava and Chola dynasties. According to Edwards (1924), the rise of sacred prostitutes in South India seems to have taken place in the 9th or 10th century A.D. and it was associated with great spurt in building up of temples. The Devadasis in those days were able to earn large sums of money, and in their old age, they were able to buy young girls and recruit them
into their profession of dancing, singing and prostitution. Their songs were obscene and their dances lascivious and depicted licentious episodes from legends (c.f. Triwedi 1977:76). The direct references to the existence of Devadasi custom in South India are more clear when compared to North, because the faith and belief of the people of South India in supernatural beings was not affected by the outside and non-Hindu invasions or influence. So, the details of rituals have been completely deep-rooted in the minds of the people, so that, in many cases we expect to find earlier and more original forms of a particular custom or ceremony.

The dedicated girls, though not in all cultures, were supposed to observe physical chastity. The belief is that the dedicated men and women should be pure in mind and body, and they dedicate their virility as well as virginity. The virgin priestesses were more honoured and respected among Greeks of the Canary islands, ancient Persia, Greeks and Romans. In Persia the virgin priestesses dedicated to the service of the sun god were scattered over Greece, where shrines were ministered by virgins such as that of Hera at Argos. The priestly Roman King Numor is said to have initiated the order of vestal virgins who remained unmarried and a few retired after thirty years (Frazer 1936:144) to get married.
In Syria also the men sacrificed their virility to the deity by castrating themselves at the great festivals at Hores and Hierapolis. Twice every year a castrated man climbed the two huge phalli which stood at the door of the temple and conversed with the gods to ensure prosperity and fertility of the land (Fenzer 1924:275).

In Mesopotamia also the custom of theogamy existed. Enun, the chief wife of the god and Netiu, the inferior ones, had girls dedicated to their religious services, but it is not known whether the chief wife Enun, married the mortal husband or not. But on the other hand, the inferior ones, Netiu were allowed to get married but were not allowed to bear children by their human husbands (Anton 1961:302).

Over the years, the sacred services of these temple clerics degenerated, owing to the undue advantage taken by the temple priests and, as a result prostitution was practised in many shrines. More also, mention may be made of Mesopotamia, which was the original home of religious prostitution, and this is well documented in the Code of Hammurabi and the epic of Gilgamesh.
Speaking in the context of India, religious prostitution is well mentioned and of two types, those who were well versed in fine arts and the prostituting ones. All the royal courts in the east, midland, and the west were associated with the Devadasis, who were good dancers and singers. They were also available for the king and other nobility for sex. The other group of Devadasis were associated with only prostitution, and they earned income to the state and temple. Kautilya in his "Arthashastra", clearly mentions that the Devadasis were paying a portion of their income regularly to the temple in the form of taxes. The records of the Vijayanagar rulers show that the entire upkeep of the police force was maintained out of the money earned by prostitutes. The Devadasis, who belonged to the faith of their enemies, stayed in separate quarters in the temple premises to entertain men sexually, and to earn a decent income. This type of arrangement continued till the foreign rulers such as the Muslims came to India. They used these women merely for sex purposes and in a non-religious style. Later on when the immoral activities of the temple dancers went beyond the control of the temple authorities, they were thrown out of the temple premises.
Types of Theesvani.

Theesvani in India is known as Devedasis (Devedasa) custom. The custom is further known by different names in different parts of the country, on the basis of service they discharge such as dancing, singing, assisting in rituals and attending to secular duties at the temple, such as cleaning, washing and earning for the temple (Milton Singer 1972:169). According to Chidamadumurthy (1956:181) those men and women are known as dēsaru and dēsigaḷu. The girls are mainly meant to provide stage (Ranga) and bodily (Ange) pleasures to the deity.

In Karnataka, Devedasis are known by different names such as "Nesavi", "Tattakkattikondavalu", "Nesareale", "Nejnapuje Nadisikkondavalu", "Kayakasam", "Kanduk", and so on. They can be broadly classified into two groups viz., those who attend to the ritual work and those who do secular work in the temples. They also come from both ritually high and low castes.

In Central Karnataka the term "Pesavi" is quite popularly used for Devedasis. As find many categories among the "Pesavi" of Karnataka such as "Gudi-Pesavi", "Jāti-Pesavi", "Beluga -
Basnvi", "Tera - Basnvi", "Garudagadha Basnvi", "Nemikole Basnvi" and so on (Gurusumathy 1982:70). Each of them has her own status and role to play. The area of their movement is also demarcated. Let us now try to understand them one by one.

(1) Cudi Basnvi

"Cudi Basnvi", in some villages also known as "Tera - Basnvi", is viewed as the wife of the principal deity of the village (Uradhevaru). She comes from the customarily designated family in the village, which by tradition, dedicates a girl as a role. The rules, which govern her dedication, are very rigid. She should be dedicated before she attains puberty and should remain a virgin throughout her office. At the time of her retirement, say when she is over thirty or so, she should designate her successor, preferably her brothers' daughter or her own younger sister, to her position. Owing to this, as soon as a daughter is born to one of her brothers, she negotiates with him and, on approval, the child is symbolically designated, and a suitable name is also given to her. Such a proposal is rarely refused, since it has financial and socio-religious advantages to the family. The girl, who is designated to be a
Devalasi, cannot freely mix with the youth of the caste or community, though she is free to move around and earn for the family. After attaining suitable age her dedication rite to the deity is performed by having an elaborate ceremony for which her village, caste and clan men and women attend. Now, it is the duty of the senior Devalasi and the village elders to see that she remains a virgin during her office. Any violation is punishable to the extent of excommunication and heavy fines to both men and the girl. Her maintenance expenses such as food, clothing, etc., are borne by the village as a whole. After retirement she is at liberty to go as a concubine of any man she and her family desire.

(ii) Jāti Basavi:

This class of Devalasis is dedicated by a caste (Jāti) to the caste deity. Her selection and maintenance are the affairs of that particular caste. However, it is not clear whether she is restricted to have sex relations with her caste men only or outside also. The low caste youth who now oppose the dominance of the upper castes on them, also oppose their women having ritual sexual relation with them and claim that privilege for themselves. The Jāti Basavi, unlike the
Hre-Basavi, has only a few privileges and obligations. They can live with one man of their choice. Their position is succeeded to by younger girls of the clan. They present themselves in all rites and rituals conducted at the temple and individual homes, mostly to assist temple Basavis and the priest. As woman married the god who has no death, they never become widows at all and get the status of Akhandamou-Basavyavati. Traditionally, they too were supposed to remain virgins, but these days this restriction is not observed strictly, since a single caste cannot afford to maintain a several by itself.

(iii) Dalewada Basavi:

This type of dedication is unique since a male issue-less couple uses one of its daughters to propagate their progeny by dedicating one of their daughters to their favourite deity as a Basavi and claim her children as members of the family. Since the girl is not married out of the clan, like herself, her children will naturally belong to the clan of her father. This type of Basavi, who has been dedicated for a particular purpose, has a few restrictions, and she is at liberty to have sex relations with any man of her choice, but he should belong to her own kin group.
Apart from these Basavis, there are other types of Basavis such as Lingada Basavi, Carudagambada Basavi, Divatige Basavi, Yede Basavi and so on (Setia 1976). Lingada Basavi, are dedicated to Lord Shiva and serve at the temple and receive alms from the devotees. Carudagambada Basavi are dedicated to the flag post dedicated to the angle (Caruda), the vehicle carrier of Lord Vishnu. The Divatige Basavi carries the sacred lamp (Divatige) of the deity, when the deity is taken in procession, and gets customary payments for this service from the devotees. Yede Basavi is one who carries the sacred food (Yede) offered to the deity and later claims it for herself and her family and clan. For ritual purpose, the dedication of girls from low castes to a deity belonging to upper castes was not allowed. So, they dedicated their girls to holy objects in the shrine—may be the sacred foot marks (Yada), flag post (Kasthe), entrance, pillars etc.

Now let us try to understand the different types of Devadasi of Yellamma deity of Sandatti, the shrine chosen for a detailed study. There are three types of Devadasi of Yellamma. They can be easily identified on the basis of the beads they wear in the form of necklace. The three types of
Sacred necklaces are "Garatì Mutta", "Sulcmuttu" and "Jogti-muttu". Those who wear the necklace of Garatìmuttu type, by rule go as concubines. A few, who are dedicated to the deity owing to a vow taken during emergencies, and traditionally those families are not obliged to dedicate a girl to the deity, also go as concubines. As per the urgency, the girls are dedicated, and later made to live with one man, selected by the family, as his wife. Such types of dedicated women are not over burdened with religious and ritual duties towards the community; and will not also go out to collect alms in the name of the deity. But, as a custom, they have to keep an idol of the deity in the family and worship it every day.

Like other types of Devadasis, they also visit the shrine during important festivals and also observe a few extra customs at the shrine, which include breaking the bangles, wearing sacred necklace etc. After the death of the person, with whom they lived or in old age, they again get initiated to Jogatihood by wearing Jogatì beads.

Those women who wear Sulcmuttu, come from the customarily designated families and castes, and these are the ones who are allowed to practise prostitution. The belief is that,
being poor, they have nothing to offer to the deity other than themselves. So, then they entertain customers sexually, they believe that they actually serve the deity, and in this belief, they go round different places, pleasing more and more men.

As dedicated women, they also have a few religious duties towards the shrine and the society at large. Whenever occasion arises, they act as religious functionaries in their locality and attend all the rites and rituals celebrated by the families of devotees and the community, and receive alms and ritual food. At the same time, they also attend all important celebrations at the shrine without fail, and also offer a part of their earning to Yellamma deity, their principal co-wife for whose services they are actually dedicated.

The last type of Devadasia, viz., those who wear "Jati-pattu" constitute several types of men and women. The widowed and deserted housewives, retired concubines and prostitutes finally become religious persons and devote themselves wholly for the service of the deity. In addition to these, a few men and women, who are mostly sexually functional, are also directly initiated for the service of the deity as nuns and religious functionaries, and as a token of this status they wear the Jogati bead necklace.
The three types of Savadani of Yellamma deity we have discussed here have their mythical connections to explain the three life stages of Yellamma who herself underwent as the chaste, degraded and pious wife of Sage Jamadagni. These three types of Savadani can be easily identified by the religious objects taken by them when they go around the society; a pot, a basket with the images of the deity (Jaga) and a begging basket. These three types of Savadani can also be arranged in a hierarchical order, as follows: Girls directly dedicated to Jogatinhood are virgins and, as a mark of it, they carry a metal pot on their head when they go on religious duties. They symbolize the maiden stage of the deity. The destitute and widowed house-wives and retired concubines, who become Jogatis, carry a basket with the images of Yellamma, symbolizing the chaste and faithful life they led as wives of sage Jamadagni. The Sule, a symbol of cursed and degraded wife of Jamadagni, is stripped off her religious duties and she carries only a begging basket with her. The devotees who have Yellamma as their family deity in particular and those, who know the traditions of this Savadani custom in general, can easily find out the difference between these three types of dedicated women and treat them accordingly. But those who do not know anything about the
Devedasi custom and the Devadasis, are shocked to see so many of them roaming in the society and leading an immoral life.

Like this, in all temples where the Devadasi custom is practised, there will be more than one type of Devadasis. Among them, some are customarily barred from having a sexual life because of their sexual afunctional status or old age. So, only a few are available for free sex. Among them, a sizeable number are taken as concubine by men, who want extra marital sex and can afford to maintain them. Only a negligible number of Devadasis go as prostitutes.

Theories of Origin of Devadasi Custom:

Devadasi custom is an age old custom, which is practised in both great and little traditions, but there are no documents to tell the origin of the custom. In the absence of this, we have proposed a few theories of the origin of Devadasi custom which are similar to those of the origin of the caste system in India. According to the theory of the origin of caste system advocated by Hutton (1945), the ritually and socially low castes of the society had no direct and intimate contact with the upper castes. They were also suppressed and exploited and
had no means to make a decent living in the society. The only alternative left to them to get this contact was by serving as slaves of the upper castes. As slaves, their women were also easily accessible to the men of the upper castes. So, we hold that to save the honour of their women and to give a legitimate status to the children born to them, these women were dedicated to temples. By dedicating their girls as temple servants, the lower castes wanted to improve their status and relations with the upper castes. These girls were looked after by the temple or by the men of the upper caste. This relation with the upper castes brought them several benefits, which included physical and moral support, intimate and continuous contact and assured maintenance. Another gain was that the children born to a devadasi got a better status when compared to her own.

Religious and Ritual Theory:

The ritually low castes were also illiterate, and so they depended on the learned upper castes for their religious instructions. Owing to this, they developed faith in supernatural beings and superstitions. Since they did not have anything to offer to the deity in the form of knowledge or
wealth, they were told to offer themselves to the service of God. Gradually this resulted in a custom and the lower castes also found it profitable. So, taking vows in the name of Gods and Goddesses to get their wishes fulfilled is an age-old custom, and this belief of the people was misused by the priests and others connected with the temples, and asked the ignorant devotees to dedicate their girls to the temples and earn the goodwill of the God. So, the practice of dedicating girls to temples became popular and, at one time, the priests as of right, demanded girls from the devotees. On the other hand, the devotees, too, thought it was their honour to give away the women named by the priests. This custom was practised in many temples till very recently. For example, Abbe Fubolo states that when the procession of Lord Venkateshwara was taken through the streets of Tirupati on festival days, the priests went about among the crowd and selected most beautiful women they could find and demanded them from their husbands or parents in the name of Venkateswara, for whose services, it was asserted, they were destined (1969:601). Such women were kept in the temple premises, for serving the priests, as long as they were young. Later, when the priests took the youthful girls,
the old ones were given a religious statue by stamping a religious mark on their body and asked to go into the society, to propagate the glory of Venkatshwara. As they went around, they earned their living by collecting alms from the devotees.

It was a part of religious instruction that offering something to the deity was rewarded in bountifully. So, when the devotees came with mundane problems, such as bad health, poverty, barrenness, etc., the priests in the temple or in the community, interpreted it as the anger/wrath of the deity, and suggested that a vow should be taken by the devotees, which included offering of a worship at the shrine, payment of a few coins or dedication of one of their daughters to the deity. To press their point, the selfish priests, who lived on the ignorance of their devotees, quoted instances from the holy scriptures and mythology, narrating the benefits or punishments got by devotees. The dedication of a woman to the deity was one of the ways suggested by the priests to the devotees of lower castes to overcome their miseries.

Racial Theory:

According to Finlay (1891), the racial theory of the origin of the caste system is concerned with the mixing of
racial groups. As migrants, when the Aryans came to India, only a few women might have come with them, and they might have taken the local women as their sex partners. Based on this we propose a theory that they took these local women only after they were dedicated to the deities as Devadasis. They accepted them without any structural clashes since they belonged neither to their group nor to their subjugated group but to the deity. The custom continued to exist even after the availability of women for marriage among them improved. So, the dedicated women continued to serve the sexual purposes of the upper groups.

Political Theory:

A few rulers of India, especially from the south wanted soldiers who had no dependents, so that they could be free, from the family burden. However, wherever they went, the soldiers got their food and women to sleep with, from the local chiefs. These women were also not married but dedicated to the local deity. Their main job was to satisfy soldiers, both sexually and in terms of food, clothing etc. So, this institution of keeping a section of men and women unmarried, no doubt, helped
the rulers of that time. But, later, the women and their progeny continued to follow that custom resulting in the present day Dowasari institution.

Degeneration of Dowasari Custom

The Dowasari custom, which was purely a religious institution and also had a few important functions to perform towards the society, degenerated, over the years owing to several reasons. Sota Shivaram Karanta (1979:7) a noted Kannada literary figure and a social worker, opines that this custom in the past, was well respected and was given encouragement from the court and the society and no stigma was attached to the persons involved in it. Over the years, degeneration took place both in its socio-cultural and ritual aspects. This degeneration can be explained with the help of our theories such as Sanskritization and political disturbances.

(1) Sanskritization Theory

Earlier to the Sanskritization of local customs and traditions, there were many local faiths, with their own deities and rituals. With the coming of such organized Sanskritic Hinduism the local religious faiths and traditions, also called
little traditions, was influenced by it to a great extent. This process has been explained by Srinivas (1966:6) in his thesis to study change in Hindu Society. However, many of these local traditions remained separate from the Sanscritic religion. Over the years, the old and new traditions got mixed up and continued to exist, since the confused devotees followed both of them separately or in an amalgamated form. This happened since the devotees could not get or understand the religious instructions which were in Sanscritic script and the priests also did not give all that they had known. It is also possible that they later twisted a few of the customs to their advantage. It is further possible that, when the Sanscritic scripts were not available to the non-Sanscritic groups, they began to initiate the ways of life and religious practices of the Sanscritic groups and got them half way or wrongly. The Sanscritic religion advocated a high degree of ritual purity and non-pollution and, so, banned women from ritual activities, since they were considered ritually impure. Automatically, the local cultures, which regarded women high in ritual status, got confused. As the Sanscritic religion got weakened, the new and old customs continued to exist and this created confusion.
When the ascetic religion banned the involvement of women in religious and ritual activities, naturally the Devadasis, who had such an important place in their original tradition, lost their status and position. They could neither give up the old order nor follow the new order, and formed a separate category in the field of religion. Once the ritual roles of the women were lost they were grabbed by men who opposed them. Like this the Devadasis lost their status, though they continued in their position as women connected with ritual work and were finally reduced to the status of prostitutes.

(ii) Political Disturbance Theory:

Until the advent of Mogul and British rule in India, there was a lot of political disturbance in Hindu India. Petty rulers fought with one another for religion and glory, and naturally, the temples became their main target. After conquering certain territory, the winners looted the wealth of the temples of their enemies and kidnapped the women attached to them. After the invaders left, the devotees, depending upon their strength, used the old temple or built a new one for their favourite deity. The old Devadasis, who were dishonoured, molested and defiled by the invaders, were also discarded and new
youthful girls were initiated in their place for service.

Similarly, when Jain temples were invaded, the same, living there, were abducted and abandoned. So, was the case with the Buddhist temples and the different sects among the Hindus - such as Shaivas and Vaishnavas. However, till the Muslim and British rule came to India a confused and unstable state of affairs had prevailed and the same temples were used to instal their own deities, and only the idols and dedicated women were abandoned. But, when the Muslims came to India, they not only looted the temples and kidnapped the women but also used both of them later to collect revenue for the state. So they entrusted these to a contractor who, in turn, demanded of the devotees to pay more tax to the temples. This made the dedicated women to go to the extent of harassing the visiting devotees for money so that they could pay the tax levied on them by the State.

The British who followed the Muslim rulers, used the set up, which already existed for their advantage, but in a different way. Their military, trade and commercial establishments were nearer to the coast. They, for the first time, introduced the institution of rod districts and asked the
brothel keepers to procure girls for their personnel, there. As a result, Dovedesi began to move back and forth between the shrines and the British settlements. With this though the British promoted prostitution, they did not get the blame of bringing in a new evil institution into India.

In the past Samindari, Ryotwari, and Mahalwari type of land holdings existed in India. This gave rise to landlordism. Under these system the tenants cultivated the agricultural lands on crop-share and never owned it. The system was given a death blow with the introduction of the Tenancy Act, which came into effect in Karnataka during the year 1965 (Warendra Rani, 1984:42). When the Act was implemented, the so called tenants who were cultivating the land, became the owners of those lands.

Under the feudal system the landlords owned large estates of land. As per feudal law, they owned everything in their estate - men, women, wealth and so on, and this brought them absolute power and authority. After the enactment of the Tenancy Act, they lost most of their lands to their tenants. As a result of this Act, the economic condition of the land-lords weakened and they were forced to forgo many of their old habits and customs and, among them, the women they had maintained
for extra marital sex, relations were also included. Then they abandoned their concubines, these helpless concubines, who were mostly Devadasis, went out in search of patrons, and this resulted in commercial prostitution. Like this the abolition of feudal estates adversely affected the Devadasi custom and made it to lose its glory, pomp and splendour.

When India achieved independence, in the year 1947, it faced many peculiar and burning problems. Among them motivating the masses to accept change and abandon the evil custom was one. It was a time when the country was going in for industrialization. Naturally, the industrial growth resulted in urban centres. Unplanned growth of urban centres, lack of proper housing, unemployment, etc. made the youth seek extra-marital conditions, and this resulted in prostitution. However, the new government brought into force a number of legislations to check the evil custom, and one of them is the abolition of the Devadasi system and rehabilitation of the Devadasis, and their children. Mass marriages and government-sponsored marriages are also doing their best to ease the situation.

The Indian constitution which came into force in 1950 has provided for the educational, political and economical upliftment
and advancement of the weaker sections of the Indian society and this has helped them think rationally, overcome many of the superstitious beliefs and practices. They have been made aware of their rights and privileges through education. The resulting awareness among them regarding the debasing custom and its evil effect on them and also of the domination of the elite of the upper castes, made them revolt against the old practices, and came forward to put an end to the Devadasi custom. As a result Devadasi custom which once suited and benefited them has now lost its value as well as attraction.

1. Aims and Objectives of the Study:

The precise aims and objects of this study are first to trace the origin of the Devadasi custom and also the reasons or factors which sustained it. Secondly, it is aimed at determining the status, role, function etc., the Devadasi had in particular family, caste and community and finding out the changes which have taken place. Thirdly, it is undertaken to investigate into the factors which brought about a shift or change in the functioning of the custom. Finally, it is taken up to probe into the present pathetic conditions of Devadasis.
in a particular and the existence of any institution in general. This is done with the hope that the custom will be understood in all its aspects and this understanding will be used in suggesting ways and means to check the trafficking of women in the name of the age-old custom.

2. **Scope of the Study:**

The study of the Devadasi custom involves the study of the society in all its spheres, such as religion, economy, social groupings, including the political. The scope of the study is restricted to the origin, functioning and evil and good effects of the custom. The geographical scope of the study is restricted to the northern districts of the Karnataka State, i.e. Davanagere, Bijapur, Dallary, Polgaon, Shimoga and Chitradurga districts. We have chosen these districts, because in these districts there are many places such as Soundatti, Shangidiurga, Sirsanag, Chandragatti, Hospet, Davanagere etc., which are closely associated with the shrines in which girls are initiated as Devadasis, even today, in large number. These districts are also prone to recurring drought conditions and affected with the feudal type of landlordism, and lack of industries and so on.
Methodology:

The present study is made on the lines of historical-functional method of anthropology. By using this method, it is possible to probe into the custom, its origin and existence. This method also helps us to know and understand similar customs prevalent in some other religions of India and the rest of the world. Franz Boas (1927) opines that every phenomenon should be considered to be the result of historical happenings. The historical perspectives of culture involve invention and diffusion, resulting in the distribution of cultural elements at a given time into not only cultures but also more or less clear-cut cultural areas. Theogamy, which is also an item of culture but known by different names and in different religions of the world, is also a universal cultural phenomenon. It has diffused into many cultures by way of either migration or frequent contact established by the groups of people with the others and may be of different religions and places.

Malinowski (1931) and Radcliffe-Brown (1962-81) were the staunch advocates of the functional school and opined that "every culture is a working whole, an integrated unity in which every element has a functional contribution to make, so the
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This method is used by us because the very customs of dedicating girls were born in existence in human society since it has a function to perform in the religious life of the society, which has become totally inevitable in the very religious life of the society. This shows that the custom has certain important functions to discharge with the changing conditions and is changing with the changing conditions and has survived even to-day. This shows that the custom has certain important functions to discharge with the changing conditions and has survived even to-day.

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(a) The institution of Devadasi has a definite structural place in the socio-religious and economic life of the people.

(b) Gradually the Devadasis lost their ritual roles and also the support from the temple/society and as were reduced to the status of commercial prostitutes.

(c) Blind belief in the custom coupled with lack of means of earning a living, stimulated the economically poor and low castes to initiate their daughters into Devadasihood.

(d) Over the years the Devadasi custom has been supporting the trafficking of women, and in this affair the shrines, priests, temple administration, etc. are indirectly helping it for their own personal gains.

(e) With the establishment of India as a welfare state, a number of steps are taken by the government to ban and also to rehabilitate the victims of the Devadasi system and, now the situation is fast changing.

This study of Devadasi custom has been made at four levels. After elaborately studying historical religious
background of the subject and collecting data in the library, the focus was shifted to the study of the custom in a village context. This was adopted since every Indian village has a patron (major) deity and, in addition, many other (minor) deities. It is customary to dedicate a Pavadeai to this deity of the village and this is a hereditary right and also an obligation of a certain caste and family. The custom is sustained and promoted by the village elders in the belief that the deity will be pleased and the community life will be without problems. So, to understand what a village community is, to which deity the girls are dedicated, what customs and rituals are followed, who dedicates the girls, who sponsors the rituals and who finally gets the girl for the sexual pleasure, the socio-economic and political interactions etc., a village by name Tadswade was selected.

The village is 15 K.Km. away from Bhavnad city, and 60 Kms. from the famous shrine of Yellamma at Guandetti. The purpose was to know who initiate the girls as Pavadeai, to which caste and groups they belong, high or low, rich or poor, which castes do not initiate their girls as Pavadeais and to which deity the dedication is made and why, etc. For this, a
house to house census of the village was undertaken with the help of a census schedule. A few additional questions were put to the families having Devadasis. This helped us to know to which caste and socio-economic group the Devadasi belong. This also helped us to get a socio-economic and political background of the village and Devadasis. With the help of the data so collected we have determined the castes, economic and social status of the Devadasis the possible pressure on them by the upper castes and so on.

At the third stage — we studied the shrine of Yellamma at Soundatti which is known in Sanskrit literature as "Venuka Vahatra". This is one of the sacred centres of Hindus which attract a large number of devotees. According to Milton Singer (1955:26-27) the sacred centres are places where varieties of ritual and devotional activities are carried on. They include several types of offerings, fire rituals, prayer and recitations, observance of some sacraments and festivals, sacred baths, water offerings, artistic and dramatic performances etc. It was investigated to know how far the shrine chosen by us fit into this explanation.
In Karnataka besides Saundatti, there are many other places in which there are shrines which are noted for girls being dedicated as devadasis, as part of religious activity. Among them, the shrines at Kudlige, Sirsingi, Uchangidurga, Chandragatti, Shagali near Davanagere, Mallare near Harvad, and Ramangudda Shrine of Pevarahalli are important. To know how the ritual complex promotes devadasi custom the Saundatti shrine was studied. Here we intended to collect data on the ritual complex and geography, priests, temples, gods - both major and minor - sacred objects at the shrine, its history, fairs, rites, and rituals. For this we interviewed scholars, priests, devotees, members of the temple trust committee and so on, with the help of a schedule. Later, the researcher stayed for a period of sixty days at the shrine to observe the day-to-day activities there. This helped him to get the data on the activities, relation and behaviour of priests, devotees, devadasis and so on.

At the fourth level of our study, one hundred commercial prostitutes from a city were studied by staying there for seventy days. The informants were interviewed with the help of a schedule with 58 items. These prostitutes were selected at random from
among those who were rounded up by the police and or produced in the courts. Naturally, they were interviewed either at the police stations or at the brothels for data. The aim of the study at this level was to determine to what extent the Devadassi custom contributed to the promotion and propagation of the commercial prostitution. Our study is valuable, since such a study of commercial prostitution was not made so far, by visiting them at their homes. The schedule also included a few more questions to the Devadasis who became commercial prostitutes to probe into their background, causes of being a prostitute, earning, life and living, harassment from the police, court and customers, their future and so on.