CHAPTER III

DEVADASI CUSTOM AND THE SHRINES

After knowing how the Devadasi custom operates at the village level, now let us turn our attention to the shrines where the Devadasis are initiated. Here we discuss what these shrines are, their importance in a religious tradition, roles in the life of the devotees, location, myths connected with the shrine and the deity, major and minor deities at the shrine, the temple organisation - the priests, the devotees and the sacred geography and so on. The shrine we have selected for our detailed study is Shri Venuka Yelamma Kashi at Soudatti. The shrine is in much news recently for its association with the initiation of girls to Devadasi-hood and thus contributing to commercial prostitution in places like Pune and Bombay. To understand the role played by the shrine in the promotion and continuation of the custom of Devadasi, a detailed study of the rites and rituals performed, myths and ritual functionaries are undertaken.

India is known for its famous ancient temples, shrines and sacred places. Right from Kashi to Kanyakumari we have
several thousand Hindu temples and shrines of great importance. In these temples and shrines, different religious activities are conducted by the devotees as a part of their regular religious activity. Devotees wish to spend more and more time in temples and other sacred places because they are very sentimentally devoted to them. They take an active part in singing devotional songs (Manjans) and chanting (Mantras) and so on and so forth. Each shrine is famous for its own deity. For example, Kashi is famous for Lord Vishwanatha, Tirupati for Lord Venkateswara, Rali shrine of Kerala for Goddess Malikadesvi. In Kashmir, Mysore city for Goddess Chausari, Soundatti and Chandragutti, shrines for Goddess deity and pavesagudi for Sairatalings, Hospet for Mallikari, and so on.

In all these shrines and places of worship, once in a year, a festival or fair is celebrated in honour of the presiding deity with all colour and pomp. These are celebrated according to the ritual calendar of the shrine, which is again modelled according to the folk or Sanskrit Hindu ritual calendar.

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, a "shrine" is a place where religious devotion is paid to a saint or deity.
It is usually considered hallowed because of its association with saintly persons or miraculous events. In the words of Milton Singer (1955:26-27), the sacred centres are places where many varieties of ritual and devotional activities are carried on. They include several types of offerings, fire rituals, prayer and recitations, observances of some sacraments and festivals, sacred baths, water offerings and artistic and dramatic performances. With such a focal place in the religious life of the devotees, the shrines have been studied by experts for different purposes since long. Among them, Indologists and travellers have left notable information on the shrines, and their working and functions. Recently the major shrines of India have been systematically studied by students of Hindu civilization. Among them the anthropologists who worked under the leadership of Prof. L.P. Vidyarthi and their publications are noteworthy (Vidyarthi 1976, Saraswat 1975).

Hindu temples have been always built in a place which is held in high esteem such as the confluence rivers, top of the mountains, birth place of rivers and so on. larger the number of devotees bigger the temple or vice-versa. The
popularity of a shrine depends upon the powerful influence of the principal deity there. There is a belief among the Hindus that certain deities are active (Jagratas) at a certain period. Once a deity or shrine becomes known for fulfilling of the wishes of the devotees, it is considered an "active" one. Naturally, the shrine attracts more and more devotees, and this means more contribution or offerings to the deity made in view of the fulfillment of the vow taken by the devotees. Vow-taking and later offering donations for its fulfillment goes on and in the process the temple draws more devotees and more wealth.

Devotees belonging to different traditions and religious faiths take vows according to their religious beliefs. Devotees belonging to the Hindu faith and coming under great tradition, take vows in the way prescribed in holy scriptures. They are usually in the form of offering devotion, visits, chanting, penance, charity and so on. On the other hand, the vows taken in the little tradition are non-sanscritic, that is, in the form of offering of cooked food, meat, blood, etc., to the deity,
Devotees, belonging to both great and little traditions, visit the temple of their family/favourite deity though not frequently but certainly once or twice a year, to attend annual fair or festival of the deity. The distance from their residence, and availability of transport and other facilities are no hurdles to such a trip. Since such a trip to the shrine is made in fulfilment of a vow, any difficulties physical, monetary, etc., are not considered a problem. This is due to the strong devotion and faith they have in the deity. Their prime object of visiting the shrine, is to offer something to the deity in fulfilment of a vow or vows. The limited or poor facilities available at the shrine does not bother them. The demands of the religious functionaries and bad treatment at the shrine does not also affect their devotion. At the most, one can postpone a visit to the shrine for some time. This in turn brings or increases the faith in them and does not reduce or remove it. With the same feeling the devotees throng the shrine of Yellama at Sounudatti.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SHRINE:

According to the available history of Sounudatti Shrine, the first known rulers of the area were the Ratnas, a Jaina.
dynasty. At that time, the area was known as Sougandhika.

Much earlier to this, during the Third Century A.D., the area was under Shaktas, the worshippers of mother goddess. They worshipped Shaktismate in the form of Matsangi. Later, Yellamma was introduced here in the form of her elder sister, The Jaina Kings, who ruled over the area for a long period, erected a temple for goddess Padmavati at the shrine. During the 8th century A.D., they also enrolled nuns in the name of the deity for religious service. By the 9th century, the Jaina rule and religion both lost their force, and once again the Shaktas took over the shrine. During the 10th and 11th centuries, Shaiva Kings ruled over the area, and, as per the law of the time, it is alleged, the Jaina Shrines became Shakte shrines. With this once again the Shaivites, especially the Kalamukha sect among them replaced the idol of Padmavati with the present idol of Yellamma. During the 12th century when refined Shaivism i.e., Veerashaivism, became dominant, attempts were made to refine the ritual activities at the shrine such as modes of worship, offerings and ways of life of the priests and devotees. As a result, offering of blood, alcoholic beverages, and dedication of girls, to the deity,
were also hindered. The advent of Veerashaivism also resulted in the Sanskritization of the local tradition and introduction of a more refined belief system.

During the later part of the 12th century, the territory came under the Vijayanagara rulers of Hampi. But at the beginning of the 13th century, they lost their hold on the territory to the local chieftains. With this political change, the shrine, once again came under the Shakta. Till the middle of the 14th century, the area and the shrine was under the local chieftains who were vessels of Vijayanagara empire. With the fall of the empire, at the hands of the Muslim rulers of South India, the Sounatti shrine lost its royal patronage and also links with the main stream of refined Hinduism and Veerashaivism. Once again, during the 16th century, the Marathas conquered the territory, and even constructed a fort at the other end of the hillock, at Pesagada. Since they were the worshippers of Ambabavesali, the other form of Shakti, they made donations to the Sounatti shrine and offered protection against Muslim invasion. Then the Maratha kingdom itself fell to the Moghuls once again the local chieftains recovered the area.
By the time the British took over the territory, the Soundatti temple was with the Peasi of Sirasagi, who later built the present fort at Soundatti town. The Peasi, was a Veereshiva Lingayat and naturally he gave protection and land-grants to the shrine. It is possible that during his regime the ancestors of the present day priests of the Shrine, who are Lingayats, secured the right to worship the deity as their priests and collect income from the temple. Since the British had proclaimed policy to honour the religious status of local chieftains and shrines, they allowed the same system to continue in the form it was when they took over. As a result, even to this day, the descendants of these priests continue to hold the status and claim the benefits from that shrine.

**MYTHS CONNECTED WITH THE SHRINE:**

There are several myths connected with the Soundatti shrine and the deities here. A few are sahesive and others are non-sahesive. Goddess Kenuka is mentioned in the great Hindu epics such as (i) Vishnu Purana, (ii) Shiva Purana and (iii) Shanka Purana. In Vishnu purana there is a mention of Yellamma deity at Harivansa, Bhagavata, Venu Purana.
Both little and great traditions give their own versions about the origin of Soundetti shrine. The version given by the little or local tradition goes like this, Yellumma, meaning mother of all (nellara Amma) was the sister of the headman of Uguregola - a small village on the other side of the hill-look on which the present shrine is located. She was suffering from leprosy, and so, she was kept away by the family, and she lived on the hillock. Daily she came to the edge of the hillock to collect her food from her brothers. One day, on the hillock, she met two Shaktas - Ekkayya and Jogayya and narrated to them her pathetic story. Listening to her plight, they treated her and cured her of the disease and employed her for their service. As a daily routine she visited the villages around the hillock, and collected food and alms for the two holy men. Gradually the name and ritual powers of the holy men spread far and wide and people started visiting them with their problems. As they came, they brought offerings of food, material goods etc., for them. By the time the two men grew old, they had taught the magic-religious art to Yellumma. Later, she became the central person and the belief spread that any vows taken in her name can solve the problems including diseases of the mortals. This gradually
grew into a shrine and her brothers began to manage the shrine and thus got the right to worship her and collect the income from it. As a result, even to-day, they have retained the right to officiate as the temple priests.

Myths Connected with the Great Tradition:

In Sanskritic scriptures the deity is known as Renuka. According to Harappurana, she is the daughter of Renuka Raja, King of Ikshaku clan. According to the epic Harivamsa, another Sanskritic holy scripture, Renuka was born in a Lotus Flower and taken by the useless king Renuka, and so got the name after him. But the epic Vajapurana denies it and advocates that Renuka was the daughter of sage Suvana and she was known here by the name Kamali. According to the Mahabharata, yet another source, Renuka married sage Jasodagni, who belonged to Harugavansa clan. According to Skanda Purana, yet another source, Sri Renuka, an incarnation of Aditi Devi, was born of the sacrificial fire (Yagnakunda) while Renuka, the King of Kashmir, was performing a great sacrifice (Yajñayagna) to the gods. On coming of age she was married to saint Jasodagni, who, himself, was an incarnation of Lord Shiva and born to the sage.
Chowana-Bhangama of the Kachopa clan. The Jamadagni couple lived in their hermitage at Siddhachala or Ramavilasana, which is today's Sonnati or Jagandevati hill and close to the river Malaprabha. To these were born four sons and of them Parsurama was the last.

According to the myth, Remuka, now the wife of sage Jamadagni, fetched holy water daily morning from the river Malaprabha for her husband's worship. To bring water she daily made a pot of sand on the bank of the river, and carried it on the coil of a live-snake, as the pot-rest. She could do this owing to the power of chastity, loyalty and devotion she had towards her husband and her moral chastity. One morning, when she approached the river, she saw Chitraka (Sandharwa) sporting in the water with his wives. For a moment Remuka lost her mental composure and with that her moral chastity and her power to mould the pot of sand was also lost. So, that day, she had to return home without the holy water. On seeing her empty-handed, the sage could visualise as to what had happened and cursed her to lose her youth and charms and also ordered her to leave his hermitage. He in turn sat for a long and deep meditation.
Renuka, now sickly and ugly, wandered on the hillock and in nearby villages for food and shelter. One day she was spotted and recognised by Ashwini Kumarama, the twin physicians of gods. They took pity on her and cured her of her disease and brought her back to youth and charm. After attaining youth and charm, Renuka again went to her husband only to incur his wrath. He asked his sons to chop-off her head for the insult she had brought on to him by taking the help of others to cure her of her disease. But the first three sons, who were present there, refused, and thus they too earned the displeasure of their father and became impotent or eunuchs. Then he called his fourth son Pārashurāma, who had earlier repaired to a forest for penance to carry out his wish. Then he arrived, as a devoted and obedient son, he carried out his binding without a word. Jñānadgāni was very much pleased with his action and promised him a boon. Pārashurāma asked his father for the resurrection of his mother. Accordingly Jñānadgāni brought her to life, but vowed never to see her face again and went to Himālaya for meditation. Renuka stayed behind to look after her children and their progeny, and thus restored the shrine and the tradition.
According to another minor myth, the slain Remuks joined her husband at his hermitage but with the head of another woman. This woman who lent her head became known as Mahottangi. The couple lived happily with their children. At that time, the divine cow (Zemadhenu) was also with them to fulfill their day-to-day needs. One day, Karthavēraraśu, king of Mahispati, visited the sage with his men. The king wanted the divine cow for himself, but this request was turned down by the sage. Enraged by this, the king killed Jamadagni and Remuka became a widow. That day was a full moon day. Pārashurāma who was away at that time later came to know that his father had been killed by the king. He took a vow to wipe out the race of Kshatriyas, the ruling caste, from the earth. Accordingly, he went round the earth, eighteen times, to kill them.

When all this was happening Jamadagni's father was away meditating in Himalayas and he came to know of his son's death and came down to revive him. The day on which the Jamadagni was resurrected to life was also a full moon day. To commemorate her widowhood and her regained marital (Pathādas) status, the devotees of Remuks celebrate both these full moon days as festivals, in a grand manner.
Plate No. 3

1) Devotees going around the sacred well in Pindernahar

2) Devotions of the deity, with the Nividya

3) Offering prayers to the deity

4) Devotion of the deity and the sacred Shrine
Devotees arriving at the shrine by bus and rickshaw.

Sacred well at Jogulamba.

Taking sacred water for worship.
To-day, Sri Renuka is called by different names, such as Yellamma, Shaktinatha, Jagadamba and so on. This is a clear indication that she is the deity of the people, who belonged to several traditions. No doubt, Renuka is a sanskritic name, and a recent one. But if we turn to the religious history of the area, we come to know that this hillock was the home of several traditions. The first inhabitants were the worshippers of a female deity, Kätangi, whose temple is still there, but a little distance away from that of Yellamma. Later, during the 3rd century, the Shaktas of Shaivite sect, under the leadership of Kālamsūka, took over the shrine. From the 6th century onwards and till the end of 8th century, the area was under the rule of the Jainas kings, and they installed Padmavati deity here and also built a temple in their style of architecture. From 9th century onwards, Jainism declined and Shaivas took over the shrine once again, and they replaced the deity with Shaktinatha. The Shaktas, especially the Kālamsūka, indulged in worldly pleasures such as sex, intoxicating drinks, and smoking. It is also alleged that they used the Jainas nuns in the temple as their sex objects and asked for more and more in the name of dedication and service to the deity. Like this
more and more girls were dedicated to the deity every year as "Devedania".

The Kalashka Shaktas dominated the scene till the 12th century, when the refined Vaesavaivism gave a death blow to them. Side by side, sanskritization was going on in the tradition, and this can be seen from the myths and legends prevailing about the shrine. The Shenuke-Jamadagni myth, Parashurama myth, Natangi myth are examples to this. Through these myths an attempt was made to replace beliefs, deities and traditions. Parashurama, an incarnation of Vishnu entered the Shiva faith, so also Vattstrayu, who is believed to have come to the earth to perform the funeral rites of Jamadagni and remained at the shrine. It is owing to these attempts, the asceticite deity Remuka found a place in the shrine.

It was generally believed that the idols of the deity Sri Remuka and Sri Jamadagni are self born (Swayambhu) and not carved, and installed by human beings. The idols are of black granite of Seligrama stones and they have fine marmalick shine on them. So far as the temple structure is concerned, the main temple of Sri Remuka is very ancient and is reported to be
about 600 years old. The sanctum sanctorum (Garbhagudi) seems to be much more older. The present structure of the temple was built probably during the 14th century in the style of Chalukyas of Kalyani. The architectural style is of Nāgara School and the temple dome (Shikhara) is also of Nāgara style. There are also many later additions to the temple, probably made during the 15th or 16th centuries, when this part of the country was ruled by the Vijayanagara kings or during 16th century when Bashave of Funr ruled. An inscription on the pillar of the inner hall (Mantapa) says that the hall was built by Timmappe Nagesha, a chieftain or a viceroy under Vijayanagara King, Krishnedovera (1509-30). Many recent additions such as the idols of Cobra god, Ganesha, Shwara, etc., have considerably marred the original architectural beauty of the temple.

Apart from the temple of Nellesma, the principal deity, there are a number of other temples of major and minor deities around the main temple. They are as follows:

1. Sri Nelliikarjuna
2. Sri Varahasuresh
3. Sri Siddheswara
4. Sri Ganapatı
5. Sri Akashśa Parma
6. Sri Uppine Kesappa
7. Sri Jomadegni
8. Sri Narukellavva
9. Sri Perwateswara
10. Sri Matangi
11. Sri Rama Bevaru
12. Sri Chatri Deva
13. Sri Markandeswara
14. Sri Malinge Krishna
15. Sri Snakellavva
16. Sri Kamakshi
17. Sri Minakshi
18. Sri Burgadevi
19. Sri Kedorlinge
20. Sri Mallarlinge
21. Sri Marutı Bevaru
22. Sri Chennallaama
23. Sri Julari Devi
24. Sri Pattatreya
25. Sri Tulalsedevi
25. Sri Bhedra Keli
27. Sri Veerabhadra
26. Sri Annapurna devi
29. Sri Mahakesha
30. Sri Kemaratiyaru
31. Sri Putukas devi
32. Sri Hovedi devi
33. Sri Takehka
34. Sri Hededa Karivarasa
35. Sri Ramalinga
36. Sri Raveeswara
37. Sri Panchauree Guru Ganapati
38. Sri Natrutirtha devi
39. Sri Kalodi Tirtha devi
40. Sri Arihine Tirtha devi
41. Sri Siddeowara guru
42. Sri Jado Karivarasa
43. Sri Sreu amuha
44. Sri Kessadeenu
45. Sri Kalpavraksha
46. Sri Chintemani
47. Sri Siddha Paduka
48. Sri Dravata
49. Sri Garuda Sarpa
50. Sri Ganesha Archandevaru
51. Sri Sakshi Ganpati
52. Sri Kalaabhairava
53. Sri Mankeaware
54. Sri Madalabhavi Karesma
55. Sri Akasha Brahma Devora
56. Sri Kalleswara
57. Sri Telada Kariyama
58. Sri Saraswati devi
59. Sri Kekinath and Jeginath Math
60. Sri Jogula Khavi Satyerva
61. Sri Yekinath, Jeginath, Padkatti.

Of those 61 deities and shrines twenty four belong to female deities and thirty seven to male. Again 25 belong to Shiva sect and 9 to Vaishnava sect. They can also be classed into two traditions - little and great. Of the sixty one shrines 10 belong to little tradition and 51 to great tradition.
The temple of Jamadagni and Matangi are outside the Yellaman temple enclosure, on the other bank of the rivulet. Besides these temples there are four sacred lamp posts (deepa-malekamba) and a Siddi-Kamba and Kyadgi-Vana on the shrine. The main deity is also known as Valukollada Yellama, the deity of seven water springs. The place gets this name since the shrine is located at the meeting point of seven springs flowing out of the cracks in the rocks of the hills and joining the river Valaprahha. They are:

1. Sanganakolla
2. Siddana Kolla
3. Mahaavena Kolla
4. Naggala
5. Iruwa Kolla
6. Gorevana Kolla
7. Yadral Kolla.

Besides these holy springs, there are three more holy bathing places (Tirthas). They are Kaduvanda Senda, Yenni-Senda, and Arishina Senda. Taking a holy bath in them is considered very sacred and believed to relieve the bather from all sins. Of these, Yennihonda, is perennial and considered the holiest of the three.
KONAIK'S GATMATS MUS"MOSHO MODERNE OF WORSHIP TEMPLE TODAY IS DEFINITELY NOT SACRED, THOUGH A NUMBER OF ATTEMPTS ARE BEING MADE TO MAKE IT ONE. THIS BECAUSE IT CONFORMS NEITHER TO AGAMA NOR TO SHAKHA OR TO TANTRIC PRINCIPLES, BUT HAS BEEN EVOLVED FROM THE LOCAL TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS.

No special worships or services ( ARCHANS OR SEVAS ) are performed to the deity. The priests, who claim to be the descendents of the brothers of the Yollama deity, have the right to worship and claim the monetary and other benefits for themselves. It is their only qualification and no training in holy scriptures or rituals is formally given to them. Today only the priests are allowed into the inner chamber of the temple, and devotees belonging to whatever caste are supposed to make offerings from the door steps of this inner-hall.

The deity is worshipped twice a day - once in the morning and again in the evening. Customarily, the deity is bathed in holy water drawn from the holiest spring, the Yennihonda. After the holy bath, the idol is garbed in saris of different colours offered by the visiting devotees, and worshipped, using turmeric
powder, flowers and so on. The deity is also offered cooked food - vegetarian, brought from the house of the priest. The devotees are allowed to offer bananas, coconuts, flowers and vermillion powder and no cooked food. In return, they get "prasada" and holy water (teertha) from the temple.

The devotees, after taking a ritual bath, go round the temple first, and enter the temple for the view of the deity and worship. It is said, there is no festival or special day for the devotees to visit the deity, since every day is considered holy and suspicious here. But the stream of devotees is rare during certain week days and months.

According to the ritual calendar given by the temple authorities, the ritual year starts from the full moon day in the month of October. Then onwards, every full moon day is a special festival day. However, full moon days of November and January are specially important, since they mark the change in the marital status of the deity. So it is a 'must' to all the Devadasis and the devotees who have taken a vow to visit the temple and offer their worship.
Sacred specialists are those, who depend wholly or partially for their livelihood on their sacred services (Vidyarthi 1978:50). The sacred specialists, such as priests, play a dominant role in the life of the devotees. At Saundatti shrine, to-day, the right to worship the Vellamma deity rests with 127 priestly families belonging to one clan and claiming to be the descendants of the original priest. The same is claimed today as their hereditary right and they have come to an understanding, and perform pooja in the main shrine by turn. Others stay in their respective homes and receive the devotees who are traditionally assigned to them, on the basis of the clan of devotees and help them in conducting worship etc. They also provide the devotees with lodging facilities, and utensils to cook food, and finally accompany them to the major shrine. The customary rule is that, without their linked priests, entry to the main temple is not permissible.

The temple priests, apart from their daily routine duties at the shrine, also visit the devotees, who are linked to them at their villages, to collect alms and to assist them in conducting domestic ritual activities. In a way payment to
priest fees resulted in a regular annual payment similar to that of jajmani payments (c.f. Oscar Lewis: 1958; Leshawari: 1956 and Gurumurthy: 1976). The temple priests usually visit their clients during the harvest season, to collect their alms, mainly in the form of food grains. They also demand cows, buffaloes etc., from the clients when some significant event such as birth, death etc., occurs in the family. The devotees, too, do not refuse their demand, thinking that any refusal might lead to the wrath of the deity and so on.

The temple priests of Yellama shrine reside in Ugaragole, a village which is 3 kilometres away from the temple. They claim that worshipping of the deity is their traditional right and occupation, which was handed over to them by their fore-fathers. So, they never allow a devotee to worship the deity by himself and expect that the fees be made through them. In addition to the income from the temple, the temple priests also own land and conduct business in their village. The income from the temple is no doubt very high. All these factors have made them financially well off and also influential in the villages and towns, which come under the sacred geography of the shrine.
The administration of the temple is covered by the provisions of Sri Penakulam Pallavan Devasthanam Administration Act of 1974, which came into force on 2nd October, 1975. Prior to this enactment, this temple was registered as a public trust under the Bombay Public Trust Act, 1950, in the year 1964 (Registration No. 5864), and was administered by a Trust Committee and the Charity Commissioner, Bengal.

The temple trust committee was established in the year 1945, and was in existence till October 1975. Prior to 1945, a committee of elders (Ponnams) administered the temple.

It is said that with the founding of Sri Pellamma temple committee, and, later, the trust, the influence of the temple priests on the devotees got weakened. But they have adopted several ways to (extract) money from the ignorant, traditionally minded and helpless devotees. For example, today the entire revenue levied on the breaking of the coconut, worship etc., to the deity goes to the temple trust committee fund. Since the entry to the temple is through their linked priests, they extract money from the devotees before they are brought to the temple. There is no way to escape from this, since, traditionally it is only through their linked priests
the devotees can get an entry into the temple. As a result, the devotees have to make double payments - one to the linked priest, and another to the temple committee.

For every ritual performed at the shrine a devotee has to pay to his linked priest both in terms of coin and kind. For example, on the occasion of tonsure ceremony, depending upon the financial status of the devotee family, the priests collect money ranging from Rs. 5/- to Rs. 101/- and even Rs. 1,001. Similarly, after marriage when a property such as a bullock is bought or a house is constructed, the devotees have to visit the shrine and offer their gratitude to the deity. To do that they need the help of the priests and pay them. To gain entry in to the shrine, they have to pay money to the temple committee. They oblige all this since it is believed that it is with the blessings of the deity it was achieved.

Similarly, the dedication of girls as Navadasis also brings a lot of income to the priests. In the past, when it was not legally banned, there was a nominal fee to perform this rite. But now, owing to the ban imposed by the Government
the priests have fixed a price, which ranges from Rs. 500/- to Rs. 5000/- or even more, depending upon the urgency and the status of the people involved. However, the priests will never publicly accept their involvement in the deal. Those who accept, tell that they have to share this income with senior Devadasis who groom the girls, temple committee officials, temple priests, police etc.

Apart from the priests, the other religious functionaries, such as Jógapas and Jógaumas have their own role to play in the religious life of the devotees of Yellama deity. The priests of Yellama worship her on by turn, so that all the 127 families of priests can get their chance to worship the deity in a year and collect money, food grains and even gold and silver, from their devotees. But the Jógapas and Jógaumas have their own linked group of priests and, according to their advice and guidance, they work for them. These religious functionaries not only assist the priests in conducting the worship of the deity but also groom the girls and boys for initiation to divine service.

These religious functionaries have direct and intimate contact with the devotees of their linked priests. This is
because of the fact that the priests can not visit the families of their devotees very often, since they are scattered, and live far away from the shrine. No, on behalf of the priests, these religious functionaries go and collect their anticipated food grain, money, cows, bulls, buffaloes and even new clothes. They even put them in religious threat, when they come to know that the devotees do not pay according to their expectation.

Many a time, some of the ritual activities, which are minor in character are conducted locally by these religious functionaries even without the presence of the priests. Especially at the time of initiating girls to Tevedashood they have a special role to play. This is because of the fact that the initiation of girls to Tevedashood is legally banned. Moreover, the police and the social workers will have an eye over the activities of the priests. During such time, the religious mendicants such as Jogappas and Jagasams will take the girls who are selected for initiation, to a safe place, and arrange for their initiation, thus, avoiding the police and other law enforcing officials who come in the way of initiation of girls. For all these services, they are tipped by their
linked priests in the form of commission. Moreover, by the time a person undergoes the initiation as Jēgappē or Jēgama he or she will be old and weak physically. So, they cannot attend any type of work other than this. Above all, by now, they know how to motivate the simple, ignorant and superstitious devotees to oblige them. Both Jēgappē and Jēgama, who are young, take part in group singing and dancing at the shrine. This helps in drawing the attention of the visitors to the shrine and in collecting alms. A few even go to the extent of harassing the visitors to make them pay. By doing all these services, they have carved a place for themselves, both in the religious life of the devotees and also in the ritual complex of Yellama deity.

Both Jēgappē and Jēgama sing songs and dance in honour of Yellama deity. They praise the glory and splendour of the deity in their songs. As per the mythology these Jēgappa are the sons of Yellama and became the victims of the curse of her husband Lord Jamsagai for disobeying him.

The cult of Mother Goddess became popular only at the end of the Vedic period. It is a fact that the worship of
Mother Goddess was common in almost all the proto-historic civilizations of the ancient days. The Indus valley people transmitted the widespread cult of the Mother Goddess in the form of Shakti Devi, Mata etc., to their successors. In ancient times, female deities enjoyed the highest place among the gods, and this is also true among all the matrilineal societies of those times. According to the Egyptian legends, it was believed that agricultural civilization had a female origin. Like in Egypt in Babylonia also the early belief was that life in the universe had a female origin. The worship of Mother Earth, which developed later into all pervading Mother Goddess, was the feature of the agricultural civilization.

The Vedic Aryans were the worshippers of the father gods; but they could not annihilate the prevailing cult of Mother Goddess, so the Goddess Prithvi was allowed to remain in the Vedic Pantheon (Sinha 1965:122). The Mother Goddess was worshipped under different names and among these Shakti is one who is addressed to different names such as Shaktimata, Durga, Parvati, Renuka, Kali, Kapti, Kapila, Chandrakali, Meherkali, Chandi, Katyayini, Kali, Maya and so on. Mother
Goddess who was worshipped under many names her devotees took delight in sacrificial victims, but owing to secularisation of the rites and rituals, the devotees have now given up the offering of blood, meat, alcoholic beverages and so on to propitiate the deity (Sarma:1966:205). In case of Menaka - Yellamma too similar changes have come in terms of worship, offerings and even her name.

**DEVOTEES:**

Soudatti Yellamma deity has devotees in all parts of the Karnataka State, and also in neighbouring states of Mahara-
ashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Goa. They visit the shrines at least once in a year, either during the "Manast Melaana", which will be in the month of January/February, or "Pende Mahaana" during October/November. Anybody can become the devotee of Yellamma deity and there are no barriers of any kind such as caste, occupation and sex.

The devotees of Yellamma can be classified into two categories: those who have her as their (1) family deity (2) their favourite deity. The treatment given to the two categories of the devotees by the priests is different and
one can see it when they visit the shrine. Those who have
her as their family deity are distributed among the priestly
families on the basis of their clans, and this is a linked
relation. They, on coming to the shrine, first visit the
linked priest, along with the Jogati or Jogappa, who has
brought or accompanied them. They have come to the shrine
means they have a vow to fulfill. The first reaction of the
linked priest is to snub them for the delay or lack of devo-
tion, and he collects his fees through threats and harassments.
Later, they prepare a plan of ritual activities and payments
and also fix up an appointment to visit the deity. They have
to obey him and they are treated as his subjects. They are
not even allowed to sit in his presence, let alone demand
services from him.

The devotees who have her as their favourite deity,
do not have this difficulty. According to their convenience,
ye visit the deity and perform the worship. They are at liberty
to go to any priest, they find friendly and, helpful, for gui-
dance. The treatment given to them is also cordial. It is open
to them to make payments either to his, or the temple of the
priest at the temple.
The devotees, based on their religious belief, take vows in the name of the deity to fulfill their wishes/desires. Taking a vow in the name of the deity to fulfill a desire is not a tradition. Each and every vow contains three elements—i.e., (i) praying to the deity to avoid or overcome difficulties or to bestow a boon, (ii) promising (the devotee promises the deity to offer something in return) and (iii) fulfillment of vows. These three elements are common in each and every vow, taken by the devotee or by the members of the families of the devotees, irrespective of their religious faith and belief.

The vows taken by the devotees can be grouped into three major categories on the basis of the persons involved. They are the—

1) Personal vows
2) Family vows and
3) Village vows.

Personal vows are those which are taken by the individual, directly in the name of the deity to avert his or her
personal problems. In case of the family vows, the head of the family, on behalf of the family as a whole, takes the vow to get peace and prosperity for the entire family. Regarding the vows taken at village level on behalf of the village, the village head men or an influential person takes the vow to get peace and prosperity for the entire village. While fulfilling the vow, the family or the village as a whole, participates in it. Apart from this, the devotees of Meilamma also take different types of vows and they may be conveniently grouped into two types: (i) vows involving offering of gifts to the deity and (ii) vows involving the punishment to the devotee. The vows which involve offerings of gifts to the deity, are again divided into two types such as gifts of (i) a permanent nature and (ii) a temporary nature. Gifts of a permanent nature include offering of objects made in silver such as face image of the deity, handa, lingam, trishula, eyes, bangles, bells, pot, rings and so on. Other kinds are breaking coconut, lighting camphor, throwing turmeric powder and salt on the deity at the main entrance of the temple and so on.

Vows involving the punishments are also divided into two types. Vows involving self-punishment and vows of punishment
on behalf of others. Self punishments are śurulēgra, bhīsma
dandaseya, fasts etc., here the object is self punishment.
Vows involving the punishment on behalf of others include
dedication of a girl as Devadasi. Such vows are made on
behalf of the family by a grand mother or great-grand-mother.
Performing "side" is another vow wherein the person who has
taken a vow hanges himself/herself by the steel hooks suspended
to a rope or pole. These types of vows are supported by
the superstitious beliefs of the devotees, and these in turn
are supported by the myths connected with the Devi deity.
For example, the myth of replacing the head to the body of
Kaliyan by the head of a low caste woman makes the low castes
feel proud. So, the religious functionaries such as Jēgētics
and priests induce the devotees to give more and more of their
girls to the service of the deity. However, it should not be
concluded that all the devotees, who visit the shrine, take a
vow of dedicating a daughter to the deity, to overcome their
problems. It is only those who have such a tradition of taking
vows do so. It is found that this type of vow-taking prevails
mostly among the devotees belonging to lower castes.

As has been mentioned in the first chapter, the devo­
tees belonging to lower and poorer castes who could not offer
material goods, offered themselves to the deity for service. Such men and women were dedicated to the deity by performing a ritual at the shrine. Here, the roles of Jogati and temple priests are important. As was said earlier the people belonging to low castes were totally banned from taking part in the ritual activities at the shrine and the community level. The only way open to them to enjoy a good and cordial relationship with the learned, economically well-off and upper caste people, was to dedicate their girls to Devadasihood.

To some extent, this dedication of girls solved their problem. Before the system of dedicating girls as Devadasis was started these persons had probably been working as slaves to the dominant upper caste men. As slaves their women were also easily accessible to them. Later, to save the honour of these women and to give a legitimate status to their children, they 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 temples or by the upper caste men and this relation with the upper castes brought them several gains, which included physical and moral support, intimate and continuous contact and assured maintenance.
Another reason which made the low castes dedicate their girls to devedashood was religious faith. Those people were illiterate and totally dependent on the learned upper castes for their religious instructions. Added to this, was their faith in supernatural beings and superstitious. Since they did not have anything to offer to the deity in the form of knowledge or wealth, they were told by the upper castes to offer themselves to the service of god. Gradually this resulted in a custom and the lower castes also found it profitable.

Taking vows in the name of gods and goddesses to get the wishes fulfilled is an age old custom. This belief of the people was misused by the priests and others connected with the temple. They even asked the ignorant devotees to dedicate their girls to the temples. This became so popular that at one time the priests demanded so of right girls from the devotees. On the other hand, the devotees too thought it was their honour to give away the girl named by the priests for the service of the deity. Like this, dedicating girls to Devedashood developed as a custom and the shrines started initiating girls to become Devedasis.
Devaradon with his shaved head.

Devaradon with a decorated pot.

Jogappu with matted hair.

Devadasi with matted hair.
Devadasis sitting & all their subservient duties in front of the temple.

Devotees, in the temple area.
The performance of rites for initiating girls as Devadasis starts with the taking of a vow. Sometimes the vow was taken when the girl was too young or even such before she was born. On her coming of age and the family being ready with financial and other matters, fixed a day and visited the shrine for the offering. The dedication rites started with the girl taking a ritual bath in a well at the shrine known as Jogula-Bhavi. After the customary bath, she is supposed to march naked to the temple. But after days she is wrapped in tufts of neem leaves or a new saree. From here the procession first

Jogula Bhavi means idolani well. This has no direct or even related meaning to the tradition. However the custom of taking a bath in this well before marching nude to the temple for initiation symbolizes the rebirth or change of ritual status of the individual. Whatever the age of the person, once taken bath here in the well symbolises a rebirth. So as a child born few minutes has no (earily) inhibitions of the world and so marched nude. Second explanation is the name Jogula Bhavi is the corrupt form of the term Jogu Bevi, meaning the well which gets its water from the percolated water from the hillock. Since the well is situated in the foothill, the water percolated from the hillock drains into this well and used by the low caste devotees to take ritual bath earlier to their climbing to the hillock to visit the shrine.
went to the house of the family priest and accompanied by him further to the temple of Jamadagni. The required sacred materials needed for the rite were brought by the priest by prior arrangements and payment by the family. On reaching the temple, the girl was asked to go round the temple thrice (Vradakehsa) and then come inside. Making her sit in front of the deity the priest performed a worship to the deity and on behalf of the deity tied the sacred necklace (Mangalamatra) around her neck. Later he also advised her of her new religious rights and duties. From there the party went to Shri Benebe temple and worshipped the deity. From there the party returned to their camp and later to their villages.

If the dedicated girl had already attained puberty, the next rite consummation of her marriage, locally known as Henmamvudri, followed immediately. For the rite, an auspicious day was chosen by the family. If the Devadasi was a Garadi type, the person chosen by the family met the expenses on the rite. In case of Bule type of Devadasis the family bore the expenses. On the day of consummation of marriage rite, by evening, the girl took a ritual bath, and wore the new saree brought by the sponsor. Later, she was taken in a procession to a well in
the village to bring holy water. On her carrying a pot at the main entrance of the house, the sponsor standing across the threshold worshipped it, and later took it to the room where the domestic shrine was. Meanwhile, the community feast sponsored by the men, was consumed by the caste and community elders and they leave. Later the girl was sent to the men for the consummation of the union.

The duration and length of relation between the men and the devadasi depended upon the category of dedication. Accordingly, the duration of their staying together was agreed to by both the parties, and the payments, facilities and gifts to be given by the men were settled and approved by the community elders. If she was a Gareti type, the girl and the men lived like husband and wife, for life. On the contrary, Gule type of Devadasi had different relations, and may be for a short duration - ranging from one night to one week, and at the most one month. With the termination of the agreement with her first paramour, she had to take another person for her maintenance, and, like this, it continued. Since her income was uncertain, she regularly went into the society for begging else and attending rites and rituals conducted in individual
families in her own caste and community and other communities also. As a result, her status as woman, was the lowest, a little better than a commercial prostitute. Owing to her bad economic conditions, she also indulged in grooming other girls for Devadasihood and acted as a contact person between the girls and the sex loving men.

The Devadasis of Sounbatti Yellamma attend all the full moon day celebrations (Kanajasa) at the shrine. Their attendance at the shrine during the full moon days of November/December (Bande Sunnisa) and January/February (Bharat Sunnisa) are however a must. Bande Sunnisa is celebrated to mark the death of Jamadagni, husband of Sri Kemuka. As a custom all the wives of Jamadagni - Varati, Jagati and Sure, converge at the shrine on that day to observe the custom of removing their sacred necklace and bangles to symbolise their widowhood. Three months after this once again the Devadasis assemble at the shrine on the day of Bande Sunnisa. This day is celebrated as the 'Puthadi Sunnisa' by the devotees. It is believed that Jamadagni was resurrected to life on this day. So, the devotees rejoice the occasion by celebrating a festival at the shrine to mark the change in the marital
status of their deity Yellamma. On this auspicious day, along with the Devadasis, the devotees also visit the shrine to perform worship and offer gifts to the deity in fulfilment of their vow. The offerings include new girls as Devadasis. This converging of large number of old and young be servants of the deity and their kith and kin in large numbers, make a casual observer go panickey.