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## SOCIO-ECONOMIC WELFARE POLICIES FOR THE REHABILITATION OF DEVADASIS IN BELGAUM DISTRICT

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Item Type	Article
Authors	A, DEVERAJ;DODDAMANI, M.F.
Publisher	Indian Streams Research Journal
Rights	Creative Commons Copyright (CC 2.5)
Download date	2026-06-19 15:21:31
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/198401">http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/198401</a>

Vol II Issue X

Impact Factor : 0.2105

ISSN No : 2230-7850

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Monthly Multidisciplinary  
Research Journal

*Indian Streams  
Research Journal*

Executive Editor

Ashok Yakkaldevi

Editor-in-chief

H.N.Jagtap

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**IMPACT FACTOR : 0.2105**

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**RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595**

**ISSN No.2230-7850**

Indian Streams Research Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial Board readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

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## SOCIO-ECONOMIC WELFARE POLICIES FOR THE REHABILITATION OF DEVADASIS IN BELGAUM DISTRICT

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### Abstract:

*Devadasi practice is an ancient practice which offers girls to the deities in Hindu temples. The girls should not marry and hence become prey for social evils such as forced prostitution. Realizing the disadvantages of Devadasi practice, the Government of Karnataka passed legislation the Karnataka Devadasi Act in 1982 to prohibit Devadasi practice. Still due to social beliefs, the practice still prevailed in Karnataka, especially in the temples of Renuka Yellamma Temples of Saundatti and Chandragutti. The Government of Karnataka also formulated rehabilitation and welfare schemes for the overall socio-economic development of Devadasis. The present study is a survey of 400 devadasis in Saundatti taluka of Belgaum district and the information was collected from interview schedule. It is suggested from the study that there is need for more social welfare and rehabilitation schemes for devadasis and there is also need to increase awareness of the Devadasis on the rehabilitation and social welfare schemes, so as to get the benefits from the same.*

### KEYWORDS:

Socio-Economic, Caste, Ancient.

### INTRODUCTION

The Indian institution of devadasi, a religious practice, which offers girls to the deities in Hindu temples. The dedication usually occurs before the girl reaches puberty and requires the girl to become sexually available for community members. Traditionally, it is believed that these girls are "serving" society as "ordained" by the goddess. In other words, "the devadasis are courtesans in God's court" (Kadetotad, 1983). Due to her sacred condition and her belonging to the divinity, a devadasi cannot be married to one particular man, as in the traditional idea of marriage women are transferable property gifted to husbands. Instead, she is a property of a divinity that benevolently concedes her to the whole community. This concept is well summarized by a saying "a devadasi is servant of God but wife of the whole town".

In Hinduism, the devadasi tradition ("servant of god") is a religious tradition in which girls are "married" and dedicated to a deity (god or goddess) or to a temple and includes performance aspects such as those that take place in the temple as well as in the courtly and mujuvani [telugu] or home context. Originally, in addition to this and taking care of the temple and performing rituals, these women learned and practiced Sadir, Odissi and other classical Indian artistic traditions and enjoyed a high social status.

Recently the devadasi system has started to disappear, having been outlawed in all of India in 1988. However, devadasis still exist in India today, as shown in a 2004 report by the National Human Rights Commission of the Government of India. According to this report, "...after initiation as devadasis, women migrate either to nearby towns or other far-off cities to practice prostitution". A study from 1990 recorded that 45.9% of devadasis in one particular district were prostitutes, while most of the others relied on manual

labour and agriculture for their income. The practice of dedicating devadasis was declared illegal by the government of the Indian state Karnataka in 1982 and by the government of Andhra Pradesh in 1988. However as of 2006 the practice was still prevalent in around 10 districts of northern Karnataka and 14 districts in Andhra Pradesh.

Devadasis are also known by various other local terms, such as jogini. Furthermore, the devadasi practice of religious prostitution is known as basivi in Karnataka and matangi in Maharashtra. It is also known as venkatasani, nailis, muralis and theradiyan. Devadasi are sometimes referred to as a caste; however, some question the accuracy of this usage. "According to the devadasis themselves there exists a devadasi 'way of life' or 'professional ethic' (vritti, murai) but not a devadasi Jati (sub-caste). Later, the office of devadasi became hereditary but it did not confer the right to work without adequate qualification" (Amrit Srinivasan, 1985). In Europe the term 'Bayadere' was occasionally used.

In the state of Karnataka in the region of South India the devadasi system was followed for over 10 centuries. Chief among them was the Renuka Yellamma (of Saundatti and Chandragutti) cult. The stories seem to indicate that in the state of Karnataka devadasis originated from Brahmin women who were thrown out of their homes by their husbands.

The followers of Renuka Yellamma, who are mostly poor, and illiterate, take a vow to dedicate themselves, their spouses, or their children in the service of Goddess Renuka Yellamma when they are unable to face the hardships of life. The typical situations include life-threatening diseases, infertility, and dire financial troubles. These are the people who are primarily responsible for propagating Goddess Yellamma's virtues and achievements and glorify the Goddess. An elaborate ceremony is held in order to initiate the Jogathis (female) and Jogappa (male) volunteers in the service of Goddess Renuka Yellamma. New followers have to bathe in three holy ponds and proceed to the head priest accompanied by community elders and other members of the family. The priests give them a long sermon on what they have to do please Renuka Yellamma. They have to identify themselves with the very poor and unfortunate ones and serve the society. At least twice a year they have to visit the Yellamma shrine on full moon days (poornima) to express and confirm their obedience. During this semi-annual ritual, they have to observe preferably total nudity. If not, they have to cover their bodies with Neem foliage or scanty clothes. Such rituals, especially in the last decade, have become heavily publicized events due to the youngsters and tourists who gather around such pilgrimage centers to have glimpses of nude and semi-nude human bodies.

Reformists and Abolitionists conceived of the devadasi practice as a social evil and considered many Devadasi to be prostitutes. The first anti-Nautch and anti-dedication movement was launched in 1882. "Their main aim was to do away with this system. Reform lobbyists were drawn mainly from missionaries, doctors, journalists and social workers. They urged the abolition of all ceremonies and procedures by which young girls dedicated themselves as Devadasis of Hindu shrines. They organized seminars and conferences to create a public opinion against the Devadasi system. In the later part of 1892 an appeal was made to the Viceroy and Governor General of India and to the Governor of Madras. This appeal also defines the position of the anti-nautch movement" (Jogan Shankar, 1994). Government of Karnataka passed the Karnataka Devadasi (Prohibition of Dedication) Act in 1982 and also amended the same in 2010 to rehabilitate the existing devadasis. As per these rules, devadasi practice is strictly prohibited, but still many people are practicing devadasi practice. The government formulated "Devadasi Rehabilitation Programme" by providing counselling and awareness and shall be economically empowered by involving the said woman in income generating activities, if necessary by providing protection or shelter in remand home upto six months and see that the said woman shall become self-sustained by availing subsidy and loans through banks. Many of the Non-Governmental Organizations and social welfare organizations are also working for the welfare of the devadasis. Hence, there is need to know about the progress of the social welfare policies and rehabilitations programmes benefited by the devadasis in Karnataka state. The present study is survey based and collected information on the benefits gained from rehabilitation and social welfare schemes by the Devadasis in Saundatti, Belgaum district of Karnataka.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The present study was made:

1. To assess about the socio-economic status of Devadasis in Saundatti Taluka of Belgaum district;
2. To look into the religious beliefs of Devadasis; and
3. To explore the benefits of rehabilitation programmes gained by Devadasis.

**SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY:**

The present study was begun with literature search. The researcher searched the published literature such as books, journal papers, research reports, etc to get the background information about the subject. After studying the same, the researcher chosen Belgaum district to survey Devadasis, who are available in Saundatti. To conduct the present study the researcher was made a sample survey of 400 Devadasis in Saundatti taluka of Belgaum district through interview schedule. The collected primary data is analyzed and discussed as under.

**ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:**

The collected primary data is analyzed and discussed as under.

**1. Age:**

Information on the age of the respondents reveals the level of awareness on the god and devotion and also knowledge on the rituals related to the devadasi practice. The age of the respondents covered under the present study is shown in the following table.

Table No. 1. Age

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Below 18 Years	--	--
19-25 years	36	9.0
26-40 years	92	23.0
41 to 50 years	143	35.7
Above 50 Years	129	32.2
Total	400	100

The age group of the respondents revealed that majority, that is 143 (35.7%) of the respondents are in the age group of 41 to 50 years followed by, 129 (32.2%) are in the age group of above 50 years, 92 (23.0%) are in the age group of 26 to 40 years and the remaining 36 (9.0%) are in the age group of 19 to 25 years respectively.

**2. Marital Status:**

Generally, devadasis were not allowed to marry one person due to their rituals and traditions. But due to increase in awareness and efforts of the government policies, now many of the devadasis get married and settled with their families. The information collected on the marital status of the respondents is presented in the following table.

Table No. 2. Marital Status

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Unmarried	55	13.7
Married	212	53.0
Widows	72	18.0
Separated/ Divorcee	Alienated/ 61	15.2
Total	400	100

As per the traditions of the devadasi practice, women should not marry single person. Now-a-days, due to the awareness created by government and NGOs, the devadasis are also getting married. The information collected on marital status revealed that of all the respondents, 212 (53.0%) are married, followed by 72 (18.0%) are widows, 61 (15.2%) are separated, alienated or divorcees and the remaining 55 (13.7%) are unmarried respectively.

### 3. Belief in Devadasi Practice:

It may be possible that during the childhood, the elder family members of the devadasis were forced their female children into devadasi practice. It is also possible that devadasis are forced to act as devadasis and hence, it was asked to the respondents that whether they believe in devadasi practice and the collected information is tabulated as under.

Table No. 3. Belief in Devadasi Practice

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Fully Believe	142	35.5
Believe to a Greater extent	106	26.5
Don't Believe	52	13.0
Total	400	100

Many of the Devadasis were made by their parents forcibly during the childhood and after getting knowledge, many of the Devadasis don't believe in Devadasi practice. As such, the information collected from the respondents on the beliefs in devadasi practice, 142 (35.5%) fully believe in devadasi practice, 106 (26.5%) believe in devadasi practice to a greater extent and surprisingly, 52 (13.0%) of the respondents don't believe in devadasi practice, even though they are also devadasis.

### 4. Occupation of Respondents:

Information on occupation of the respondents reveals their economic status and standard of living. Earlier, prostitution was the main occupation of the devadasis, but due to government welfare programmes and schemes, the devadasis are engaged in occupations like self-employment. The collected information on the occupation of the respondents is shown in the following table.

Table No. 4. Occupation of the Respondents

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Agricultural Labour	122	30.5
Small Business/ Trade	31	7.7
Seasonal Employment	65	16.2
Prostitution	70	17.5
Any Other	112	28.0
Total	400	100

It is noted from the above table that of all the respondents, 122 (30.5%) are working as agricultural labourers, 31 (7.7%) are running small business and trade, 65 (16.2%) are engaged in seasonal employment, 70 (17.5%) are engaged in prostitution and the remaining 112 (28.0%) are engaged in other occupations.

#### 5. Awareness on the Rehabilitation Programmes and Welfare Schemes:

It was asked to the respondents that whether they are aware on the rehabilitation programmes and welfare schemes meant for the empowerment of devadasis. The collected information is tabulated as under.

Table No. 5. Awareness on the Rehabilitation Programmes and Welfare Schemes

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	288	72.0
No	112	28.0
Total	400	100

It is revealed from the above table that 288 (72.0%) of the respondents are aware about the rehabilitation programmes and welfare schemes for the empowerment of devadasis, whereas remaining 112 (28.0%) of the respondents are not aware about the rehabilitation programmes and welfare schemes of the government.

#### 6. Benefits availed from Welfare Schemes:

There are many rehabilitation schemes and social welfare programmes formulated for the welfare of devadasis by the Department of Women and Child Welfare, Government of Karnataka. They include Income Generating Activity (IGA), which provides capital amount of Rs. 10000 with a subsidy of Rs. 10000 to start new business by investment of Rs. 20000. There is also monthly pension scheme for the Devadasis aged above 45 years and the amount of pension is Rs. 400 per month. There is also a rehabilitation programme which provides house facility for the Devadasis, who possessed residential land and the Government provide Rs. 40000/- to construct their own house. There is also scheme a short term loan of Rs. 5000/- to Devadasi members of Self-Help Groups with 6% interest. Another scheme of incentive, which provides amount of Rs. 5000/- for formation of Self-Help Groups. There are also other programmes to train the devadasis in self-employment programmes such as Accounting, Handicrafts, Awareness Campaign against Devadasi Practice, etc. The information was collected from the respondents on the benefits gained by the Devadasis on the above discussed programmes and the collected information is tabulated as under.

Table No. 6. Benefits availed from Welfare Schemes

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Income Generating Activity	66	16.5
Monthly Pension	231	57.7
Rehabilitation Scheme	102	25.5
Loan Facility	78	19.5
Loans to Self-Help Groups	43	10.7
Any Other	52	13.0
Not Applicable	112	28.0
Total	400	100

It is observed from the above table that a few of the respondents have gained from more than one rehabilitation and welfare scheme. Particularly, 66 (16.5%) have gained from income generating activities, 231 (57.7%) have gained from monthly pension scheme, 102 (25.5%) have gained from rehabilitation scheme, 78 (19.5%) have gained loan facilities from banks, 43 (10.7%) have got loans to their Self-Help groups, 52 (13.0%) have availed other benefits from other schemes and for the remaining 112 (28.0%) of the respondents, it is not applicable as they are not aware about these schemes.

**SUGGESTIONS:**

- 1.It is essential for the devadasis to marry and hence, in the society, nobody would marry devadasis. Hence, it is suggested to the government to provide financial and other incentives for the men who marry devadasis.
- 2.The practice of devadasi should be curbed by increasing the awareness of the people. For this purpose, there is need to educate the devadasis against the ancient faiths and beliefs.
- 3.It is suggested to provide a source of income to devadasis. The Self-Help Groups and such other government welfare schemes should be effectively implemented for the welfare of devadasis.
- 4.It is suggested to the Voluntary Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations to increase awareness of the devadasis on the rehabilitations programmes and welfare schemes of the government for the welfare of the devadasis.

**CONCLUSION:**

It is observed from the present study that, less number of devadasis are there in young age group. Hence, it can be said that the devadasi practice is slowly disappearing and there are elder devadasis, for whom there is need for rehabilitation. Further, majority of the devadasis are married, but still a few of the respondents are not married as no men would marry devadasis. Hence, there is need to announce incentives for the men who marry devadasis. Even though there are plenty of welfare schemes and rehabilitation programmes for the welfare of the devadasis, still only a few of the devadasis are aware on such schemes. Hence, there is need to increase awareness of devadasis on such welfare schemes. There is need for more rehabilitation schemes and programmes for Devadasis such as to provide reservation to the Devadasis and their children in education and employment, special scholarships for the children of devadasis, etc. It is also suggested to the Devadasis to establish a new social welfare organization for the betterment and development of Devadasis and such other deprived women in the society.

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