

**THE EVOLUTION AND REFORMULATION OF THE
DEVADASI SYSTEM IN TAMILAKAM-
A HISTORICAL STUDY**

*A Thesis submitted during 2014 to the
University of Hyderabad in partial fulfilment of the
Award of a Ph.D. degree in Centre for Women's Studies*

By

S. JEEVANANDAM.



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School of Social Sciences**

**University of Hyderabad
(P.O.) Central University, Gachibowli
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**The Evolution and Reformulation of the Devadasi System in Tamilakam- A Historical Study**” submitted by **S. Jeevanandam** bearing Regd. No **09CWPG02** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of **Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies** is a bonafide work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance which is a plagiarism free thesis.

The thesis has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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DECLARATION

I **S. Jeevanandam** hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**The Evolution and Reformulation of the Devadasi System in Tamilakam- A Historical Study**” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of **Prof. Rekha Pande** is a bonafide research work which is also free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodganga/INFLIBNET.

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Signature of the Student

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ABBREVIATIONS

AR	Annual Report
A.R.I.E.	Annual Report of Indian Epigraphy
A.R.S.I.E.	Annual Report of South Indian Epigraphy
ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
Ch.	Chapter
Comp.	Compilation
EC	Epigraphia Carnatica
Ed.	Edited, Edition
EI	Epigraphia Indica
FNSI	Foreign Notices of South India
fn	foot note
GO	Government Order
HAS	Hyderabad Archaeological Series
HISI	Historical Inscriptions of South India
IA	Indian Antiquary
Ibid.	in the same place
IEASHR	Indian Economic and Social History Review
JAHRS	Journal of the Andhra Historical Research Society
JAU	Journal of Annamalai University
JIH	Journal of Indian History
JIAS	Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies
JMU	Journal of Madras University

K.K.	Kanyakumari Kalvettukal (Kanyakumari Inscriptions)
l.	Line
ll.	Lines
lit.	Literature
MAMP	Manual of Administration of Madras Presidency
M.E.R.	Madras Epigraphy Report
ML	Malayalam
MLC	Madras Legislative Council
Ms.	Manuscript
Mss.	Manuscripts
n.d.	no date
No.	Number
Nos.	Numbers
Op.cit	in the work cited
PMLC	Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council
P.S.I.	Pudukkottai State Inscriptions
pt.	Parts
SATLS	Studies in Ancient Tamil Law and Society
S.I.I.	South Indian Inscriptions
S.I.T.I.	South Indian Temple Inscriptions
Skt.	Sanskrit
sl.	Sloka
sls.	Slokas
S.N.D.P.	Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana

st.	Stanzas
Ta.	Tamil
T.A.S.	Travancore Archaeological Series
Tl.	Tamil
T.M.S.S.M.	Thanjavur Maharajah Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library
tr.	Translation, Translator
T.T.D.E.S.	Tirumalai Tirupati Devasthanam Epigraphical Series
Up.	Unpublished
v.	verse
Vol.	Volume
vs.	verses.

CHAPTER- I

Introduction

History writing is very biased in its nature, because it has given a very male centric view of the past. The conventional history marginalized everyday lives of women into irrelevance and virtual non-existence.¹ In general, the voices of women are not represented in the historical reconstruction. It is essential that these voices are heard in order to get an understanding of gender sensitized past. Gerda Lerner, a historian, mentioned that the experience of women in history has been obscured and neglected by patriarchal understanding, a fact that has significantly affected by the psychology of men and women.² She further stated that women have been systematically excluded from the enterprise of creating symbol systems, philosophies, science, and law.³

Writing women's history is not a process of creating or constructing the history of few great women of the past. It is just a process of recording the experience of women in history. In the words of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, women's history have to explore the complexity of the female experience and not to create a pantheon of ideologically correct heroines, but to analyse the evolution of women's roles, in the context of the effect of economic changes upon a society's allocation of economic resources and power, institutional developments, and ideological conceptualizations.⁴ With regards experience, Gerda Lerner cited that women have a significantly different historical experience from men.⁵ In general, the patriarchal attitudes deny the historical agency of women. In Indian society, women are placed within the "private" domain but recorded history focuses the "public" domain. Hence, in order to reconstruct history and to get a balanced view of the past, we need to look for sources, which will give us some information about women of Indian society. One of the principal goal of women's history is to redefine the canons of traditional history and that events and processes central to women's experience assume historical centrality and recognize women as an active agent of social change.⁶

Ratna Sharma specified that to construct the general status of a culture, one have to assess the position of women in its society.⁷ Historically, there are very few details available from inscriptions about the condition of the women. This phenomenon is

common in almost all the parts of Indian Subcontinent, especially in Tamil speaking region, which was popularly known as Tamilakam. Swaminathan, an art historian, mentioned that there is no evidence available on women education, social status, marriages and so on.⁸ Usually, the medieval Tamil women were positioned as subordinate to men. They appeared to have participated in the household activities and religious ceremonies. The feature of the slavery was prevailed with women. Subramanian, a Tamil historian, compared the relationship between a husband and wife with the relationship of *guru-sisya*.⁹ The wives were insisted to look after their husbands as their gods. The male dominated society treated homemakers as bearer and nurse to bring up their children and men were free from all these responsibilities. The patriarchal institution restricted women to claim property.

According to the Indian tradition, women were treated as a perpetual minor. The medieval religious texts, stressed monogamy for women and polygamy for men. In general, marriage was constructed as sacred and condition of the wedlock could not be ended with divorce even after her husband's death. They became widow of the dead, otherwise they insisted to perform *sati*. The word *sati* literally meant chaste wives and inalienable duty of chaste wives was to be united with her husband even after his death. However, the *sati* practice was not widely common in Tamilakam. *Sati* was considered as an act of heroism and the custom was paralleled with the hero stone worship of South India.¹⁰ One who did not commit *sati* had to lead the life of an ascetic and they shaved their head, shed their ornaments, forgo edible food and sufficient sleep. They were cursed as inauspicious.¹¹

Interestingly, a section of women were free from these clutches, accessed considerable liberation which other women could not even imagine, formed a community and later became a unique feature of Indian history. The name of the community is popularly called as devadasi, temple women. The history of South India is incomplete without the inclusion of the institution of devadasi. Saskia Kersenboom-Story stated that devadasi were an object of romantic reminiscence of the past.¹² In South India, devadasis were very important functionary in the 'Hindu' society and were closely associated with the cult of fertility.¹³ Their ritual dancing was part of religious service in a long history of temple. A.K. Singh, a historian, said that in India, the practices originated and developed during the early medieval period onwards.¹⁴

There are a large number of inscriptions, which provided a lot of information regarding devadasi. The institution of devadasi had taken such deep roots in the temple organization in South Indian society.¹⁵ Several South Indian inscriptions proved the association of temple girls with temple service since from 9th century C.E.¹⁶ The study of this institution helps us to reconstruct the history of South India and also analyse the position and general status of the women of the particular society.

A study of this institution is important in understanding not only the temple activities but also their contributions to the South Indian society. It helps us to understand the role of women in perpetuating a particular ideology and understanding the complexity of women's situation in terms of oppression within a patriarchal structure. Devadasis were prominent women in public domain, who often played prominent role in political and social events. Saskia Kersenboom-Story pointed out that devadasi were a very expressive semiotic unit signifying the mythical-ascetic-cum-ritual object residing in the collective consciousness of 'Hindu' tradition.¹⁷ Latha Iyer and Kanakalatha Mukund also stressed that the historical significance of devadasihood and their various roles in local society.¹⁸ Historically, devadasi employed in temples as dancers, singers, musicians and for offering certain services to the deities.

1.1. Devadasi

Devadasi or *devaradiyar* (a female slave) is a woman who was dedicated and attached to any specific temple.¹⁹ It is a pan Indian phenomenon.²⁰ Devadasi means a woman who was enslaved for the service of some deity or sacred object. They were unmarried temple servants who had been dedicated to temple deities as young through the rites, which resembled 'Hindu' marriage ceremonies.²¹ The 'divine' marriage of the temple girls were eternally free from the so-called inauspicious widowhood. In this context, Saskia Kersenboom-Story referred devadasi as *nityasumangali*.²²

The word devadasi is to be a Sanskritized form of Tamil word *devaradiyar*, which meant a woman who enslaved for the service of some specific deity or sacred object.²³ In general, the word is the feminine form of *deva-dasa*, a man who enslaved for the service of a deity.²⁴ However, the term has its origin in Sanskrit, the prevailing custom and practices are in no way related to the gods or deities mentioned in

Sanskrit literature, especially the Trinity.²⁵ Leslie Orr, a historian, stated that the devadasi or temple women was women, one who may or may not be a prostitute or dancer and one who is associated with temple, either by having some kind of regular service function in a temple or because her primary social identity is defined with reference to a temple.²⁶

Edgar Thurston, an ethnographer, described devadasis as *dasis* or *deva-dasis* are dancing girls attached to the Tamil temples, who subsist by dancing and music, and the practice of 'the oldest profession in the world'.²⁷ Further, he stated that the rise of the caste and its euphemistic name for seem to date from the 9th century C.E. and 10th century C.E., during which many activities prevailed in Southern India in the matter of building temples, and elaborating the services held in them. The dancing-girls' duties, then as now, were to fan the idol with *charmaras* (Tibetan Oxtail), to carry the sacred light called *kumbarti*, and to sing and dance before the god when he was carried in procession.²⁸

In a book *Religious Thought and Life in India*, Monier-Williams described devadasis in a way that they were held to be married to the god, and had no other duty but to dance before the shrine and belonged to the god's, hence they were called the god's slaves (*deva-dasi*), and were generally considered to follow patterns of piety and propriety.²⁹ He further pointed out that, in the present day, they are still called by the same name, but are rather slaves to the licentious passions of the profligate Brahmins of the temples to which they belonged. He was surprised to see the number and weightage of the ornaments of devadasi, especially in Southern India. He referred that a profitable trade was done by devadasi under the sanction of religion.³⁰ The arguments of Joep Bor was also similar with Monier-William. He detailed that devadasis as pretty temple servants who dressed conspicuously and were privileged in that they were taught reading, writing, singing and dancing. Their main duty was to worship the gods with songs and dances, but according to most travelers, their gestures were lascivious and their songs obscene. Travelers noted that the dancers were public prostitutes.³¹

Frederique Apffel Marglin, an anthropologist, considered devadasis as a very specialized, unusual group of women and one who acted as the harbingers of auspiciousness to a state and society.³² They do not marry any mortal men and their dedication to temple service was regarded as constituting a marriage with the main deity.³³ Venkatramaiah, a Tamil scholar, said that some women were employed in temples as workers and those well versed in dance (*See Appendix: - 1*) and music. They would dance and sing in the temples on certain specific occasions. They were not harlots or prostitutes. They were spinsters who might leave the service in the temples and enter into married life if they should so desire.³⁴

A Concise Dictionary on Hindu Religion mentioned that the devadasis were the celestial dancing women otherwise a women one who do service in temples.³⁵ Ramanathan in his dictionary mentioned that the devadasi meant *devadiyal*.³⁶ *Kazhakap Puzhavar Kuzhuvinar* mentioned that *devadi* meant palace³⁷ and *patiyilar* meant *kanikaiyar*, women.³⁸ The first European encounter of the term devadasi was appeared in the *Lettres edifiantes et curieuses* (1713 C.E.) in which a Jesuit missionary mentioned them as a 'divine slave'.³⁹ Dutch pastor Francois Valentyn (1726 C.E.) used the term *devadasikal*.⁴⁰ Sonnerat was probably the first author to change the commonly used Portuguese term *bailadeira* into the French word *bayadere*.⁴¹ *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* (1999 C.E.) mentioned that the word *bayadere* meant a professional female dancer of India.⁴²

Devadasis were a common feature in almost all the major brahmanical temples.⁴³ Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan explorer, referred the dance of 500 dancing girls before God of Dineswara in 1342 C.E.-1343 C.E.⁴⁴ Abbe Dubois, a French Catholic missionary, recorded the devadasi practices in his book *A Description of the Character, Manner and Customs of the People of India*. In every temple, based on its size, entertains a band of these, to the number of eight, twelve, or more.⁴⁵ *Kudi Arasu*, the radical newspaper of the Self-Respect Movement mentioned that every temples had nearly 10 to 30 devadasi and even in major temples carried more than 100 of them.⁴⁶ The service they performed consists of dancing and singing. In smaller temples, the Brahmins themselves did the services, attended by the music, the dancing girls and other assistants.⁴⁷ Abbe Dubois referred that devadasi were the important persons next to the sacrificers.⁴⁸ The *Travancore State Manual* recorded that in the Southern

districts of Travancore there were entertainment was provided by dancing girls and musicians with their instruments at the *pagoda* (temple), and they attended five times a day, early in the morning, at forenoon, at noon, in the evening and at night. In all those occasions, one or two singers also attended the temple, who were paid 25 and 30 *panams* per mensem.⁴⁹

In general, devadasi did not allow marrying any mortal. Her unmarried status was equalled to being ritually celibate. Selvy Thiruchandran, a feminist writer explained that a mother or grandmother of devadasi advertised the availability of young devadasi to the public. Soon after that, her patron was decided. According to the devadasi custom, the married men should be the patron. She did not expect to serve the patron as a wife. Her non-domestic role was emphasised.⁵⁰ Ramachandram described about devadasi that they had a plaited hair, wore *kashayam* (tonics), and lived upon the small ration, which were given to them out of the cooked rice offered to God, so as to keep body and soul together and they lived like ascetics.⁵¹

The illustration of devadasi were occurred even outside the temple institution. They became an integral feature of the social life and no important social occasions would complete without the presence of devadasi.⁵² They had certain de facto rights in the temple and society. They permitted to hold land and to transfer the land. Politically, they permitted to use their umbrella, flag, palanquin, etc. They allowed to have children and could adopt female children. Abbe Dubois mentioned that devadasi were the only females in India who may learn to read, to sing, and to dance.⁵³ Joardar pointed out that the Bengali girls were careful never to sing or to dance. Because it considered as a sign of immodesty, which would scandalise the neighbours and disgrace the family.⁵⁴ There were no restriction was imposed on their sexual activities. However, the sexual relation to the lower caste men was considered as social stigma. During the funeral, flowers, sandal wood paste and garland of the deity were offered to devadasi to honour her lifelong servitude. According to the tradition, the funeral procession was halted for some time in front of the temple, the deity was observed a daylong pollution and no *puja* was conducted on the day. Usually, the funeral pyre was carried from the temple kitchen.⁵⁵

1.2. The evolution of the devadasi system

There are many speculations and theories⁵⁶ regarding the origin of the devadasi system. The system of dedicating women for the ritual service was an ancient and universal practice. The customs were differed from each country based on the period and their culture. Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Babylonia and Cyprus were the few countries, where the system of dedicating women to the religious service flourished from several thousand years ago.⁵⁷ In the temples of Osiris and Isis, Aphrodite⁵⁸, Anu, and Ishtar, women were used for sacred services.

Generally, the practice of dedicating women in the name of religion is termed as theogony. James Frazer viewed that theogony was the result of Mother Goddess worship.⁵⁹ The custom was found in ancient India. The religious women occupied a divine status, their roles personified in the forms of Mother Goddess, and numerous material gifts were offered to her.⁶⁰ In meantime, the Mother Goddess tradition came under the influence of Sanskritic tradition through two processes. One was that, the new myths were created and propagated, and another one was they were subjected by powerful male deities. The powers and capacities of the male deity were glorified. The concept of ritual purity and pollution were introduced. The shift from matriarchy to patriarchy reduced their status as mere ritual functionaries.⁶¹

J.N. Farquhar stated that every well-established 'Hindu' temple aimed at being an earthly reproduction of the paradise of the god in whose honour it was built... The *gandharvas* (celestial men) were represented by the Temple-band, the *apsaras* (celestial women) by the courtesans who sing and dance in the service. These were dedicated to the service of the god; but they gave their favours to his worshippers. They usually called as devadasis, handmaidens of the god... They did their dancing and singing performance in temple and procession. Hence, the common name for them everywhere was *nautch* girls, dancing girls...⁶²

Yande in his Naik-Maratha Mandal mentioned that Krishna married more than 16000 women and numerous allusions in the *puranam* to the king who patronized prostitute for the purpose of dancing and singing in the court. Moreover, the imitation of these legendary monarchical kings and a young unmarried damsels were about the best things to charm the gods of the savage tribes whom they practiced the ghost worship

and fetish worship. Some of the Indian aboriginal races must have gone through this phase of religious worship.⁶³ *Kudi Arasu* revealed that Vashistar, the *puranic* saint was born as a son of devadasi called Urvashi.⁶⁴ Jamanadas mentioned that the effect of fall of Buddhism in ancient India was the momentum for the establishment of devadasi system.⁶⁵ Yande noted that the Buddhist institution of *Bhikshunees* was responsible for the origin of this custom of dedication.⁶⁶ He further added that this most immoral custom had been completely converted to the Aryan cult and all their actions were regulated by the religious duties prescribed by that cult.⁶⁷

Parasher-Sen considered the service of women in the temples in India was an innovation of the *puranic* religion.⁶⁸ A.K. Singh mentioned that the devadasi institution in India did not go back to 3rd century B.C.E.⁶⁹ because the practice of worship in public temples was taking shape in the early centuries of the Christian era.⁷⁰ However, the system existed in early centuries, but the custom was much practiced and prevailed from the early medieval period onwards. Altekar pointed out that, after the magnificent construction of the temples of 'Hindu' gods, people began to feel in course of time, that there should be singing girls attached to shrines to play music on the occasions of the different services and worships of the day.⁷¹ Leslie Orr opined that the system prevailed from early medieval period onwards.⁷² M.G.S. Narayanan, a South Indian historian, believed that the expansion of the temple system and growth of the *bhakti* movement brought into existence the class of temple dancing girls.⁷³

The development of the devadasi institution was not uniform in its nature.⁷⁴ Historically, the origin of the devadasi custom was not clear. For some scholars, the system had emerged out of the fertility cult.⁷⁵ The earliest literary source mentioned that the association of women with temple was in the hymns of Tamil *bhakti* saints in 7th century C.E.⁷⁶ Campantar, a prominent Saivite saint mentioned that the temple woman as *kuravankamazh narumenkuzhal arivai* which meant a woman who had fragrance on tress hair.⁷⁷ The earliest inscriptional evidence, which discussed about the devadasi in South India was found in 8th century C.E.⁷⁸ The devadasi custom had become an institution towards the end of 5th and 6th century C.E. under the patronage of the Pallavas and the Pandyas.⁷⁹ In general, the system widely prevailed in the South Asia especially in modern South India and some parts of Srilanka.

The medieval temple organization did not strike roots before the 4th century C.E. to 5th century C.E. However, the practice of worshipping images in public temples was taking shape in the early centuries of the Christian era, but the institutional character of the temple and its importance in the socio-economic life of the people did not become noticeable until the 4th century C.E. and 5th century C.E.⁸⁰ The study of inscriptions showed that the inscription of devadasi started taking roots in the 7th century C.E. and 8th century C.E.⁸¹ The central part of the feudal age in India, from the 9th century C.E. to the 12th century C.E. marked the origin, development and maturity of the devadasi institution in South India.⁸²

In India, the whole process of social formation (from 5th century C.E. to 6th century C.E. onwards) was appear to be inseparably connected with developments in the field of religion. The conflict between Saivism and Vaishnavism and other religious values propagated the new religious ideology. This marked the new era in the religious temple preface. The religious sanctification of the political authority was an important characteristic of feudal polity.⁸³ The temple was the hub of the social and economic life in a locality.⁸⁴ The temples with devadasi drew liberal patronage from both the rulers and the private individuals.⁸⁵ Even outside the temple, devadasi was an integral part of the social life.⁸⁶ They emerged as sub-caste, with their own traditions, rules of behaviour and etiquette.⁸⁷ The inscriptions also revealed that the 11th century C.E. and the 12th century C.E. marked the period of maximum growth.⁸⁸ The devadasi institution was established in regions that were economically and politically well developed as in the riverine of the Cauveri delta in Tamilakam.⁸⁹

The custom gained support from religious, political, economic and social situations that prevailed in the society during the period and region. All the royal courts in India were associated with the devadasi who were good dancers and singers.⁹⁰ However, the devadasi system was prevalent throughout India, it did not flourish to a great extent in Northern India due to various reasons. In North India, it neither emerged as an institution having strong base in the society nor a common feature of majority of the temples.⁹¹ The political instability of the Northern India and the strong non-Hindu rulers⁹² such as Persian and Moghuls did not patronage the temples and confused to understand the alien custom. Khafi Khan, a historian, noted the condition of devadasi of North India especially on the reign of Aurangzeb. He pointed out that the

proclamation of Aurangzeb on the prohibition against women to dance and sing. He further referred the king's order that all the dancing girls in the country should marry, otherwise they were instructed to expel from the kingdom.⁹³ During the same period, there were very little sources available on devadasis of Central India.⁹⁴ Even in South India, the development of the devadasi institution was not uniform.⁹⁵ Though the system was very much in existence, it did not affect the non-Hindu invasions or the external influence. So the details of the rituals were completely deep rooted in the minds of the people comparatively rest of South India.⁹⁶ As a part of 'Hindu' ritual structure, devadasi custom had its own status, roles, rules and functions to play.

In South India particularly in Tamilakam, the earliest inscription that mentioned about devadasi was as late as the 8th century C.E.⁹⁷ The earliest literary sources to mention the association of devadasi with temple was in the hymns of Tamil Nayanmar Campantar in 7th century C.E.⁹⁸ The devadasi custom had become an institution towards the end of the 5th century C.E. and 6th century C.E. under the patronage of the Pallavas and the Pandyas.⁹⁹ The Chokkur inscription of Goda Ravi dated Kollam era 107 (932 C.E.) obtained from Malabar (northern districts of modern Kerala) contained the first recorded reference to the devadasi system in Kerala.¹⁰⁰ Sreedhara Menon mentioned that devadasi were mentioned in several inscriptions from the 10th century C.E. onwards. The institution much head away in 11th century C.E.¹⁰¹

The sources for the origin of the custom largely based on the literary records of ancient Tamils, particularly in *Tolkappiyam* and *Chilappathikaram*. The practice of ritual dancing practiced by ancient Tamil tribe such as the Maravar hunters, and the gradual transformation of it under the influence of the Brahmanical religion, seems to point towards the probable inspiration for the system of temple dancing.¹⁰² In Sangam literature¹⁰³, the dancing women and prostitutes were frequently mentioned. However, there was no evidence of temple women. From the early medieval period, the devotional literature of Alvars and Nayanmars (6th century C.E. to 9th century C.E.) extensively used the concepts such as women as celestial, offerings to worship, and singing and dancing in the temples. The Tamil *bhakti* ideologies of self-surrender and devotion to service had a huge impact on the society¹⁰⁴ and it resulted in the construction of temples.

The temples had a huge bureaucracy and it had command over the temple girls, who were employed in the service of God. Devadasi became significant officiating dignitaries. They were the most important ritual performers, and no celebration was completed in the temple without the performance of the temple girls. Hence, the employment of these dancing girls became customary on the part of the *devasthanam* (temple institution), which was gradually institutionalized into a professional organization. The institution of devadasi became an integral part of medieval temple organization.¹⁰⁵ Rajarajan I, the Chola emperor, was responsible for the introduction of the devadasi system in Ilankai (modern Srilanka). He constructed 'Hindu' temples and introduced the devadasi system in Ilankai.¹⁰⁶ The devadasis of Tamilnadu used to visit Ilankai in the month of February and danced in the 'Hindu' temple of Yalpanam (Jaffna, Srilanka).¹⁰⁷

After the decline of the Cholas and Pandiyas, the political instability overshadowed the Tamil society. The devadasi system faced the struggle for existence. The interlude of non-Hindu rulers further weakened the temple institutions and the devadasi system.¹⁰⁸ The invaders perceived the temples to be a great source of wealth. They invaded the new regions, targeted temples and looted the wealth.¹⁰⁹ Amir Khusru (1253 C.E.-1325 C.E.), a medieval scholar, mentioned that the large quantities of wealth and jewels which were carried away to Northern India.¹¹⁰ Due to the loss of patronage, many professional communities remained unemployed, and the workers suffered from want and misery.¹¹¹ The emergence of the Vijayanagar rule in South India marked a significant move in the reformulation of the system. Kumara Kampana, the army chief of Vijayanagar captured Tondaimandalam from Sambuvarayar in 1352 C.E. Following the event, Kumara Kampana initiated the process of devadasi restoration in Tamilakam.¹¹²

The fall of the Vijayanagar kingdom witnessed the collapse of the devadasi system. During the Nayaka period (1565 C.E. and 1800 C.E.), the symptoms of the decline of the system made their explicit appearance.¹¹³ The political instability of the state, irrelevance of the temple institution, political intervention and repeated transfers of devadasis from temple to temple, the graded hierarchical structure and poverty were distracted the so-called sacred services of devadasi and victimize them as prostitutes. During the colonial period, they were criminalized as prostitutes.¹¹⁴

1.3. Devadasi and the question of caste

The caste system was deep rooted in every sections of the Indian subcontinent. The question of caste was associated with the devadasi system. However, devadasi system did not identify as a separate caste. E.V. Ramasami, the founder of Self-Respect Movement, spoke about the different caste affiliation with the devadasi women. In Kodumudi (town in Erode district, modern Tamilnadu) meeting, E.V. Ramasami mentioned that the devadasis were identified as *Goundar* caste in Kongu region, *Pillai* in Thanjavur and Tirunelveli and they were categorized as *Mudaliyar* in Chennai.¹¹⁵ Ramachandreir mentioned that a relation of any caste-men with devadasi did not strike the caste and their social status.¹¹⁶ According to the Hindu notion, that any persons or things appertaining to a deity or temple was sacred, pure and incapable of polluting others.¹¹⁷ In general, any relationship and intimacy between the caste man and non-caste woman was treated as social crime and the person was tabooed, placed out of caste and completely denied all his caste privileges. But an open intimacy and association of caste man with temple woman as a concubine or prostitute did not strike the caste-man as an act of inconsistent to the caste system and rules, and he was not deprived from his caste status.¹¹⁸ Ironically, his position was strengthened in the society.

Aloysius, a sociologist, mentioned that a caste is an occupational endogamous community as well as rank ordered and ritually legitimated *Varna*.¹¹⁹ Ketkar defined caste as a social group, which should carried two characteristics such as membership is confined to those who are born of members and includes all persons so born, and an inexorable social law forbids the members to marry outside the group.¹²⁰ In this sense, devadasi should be a woman from any caste order. The customs of devadasi could accumulate girls from various castes, customs and regions.¹²¹ They were dedicated to different Hindu deities.¹²² Abbe Dubois mentioned in his note that the profession of dancing girls was opened to embraces all persons with irrespective of their caste affiliation.¹²³ The Hindu Law recognized the legitimacy of the adopted child. So naturally, devadasi would not classified as separate caste but it was a homogenous community, which carried similar characteristics with one another.

The Hindu Law recognized the dancing girls as a separate class and acknowledged the civil rights and status.¹²⁴ The High Court of Madras acknowledged that the dancing girls were a separate community and had no caste, or belonged to any caste, and that consequently they could adopt a girl from any caste or no caste.¹²⁵ Yande reported that all the other castes, either high or low, look down upon the castes in which this custom of dedicating girls to gods prevails, and even the so-called lowest caste will never be induced to dedicate their girls to gods and allow them to carry on the most infamous trade of prostitution.¹²⁶ It was known fact that the devadasis were recruited from various castes from the Hindu community and having different names in different districts.¹²⁷ The strength of the community was laid by the adoption from other communities because when the old devadasis become sterile, which they very often were by the nature of their profession, they buy girls from other caste-Hindu and so, misery of such a life.¹²⁸ Usually, the succession to the profession was matrilineal. Devadasi was identified with their mothers, and the property was transferred through the female lineage.¹²⁹

1.3.1. The role of caste

Sadasivan, a historian, mentioned that the girl meant for the dedication must have been of the devadasi caste.¹³⁰ Saskia Kersenboom-Story stressed that the nature of devadasihood was *murai* (professional ethics) or *vrtti* (way of life) which meant functions or task not as *jati* (caste).¹³¹ Sadasivan also mentioned that the gradation of devadasi was called *murai* and those who came under *muraikkaris*.¹³² Amrit Srinivasan pointed out that the temple dancing girls were not a *jati*.¹³³ Even further that a highly systematized knowledge about caste was developed over the latter half of the 19th century C.E.¹³⁴

However, caste played a significant role within the system. Based on their caste affiliation, the hierarchy was formed and nature of work was determined. Sadasivan mentioned the graded hierarchy of devadasi system.¹³⁵ In Suchindram temple of modern Kanyakumari district, Tamilnadu, there were special customs called *muththa kudi* (traditional family) and *sirappu kudi* (family with special respect).¹³⁶ An Epigraph of 1343 C.E.-1344 C.E. from Tiruvorriyur categorized them into *patiyilar* (not of a specific temple or husbandless), *devaradiyar* (servants of god) and

ishabattaliyilar (those of the Siva temple).¹³⁷ The dedicated girls from the upper caste were allowed to perform ritual services and the rest had to do the secular works like cleaning the temple premises and utensils.¹³⁸

In general, the girls from upper caste did the ritualistic performances and the others had to do the non-ritualistic performances.¹³⁹ At same time, the upper castes girls became the concubines of the upper caste men, and the rest to be commercial prostitutes.¹⁴⁰ Sadasivan mentioned that the low-grade devadasi was paid so cheap.¹⁴¹ John Shortt referred that devadasi were permitted to do prostitution with any individual of an equal or superior caste or to live in a professional concubinage.¹⁴² Naik-Maratha Mandal mentioned that the devadasis were the castes of hereditary prostitutes.¹⁴³ However, the early 20th century C.E. developments of the Self-Respect Movement encouraged the inter-caste marriages of devadasi women to men of other caste. In 1929 C.E., the self-respecters S. Guruswami of *Mudaliyar* caste and Kunjitham of *Isai Vellalar* got into a self-respect marriage.¹⁴⁴

1.3.2. The dedication of devadasi

According to the devadasi tradition, the dedication was an important occasion and it was considered as meritorious in the life of devadasi. The dedication was occurred both on voluntary and non-voluntary basis. Vidyadhar Agnihotri referred that the people dedicated their daughters to different deities while the others purchased girls for dedication to ensure their posthumous reward of a heavenly abode.¹⁴⁵ The voluntary dedication was happened due to various reasons such as superstition, carrying tradition, etc. John Shortt, the Superintendent of Vaccination in the Madras Presidency, referred that the dedication was made because of vow of the parents whom they were sick or other affliction, or when surrounded by troubles and trials, to give one of their daughters to some particular temple.¹⁴⁶ Yande pointed out that the poor, ignorant and superstitious families were generally became the victims of the custom which were depended almost entirely on the profit they gained.¹⁴⁷

Abbe Dubois mentioned that usually the perilous pregnant women were making vow to dedicate their daughter to the temple service for their safe delivery.¹⁴⁸ Alice Van Doren highlighted the event that the parents were made pledge to dedicate their youngest daughter because of the critical condition of their first-born son who was

near to death. After the recovery of the son, the parents fulfilled the oath of their dedication of eight years old daughter to the temple.¹⁴⁹ Ramachendrier, an assistant collector of Tiruchirappalli, stated that the custom was permitted the dedication of the elder daughter to the goddess Basavi.¹⁵⁰ Further, he stated that the girls were holding a stick and Margosa leaves in their hand and danced during the procession especially on the prevalence of epidemics.¹⁵¹

The non-voluntary dedication otherwise forced servitude was also common among the dedication. The adoption was a common feature in the devadasi system. Vidyadhar Agnihotri mentioned that devadasis were used to purchase girls from outside the family to dedicate to temple to ensure their posthumous reward of a heavenly abode.¹⁵² In general, they purchased girls from the poor caste-Hindus.¹⁵³ Based on the tradition, no women could dedicate themselves to the temple, and the immoral life of the dedicated daughters would not bring any disgrace to the family.¹⁵⁴ They were instructed to get the approval from the respective authorities of the temple administration. Ramachendrier remarked that prostitutes, women from non-devadasi community, married women, who deserted or discarded by their husbands, and widows, leading adulterous lives, could not claim the status of dancing girls. However, the daughters of such women could join the community of dancing girls and become devadasis.¹⁵⁵ The introduction of a virgin girl into the family of a dancing girl was sufficient to entitle her to be treated as daughter and no matter how she was obtained and to what caste she was belonged.¹⁵⁶ Usually, the selection of girls for adoption was based on their physical charm. John Shortt referred in his note that the good looking and well-made girls were chosen for the dedication.¹⁵⁷

The dedicated girls were trained in music, dancing and all other fine accomplishments to make them attractive to vice. Muthulakshmi Reddi, the first women legislator of Madras Presidency, mentioned that these accomplished girls were well tutored in the art of evil trade.¹⁵⁸ She mentioned that they were trained it, as a practice of their caste-duty or *dharma*.¹⁵⁹ Here, she highlighted the word ‘trained’ but the custom of caste was based on their birth alone. Abbe Dubois mentioned that they were bred to this profligate life from their infancy. They were taken from any caste, and are frequently of respectable birth.¹⁶⁰ Their profession requires of them to be open to the embraces of persons of all castes.¹⁶¹ Yande mentioned that all the other castes, either high or

low, look down upon the castes in which this custom of dedicating girls to gods prevailed, and even the so called lowest caste will never be induced to dedicate their girls to gods and allow them to carry on the most infamous trade of prostitution.¹⁶²

The selected girls should undergo the ritual ceremonies to become a devadasi. Even a daughter of devadasi had to go through a number of rites to attain the status of her inherent rights and duties.¹⁶³ The girls pass through a certain ceremony in the temples and the temple priest conducting *puja* as a representative of the particular deity. As per the custom of the devadasi order, the selected girls were underwent certain ceremonies like *pottu kattuthal*, *gejja puja* (anklet ceremony) and puberty.

1.3.3. The dedication ceremony

Devadasis were existed in most of the temples in the Tamil country. The dedication was happened in both Saiva and Vaishnava temples. B.M. Sundaram, a musicologist, referred the Vaishnava temple *dasis* such as Thanjavur Mohanambal of Venkatesa Perumal *koyil*¹⁶⁴ and Thanjavur Kokilambal of Rajagopalaswami *koyil*.¹⁶⁵ Usually, the dedication was varied from temples to temples.¹⁶⁶ Natural and as well as adopted daughters of dancing girls were made, when young, to dedicate themselves to the idol of the temple to which their mother belonged. Traditionally, the girls between six and nine years of age were dedicated while before they attained puberty. The name of the girl was recommended by a head devadasi to the temple authorities. The ritual was done on the auspicious day either in the temple quarters or in the house of devadasi. The expenses of the ceremony was partly bared by senior devadasi and rest would be part of the patron and temple authorities.

The dedication ceremony was called as *pottu kattuthal* (tying *pottu*). The ceremony was resembled the brahmanical marriage. The bridegroom was the presiding deity of the temple. In general, the priest and Brahmin were conducting *puja*, as a representative of the god. The priest tied golden *pottu* (symbol) on the neck of the girls. The ceremony stamped the girl as devadasi, after that they were exclusively associated for the temple services.¹⁶⁷ The ceremony of *pottu kattuthal* signified the person one who pledge to sacrifice their life for the service of the god.¹⁶⁸

The girl one who undertook the ceremony should marry either an object or dagger.¹⁶⁹ Sarma mentioned that the ceremony of *pottu* was the symbol of the religion, which denoted the pledge of the women as an ascetic for their rest of the life.¹⁷⁰ It resembled that the women lead an ascetic life if it would not happened she would sacrifice her life to the sword.¹⁷¹ He mentioned the ritual that resembled the girl should not violate the rituals and sacredness. If it happened, the sword should take away their life.¹⁷² As per the Hindu custom, Lord Siva considered the dedicated girls as his women, so they were denoted as *rudrakanikai* and their service to the deity identify them as devadasi.¹⁷³ Based on their sect (Saivism and Vaishnavism), the dedicated girls were used to wear rosaries or sacred beads and *vibhuthy* or *srechurnam* (ash).¹⁷⁴

The *Census of India, 1901*: - *Travancore* detailed the ritual ceremony of the *pottu kattuthal* in the Suchindram temple. Usually, the girl to be wedded took bath and moved to the temple with two pieces of cloth, a *tali* (wedlock), betel, areca nut, and coconut. The ceremonial artefacts were placed before the priest and later the priest kept those artefacts under the feet of idol. The young girl seated to face towards the deity. The priest kindled the sacred fire and went through the rituals of the *Tirukkalyanam* (sacred marriage). The priest used *Panchakshara mantra* in Saiva temple and *Ashakshara mantra* in Vaishnava temple. The priest tied *tali* around her neck and did all the rituals of the bridegroom on behalf of the deity. The grand ceremony was celebrated for four days.¹⁷⁵ Samy Chidambaranar, an ideologue of Self-Respect Movement, stated that the naming ritual itself branded the young girls as wife of god.¹⁷⁶ Interestingly, *Kamikamam*, the brahmanical text, referred devadasi as the wife of the priest.¹⁷⁷ Following the rituals, the dedicated girl was allotted with grants and confirmed some special privileges, and they received certain sums as wages, the amount was dependent on the worth, sanctity, and popularity of the temple which they were dedicated.¹⁷⁸

1.3.4. Gejja puja and puberty

In general, training was an important part in the life of young devadasi. They were expected to undergo a rigorous training in dance and music under the apprenticeship of *nattuvanar* (teacher). Later, they became accomplished performers and their services being required in temples for various rituals.¹⁷⁹ Tamil lexicon mentioned that

devadasi as dancing girl, dedicated to the service of a god or celestial dancing girl.¹⁸⁰ In addition to the artistic performances, devadasi had to do a series of other services in the temple. Ramachandram mentioned that the engagement of devadasi in cleaning, decoration, flooring, burnishing its vessels and lamps, collecting flowers, making garlands, and offering them to God in the temple.¹⁸¹ William Taylor in his note mentioned that the service of devadasi such as lighting lamp, powdering sandal and garland making on the temple service for both in the morning and evening rituals.¹⁸² He further stated that the customary offerings and performances were glad and struck his eyes with great piety.¹⁸³ In Tiruvarur, devadasi were practiced two *murai* (traditions) which were *periya murai* (big tradition) and *china murai* (small tradition). Also devadasi were performed their daily rituals in every evening in the sanatorium and showed sixteen types of hand signals which was known as *kaikattum murai*.¹⁸⁴ In *periya murai*, devadasi stood in the sanatorium and did rituals which carried *arati* (sacred light) to the gods. Usually, the ritual was done by the senior devadasi who passed the menopause. According to *chinna murai*, devadasi was not allowed to use the sacred light but they resembled the rituals in out of the sanatorium in the temple premises.¹⁸⁵

The ceremony of *gejja puja* was considered an important ceremony next to *pottu kattuthal*. The *gejja puja* is a ceremony, which honoured the young devadasi with anklet on her leg. The ceremony signalled that the dedicated girl was started to learn dance. Following the ceremony, the elders in the family taught the artistic forms to the children and then, they sent to teachers outside the family whose style was compatible.¹⁸⁶ John Shortt mentioned that the young devadasi were taught to dance at the early age of five.¹⁸⁷ There was an equal distribution of hours was devoted to singing and dancing practices.¹⁸⁸ In general, the lessons in dancing and music were given daily two hours in the morning and the evening. In three years, the child was supposed to master the arts of singing and dancing, and then they continued their performance until the age of thirty and forty.¹⁸⁹ The tradition insisted devadasi to dance six times a day, at the temple, before the deity, while the priests were officiating the rituals. The duties of the devadasi was synchronised by their turns.¹⁹⁰

After *gejja puja*, the festival for puberty of the dedicated girl was became grand. Traditionally, devadasi considered puberty as a meritorious one. *Muvaraiyan Virali Vitu Tutu*, the 17th century Tamil literature, mentioned the puberty celebration of the devadasi. According to the text, devadasi celebrated the day of her puberty as *thiranda nal*, which meant ‘matured day’.¹⁹¹ During the day, she conducted a grand festival with the traditional songs of *villupattu*, *kuththu* and *kaniyan kuththu*.¹⁹² On the day, she worshipped the demi-god called Madan and sacrificed animals.¹⁹³

In general, devadasis had to master in all the fields. The performance of devadasis were categorized into ritualistic and non-ritualistic.¹⁹⁴ The ritualistic performance was primarily considered as dancing and singing. Devadasis did the various dance performances (*aryak-kuththu*, *santik-kuththu*, etc.) in the temples and other festivals with meticulous care, devotion and dedication. Usually, devadasis were the good dancers and singers and their performances were held in the specific halls like *natakasalai*, *nrttamandapam*.¹⁹⁵ The songs and dances of devadasi became a source of attraction to the lay worshippers and pilgrims.¹⁹⁶ The artistic qualities became an iconic identity of devadasis. Altekar pointed out that the people visited temples not to pay their respects to deities, but as to carry their love intrigues with the singing girls who was employed in the temples.¹⁹⁷ The kings, nobles, temples, and *sabhas* (village assembly) remunerated devadasi with *manya* (gift) and *jivita* (allowances), as a recognition of their performance and other multifarious activities.¹⁹⁸ The non-ritualistic performances were included such as washing, sweeping, collecting flowers, sounding bells, fanning the deity.¹⁹⁹ The South Indian inscription mentioned that the women who served in temple *madaippali* (kitchen) were called as *adukkalaip-pendugal*.²⁰⁰

1.3.5. Categories of devadasis

The prolonged continuity of the tradition carried different categories among the devadasi institution. *Abithana Chintamani*, an encyclopedia on Tamil literature, classified devadasis into seven kinds, based on their method of dedication.²⁰¹ According to the encyclopedia, *thathai* was a woman, one who dedicated herself to the god; *vikkirathai* was one who sold for the temple worship; *piruhuthya* was one dedicated herself for the welfare of the clan; *pakthai* was a person dedicated herself to

the god for the devotion; *haritha* was a person who was mesmerized by the god; *alankarai* was one who sent by the king due to her excellence in her field; and *rudrakanikai* was one served the temple for the remuneration.²⁰² All the women were subdivided by *vazhankai* and *idankai dasis*. Usually, *vazhankai dasis* served to *idankai dasis*.

Edgar Thurston pointed out the seven classes of *dasis* from the old 'Hindu' texts. His monumental work, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* referred *datta* was a girl one who gave herself as a gift to a temple, *vikrita* was one who sold herself for the same purpose of dedication, *bhritya* was a girl who offered herself as a temple servant for the prosperity of her family, *bhakta* was one who joined a temple out of devotion, *hrita* was one who enticed away, and presented to a temple, *alankara* was one who being well trained in her profession and profusely decked and was presented to a temple by kings and noblemen and *rudrakanika* or *gopika* was one who received regular wages from a temple, and were employed for singing and dancing.²⁰³

1.4. Other names for devadasis

The devadasi tradition was ancient and widespread culture in India. Therefore, the name of the institution was also varied from regions to regions. The Sangam literature was considered the most secular contributions of Tamils. The Sangam literature portrayed the images of dancing women and prostitutes. *Tolkappiyam*, *Ettuttogai*, *Pattupattu* and *Pathinenkilkanakku*²⁰⁴ gave the earliest reference of the 'captive women' (*kondi mahalir*) one who engaged in divine service.²⁰⁵ All the other Sangam classics referred the *viraliyar* (minstrels), *kuttiyar* (dancing girls), and *parattaiyar* (prostitutes). Later all these customs were merge to evolve the devadasi system in Tamilakam.²⁰⁶

The materials related to the evolution of the devadasi system was evident from the Tamil epics of *Chilappathikaram*, *Manimekalai* and *Civakachintamani*.²⁰⁷ The Sangam literature and post Sangam sources such as *Chilappathikaram*, *Manimekalai* did not mention anything directly about devadasi system or religious sexuality. However, it portrayed prostitutes in their work. The Sangam text referred the women who acted as *velan vriyadal*, *kuri solluthal virali*, but there was no references for the dedication of women to any particular deity. Even, the term *paraththai* (prostitutes)

were denoted as *ayilai mahalir*²⁰⁸, *nerilai mahalir*²⁰⁹, *vilaik kanikai*²¹⁰, *vilai nalap pendir*²¹¹, *kurumahal*²¹², *manilai mahalir*²¹³, *valilai mahalir*²¹⁴, *kurunthodi mahalir*²¹⁵, *kanankulaiyavar*²¹⁶, *ezhil unkan nallar*²¹⁷, *kodiyannar*²¹⁸, *ezhilnallar*²¹⁹, *thunaimalark kothaiyar*²²⁰, *kadikkondar*²²¹, *ethilar*²²², *kondi mahalir*,²²³ *padini*²²⁴, *kama kilaththiyar*, *paraththaiyar*, *kamakkilaththi* (concubine), *katharpparaththai*, *irparaththai* and *cheripparaththai*.²²⁵ The characteristics of prostitute was categorized on the basis of dance, beauty and youthfulness. In general, family women were differentiated and identify them as *kula mahalir* (family women).

The post Sangam Kalabhra reign was referred as the Dark Age of Tamilakam. They were considered as alien rulers and believed the followers of Shamanic religion. There is no visible evidence of that particular period. The contemporary literature are the importance evidence of the period. The core of Kalabhras literature was morality. In general, women were kept mute. *Pathinenkilkanakku* mentioned prostitute in different terms such as *ainthodiyar*²²⁶, *panpin mahalir*²²⁷, *porut pendir*²²⁸, *maya mahalir*²²⁹, *manilaiyar*²³⁰, *irumanap pendir*²³¹, *vesaiyar*²³², *vanna mahalir*²³³, *pudaippendir*²³⁴, *punguzhaiyar*²³⁵, *ayilaiyal*²³⁶, *thalirannar*²³⁷, *onnuthlar*²³⁸, *kanikai*²³⁹, *varaivin mahalir*, *vilai mahalir*. The other post Sangam works also detailed about the prostitute in different terms such as *adal kooththiyar*²⁴⁰, *arankak kooththi*²⁴¹, *arankiyan mahalir*²⁴², *kadai kazhi mahalir*²⁴³, *kanikai*²⁴⁴, *kothiyar*²⁴⁵, *thoriya madanthaiyar*²⁴⁶, *nadaka madanthaiyar*²⁴⁷, *puvilai madanthaiyar*²⁴⁸, *vampap paraththai*²⁴⁹, *koththiyanmadanthaiyar*²⁵⁰, *kondi mahalir*²⁵¹, *pothuvar*²⁵², *porul vilaiyatti*²⁵³, *dasi*²⁵⁴, *kalaiyunar mahalir*²⁵⁵, *arivaiyar*²⁵⁶, *adan mahalir*²⁵⁷, *poga mahalir*²⁵⁸, *kalaiyindra sollal*²⁵⁹, *adan mankaiyar*²⁶⁰ and *paraththai*.²⁶¹

The devotional literature of Tamil, *puranas* and *stalapuranas* (temple myths) of the medieval period detailed the devadasi custom. The devotional literature of Alvars and Nayanmars (composed between 6th century C.E. and 9th century C.E.) referred the women as a celestial human being. *Periyapuranam*, the 12th century C.E. Saivite hagiology, detailed the devadasi system. During the reigns of Vijayanagar, Nayaka, Maratha and Poligars, there were innumerable minor literary works were composed in Tamilakam. Those literatures such as the *parani*, *ula*, *tutu* and *kovai* detailed the general conditions of devadasis. The medieval *Manipravala* literature, threw the valuable lights on the growing influence of the devadasi system.²⁶²

The cultural and geographical indicators played a significant role in the variations of the devadasi institution. According to the *Census of India, 1901: - Travancore*, the Tamil devadasis were known as *padham* and Malayalam known as *padhamangalam* in South Travancore. The Malayalam speaking devadasis were used to wear white cloths in Suchindram and Padmanabapuram temple.²⁶³ In addition, they did not engage in the private performance such as Tamil *dasis* did.²⁶⁴ Devadasis were called by several names in the Indian subcontinent. In Tamilnadu, devadasis were identified as *devadasi*, *devaradiyar*, *patiyilar*,²⁶⁵ *talichcheri pendukal*, *devanar makal*, *koottikal*, *adikalmar*, *manikkam* or *manikkattar*, *kanikaiyar*,²⁶⁶ *devadiyal*, *emperumanadiyar*, *koyil pillaimar*²⁶⁷, *rudrakanikai*, *koyil pinakkal*²⁶⁸ and so on. The devadasis of Kerala noted as *kuttiyar* (officially known as *atumpatrams*)²⁶⁹, *kudikari*, *marampavaiyar*, *devidicchi*, *nangaimar*²⁷⁰, *muraikkari*, *kootachi*, *koothichi*, and *attakkari*²⁷¹. In Andhra Pradesh, they were called as *bhogam-vandhi*, *sanis*, *bhogam* and *jogin*,²⁷² Devadasi in the Karnataka region were known as *suleyar*²⁷³, *sule*, *poti*, *basavi* (young devadasi) and *jogtis* (old devadasi) (The term ‘*basavi*’ refers to feminine form of ‘*basava*’ a bull which roams the village at will without any restriction. Hence, ‘*basavi*’ alludes to the foot loose position of the woman.).²⁷⁴ In Assam, devadasis were called as *Natis*²⁷⁵, *kurmapus kudipus*, and *darikas*²⁷⁶. The devadasi system in Odisha was identified with the terms *patras* and *maharis*. In Konkani belt, devadasi were denoted by *bhavanis*, *bhavin*, *kudikar* and *kalavant*. Further in Marathi speaking region, devadasi system was referred in terms such as *murali*, *jogateen* and *aradhini*²⁷⁷. Sadasivan mentioned that the devadasis’ in the Bombay presidency were identified in different terms, based on their temple affiliation.²⁷⁸ Often, the devadasi system was confused with prostitution. However, the Tamil word clearly differentiate the devadasi and prostitution, the word *vesi* referred prostitutes and *dasi* meant slave women who attached to the temple.²⁷⁹

1.5. Proverbs on devadasi

There were many proverbs, which were closely associated with devadasi. The proverbs reflected the public consensus on the general status of the devadasi system. A proverb, *thevaradiyal irunthu aththal seththal kottu melam*, *thevadiyal seththal onrumillai* meant that if the dancing girl be alive, and her mother dies, there will be beating of drums; but if the dancing girl dies there will be no such display. Which

meant that to get the favour of the dancing girl, many men would attend her mother's funeral; but if the dancing girl herself dies, there will be nothing gained by attending her funeral. It also meant that a devadasi's property remained with her family only as long as she lived and her death usually left the house without a single penny.²⁸⁰

Another proverb, *kozhukkattaikku thalaiyumillai, kooththadichchikku muraiyumillai* meant that the cake has no point like dancing girl does not have any ethics in their life.²⁸¹ In the same way, *siraichchalaikku azhakillai thevadiyalukku muraiyillai* referred a prison has no beauty and a dancing girl does not regard the ties of relationship.²⁸² *Thelukku kodukkile visam, thevadiyalukku udampile visam, unakko sarvankam visam*, which meant scorpions have poison in their tail, harlots in their body, but as to you, your whole body is poison.²⁸³

Some proverbs detailed the poverty of devadasi girls. *Kovil sorrukku kumattina thevadiyal, kadich chorrukku karanampodukiral* meant the dancing girl who was formerly more than filled with good food in the temple, now turns a somersault to get a poor man's rice.²⁸⁴ *Orukku oru thevadiyal yarukkendru aduval* referred the village has only one dancing girl; for whom is she to dance? (As all want her services, she is not only in doubt where to go, but also suffers from being overworked.).²⁸⁵ *Adamattatha thevadiyal pothathu enralam* pointed the dancing girl, who could not dance, said that the hall was not big enough.²⁸⁶ *Than pathiniyanal, thevadiyal thervilum kudiyrukkalam* stated if a matron is chaste, she may live in the dancing-girls' street.²⁸⁷

1.6. Sources for the study of the devadasis

The study used both primary and secondary sources. According to the historical background, the nature of sources are differed. The study extensively used the historical narratives such as epigraphy, travelogues, literary sources, official records, newspapers, collected speeches and writings, reports and minutes, memories and autobiographies, oral narratives, personal letters, and diaries as well as monographs and folk songs.

The study of inscriptions provided the information about the devadasi. It helped us to situate devadasi within the particular historical context of the medieval South India. From 11th century C.E. onwards, the inscriptions that dealt with devadasi was available in every part of Indian subcontinent. In general, the inscriptions were engraved on rocks, boulders, walls of temples, pillars and loose slabs. Some of the inscriptions are unfortunately buried under earth and hundreds of inscriptions engraved on copper and silver plates.²⁸⁸ The epigraphical evidences detailed the social status of devadasi women. The recorded gifts explained the charitable activities of devadasis. Usually, devadasis were made different endowments such as lands, lamps, sheep, cow, gold, jewels, and other ornaments to the temple²⁸⁹ and other the public charities. The sources highlighted the role of the temple and the dancing girls in early medieval, medieval and even later period. The earliest epigraphical reference to devadasi was occurred in the reign of the Pallava king, Nandivarma Pallavamalla (731 C.E.-796 C.E.)²⁹⁰ The inscriptions were published in the series of *South Indian Inscriptions (S.I.I.)*, *the Inscriptions of Pudukkottai State (P.S.I.)*, *South Indian Temple Inscriptions (S.I.T.I.)*, *Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy (A.R.I.E.)*, *Travancore Archaeological Series (T.A.S.)*, *Epigraphica Indica*, etc.

The historical remains such as sculptures and paintings were reflected the respective society and elegant of devadasi women. In general, the sculptures of the dancing girls were depicted in the walls and towers of the temples. For example, the paintings of the dancing girls were depicted in the temples of Kailasanatha (Kanchipuram), Vaigunthaperumal (Kanchipuram), Vettuvarkoil (Kalugumalai), Rajarajesvaram (Thanjavur), Chittannavasal cave (Pudukkottai) and Thiyagarajar temple (Tiruvarur).²⁹¹

In addition to inscriptions, we have other sources from time to time. Thanjavur Marathas of 18th century C.E. used *Modi* scripts, which were popularly known as the *Modi* records. However, the documentation of *Modi* records has not been done systematically. So referring *Modi* source was a little difficult (*See Appendix: - 2*).²⁹² The translated works of K.M. Venkatramaiah and Vivekanandagopal were helpful while using those sources. Further, the government orders (GO), legislative council debates, different volumes of census reports of India and contemporary newspapers

and magazines from the Colonial period gave valuable information about the devadasis in colonial India.

Usually, literature furnishes primary data for the study of devadasi. It throws light on contemporary events and substantiates the information, which was found in the inscriptions. The present thesis used mostly Sangam and post Sangam literature, *bhakti* literature and other minor literature, especially the literary genres of *tutu* and *Kalambagam*, the songs of Arunakirinathar and Kalamekam.

The records of Arab, Chinese and European travellers provided the references of the temple women of India. Huan Tsang (c. 7th century C.E.), Abu Zaid al Hasan (930 C.E.) Al-Beruni (1030 C.E.), Chau-ju-Kua (12th century C.E.), Marco Polo (1290 C.E.), Wasaf (14th century C.E.), Ibn Batuta (14th century C.E.), Durate Barbosa (1504 C.E.-1514 C.E.) and Abbe Dubois (1799 C.E.) were few notable travellers, who recorded the institution of devadasis. Al-Beruni stated that the institution of devadasi was started to degenerate as early as the 10th century C.E. to 11th century C.E.²⁹³ Abdul Razaak, a Turkish ambassador from Persia, described 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.²⁹⁴ Nicolo Conti (15th century C.E.), Paes and Nuniz (16th century C.E.) were detailed the devadasi institution of the Vijayanagar period. Abbe Dubois (1799 C.E.) said that devadasi granted their favours to anyone demanding them, in return for ready money. He further added that the people perceived devadasis or the handmaids of god as a prostitute.²⁹⁵ The 16th century C.E. missionary letters of Fr. Immanuel de Veiga and Fr. Vico detailed the devadasi system.²⁹⁶

The study largely depended on the personal writings such as ‘Personal documents’ or ‘documents of life’ may include diaries, letters, autobiographies, biographies, memoranda and other materials.²⁹⁷ The writings of E.V. Ramasami and other self-respecters, Muthulakshmi Reddi, the personal communication to Gandhi and so. With regards to biography, the life of Ramamirtham was referred from the writings of Ramamirtham in her novel *Dasikal Mosavalai alladhu Mathipetra Mminar* (Dasis web of deceit or enlightened Playboy) and newspapers of Self-Respect Movement and the biography of Jeevasunadari. The life of Nagarathnam was perceived from the

work of Sriram (*The Devadasi and the Saint: The Life and Times of Bangalore Nagarathnamma*) and Balasaraswati's life from Douglas M. Knight Jr's *Balasaraswathi: Her Art and Life*. And T.J.S. George's *MS: A Life in Music* is helpful to refer the life of M.S. Subbulakshmi.

1.6.1. Review of literature

There are two kinds of secondary sources, used for this research. One is exclusively discussed on the devadasi and its institution. The next one is the works, which detailed the issues, which were related to women, society and ideologies. Such as the works of K.N. Panikkar, V. Geetha, M.S.S. Pandian, K.A.N. Sastri, etc.

There are good numbers of secondary sources available on studying devadasi system. The sources are partly or completely analysed, devadasis and the institution. Frederique Apffel Marglin, Saskia Kersenboom-Story, Leslie C. Orr, Sadasivan, A.K. Singh, Tarachand, Priyadarshini Vijaisri, Kunal M. Parker, Shashi Panjrath and O.P. Ralhan, Jogan Shankar, Kay K. Jordan, Nagendra Kr. Singh,²⁹⁸ Indira Viswanathan Peterson, Daves Soneji, Amrit Srinivasan,²⁹⁹ Rekha Pande, Lakshmi Subramanian, Kalpana Kannabiran and Lakshmi Viswanathan are the few prominent scholars who did extensive research on devadasi institution.

A.K. Singh's *Devadasi System in Ancient India* discussed the evolution of devadasi system in a historical perspective. Inscriptions were the primary sources for his study. The book discussed about the origin of the system and further detailed the functions and activities of the organization, their regional distribution and their paramours. Shashi Panjrath and O.P. Ralhan detailed the institution in a historical perspective.³⁰⁰ They pointed about the temple institution and its performance and influence in the respective society. It further analyzed the role of devadasi, their royal patronage, rituals and practices, duties and rewards in South India. Rekha Pande in her article *Devadasis* analyzed devadasi of a medieval South India. In it she discussed about the relationship between temple organization and devadasis, their land grant which popularly known as *devadana* and the functions of devadasis in temple institution.³⁰¹

Saskia Kersenboom-Story's *Nityasumangali* is one of the pioneering works in the study of devadasi system. The work considered the institution as semiotic unit. She did not analyse the institution based on sociological, historical or philosophical perspective. She looked at understands the system and how the system functioned within the Hindu tradition.³⁰² She traces the concept of the devadasi from the Sangam Age beginning in 100 B.C.E. and lasting until the collapse of the Thanjavur court in 1947. She provides a detailed analysis of the role of the devadasi in both the daily and festival temple rituals based on Sanskrit manuals, inscriptions, and informants' accounts. Leslie C. Orr's *Donors, Devotees, and Daughters of God* marked an important addition to the study of this system.³⁰³ This book is based on an exhaustive study of temple inscriptions and claimed to reveal the actuality of temple women's lives, from those inscriptional records from the Chola dynasty (850 C.E.-1300 C.E.) in Tamilnadu. The body of the book is loaded with statistics and tables. She challenged the image of women dancers as prostitutes and produced valuable information on them. She portrayed devadasis in three categories as donors, devotees and at the same time as daughters of god. *Devadasi System in Medieval Tamilnadu* of Sadasivan detailed the devadasi institution of medieval Tamilnadu. It is one of the extensive researches on the devadasi institution of Tamil society. His research is based on inscription and epigraphical records. The work brought out the general condition on devadasis during periods of Chola, later Pandya and Nayakas.

Frederique Apffel Marglin's study of devadasis in eastern India, especially devadasis associated with the temple of Jagannatha in Puri, Orissa It provides an ethnographic data. It combined with description of the devadasis involvements in palace and temple rituals, their sexual initiations, caste and geographical structures on their sexual availability, and their culturally askew kinship systems. It centres on all such discussion on auspiciousness/ inauspiciousness as an axial pair of Hindu values. Marglin highlighted that the secularized nature of kingly role in India.³⁰⁴ Tarachand's anthropological work *Devadasi Custom* theoretically contributes to understand the concept of religious tradition, marriage union, lineage inheritance, family leadership, status, authority and so on. The work theorizes the various concepts of the origin of the system. It basically set on the post-colonial village of Wada in Maharashtra.³⁰⁵ *Devadasi Cult* of Jogan Shankar analysed the devadasi system of Yellamma tradition.

It based on the sociological perspective. It detailed on the post-colonial period.³⁰⁶ Kalpana Priyadarshini Vijaisri's *Recasting the Devadasi* focused on the sacred prostitution of South India, during colonial period with special focused on Karnataka and Telugu speaking area (Mysore state and Maratha country). It locates various manifestations of this custom in a culturally pluralistic context.³⁰⁷ Kannabiran's article *Judiciary, Social Reform and Debate on 'Religious Prostitution' in Colonial India* discussed devadasis system in the colonial India. It detailed the struggle between the reformist and the revivalist and the role of devadasi.³⁰⁸ Moreover, her another work, *Muvalur Ramamirthammal's Web of Deceit* was a translated work of the notable devadasi of colonial Tamilnadu, Muvalur Ramamirthammal.³⁰⁹

Kunal M. Parker's *A Corporation of Superior Prostitutes' Anglo- Indian Legal Conceptions of Temple Dancing Girls, 1800- 1914* is detailed work on the various judicial issues on the abolition devadasi system in colonial period. It analysed the problems between the indigenous custom, Hindu and colonial law. It further discussed about the labialization of devadasi as prostitutes.³¹⁰ Jordan's *From Sacred Servants to Profane Prostitutes* is one of the prominent works on the relating to the different judicial policies, which were enacted during the colonial period for the abolition of devadasi system. It detailed the colonial transformation of the Indian legal system towards the issues of devadasis.³¹¹ Amrit Srinivasan's *Judiciary, Social Reform and Debate on 'Religious Prostitution' in Colonial India* examined the official debate in the colonial judiciary on the devadasi institution of the Madras presidency. The study of the devadasi institution undertook with a twofold purposes. The first was an attempt to understand the relationship between women, religion and the state in pre-colonial and colonial South India, and the second was to try and disentangle this complex process, specifically looked, how far the projects of colonialism, reforms and revivals were based on an understanding of the material reality of the practice between 1860 C.E.-1935 C.E.³¹²

Indira Viswanathan Peterson and Daves Soneji's *Performing Pasts: Reinventing the Arts in Modern South India* is a book, which contained the important collection of articles on performing arts and modernity in South India.³¹³ It illuminated the tension between modernity and tradition. It critically interrogated colonialism and nationalism in the context of the "invention" of South India's performing arts in the 19th century

C.E. and 20th century C.E. The articles in the volume, discussed the various issues on devadasi custom during colonial period. Lakshmi Subramanian's *From the Tanjore Court to the Madras Music Academy* was a critical study, which discussed the transformation of devadasi arts from its nature to modernity. The work set on colonial background. Her book focused on the modernization the devadasi's art form.³¹⁴ Lakshmi Viswanathan, a classical dancer, explored the world of the devadasi in the historical context in her book *Women of Pride*. It gave a general information on devadasi institution and provided the interviews of devadasis and *nautch* women of colonial India.³¹⁵

The work of A.K. Singh and Shashi Panjra and O.P. Ralhan, Rekha Pande provided general details of devadasi and their situation. Saskia Kersenboom-Story, Leslie Orr and Sadasivan focused the temple women of Tamilakam. Saskia Kersenboom-Story analysed the system within the Hindu custom. Leslie C. Orr detailed on devadasi on medieval Tamil Chola dynasty. Sadasivan historically detailed the medieval temple institution. Frederique Apffel Marglin, Tarachand and Priyadarshini Vijaisri focused the devadasi institution in Orissa, Karnataka and Mysore region respectively. Kunal M. Parker and Kay K. Jordan preceded the legal things of devadasi in colonial context. Indira Viswanathan Peterson and Daves Soneji, Amrit Srinivasan, Lakshmi Subramanian, and Kalpana Kannabiran set their research in colonial context and analyzed the transformation from its traditional way of performance to modernity. All the above-mentioned research works focused on different issues related to devadasis. However, they are not concentrated on the historical connectivity of the evolution of the institution and its reformulated structure in the Tamil country. The current thesis is going to focus on the evolution and reformulation of the devadasi institution in Tamil region.

1.7. Methodology

This study uses qualitative methods, especially the methodologies of History and Gender Studies. The researcher carried out unstructured interviews with the last surviving devadasi to understand their experiences and opinions on devadasi institution.

This research used a large amount of translation. With regard the transliteration, the thesis followed its own pattern – for instance, the word ‘அம்மா’ (mother) was transliterated as *amma* instead of *ammaa* or *ammā*; and the meaning was given either in brackets or in the endnotes. The historical discourse engaged with many historical personalities. Those eminent were usually identified with their surnames like E.V. Ramasami as *Thanthai Periyar* and M.K. Gandhi as *Mahatma*. The present thesis tries to avoid their popular names or pseudonyms and has attempted to use their proper names alone.

Geographical boundary is not a permanent phenomenon but changes with time. Hence, defining the exact geographical boundary of Tamilakam is also tough. According to *Chilappathikaram*, the limits of Tamilakam were from Venkata Hills (Tirupathi) in the North to Cape Comorin in the South and from the Bay of Bengal in the East, to the Arabian Sea in the West.³¹⁶ Subramanian stated that the Tamil country called Tamilnadu or Tamilakam lies to the South of the Mysore plateau in the North and North West and the Tirupathi hills in the North East, and is bounded on the West by the Arabian Sea, on the South by the Indian Ocean and on the east by the Bay of Bengal.³¹⁷ The Vaishnava canon addressed Venkatam as part of Tamilakam. So our study is based on the geographical area from Venkata hills in the north and with its southern tip at Cape Comorin. This study includes the modern states of Tamilnadu, Kerala and some parts of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. (*See Appendix: - 3*).

1.7.1. Objectives

This thesis has five objectives to comprehend the evolution and reformulation the devadasi system.

- The first objective is to understand the concept and nature of devadasi institution.
- The second objective is to know the historical background of the devadasi system in Tamilakam. The study also focuses on social, religious, political and economic condition of the Tamilakam.
- The third objective is to study the life of devadasi in the historical context.

- The fourth objective of this study concentrates on the historical transformation of the devadasi institution from sacred place to profane.
- The fifth object is to find the role of reformist and revivalist in the process of abolition of the system.

To achieve its object, this study has to face few challenges. The first one is in the form of sources. Sources are the backbone for every historical study. Regarding this study, we have to utilize various kinds of primary sources. Each kind has its own nature and problem. Few of the medieval Tamilakam inscriptions were scripted in Prakrit language. The next issue is in the form of *stalapuranas*. These give details regarding temples, its origin, deity, worshipping pattern and auspicious days etc. However, *stalapuranas* were infused with the mythological elements. Therefore, we have to focus on those evidences in a rational and historical way. In the same way, the devotional songs of Alvars and Nayanars carried the devotional elements. Professor Raghavan had characterized the saints as “mystics who spoke the language of experience and poetry and not of argument and logic.”³¹⁸ The other challenge was in the identification of the exact sacred centers of the medieval period. The names of the places mentioned in the primary sources have changed in course of time.

1.7.2. Chapterization

The present study is divided into seven chapters.

The first chapter is titled *Introduction*. It details the concept of devadasi, meaning and features of the devadasi institution. It analysis the sources and historiography of the study. Then it discusses about the methodologies that have been used and followed in collecting and analyzing the data and concludes with the details of the chapterization of this research.

The second chapter is *Pre-Colonial Tamilakam: - The Historical Context*. It discusses the historical development which led to the formation of devadasi institution of South India with special focus on Tamilakam. This chapter focuses on the social condition of the age that was influenced in the emergence of devadasi system in Tamil country. It looks at the political background. It also explores the economic, social and religious situation in Tamilakam.

The third chapter, *Emergence and Growth of the Devadasi System: - Pre-Colonial Tamilakam* analyses the position of devadasi in pre-colonial Tamil country and further it details the effective participation temple women in the Tamil society.

The fourth chapter, *The Devadasi System: - The Colonial Tamilakam* vividly lists the transformation of the devadasi system from the one mode of political condition to another one. It analyzes various causes for the degradation of the system. The conclusion of this chapter is highlights the general condition of devadasis of colonial South India.

The fifth chapter *The 20th century C.E. Debate on Devadasi System* discusses the role of reformist and revivalist in the move of the abolition and restoration of the devadasi custom in the society.

The sixth chapter *The Life Stories of Some Selected Devadasis of South India* gives different perspective on devadasis and their institution in their contemporary society. It details the portrayal devadasis in their contemporary media and its influence over the system.

The last and concluding chapter *Conclusion* gives a valedictory note of this work and summarizes the facts from the chapters and conclusion.

End Notes

¹ Iyer, Latha and Kanakalatha Mukund. "Herstory: Women in South India in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries." *Indica* 32, no. 1. (1995): 29.

² Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. Oxford University Press: New York, 1986: 6.

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg in Morgan, Sue. Ed. *The Feminist History Reader*. London: Routledge, 2006: 100.

⁵ Lerner, Gerda. 1986. *Op.cit.*, 5.

⁶ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg in Morgan, Sue. Ed. 2006. *Op.cit.*, 99.

⁷ Sharma, Ratna. "Devadasi: The Sacred Veil on Priestly Prostitution." *Adhyayan* VI, no. 1 and 2. (1996): 20.

⁸ Swaminathan, S. *The Early Cholas History, Art and Culture*. Delhi: Sharada Publicating House, 1998: 124.

⁹ Subramanian, N. *History of Tamilnad*. Madurai: Koodal Publishers, 1978: 344.

¹⁰ Hero Stones are the small establishment made on the buried person whose act was considered as valiant. In general, people used to offer or worship the establishment.

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- ¹¹ Subramanian, N. 1978. *Op.cit.*, 344.
- ¹² Kersenboom, Saskia C. *Nityasumangali*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1987: IX.
- ¹³ Sharma, Ratna. 1996. *Op.cit.*, 20.
- ¹⁴ Singh, A.K. 1990. *Devadasis System in Ancient India*. Delhi: H.K. Publishers and Distributors. p. 7.
- ¹⁵ Tarachand, K.C. *Devadasi Custom: Rural and Social Structure and Flesh Markets*. New Delhi: Reliance Publishing House, 1991: 12.
- ¹⁶ Sharma, Ratna. 1996. *Op.cit.*, 23.
- ¹⁷ Kersenboom, Saskia C. 1987. *Op.cit.*, XVI.
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- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.
- ⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 13, 24.
- ⁹⁰ Tarachand, K.C. 1991. *Op.cit.*, 13.
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- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*
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- ²⁰² *Ibid.*
- ²⁰³ Thurston, Edgar and K, Rangachari. 1987 (Rpt. 1909). *Op.cit.*
- ²⁰⁴ *Pathinenkilkanakku* is an anthology of eighteen-post Sangam literature. Those are *Nalatiyar, Nanmanikkatikai, Inna Narpathu, Iniyavai Narpathu, Kar Narpathu, Kalavazhi Narpathu, Ainthinai Aimpathu, Thinaimozhi Aimpathu, Ainthinai Ezhupathu, Thinaimalai*

Nurru Aimpathu, Tirukkural, Thirikatukam, Acharakkovai, Pazhamozhi Nanuru, Siruppanchamulam, Muthumozhikkanchi, Elathi and Kainnilai. The songs were written by various authors. The style and content of the works are different from earlier Sangam literature.

²⁰⁵ *Manimekalai*. Song no. 18. 1. 109.

²⁰⁶ Sadasivan, K. 1993. *Op.cit.*, 10.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰⁸ *Akananuru*. Song no. 206. 1. 8.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, Song no. 336. 1. 11.

²¹⁰ *Paripadal*. Song no. 20. 1. 49.

²¹¹ *Purananuru*. Song no. 365. 1. 8.

²¹² *Narrinai*. Song no. 1. 1. 20.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, Song no. 30. 1. 5.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Song no. 380. 1. 5. and *Kuruntogai*. Song no. 45. 1. 2.

²¹⁵ *Kuruntogai*. Song no. 384. 1. 2.

²¹⁶ *Kalittogai*. Section. 3. Song no. 66. 1.13.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Section. 3. Song no. 67. 1. 6.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Section. 3. Song no. 67. 1. 10.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Section. 3. Song no. 67. 1. 14.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, Section. 3. Song no. 70. 1. 9.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, Section. 3. Song no. 72. 1. 9.

²²² *Ibid.*, Section. 3. Song no. 78. 1. 13. and Section. 3. Song no. 84. 1. 20.

²²³ “வானவ மகளிர் மானக கண்டோர்; நெஞ்சு நடுங்குறாவைக் கொண்டி மகளிர்” (*vanava mahalir manaka kandor; nenju nadunkuruvuk kondi mahalir*). *Maduraikanji*. 1. 583.

²²⁴ “புறம் போற்ற வய வேந்தன்; மறம் பாடிய பாடினி யும்மே” (*puram porra vaya vendhan; maram padiya padini yumme*). *Purananuru*. Song no. 11. 11. 10-11.

²²⁵ The representation of women in Sangam and Post-Sangam literature is referred from the work of Narmadha. *Thamizhagathil Thevaradiyar Marabu-Panmuga Nokku* (A Multi-Dimensional Approach towards Devadasis of Tamilnadu) (in Tamil). Chennai: Bodhi Vanam, 2006: 24-25.

²²⁶ *Tirukkural*. Section. 2. *Varaivin mahalir*. Song no. 911

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, Section. 2. *Varaivin mahalir*. Song no. 912.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, Section. 2. *Varaivin mahalir*. Song no. 913

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, Section. 2. *Varaivin mahalir*. Song no. 918

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, Section. 2. *Varaivin mahalir*. Song no. 919.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, Section. 2. *Varaivin mahalir*. Song no. 920.

²³² *Acharakkovai*. Song no. 51. 1. 1.

²³³ *Ibid.*, Song no. 82. 1. 1.

²³⁴ *Nalatiyar*. Song no. 368. 1. 2.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, Song no. 370. 1. 1.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, Song no. 372. 1. 1.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, Song no. 373. 1. 3.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, Song no. 379. 1. 1. and Song no. 380. 1. 1.

²³⁹ *Thirikatukam*. Song no. 24. 1. 1; Song no. 76. 1. 2 and Song no. 81. 1. 1.

²⁴⁰ *Chilappathikaram*. Part. 1. Section. 5. 1. 50.

²⁴¹ *Manimekalai*. Song no. 18. 1. 35. and Song no. 24. 1. 22.

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- ²⁴² *Ibid.*, Song no. 7. 1. 44.
- ²⁴³ *Chilappathikaram*. Part. 2. Section. 14. 1. 71.
- ²⁴⁴ *Chilappathikaram*. Part. 1. Section. 5. 1. 50. and *Manimekalai*. Song no. 11. 1. 13.
- ²⁴⁵ *Chilappathikaram*. Part. 2. Section. 14. 1. 156; *Manimekalai*. Song no. 12. 1. 51. and *Civakachintamani*. Section no. 7. 1. 1651.
- ²⁴⁶ *Chilappathikaram*. Part. 2. Section. 14. 1. 155.
- ²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Part. 2. Section. 22. 1. 142.
- ²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Part. 1. Section. 5. 1. 51.
- ²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Part. 1. Section. 10. 1. 219.
- ²⁵⁰ *Manimekalai*. Song no. 18. 1. 6.
- ²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Song no. 18. 1. 109.
- ²⁵² *Ibid.*, Song no. 28. 1. 51.
- ²⁵³ *Ibid.*, Song no. 5. 1. 87.
- ²⁵⁴ *Civakachintamani*. Section no. 7. 1. 1675.
- ²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Section no. 7. 1. 1625.
- ²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Section no. 9. 1. 2079.
- ²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Section no. 10. 1. 2118.
- ²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Section no. 10. 1. 2173.
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- ²⁶⁷ *Koyil Pillaimar* lived in Thazhakkudi, Krishnan Koyil, Tirupathicharam, Sucindrum, Budhappandi and Nagercoil in modern Tamilnadu. This *koyil pillaimar* had a marriage alliance with Vellalar of Nanchil Nadu and later the community was faded away. These details are pointed out by Nanjil Nadan in his book *Naanjil Naattu Vellalar Vaazhkai*. (Nadan, Nanjil. *Naanjil Naattu Vellalar Vaazhkai* (Ethnography of Vellalars of Nanjilnadu, Kanyakumari District) (in Tamil). Chennai: Kalachuvadu Pathippagam, 2003 (Rpt. 2008): 29.)
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- ²⁷⁸ Sadasivan, K. 1993. *Op.cit.*, 1-2.
- ²⁷⁹ Shortt, John. 1870. *Op.cit.*, 182.
- ²⁸⁰ தேவடியாள் இருந்து. ஆத்தாள் செத்தால் கொட்டு முழக்கம், தேவடியாள் செத்தால் ஒன்றுமில்லை (*thevaradiyal irunthu aththal seththal kottu melam, thevadiyal seththal onrumillai*) (Jensen, Herman. Rev. *A Classified Collection of Tamil Proverbs*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1897 (Rpt. 1986): 40.)
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- ²⁸² சிறைச்சாலைக்கு அழகில்லை தேவடியாளுக்கு முறையில்லை (*siraichchalaikku azhakillai thevadiyalukku muraiyillai*) (*Ibid.*)
- ²⁸³ தேளுக்குக் கொடுக்கிலே விஷம், தேவடியாளுக்கு உடம்பிலே விஷம், உனக்கோ சர்வாங்கம் விஷம் (*thelukku kodukkile visam, thevadiyalukku udampile visam, unakko sarvankam visam*) (*Ibid.*, 49.)
- ²⁸⁴ கோவில் சோற்றுக்குக் குமட்டின தேவடியாள், காடிச் சோற்றுக்குக் கரணம்போடுகிறாள் (*koyil sorrukkuk kumattina thevadiyal, kadich chorrukkuk karanampodukiral*) (*Ibid.*, 60.)
- ²⁸⁵ ஊருக்கு ஒரு தேவடியாள் யாருகென்று ஆடுவாள் (*orukku oru thevadiyal yarukkendru aduval*) (*Ibid.*, 153.)
- ²⁸⁶ ஆடமாட்டாத தேவடியாள் கூடம் போதாது என்றாளாம் (*adamattatha thevadiyal pothathu enralam*) (*Ibid.*, 201.)
- ²⁸⁷ தான் பத்தினியானால், தேவடியாள் தெருவிலும் குடியிருக்கலாம் (*than pathiniyanal, thevadiyal thervilum kudiyrukkalam*) (*Ibid.*, 335.)
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CHAPTER - II

Pre-Colonial Tamilakam: - The Historical Context

The devadasi system was not an independent one. It encountered with society. It was much associated with the power structure of the medieval society. It flourished under certain political conditioning of the South India. Kay. K. Jordan pointed out that the medieval temple represented as an intersection with the sacred realm that gives meaning to both kingship and the service of the devadasi.¹ The process was manifested in changes in kinship organization and economic relations in the establishment of religious and state bureaucracies, and in the shift in cosmogonies expressing the ascendancy of male god figures.² This particular chapter discusses about the historical development of the devadasi system, and how the different social conditions had led to the establishment of the devadasi institution in South India.

2.1. The South Indian society

The South Indian polity, especially the ancient Tamil was divided into number of tribal units and the main difference between them was being largely due to its geographical environment.³ There was an unequal society, which existed in Tamilakam from the early times of Chola period onwards.⁴ The primitive Tamil society was tribal, horizontal and communalized in nature. They distributed themselves over five different geographical regions such as hilly, pastoral, agricultural, littoral and desert. The stratification of society was hierarchically arranged. In the beginning, it was based on profession, and later it became a rigid birth based castes. The earlier communities like Paraiar (drummers), Minavar (fishermen), Umanar (salt traders), Vellalar (peasants), weavers and Kollar (artisans) were all classified as communities. Whenever the new art and craft was developed, a new community came into exist.⁵ From 6th century B.C.E. or 5th century B.C.E. onwards, the wave of Brahmin migration might happen in the Tamil country, and later centuries they became an integral part of Tamil society.⁶ The Sangam corpus *Purananuru* mentioned the four fold community divisions, calling each community as *kudi*.⁷ “There are no *kudis* other than these four” but later all these classification were considered as untouchables. However, Tevaram, the Saivite canon of medieval

Tamilakam, highlighted many castes in the South Indian society. The *Varna* system of Aryan was super-imposed on the indigenous tribal system of the South.⁸ The *gotras* of Aryans and the totems of tribal intermingled to create a new social order, which was peculiar to Indian caste system. The horizontal division of the pre-Aryan Tamil society moved towards the vertical and exclusive *Varna* system.⁹ The regional version of the theoretical *Varna* system was developed, and it became much more rigid.¹⁰ The interaction of Brahmins and peasant folk constituted the primary cultural nexus of medieval South India.¹¹ Subramanian, a historian, said that these processes created a new social stratification, which was peculiar to Tamilakam.¹² Later, it made society in much more complex.¹³ Champakalakshmi, a historian, witnessed the presence of the brahmanical tradition in an amalgamated form in the early Sangam age.¹⁴ The late Sangam and post Sangam works of the 4th century C.E. to 6th century C.E., *Paripadal* and *Tirumurukarrupadai* marked a new era in Tamil culture, and a new milieu in the Tamil religion and worship.¹⁵ An idea of absolute or universal godhead entered into the Tamil ethos.¹⁶ The vernacular rendering of the Puranic religion was established. The elements of the folk cult incorporated the brahmanical traditions of Vedic religion.

The culture of caste is an element in the character of Indian societies. Burton Stein, a medieval historian, detailed the vital distinction between the Aryan *Varna* system and South Indian caste system. According to him, the former consisted the four fold classifications of Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sutra and the later consisted only the two fold of Brahmin and non-Brahmin.¹⁷ The caste principles were pertaining to kingship, marriage and occupation as well as to matters directly involved Brahmins. In ancient Tamil society, even the kings and the merchants were not different from the ordinary peasants.¹⁸ The kings could freely marry within the non-brahmanical community. In South India, the relative isolation on autonomy of peasant localities was reinforced by kinship and marriage practices.¹⁹ The impact of the *Varna* system divided the society in different basis. The Aryan framework set a sort of example and later it became prestigious. Otherwise, the horizontal communities would have developed hierarchical attitudes. The tendency to imitate the brahmanical order was popular among the indigenous groups and it generated the comparative prestige within the groups. However, the early sacrificing Brahmin priest had no legitimate rights in the temple, but

in the course of time, they became the temple priest and also brought the entire area of religion under their control. The Brahmins continued to hold their position of supremacy in Pallava and Chola period, but they slowly became a distinct group in the community and confined themselves to a particular sub-urban areas and generally disdaining manual labors.²⁰

The political ideologies of the Tamil kingdoms under the Pandiyas and the more powerful Pallavas differed from those of the Tamil kings during the Sangam period. In ancient times, the kings and the numerous petty chiefs had legitimized their power through personal acts of magnanimity and heroism, which attracted the loyalty of personal for relatively small-scale military adventures. The Pallavas developed a variant of north Indian political order based on a duality between the ruler, as wielder of physical force, and ritual specialists as possessors of spiritual expertise.²¹

The domination of the Brahmin in society logically implies the dominance of the patriarchal structure. The Vedic Brahmanical structure determines the ascriptive and prescriptive roles of women and the lower castes.²² The brahmanical interpretation which became important under the Pallavas, the Brahmins were the crucial actors in the political system, exemplifying the highest levels of ritual purity, and passing down the lore of the Vedas which maintained dharma. The Pallava rulers supported Brahmins and their Sanskrit institutions, bestowing on Brahmin communities control over numerous agrarian villages and giving lavishly in return for services at large scale royal rituals.²³ The Vellalar and Brahmin officials constituted the ruling elites in the Chola state, and the ideology, which provided a strong basis for the Chola ruling system, was communal as well as Brahmanical.²⁴ Frederique Apffel Marglin, an ethno-historian, explained the process of ritual sanction by the Brahmin to the tribal chiefs to get the religious status thorough conducting brahmanical rituals and the settlement of Brahmins.²⁵ The Velvikkudi Grant of Parantakan Nedunjadaian (769 C.E.-770 C.E.) mentioned that the village Velvikkudi was gifted to one Narkorran also known as Korkai Kilan by the Pandiya ruler, Palyagasalai Mudukudumipperuvazhudi when he completed *velvi* (yagna).²⁶ The Pandiya ruler Kadungon (590 C.E.-620 C.E.) gifted a village of Srimangalam as a *brahmadeyam* (Brahmin settlement) to twelve Brahmins.²⁷

Champakalakshmi pointed out that in the early medieval period (from the 6th century C.E. onwards), the brahmanical tradition with the Vedic *yagna* along with the Puranic worldview became the norms for political legitimacy.²⁸ The patronage was not entirely without its return. The patronage helped the patrons to use the symbols of the religion for their benefit. The exercise of the power in a particular socio political formation was achieved primarily through the use of the symbols of the agamic Hindu religion, which was propagated through the aggressive *bhakti* movement and its institutional expressions. The symbols associated with the temples were used for purposes of political mobilization as a metaphor of power.²⁹ The religious institutions started to function as the state itself in a surrogate way.³⁰ The kings were created by the performance of *srata* sacrifice under Vedic Brahmins.

2.2. The temple

The power structure of Tamilakam co-existed with religion, religious institution and symbols. The religious institutions such as temples played a crucial role. The constructed temples made a huge impact in the South Indian society. The South Indian temples were not only noted for its religiosity, but they performed multi-dimensional functions. The medieval temples were constructed for different reasons. Parabrahma Sastry, a historian, pointed out that the temples of the medieval period were a symbolic representation of the various social activities.³¹ The earlier temples functioned as fortresses, treasuries, knowledge centre, warehouses, parks, exhibition sheds, auditorium, amusement, and so on. Champakalakshmi stressed that the religious institutions were a primary causative factor for the medieval pre-industrial and traditional agrarian South Indian society.³² Rajeev H. Dehejia and Vivek H. Dehejia mentioned that religious thoughts and economic activities were closely intertwined with the history of India.³³ *Kudi Arasu*, the Tamil rational weekly detailed that the constructions of the temples by the ancient rulers was mainly due to widespread the cooperation, unity, discipline and devotion among the people.³⁴ The institution of devadasi had taken a deep root in the temple organization of South India and they were an essential part of the temple complex.

The Chola, Pandiya and Chera occupied the fertile riverine agrarian basins of Cauveri, Vaikai and Periyaru respectively. The polity of the strong agrarian base able to dominate the other small chieftains like Velir, Aye, Ori, Pari, etc. After the fall of Sangam order, the Kalabhras started to govern the Tamil country. There were many misconceptions about this period due to the lack of historical evidences. During the Sangam period, there was paucity of the historical evidence for the existence of the structural temples. Initially, the sacred abodes were constructed by clay with the wooden roof. The temples, which were constructed by sand, were known as *manthali* (sand temple). The wood structure of the temple construction was still somewhat prevalent in Chidambaram and parts of modern Kerala.³⁵

In the beginning of the early medieval period, the reign of Kalabhra power was overshadowed by Pallavas and Pandiyas.³⁶ It marked a new beginning in the social and cultural space of the Tamil country. The period of Pallavas had been identified as transitional in a number of important ways, which is related to the development of south Indian society and culture. During this period, the concept of land grants was introduced.³⁷ The transition period witnessed a great wave of immigration and settlement of the Brahmins.³⁸ The medieval rulers settled down Brahmins in the conquered tribal areas and they tamed and taught the tribal people to obey the king and his suzerainty.³⁹ In the proceeding period, the Brahmins started to control over the court and countryside.⁴⁰ The period witnessed the process of temple building, foundation of the *bhakti* cult, introduction of the women into the sacred shrines and efflorescence of essentially rural brahmanical institutions as loci Sanskrit learning and the establishment of kingship based upon *chakravarty* model of kingship.⁴¹

During the early medieval period, Pallavas and Cholas (4th century C.E. to 9th century C.E.) reined the Tamil country. The Pallava period witnessed the promotion of Sanskrit as a court language and placing the brahmanical culture to an exalted position in the social polity. The Pallavas had established their kingdom at Kanchipuram under Simhavarman I in 275 C.E. Simhavishnu extended Pallava domain beyond Kanchipuram. Later Pallava successors Mahendravarman I (571 C.E.-630 C.E.) and Narasimhavarman I (630 C.E.-668 C.E.) brought glory to the kingdom. Narasimhavarman II (695 C.E.-722

C.E.) established the town Mamallapuram and initiated the art of single rock cut temples and constructed the Kailasanatha temple in Kanchipuram and seashore temple in Mamallapuram.⁴² The reign of Dandivarman (796 C.E.-846 C.E.) marked the beginning point for the glorious Pallava kingdom. During his reign, Rastrakutas and Cholas emerged in North and South respectively. The supremacy of Pallavas came to an end with Nirpatungavarman and the battle of Tirumpurambiyam sounded the death knell to end of the rule of Aparajitavarman and also the great Pallavas.

The rise of the Cholas had occurred in the days of Vijayalaya in the mid-9th century C.E. He ruled Palaiyarai and later he was able to seize Thanjavur from Muttaraiyar, a feudatory chief. After his victory over Pudukkottai and Thanjavur, Vijayalaya constructed the temple Nisumpasodini for his victory.⁴³ The long reign of Parantakan I, the grandson of Vijayalaya had extended the territories of Cholas from Kalahasti to river Cauveri. The Kerala chiefs, Paluvettaraiyar and Velir had accepted the suzerainty of Cholas. The death of Parantakan I (955 C.E.) created a political instability in the Chola court. After the thirty years of interval, Rajarajan I (985 C.E.) succeeded the throne. The accession of Rajarajan I led the Cholas to their ultimate place in Southern India and it became the first Tamil dynasty that tried to bring the entire South India under their common rule and extended its territory as much as possible. The king Rajarajan I constructed the Rajarajesvara temple in Thanjavur for the mark of his great kingdom. The king brought four hundred women from the different parts of his kingdom and dedicated them to the temple.⁴⁴ Rajendran I extended the glory of Cholas. He was capable to invade northern India and hold his power over Ilankai (modern Srilanka). The agamic variety of brahmanical religion, rooted in South India by the 7th century C.E. or 8th century C.E. In monarchical state, patronage of the temple meant patronage of the powerful Brahmin groups. The northern invasion of Rajendran I brought further large number of Brahmins into the South.⁴⁵ The stable rule of the Cholas was considered as the heyday of Brahmanic religion, temple and other temple establishments. There was a constant flow of endowment that was made to temples not only for economic concern, but also to consolidate their political power. In general, these temple constructions and religious endowments were considered as an act of legalization. James Heitzman, a historian, explained the driving force behind the donations was the concept of the legitimization of

their authority, whereby gifts to the gods or their representatives on earth resulted in a transfer of divine sanctity and merit to the givers.⁴⁶ The temples received major grants from royal houses especially the ones who adopted the *bhakti* ideology to promote the temple's role.⁴⁷

The imperial Cholas started to govern the vast geographical territory compared to the other kingdoms of Pallava and later Pandiya. The success of these medieval Tamil kings was mainly based on their relationship with the people and their alliance and control over the small chiefdoms. The relations between the kings and his subordinates decided the longevity of the kingdom. The Adigamans of Tagadur changed their loyalty from the Chera to imperial Cholas that could be attributed to the considerable decline in the Chera power after the Sangam age in South India. When the reign of Nolambas from the Mysore border made incursions into the Pallava Nirpatungavarman territory, but they were promptly checked by the subordinate of Pallavas, Banas. Subramanian pointed out that pre-Vijayanagar Tamil kingdom was multiple monarchies supported or hammered as the case may be by lesser chieftains. Banas, Gangas, Kadavas, Sambavarayars, Adigamans, Muttaraiyars and Kodumbalur Chieftains were the prominent petty rulers of the medieval Tamilakam.⁴⁸ To consolidate so many local chieftainships of the macro regions and prove their supremacy over others, the medieval South Indian kings practiced the theory of divine rights. The concept of divine rights justified the absolute power of the king over his chieftains and subject. The theory had helped to convert the tribal pattern of Sangam kingship into the absolute *Kshatriya* mode of kingship. In this sense, Pallavas had become the first South Indian kingdom, which incorporated the use of ritual authority as the basis of their authority.⁴⁹

The period between 850 C.E. and 1200 C.E. is considered as a golden period of temple expansion and endowments.⁵⁰ During this period, temples acquired a great position of centrality as a symbol of political power. The temples acted as a means of consolidating local communities and integrating them into the government and state. Therefore, the construction of temples and endowment towards it became a regular act. The temples had received major grants from ruling families who adopted the *bhakti* ideology⁵¹ to promote the temple's role. The processes of institutionalizing the temple as an ideological

apparatus was still in their initial stages under the Pallavas. The reign of Rajasimman noted the construction of structural temples.⁵² During the early medieval period, many new temples were established. They were much concerned towards architecture and it helped to spread the style of stone architecture in and around Tamilakam. The temples of Pallavas were classified into cave temples⁵³, single rock temples and structural temples. Mahendravarman and Narasimhavarman II constructed cave temples and single rock cut temples. Pandiyas constructed temples at Tirumeiyam, Kundrakkudi, Malaiyadipatti, Kunnandar *koyil*, Kudumiyanmalai, Kazhukumalai, Tirupparankunram, Anaimalai and Tirumalpuram.⁵⁴ Pandiyas constructed more cave temples than Pallavas.⁵⁵ Vettuvan *Koyil* in Kazhukumalai is a single rock cut temple. Soman alias Adhiyendhiran⁵⁶ constructed two cave temples in Namakkal. The two temples belonged to lord Vishnu.⁵⁷ Paluvettaraiyar, the petty chieftains constructed temples in their capital Pazhuvur.⁵⁸ In general, the Tamil temples were denoted by different names such as *koyil*, *niyamam*, *nagaram*, *kottam*, *palli*, *thali* and *thanam*.⁵⁹ The temples that were constructed for lord Siva is known as *echchuram* (*Isvarakiraham*) and lord Vishnu is known as *vinnakaram* (*Vishnukiraham*).

The institutions of temple were actively involved in both direct and indirect economic activities of the medieval society. The temples acquired the rights in land and accumulated the agrarian wealth. The temples promoted agriculture and they became the production centers. They also obscured all the other forms of productions.⁶⁰ Subramanian compared the activities of the temples with a bank.⁶¹ The temple functioned as a big employer.⁶² So the medieval rulers increasingly made endowments to the temples in the form of lands, livestock, gold and money. The land largely became the main item of gift and it made the temple as a major landowner. The new temple-centered-economy positioned on the fertile tracts of land, which often maintained a good number of girls who received substantial endowments.⁶³ So the medieval rulers consciously used temple as a means of extending their agricultural activities and thereby, expanding their resource bases.⁶⁴ The socio-religious activity of dedicating girls to temples as part of the overall ideology of *bhakti* cannot be viewed in an isolation from the general economic and historical developments of the time.⁶⁵ The largest number of medieval temples had come from the fertile regions of Cauveri basin. The north and south bank of the river Cauveri

carried 63 and 190 Saivite temples respectively and 40 Vaishnavite shrines were established in this particular geographical region alone.⁶⁶

2.2.1. The temples and kingship

Noboru Karashima, a medieval historian, noted that the medieval temples functioned as the nexus of local as well as state.⁶⁷ Champakalakshmi further strengthened the argument. She mentioned that the medieval temples were not only functioned for the development of the *bhakti* cult, it equated with the *koyil* (palace). It was also of crucial institutional significance in assisting the process of the simultaneous expansion of divine and royal authority by establishing the symbolism of the cosmos and temple territory.⁶⁸ The Sangam notion of king and kingship were transferred to the sacred power of the deity in the temple as *iraivan*, *peruman* (lord) in the *koyil*, temple or palace.⁶⁹ Arjun Appadurai, a cultural anthropologist, said that the relationship of human kings to the temple deities in South India. He also stated that it was an elegant and symbiotic division of the sovereignty, and the sovereign deity was the paradigm of royal authority.⁷⁰ The copper plate of the larger Leiden grant stated the phrase that the King became a God.⁷¹ The divine origin of monarchs was equated with the divine rights of their rule. The deity was related with the king.

The medieval rulers used temple construction as an act of legitimizing their power to govern the larger portions of the Tamil land. According to Kesavan Veluthat, the medieval society reflected its existing social order and recreated a parallel world of authority in the realm of religion.⁷² The god in his temple was treated as earthly king. Basham, a historian, pointed that the God had wives, ministers, attendants and all other paraphernalia of a court, which included His prostitutes, often the children of mothers of the same profession.⁷³ The administrative divisions of the kingdom resembled the order of the Hindu mythology. The medieval kings were compared with the omnipresent and his ministers and chieftains were equated with petty Gods. The subjects were unconsciously bounded within it. In the patriarchal medieval society, the administrative units such as *valanadu* and *mandalam* were generally placed under the control of some senior members of the royal household. The senior most of the ruling family reined from the capital and others were controlling the ancillary ones.

The kings were equated with *devas* and the temple and palace were noted as *koyil*. The deity was conceived to be paradigmatic sovereign.⁷⁴ The Tamil word *koyil* referred both temple and royal palace. The charters of early Pallavas did not refer the divine origin of their kingship, but from the period of Nandivarman II, the ideas of the divine origin of kingship were elaborately related in their copper plates.⁷⁵ The Chola and Chera rulers were identified with *Surya vamsam*, Pandiyas with *Chandra vamsam* and Pallavas with *Brahmaksatra*. Pallavas claimed their descent from sages and Vedic gods; they were *dharma maharajas*.⁷⁶ The Pallava rulers traced their lineage from Lord Brahma and Pandiyas from the lotus of Vishnu navel.⁷⁷ Based on the myths, the divine origin of their dynasty was created. Systematically, the divinity of the personality over kings was fused. The success of the rulers and prominent incident of the royal court was equated with the divine or *puranic* figures.⁷⁸ In *Tiruvaimozhi*, Kulacekara Varman was equated with Vishnu and Kanyakumari inscription described Parantakan I as *Srinilaya* or abode of Lakshmi.⁷⁹

The paraphernalia attached to temple deities was indistinguishable from the paraphernalia of human kings: conches, palanquins, umbrella, elephants, fly whisks and so on.⁸⁰ The kings who had ruled the Tamil country were custodial despotic, though, perhaps benevolent and got invariably the loyalty of the people.⁸¹ But there was no known rights or *dharma* by which that loyalty could be demanded, that right was precisely what the brahmanical social theory provided; considering the advantages the kings derived in return, provision of an honorable place for the Brahmin in that society. It was a cheap reciprocal consideration for the kings to offer. The chieftains wanted their position to be legitimized by the prerogative of antiquity.⁸²

The Throne, the Crown, the Royal umbrella and other paraphernalia like a horse, an elephant, the whisk, the conch, and sword constituted the royal emblems of royalty. The crown had ritual significance for the royalty. There was a dynastic crest or emblem like tiger for Cholas, the fish for Pandiyas, the bow for the Cheras and the bull for Vijayanagar or occasionally lion for Pallavas. These were not only used for the official purpose but as the symbols of divinity, as many Vedic gods carried these emblems. However, the reason for the choice of a particular emblem was not clear, but these

resembled the principles, ideology and religion of the particular dynasty. Pandiyas adopted fish as their emblem because of the proto-historic fisher folk relation, Cholas' tiger emblem resembled their magnanimity and the fertile landscape of Cauveri, and the Cheras used bow and arrow to signify the hunting tradition. Pallavas used bull as their religious identity.

The imperial titles and *abisekanamas* were equated the divine connotations.⁸³ *Prasasti* or *meykkirti* showed clearly the effort by those subsequent kings to make the people of their kingdom aware of their glorious achievements and even felt their presence in the locality.⁸⁴ Pallava kings had assumed several *birudas* (surnames) and additionally, kings had adopted many titles of *bhattaraka*. Mahendravarman I started the practice of inscribing these *birudas* on monuments, which he had dedicated to his favorite Gods.⁸⁵ Tiruchirappalli Cave Temple and Pallavaram Cave Temple have their titles engraved. Mahendravarman I had adorned the titles like *Purusottama*, *Vidhi*, *Sthanu*, *Kalahapriya* (Narada), *Manprava* (Siva, the Supreme Being), *Mahamegha*, *Vicitracittan*, *Chendakari* (Builder of Temples), *Mandavilacan* (Seeker of Pleasures) and *Cittirakarapuli* (Tiger of Painters).⁸⁶ Narasimhavarman II was attributed with more than 250 titles like *Rajasimha*, *Sankarapakta* and *Aahama Priyan*.⁸⁷ The Pandiya king Arikesari Maravarman was portrayed in *Pandikovai* as *Nedumaran*, *Puliyar*, *Minavan*, *Neriyar*, *Vanavanmaran*, *Arikesari*, *Parangusan*, *Vikari*, *Adicayan*, *Ranodayan*, and *Ranandagan*.⁸⁸

The King-God concept was developed and derived substantially from the *arrupadai* tradition of Tamil literary genre. Later, it was further developed by the *bhakti* saints. Nayanmars, the *bhakti* poets of the Saiva sects, transposed the metaphor, *vallal* (philanthropist).⁸⁹ They referred lord Siva as *vallal*. The deity was equated with Lord and the devotee was compared with the vassals.⁹⁰ The words *udaiyar* or *tambiran* (lord), *adiyar* (serf) were frequently used in the medieval *bhakti* literature. The Alvars noted that the presence of the king made them to think about the Lord Tirumal.⁹¹ The pyramid structure was formed. The deity or the king was kept in supreme and the Brahmins were placed next to that order. Cundarar, the Saiva saint, mentioned that Brahmin in the society could not be a slave of others.⁹² Further, he claimed himself to be the slave of the slaves of the Brahmins of *Thillai* (Chidambaram).⁹³ There were direct and indirect

evidences that the Saivite saints in particular put themselves in the minstrel place vis-a-vis Lord Siva as the patron.⁹⁴ The mature development and ramifications of the king-God concept became evident during the glorious period of the Chola Empire which arranged endowments for every artistic activity.⁹⁵ In many occasions, the worship conducted in the Rajarajesvara temple was centered on the king Rajarajan I.⁹⁶ Hultzsch in his introduction of the South Indian Inscription volume mentioned that the Rajarajesvara temple at Thanjavur has evidently served as a model for a large number of other temples in Southern India.⁹⁷

From the 9th century C.E. and 10th century C.E. onwards, the royal titles were superimposed on the deities of the South Indian temples such as Varadaraja of Kanchipuram, Rangaraja of Srirangam, Nataraja and Govindharaja of Chidambaram and Thiyagarajar of Tiruvarur emerged as the royal deities with increasingly elaborate ceremonies. The structural stone temples with endowments for sensuous royal art performances at frequent temple festivals also came into vogue. Rajarajesvara temple became the richest social unit of the time. The imperial Chola kings had a custom to crown themselves on more than one occasion in different places of their kingdoms. There were many Chola kings crowned in Chidambaram in addition to the first coronation at their capital city, because Chidambaram was considered as the religious capital of Chola rule. During the time of Vikrama Chola, the Nataraja of Chidambaram became virtually tutelary deity of the dynasty.⁹⁸ Yasushi Ogura stated that the increasing importance to the Sanskritized universal deities might mean the degradation of imperial temples as centres of worship in the empire.⁹⁹

Usually, the king was the protector as well as the patron of the temple.¹⁰⁰ The king's dual responsibilities toward the temples distinguished from other wealthy donors.¹⁰¹ The duty of the king was both a patron and protector of religion. As a patron, he endowed temples; and as a protector, he adjudicated disputes over honors and incomes. Sometimes he was even directly involved in religious rituals, acting as the sacrificer to the deity on behalf of the kingdom.¹⁰² They received prestige and respect from the public in return for their patronage and service towards the temples. The temple functioned as a symbol or set of symbols.¹⁰³ Appadurai stated that the deity in India was conceived as a person and the

religious images were ceremoniously vivified. The cycle of daily worship such as waking the deity, dressing and feeding, and putting on bed at night supported the belief, the God as a persona.¹⁰⁴ The interaction of the kings within a cultural environment was infused by a sense of the reality and meaningfulness of the sacred. Historical accounts showed that the king was sometimes honored with ceremonies similar to those performed for the deity.¹⁰⁵ On the death of the devadasi, the temple deity to which she was associated with underwent a pollution.¹⁰⁶ The dead body of the devadasi was kept in front of the temple for short duration and the funeral pyre, sandal paste and other necessities were brought from the concerned temple.

The association of devadasi with kings was respected for their special relationships to the divine and was, therefore, linked to the traditional worldview.¹⁰⁷ Frederique Apffel Marglin observed that the devadasis of Puri were known as *Calanti Devi* (walking Lakshmi) and the king was known as *Calanti Vishnu* (walking Vishnu).¹⁰⁸ The devadasis, as brides of Lord Jaganath, an incarnation of Vishnu, were interpreted as human representations of his consort Lakshmi. The kings of Orissa claimed to be partial incarnations of Vishnu. In South India, the Chola imperialism helped the extension of the devadasi system throughout the Chola domain. Rajarajan I and Rajendran I extended the system to its neighborhood.¹⁰⁹

Devadasis who danced before the great god in a major temple, were ‘married’ to the ruling deity and they became the human embodiments of the god’s consort. A king was homologous to the divine consort. Thus, devadasi was associated with kingship and was a symbol of royal sovereignty. The power of the divine consort (Sakthi) was the energy source of the male god as well as the king. As human embodiments of the goddess, devadasis were associated with Sakthi. Like kings, they were regarded as auspicious and associated with fertility and prosperity in general. Thus, devadasi could be substitute for the principal wives of a king in public rituals and they took place in seclusion. They had sexual intercourse with temple Brahmins. Since they were married to the god, they were not supposed to bear children. They could not marry a human; however, it was not uncommon for kings to have intimate relations with these symbols of their sovereignty.¹¹⁰

There were many kings established the temples in their name. Vikramakesari Poothi constructed the temple under his name Vikramakesarichchuram.¹¹¹ Mahendravarman, the Pallava king named temple as Lalithangura Pallavachvarakkiraham.¹¹² In medieval period, temples were constructed for the remembrance of the dead and those temples were called as *pallippadai* (sepulchral temples). Parantakan I constructed a *pallippadai* for his father Adityan I in Kalahasti, a village of Tondaimanadu. In Tirunallam alias Konerirajapuram had a *pallippadai* of Kandaradityan was established by his queen Chembiyan Madevi. Rajarajan I constructed two sepulchral temples Arinjigaisvara temple at Melpadi and Kandalesvara temple at Tenneri for Arinjigai Chola and Uttama Chola respectively.¹¹³ The image of the royal family was kept in the structural temples. It was believed to be the extension of the hero stones or memorial tablets which was practiced between 5th century C.E. and 12th century C.E.¹¹⁴ Nilakanta Sastry mentioned the worship of the Chembiyan Madevi image.¹¹⁵ Rajendran I constructed the Panchamahadevisvara Temple in Ramanathan *koyil* for Panchavanmahadevi, stepmother.¹¹⁶ These acts signified that the temple service was the way of service of the royal household.

The Chola king Kochchengannan constructed 70 temples for Lord Siva.¹¹⁷ The 11 verses of Sanskrit inscription praised the king Paramesvaravarman I for his construction of the temple for Lord Siva.¹¹⁸ The early Chola rulers were reconstructed thirty brick temples into stone.¹¹⁹ During this period, most of the temples were converted into stone and all the stone temples were noted as *karrali*. The Mukthiswara temple of Kanchipuram was renewed into *karrali* by the Pallava queen, Dharma Madevi and the temple recruited 49 *devaradiyar* for the ritual services.¹²⁰ Chembiyan Madevi, the mother of Uttama Chola renovated the most of the Saiva temples (*padal perra sthalam*) into *karrali*.¹²¹ She constructed the temples in Konerirajapuram (Tirunallam), Aduthurai, Tirukkodikaval, Kurralam, Tirunaraiyur, Kandarathithyam, Viruthachala and Tiruvennainallur.¹²² Chembiyan Madevi rebuilt the brick structure of central shrine of the Mahadeva temple at Tirukkodikaval in Nallarur nadu into stone.¹²³

Most of the inscriptions documented the recorded gifts to Brahmins and temples from wealthy and powerful persons and groups of a locality.¹²⁴ The Velvikkudi grant revealed that the Kali kings reestablished dharma by reviving land grants to Brahmin donors.¹²⁵ Pallavas and Pandiyas adopted Puranic and Sastric norms, institutionalized land grants to Brahmins and used Puranic cosmology and religion to promote the temple as an institution and integrative force.¹²⁶ The Pallavas and Cholas gave priority to the Brahmins for the ideological consolidation of the vast territories.¹²⁷ K.K. Pillai mentioned that after the invasion of Rajarajan I to the terrain of Nanchilnadu¹²⁸, the king provided gifts to Nancinattu Tiruccicindiram¹²⁹ (Suchindram temple) and Brahmins. He established the devadasi institution and insisted the practice of reciting the devotional hymns from Tevaram and Tiruvacakam. Rajarajan I popularized festivals and ceremonies to confine his temporal sphere of Rajarajan over the Nanchilnadu.¹³⁰ They even entered into the matrimonial relationship with royal families.¹³¹

The non-Kshatriya Tamil kings accommodated the Brahmins in comfortable and separate quarters and settled them exclusively in brahmanical villages called *brahmadeyam* for the sake of their royal legitimation through *yajnas* and *yagas*. The *brahmadeyam* which were the lands of the Brahmin were offered to separate quarters and settled exclusively as brahmanical villages which were granted by the non-Kshatriya Tamil kings. *Brahmadeyam* institution had great importance in the preservation and dissemination of brahmanical knowledge and religion.¹³² Most of the *nadus* possessed at least one *brahmadeyam* where some forms of *sastric* learning and devotional worship of puranic deities.¹³³ These tax-free *brahmadeyam* lands were later denoted as *chaturvedimangalams*.¹³⁴ These *brahmadeyams* functioned mainly as an institution integrating pre-existing pastoral and agricultural settlements into a new agrarian order and as the disseminator and brahmanical ideology.¹³⁵ Sathianathaier asserts that the classical *brahmadeyam* was first developed in Tondaimandalam or whether the development occurred at the same time in both central southern parts of Tamil plain perhaps even in Venadu (modern Kerala).¹³⁶

Brahmins were organizers and managers of production in the *brahmadeyam*. The elaborate arrangements for their upkeep were made by *sabhas* or assemblies of the *brahmadeyam* including their maintenance, repair, attention to sitting and control of water supply through accesses and specifying committees (*variyaams*) for their supervision and administration.¹³⁷ In Brahmin households of *marudam* the cultivating groups in service of the Brahmins created new relations of production outside the existing framework on which all contemporary production activities were based. Such service groups were the beginnings of a new stratification into castes at later stage.¹³⁸ The middle ages the Brahmins who propounded the Sacred Law might themselves be attached to temples with hundreds of prostitutes on their staffs.¹³⁹

The decline of the Cholas by the end of the 12th century C.E. placed the Hoysala occupation of the Tamil region. The establishment of the Vijayanagar Empire (1370 C.E.) led the integration of the three cultural zones of Kannada, Telugu and Tamil. In later, Nayaka soothed the Telugu and Kannada settlement in the Tamil country. It was a great blow to the pre existing political structure of Tamil country. The fertile Cauveri delta attracted Telugu Brahmins, Reddi and Velamas, a dominant agricultural community of the arid northern zones of the Deccan plateau. It resulted a network of relations between wetland agricultural settlements and dry upland zones with a narrow resource base. These groups gradually became economically and politically powerful, and began impinging upon the pre-existing local power groups and their areas of control. The Telugu warriors claimed them as restorer of the tradition rather than innovators. They extended temple grants and donations. The new warrior class, subsequently known as the Mayors, emerged as the patron of temples and *mathas*.¹⁴⁰

During the Vijayanagar period, Nayakas functioned as a feudatory of the great empire. The provincial chiefs were identified as *mandaleshvar* and *mahamandalaeshvar*. The principalities were divided into 72 *palaiyaams*, which based on the Kakatiya model of 77 *padmanayakas*. However, later political development freed the Nayakas in Tamilakam.¹⁴¹ The newly emerged kingdoms were centred on Madurai (1529 C.E.-1736 C.E.), Thanjavur (1532 C.E.-1673 C.E.) and Chenji (?-ca. 1640 C.E.). Their kingship was differed from the earlier Pallavas, Cholas and Vijayanagar. The Nayaka rulers did not

claim the *dharmic* ideologies, and preferred the *Sudra* pattern of kingship.¹⁴² Nicholas Dirks, an anthropologist, mentioned that Vijayanagar and Nayakas subordination was articulated by the gifts and honors. The transaction between them was parallel transaction of *puja* and worship, and the emperor cast as deity.¹⁴³ The later Nayaka refashioned the political centre and established symbolic and organizational autonomy.¹⁴⁴ It influenced the sacred arena of temple and temple deities. Burton Stein detailed the large expansion of the temples centre after 1450 C.E.¹⁴⁵ But the patronage to the Siva and Vishnu temple was decreasing in number and on the other hand minor deities like Amman and Ganesha was popularized.

The Nayakas entertained the concept of *annadana* (food donations) to Brahmin instead of land grants (*brahmadeyam*). It collapsed the dualistic model of Sanskrit kingship, the Kshatriya Brahmin alliance.¹⁴⁶ The period witnessed the shift in nature of patronage. In the second quarter of the 16th century C.E., the state monetary endowment to the Tirupathi temple was dropped, and the local residents and merchants replaced it.¹⁴⁷ Velcheru Narayana Rao pointed out the decline of the temple inscriptions from the 16th century C.E.¹⁴⁸ Nayakas widen their religious bases. They made land grants to Catholic churches in Nagappattinam. Acyappa Nayaka of Thanjavur granted a land to Nagore *dargah* of Sayyid Abdul Qadir Shah al Hamid (1520 C.E.-1570 C.E.).¹⁴⁹ During the Nayaka period, there was a new fortified political urban centre, and urban based court in Tiruchirappalli, Salem, Dharmapuri, and Velur was established. It brought the new political centres apart from the traditional centres of earlier periods. During the Nayaka period, a constant conflict and competition occurred. In later part of their reign, the little kingdoms of Ramanathapuram and Pudukkottai emerged. It also became a new patron.

The role of king was of a master and lord. It imbibed the individualized semi divinity of Nayakas.¹⁵⁰ The *quazi* divinity substantiated a palace into temple and temple into palace. The Nayaka court and temple became single world, which compare with their earlier empire sort of kingdoms. It blurred the boundary of courtesan and devadasi. According to Velcheru Narayana Rao, the culture of *bhoga*, of erotic longing and fulfillment, was one in which the boundaries between courtesans (*bhoga-stri*, *vesya*) and temple women that had become indistinguishable. Their new role as artists who performed at both

temple and court allowed these women to be imaged as mistresses, wives, or even queens at the Nayaka court.¹⁵¹ The Nayaka court produced a peculiar syncretic culture that integrated aspects of indigenous Tamil culture, Telugu literary material, the new Mughal style courtly practices from Maharashtra and the modernity of the European enlightenment.¹⁵²

2.3. The *bhakti* tradition

The *bhakti* movement influenced the South Indian society. Elaine Craddock mentioned that the devotional movement contained an element of social as well as religious reform. It protested against the heterodox faiths of Buddhism and Jainism and favored the brahmanical institution like temple, which was largely depended on the royal patronage.¹⁵³ The religious institutions gained a momentum with the concept of *bhakti*. The word *bhakti* meant loyalty.¹⁵⁴ Leslie Orr, a historian, noted that the Tamil *bhakti* ideologies of self-surrender and devotion to service had a great impact on the society.¹⁵⁵ The Tamil saints referred to them as *adiyar* or *thondar* (slaves) and they were indeed the slaves of the Lord. The *bhakti* age led to the proliferation of temples, multiplicity of deities and the growth of the *agam* literature. Champakalakshmi said that the movement was able to synthesize the northern Sanskrit and the popular southern Tamil tradition.¹⁵⁶ Subramanian said that the new gods that were unknown or poorly known to the ancients became established pantheon.¹⁵⁷ The religious encounters between Sramanic and Vedic sects witnessed the propagation of new religious ideas. The Nayanmars and Alvars brought religion close to the people and popularized the temple rituals in the Tamil country. The *bhakti* movement preserved the brahmanical caste structure and fixed its enemy as Buddhism and Jainism.¹⁵⁸ Appar and Campantar, the Saiva saints, praised the association of Brahmin and Vedic rites. They mentioned that they hailed from the sacred places where the Brahmins lived and performed Vedic sacrifices and the places, which were filled with Vedic chants and smoke of sacrifices.¹⁵⁹ Regularly the hagiographers and hagiographies belonged to the Brahmin caste and the royal household. The religious propagators like Nayanmar and Alvar came mainly from the upper strata.

Kesavan Veluthat, a historian, said that the *bhakti* movement demonstrated to have had direct links with the expression of agriculture and the formation of the state based on it.¹⁶⁰ This marked the new era in the temple preface. The period between 850 C.E. and 1200 C.E. witnessed the emergence of many new shrines in Tamil country under the influence of *bhakti* saints.¹⁶¹ The conscious efforts of the ruling family to adopt the *bhakti* ideal made it the dominant ideology in the formation of a powerful regional state under the Cholas.¹⁶² Champakalakshmi considered Saivism was a deliberate choice by the Cholas. According to her, Saivism proved to be more efficacious instrument of acculturation for acquisition of a wider popular base of Tamil society and it easily incorporated parochial gods like Murukan and Korravai as Kanthan and Parvathi respectively. The conversion of local cult centres into shrines of Siva, through the identification of several local and popular forms as part of the Siva religious tradition.¹⁶³ It equated the phallic symbols or the aniconic lingam with the folk worship of the pillar and tree were the most significant factors in the elaboration of the popular base of Saivism. Saiva iconography evolved in direct relation to the specific requirements of the ideological needs of Cholas power.¹⁶⁴ The *bhakti* saints had a great impact on the state. In 29th year of Rajarajan I, ordered craftsmen to produce copper images of some of the important Saiva saints Nambi Arurar, Nankai Paravaiyar, Tirunavukkaracar and Tirunanacampantar.¹⁶⁵ Rajendran I conducted festivals in honor of the Saiva saints in Tiruvorriyur temple.¹⁶⁶ Kulottungan III in his 24th regal year made donations for the daily ritual worship of the images of the Nayanmars in a temple at Uttatur.¹⁶⁷

The concepts such as self-surrender, sacrifice, dedication and destiny were deeply imbibed within the society. The metaphor for the human body as temple, apprehension of the divine through acts of devotion, provided the much needed justification of human existence, as against the Jain idea of self-mortification for salvation.¹⁶⁸ The poems of the Tamil saints repeatedly stress the inefficacy of penance involving fasting and bodily mortification; deep love and genuine surrender are necessary to reach the lotus feet of the Lord. Nayanmars and Alvars brought the *bhakti* strands together. The stories of the *bhakti* saints revealed the notions of complete surrender. Ciruthondar alias Paranjothi, the chief commander of Pallava was said to have sacrificed and cooked his five-year-old son when disguised Siva requested for cannibalistic meal. Iyarpakai Nayanmar was another

Saiva saint from the *Vaishya Varna* who lived at Kaverippumpattinam in Chola country. *Tiruttondar Puranam*, the Saiva hagiography, praised him as the saint who could sacrifice everything to the god and his devotees.¹⁶⁹ According to the *Puranam*, the saint gave his wife to Brahmin mendicant for his desire. Later, he escorted them safely through the woods and assassinated his relatives who resisted the sacrifice of his wife.¹⁷⁰

The kind of servitude or complete surrender was accepted thorough the concept of *bhakti*. Periyalvar mentioned that the vow of surrender as *nan adimai punden* which meant ‘I surrendered’.¹⁷¹ The post Sangam epic, *Chilappathikaram* referred *adimaittiral* (group of slaves). The slaves were called *adiurai* and their status was *adimai* (slave). *Kalittokai*, the Sangam literature mentioned that slaves were being branded on their chest.¹⁷² Tirumankai Alvar, the Vaishnavite referred him as ‘becoming slave of God’.¹⁷³ The myth of Cundarar detailed that an old Brahmin suited a case against Cundarar regarding the slave agreement. It indicated that the slavery was common among all caste.¹⁷⁴ But no slave market existed. The hierarchical community system however reduced the lowest communities to the status of slave. The rigid division as master servant nature was a chief characteristic of the Tamil society.¹⁷⁵

The *bhakti* movement helped to keep the rigid social stratification. The story of Nandanar,¹⁷⁶ the Paraiar saint demonstrated the hegemony of the caste system in society. The untouchable saint was born at Adanur near Chidambaram. His caste duties were slaughtering animals and preparing leather. He visited the Tirupunkur temple and worshipped lord Siva. But he was unable to see the idol. Nandi, the vehicle of Siva was little moved and made him to experience the god’s presence. After that, he constructed a pond and bathed. Here, it is evident that there were restriction of Nandanar to enter in the temple precincts and use of the public ponds. Later, the fascinated Nandanar was interested to see the god of the Chidambaram temple. But he could not enter the city of Chidambaram. The Brahmins and brahmanical ritual order posed the questions “purity”. Nandanar’s birth bothered him and he worried about his destiny. The feared Brahmins compelled him to cross the *velvi thee* (sacred fire). According to the myth, Nandanar entered into the fire and vanished. The Brahmins of temple mystified his murder and incorporated a myth of reaching the feet of God.

The concept, love was the central to the path of *bhakti* or devotion. George W. Spencer mentioned that the development of *bhakti* devotionism and the infusion of popular Hinduism with the ideal of salvation through intense devotion to a personal deity is the most significant religious development in medieval South Indian history.¹⁷⁷ Love became an important element in the poems of *bhakti* saints. The concept was much expended genre of the Sangam Tamil literature. Subramaniam mentioned that the transmutation of *agam* into *bhakti* was the most functional and the most fortunate development in Indian's religion.¹⁷⁸ Tamil erotic tradition of *agaththinai*¹⁷⁹ transformed into emotional (*nayika-bhava*) *bhakti* by the Vaishnava saints. It brought religious tradition of devotion a permanent element of ecstasy and eroticism.¹⁸⁰ *Bhakti* poetry in Tamil from the 6th century onwards drew much inspiration from this *agam* genre and in the case of *agam* poetry in particular.¹⁸¹ The works of Nammalvar, Tirumankai, Kulacekara and Andal are classical examples of the transmutation of *agam* genre into the religious idiom. The content was narrated in the first person singular. The chief moods of *bhakti* are union and separation resulting in *viraha* poetry expressing the anguish of unfulfilled love. Vijaya Ramasamy, a historian, said that more closely associated with the feminine than with the masculine.¹⁸² Both male and female saints take on a female personality. The *bhakti* saints personified them as lady love and God as lover. Vijaya Ramasamy pointed that the mystical union between the self as the bride and the supreme as the bridegroom was the basic of the *bhakti* tradition.¹⁸³ Periyalvar surrendered himself to Lord Vishnu. He further quoted that "...being marked, myself and everything I own, with sign of your discus."¹⁸⁴ Basava, the 12th century saint often referred himself as a woman whether as a loving bride or a cuckolding wife.

I am a married woman

Married to one am I.¹⁸⁵

The emotional and sensuous character of worship (ecstatic singing and dancing) was propagated by the *bhakti* movement, which contrasted with its contemporary Sramanic religious tradition. The agamic tradition and the *bhakti* movement gave a ritual and religious orientation to the arts.¹⁸⁶ The dance of the lord Siva was frequently praised.¹⁸⁷ Subramaniam explained that the performing arts could retain all their sensuousness under

a religious umbrella because of the original and continuing erotic and romantic basis of *bhakti* to get the continuing support of the Hindu temple for centuries.¹⁸⁸ The music and dance were essentially cultivated as sensuous pursuits of pleasure. They were brought closer and integrated into religion as a byproduct of the rise of the *bhakti* movement in Tamil region.¹⁸⁹ Appar praised the service, which was rendered by the temple girls as *thondu seidal, panikal pavilludal*.¹⁹⁰ The *bhakti* tradition provided an ideological base for the devadasi institution and their services.

The direct engagement of women in the *bhakti* tradition was less. Among the 75 saints, only 4 were women Karaikkal Ammaiyar (Vaishya *Varna*), Mankaiyarkaraci (Kshatriya *Varna*), Andal (Brahmin caste) and Isainani Ammaiyar (Brahmin caste). Vijaya Ramasamy pointed that women who seem to reject the patriarchal structure at the worldly level continue to operate within the framework of patriarchy at the spiritual level.¹⁹¹ Women, who abandoned their homes or rejected the ties of marriage, their devotional outpourings continue within the familial paradigm. The only difference was that, now the family consists of patriarchal gods as their husband such as Lord Siva and Vishnu.¹⁹² The divine story of Karaikkal Ammaiyar (mother from Karaikkal) and Andal were the classical example of it nature. Their poems dwell in perpetual bliss with the omnipresent deities. In general, their poems mocked the worldly life, and considered God as their ultimate truth. They completely surrendered their soul and body.

Karaikkal Ammaiyar was belonged to mid-6th century C.E. She was most probably the first poet saint who wrote hymns on lord Siva. Her poetic composition was placed in 11th Saiva Tirumurai. According to the myth, the beautiful Punithavathi was born at Karaikkal in the Chola country. She married a merchant called Paramathaththa. She was an ardent devotee of lord Siva. Her mystic experience separated her from her husband and led him to marry another woman. Then she left the worldly life and got a frail, bony ghost-like appearance. She started her pilgrims and stayed in Tiruvalankadu to compose poems on Lord Siva. She was interested in visiting Mount Kailas where Lord Siva was believed to be resided. However, the pious woman did not want to use her foot to claim the Himalaya, due to the sacredness of the mount. The impressed Lord Siva appeared and accepted her as his mother.¹⁹³ The legend of Andal revealed an erotic expression of the

bhakti cult. Her poems *Tiruppavai* and *Nachchiyar Tirumozhi* expressed her erotic love of the god Vishnu. She was an adopted daughter of Periyalvar, the Vaishnava saint. She madly loved the Lord Sriranganathar of Srirangam temple. She considered her, as a ladylove of the God. She used to wear the garlands of god and loved her decked presence. Periyalvar annoyed with the activities of his daughter and insisted her to stop the different behaviors. The god became unhappy, and appeared before Periyalvar and exposed her divinity. Later, the deity accepted her as his bride. Andal adored like a bride, and entered into the temple sanctum and disappeared. Both these myths explained the abnormal lives of the women and their rejection of the worldly life. There was a kind of unrest in their personal lives. Karaikkal Ammaiyar was rejected by her husband, and Andal was an adopted daughter of the Brahmin of the Srirangam temple. The stories ended with complete surrender to the god. The first one acknowledged God as a mother, and the later considered as a lover. The relationship between the god and women was strictly constructed within the domain of family.

2.4. Conclusion

The development of devadasi institution occurred due to the emergence of temple institution. The firm establishment of temple order in Tamil country strengthened the devadasi system. The Brahmin-Kshatriya combination helped to preserve the patriarchal order in the society. The system had its consistence growth from the Pallava period onwards. The imperial Cholas improved the condition of devadasi system by the means of donation and protection. The *bhakti* movement provided an ideological base for the existence of the system. The medieval records detailed the role of devadasi in the temple. The nature of devadasi work was classified according to their social background. A kind of unequal hierarchy existed among devadasi women. The political intervention of the non-Hindus led a little setback in the system. However, the emergence of Vijayanagar brought back the old Vedic order in the Tamil country. The later medieval records and travelogues highlighted the public appearance of devadasi. It detailed the involvement of devadasi in physical relation in the profane places. The moral conduct of devadasi was continuously questioned by the later medieval text.

End Notes

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- ⁷ துடியன் பாணன் பறையன் கடம்பெனன்; நிந்நான் கல்லது குடியுமில்லை. “*tudiyan panan paraiyan kadampanen; innan kallathu kudiyumillai.*” (*Purananuru*. Song no. 335. ll. 7-8.)
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kulirnthanal adumengal appan idantiru alankade.” (Karaikkal Ammaiyar’s *Tiruvallankattu Muththa Tiruppathikam*. Section no. 2. Song no. 1. ll. 3-4.)

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CHAPTER – III

Emergence and Growth of the Devadasi System: - Pre-Colonial Tamilakam

In history, reference to woman are minimum or even nill. They are marginalized and always kept in a subordinate position. Within the patriarchal structure, the multiple voices of women are subdued. Irrespective of caste and class, women are forced to face suppressions at different levels. In general, women are dominated by men across the culture, and patriarchy determined the future of women. However, women are the equal actor and agent in history, the recorded history does not provide a space for women. The recorded history carried the information of very few women. In South Indian history, the visibility of women occurred in three major areas of royal households, sacred centers and prostitution. The archival records of South India carried very little information on women who generally belonged to the above-mentioned categories. The inscriptions, *bhakti* literature detailed and praised the philanthropic activities of few royal women such as Mankaiyarkarci (wife of Pandiya king), Chembiyan Madevi (wife of Uttama Chola) and Kundavai (sister of Rajarajan I). These women generously endowed to the temples and other social activities. Though prostitution was common in history, the South Indian epigraphical records did not provide much detail about the prostitutes. In this context, the public appearances of devadasi was unique. Devadasi, the temple woman was visible throughout the history of South India. The devadasis were prominent women who shared the public domain and often played a prominent role in political and social events. They fulfilled several roles in parochial society.¹ They were employed in temples for multiple services, but their ritualistic performances such as dancing and singing were highlighted.

3.1. Devadasis in the medieval period

During the medieval period, devadasi became significant officiating dignitaries of the temple institution. The system was widely prevalent in the medieval period. The Pallavas, Cholas and Pandiyas were interested in the development of the devadasi system. An inscription dated 1203 C.E.,² recorded that queen probably of Jatavarman Kulacekara I promoted the devadasi system in temple of Tirupattur³ and the system was further extended in the Suchindram temple around same period.⁴ The medieval temple

inscriptions and other historical sources noted in different names for devadasi such as *devaradiyar*, *patiyilar*, *ishabattaliyilar*, *manikkam*, *nakkan* (Lord Siva), *nankai*, *talichcheri pendukal*, *thalaikkoli*, *devanar makal*, *rudraganikai*, *emperumanadiyar*, *sani* and etc. In general, the names of the medieval devadasis were prefixed with the word *nakkan*.⁵

Devadasi had a social recognition and exercised certain kind of privileges and rights in the religious institution as well as in society. An Annual Report of Indian Epigraphy (A.R.I.E.) mentioned that *Nankai* Paravai, was a famous devadasi of the reign of Rajendran I.⁶ Her image was kept within the temple premises, with the image of the Chola emperor, Rajendran I (*See Appendixes: - 4 and 5*). Later, the images got ritual sanction, and even today, the temple priests conducted the rituals of the images. The personal communication with 'Padma Shri' P.R. Thilakam, the music teacher of Thanjavur and from the grand lineage of *kondi* tradition of the devadasi custom, revealed the establishment of temple for her ancestor Manickka Nacchiyar in the North Car Street of Thiyagarajar temple of Tiruvarur (*See Appendixes: - 6 and 7*).⁷ According to the *kondi* tradition, devadasi received *parivattam* (special rights) from the temple of Thiyagarajar of Tiruvarur. So far, the tradition was continuing, and P.R. Thilakam received the special rights from the temple. During the temple procession, the temple car was halted for some time in front of the shrine to honor Manickka Nachchiyar and *kondi* lineage.⁸

In 1090 C.E., devadasi named Thillaivanamudaiyal Madavalli was specially mentioned as the sacred servant of the Siva temple of Tirumananjeri.⁹ T.V. Mahalingam mentioned that the devadasi of medieval period was allowed to carry their flag and other paraphernalia.¹⁰ Tiruvenkata *manikkam* of Tiruvenkatesvara temple of Tirupathi was permitted to use a palanquin.¹¹ Devadasis from the Agastisvaram taluk had the hereditary rights in temple, which they were associated.¹² The damaged record of 1474 C.E. said that Udaiyammal, a devadasi, was granted the privileges of *tiruvandikkappu* and *mudaladaivu*. According to that, she had the right to do her dance performance in the beginning, and she was entitled as *naluthikkum venra manikkam* (*manikkam* who conquered all the four directions).¹³ In 1235 C.E., temple trustees recommended to name a village as Uravakkinanallur after the performance of the devadasi called

Uravakkinathalaikkoli.¹⁴

The medieval sources highlighted the beauty and the characteristics of devadasi women. In general, the term *manikkam* meant ruby. The devadasis were popularly identified as *manikkam*. An inscription of the Valisvara temple in Tiruvalisvaram mentioned that the dancing girl Bhuvani Pandi is also called as Atkonda Nayamanikkam.¹⁵ The Pudukkottai State Inscription (P.S.I.) mentioned devadasi as *alagiapendir*, which meant exquisite beauty.¹⁶ Another inscription noted devadasi as *alagilumalagiya*, which referred the devadasi as a beauty among the beauties.¹⁷ Usually, the expert in the dance performance was titled as *thalaikkoli*. A 19th year inscription of Rajarajan III (?) said that the Chola king Rajarajan III was pleased to watch the performance of Uravakkinathalaikkoli at Rajarajan *tirumanamandapam* (marriage hall) in the Adhipurisvara temple.¹⁸ Cundarar, a prominent Saiva saint, was attracted by the beauty and dance performance of the *rudraikanikai* called Paravai Nachchiar of Tiruvarur temple.¹⁹

The dedication of devadasi to a deity or god did not mean that they had to live a life without the normal sexual pleasures and childbearing. The patriarchal family structure accepted devadasi as wife, mistress, ladylove and so on. The medieval records detailed the engagement of devadasi in a family as a wife, mistress etc... In a feudal society, courtesans and slaves were the symbol of wealth. Therefore, many kings and nobles desired to hold devadasis as their mistresses.²⁰ The medieval Chola emperor such as Rajarajan I and Rajendran I had devadasi as their mistress. Elisaivallabhi and Theayagavalli were devadasis who became the consorts of Kulottungan I²¹ and another inscription mentioned that one of the queens Kulottungan I was *anukkiyar*, was a personal attendant of the God at Kanchipuram.²² Paravai Nachchiar of the Tiruvarur temple and Sankili Nachchiar of Tiruvorriyur temple were married the Saiva saint Cundarar.²³ An inscription of 1189 C.E. referred the marriage of a devadasi of Achyutamangalam.²⁴ An inscription 1049 C.E., Chatural Chaturi, a devadasi of Tiruvorriyur temple was the wife (*agamudaiyal* or *illal*) of one Nagan Perungadan.²⁵ Chokkatamdal, a *ganikai*, of the Tiruvanaikka Temple became the wife and queen of Jatavarman Cundarapandiyan.²⁶ An inscription of Ramalingesvara Velpuru temple stated that Kasadi Suramadevi as concubine of Kota Ketaraja.²⁷ Akkaranangai, *devanar makal*

of Tiruvarur was the wife of Pillai Cheramanar, a confidant of a Chola king.²⁸ A Pandiya Chronicle recorded that Mavali Vanadhi Rayan, an illegitimate son of Maravarma Kulacekara I and Abhirami, a devadasi of the Tirupattur Kali *koyil* was chosen by the Vijayanagar generals as Pandiya ruler by 1400 C.E. After the fall of the Madurai Sultanate, these Mavali Vanadhi Rayan posed himself as a ruler of Madurai and started to rule the country for a time.²⁹

3.2. The recruitment

The engagement of devadasi in the temple was considered as divine thing. The recruitment of devadasi occurred through various means such as presentation and purchase³⁰. The medieval state, temple institutions and village assembly had the right to recruit and appoint the temple servants. The presentation was carried into two categories. Some women were gifted as an object and the other one was a voluntary dedication.³¹ The extensive devotion, poverty, superstition and prayer were the chief factors for the volunteer dedication. Usually, the donor might be from the royal household, military generals, local chiefs, wealthy merchants and prominent devadasi. The authorization of the temple authorities or village assembly was required to become a temple servant. The parents of Sankili Nachchiyar were insisted upon to get the permission from the village assembly for their daughter to become a devadasi of Adhipurisvara temple.³² The service of the temple women started from the very tender age. The Chebrolu inscription mentioned that the service of the devadasi starts from the age of eight.³³

An inscription of 9th century C.E said that a girl named Mrugansetti was married to the deity of Parthibhasekharapuram.³⁴ Kulacekara Alvar married his daughter Cholakulavalli to the Sriranganathar, the god of Srirangam temple.³⁵ An inscription of Keraladeva recorded that some girls voluntarily entered temple services.³⁶ Cholvalli (Uraiur Nachchiyar) the daughter of Nandachola of Uraiur was married to Sriranganathar and brought the dowry of 360 *kalams* of golden rice with dal, vegetables, other curry stuff, golden plates, containers and also a hundred maid servants was presented to the bride groom.³⁷ *Tiruvidaimarudur Puranam* states that the Pandiya king Varakuna Pandiya dedicated his queen to Mahalingasvami temple at Tiruvidaimarudur.³⁸ Uttama Chola presented 8 trumpets and 24 fly whisks women to the image of Sribalideva in

Adhipurisvara temple in his 5th regal year.³⁹ An another inscription of 1098 C.E.-1099 C.E. mentioned that the Vellalar residents of Pandimangattuppaliyur, Jayakondachola mandalam's Amudan Velan, Amudan Pallikondan, Amudan Uyyavandan dedicated Angadi, her Perangadi and her descendants as *devaradiyar* to god Mahadeva in Tiruvakkarai Chandramulisvara temple⁴⁰ for service to temple.⁴¹ In 948 C.E., a man from Nanthimangalam donated three women for fanning the idol for Tirukarrali Parameshvar Temple in Tiruchirappalli.⁴² At Srikurmam Palakonda Sarvajnideva (1471 C.E.) presented two women, Sutasani and Saorasani to holds four *chamaram* in the morning and in evening.⁴³ An inscription of Adhipurisvara temple recorded the dedication of five people by Tiruvegamudaiyan. The number included Periya nachchi, the daughter of Mari and her sisters Kavuthalviyai and Vadukalviyai.⁴⁴ An epigraph from the Venkatachalapathi temple of Karisulndamangalam registered the consecration of certain persons, men and women as servants in temple of Thentiruvengadam alias Amarakapuri Chaturvedimangalam in Mulli *nadu*.⁴⁵ The epigraph further added that they had to do service in the *matha* (attached with the temple).⁴⁶ A record of 1453 C.E. mentioned that some six women including mothers, daughters and granddaughters entered the temple as a slave on the hereditary basis. The names of the women were Mallayi, daughter of Ulagudaiyanacchi, Ponnai, Alagapperumal, Venkatam and Thayuman.⁴⁷

In the 29th regal year of Rajarajan I an order was issued to recruit temple servants to Rajarajesvara temple. The prolong inscription detailed the transfer of four hundred devadasis from other temples to the royal temple of Thanjavur.⁴⁸ During the 27th year of Kongu-Chola king Vikrama registered the appointment of girls to a temple.⁴⁹ Tirukkulichcharattu Alvar temple at Palkalam recruited five persons including one for beating the gong (*segandigai*) and two for blowing the trumpets (*kalam*).⁵⁰ An inscription of Tiruvalankadu mentioned the order of Kulottungan III to capture of girls.⁵¹ They were transferred from other temple. Rajasundari, formerly serving in the temple of Jampai was transferred to the temple of Elavanasur.⁵²

In 948 C.E., certain mediator named, Chandracekara of Nandivarma *mangalam* sold his three slaves to the temple of Vayalur.⁵³ A record of 1119 C.E., registered the hunters sold some of their family women as slaves to the temple of Tiruvallam.⁵⁴ Another record

mentioned the sale of women for temple service.⁵⁵ The inscription of 1218 C.E.-1219 C.E. registered the sale of five women and their decedents.⁵⁶ A damaged inscription of Uttarapatisvara temple mentioned that the sale of four women as *devaradiyar* to the temple of Tiruvalangadudaiyar Nayanar for 700 *kasu*.⁵⁷ Culamangalam a kanakkar sold two of their slaves to the temples *alvilaip piramana isaivutittu*.⁵⁸ In 1208 C.E., Vayiradaran, a local chief sold 36 of his slave one who were received in dowry.⁵⁹ The Uttarapatisvara temple mentioned that the sale of four women as *devaradiyar* to the temple of (Tiruva)langadudaiyar Nayanar, for 700 *kasu* during the 13th year of Rajadhirajan II.⁶⁰

3.3. Duties of the devadasi

In the appointment of dancing girls, Rajarajan I drafted the rules for the temple services.⁶¹ During the Chola period, an official supervision was strictly imposed on devadasi.⁶² The Vaishnava saint Ramanujar introduced *Udaiyavar* Code (reforms) in the temple service of the Sriranganathar temple of Srirangam. According to that code, devadasis were listed in the third category and their duties were newly assigned. Later it enumerated in the canon of *Koyil Ozhugu*, the chronicle of Srirangam temple. It stated that devadasi would bath at dawn and adorn themselves and then they would visit the temple and stand well in sight of the deity.⁶³ The Kalattur inscription of Kulottungan III fixed the timings for the performance of each of the dancing girls in the temple of Cundara Cholisvara Udaiyar.⁶⁴ In Suchindram temple, devadasi were asked to dance at *Vadakkedam* when *diparadhana* happened and on the same time, other devadasis were engaged in a chorus of *kulavai* (making a sound with their tongue).⁶⁵ In 1370 C.E., an inscription stated that a devadasi was directed to conduct the daily worship of God in the Narasimha temple at Chinnadasaripalli.⁶⁶ The Suchindram temple mentioned that the devadasi of the temple participated in the reception of the ruling sovereign or members of the royal family and attended on them during their entire period of stay in the temple.⁶⁷ During the reign of Krishnadevaraya, Kuppayini was a devadasi of Tiruvengadam temple at Tirupathi accompanied the king to Tirupathi.⁶⁸

The South Indian temples strictly conducted the regular ritual cycles in a day, week, month, season and year. Marco Polo, the 13th century C.E. Italian merchant traveler, mentioned that the king of Malabar region performed 104 prayers everyday morning and evening in honor of the deities.⁶⁹ K.K. Pillai, a historian, referred the duties of the devadasis in the Suchindram temple. According to the reference, in every Tuesday and Friday, devadasi of the temple cleaned and smeared the temple premises with water and cow dung.⁷⁰ Abbe Dubois, a French Catholic missionary, mentioned that in great temples, bringing water for the temple ritual was considered as an auspicious ceremony. Usually, water was brought on the back of elephants with the escort of Brahmins and other temple authorities. The procession was preceded by the musicians and dancers of the temple.⁷¹

In general, *pusai* (rite) was considered as the temple ritual. The *pusai* consisted of sixteen rites of adoration which directed to the deity such as *avakanam* (invocation), *stapanam* (fixing), *pattiyam* (water for the washing of the feet), *acamanam* (water for sipping), *arkkiyam* (water for hand washing), *apicekam* (bathing of the idol), *vastiram kantam cattutal* (dressing and perfuming), *puspancuttutal* (offering of flowers), *tupatipam camarpittal* (offering of incense and light), *naivettiyam* (offering of food), *pali* (sacrifice), *homam* (oblation through fire), *nityotsavam* (daily festival), *vattiyam* (music), *narttanam* (dancing), *utvacanam* (send-off).⁷² The recruited devadasi had a multi task within the temple institution. Their work covered all types of services. They had to participate in the daily cyclic of the temple worship from morning waking up to sleep time of the deities at night.

According to the custom, devadasis were well trained and the division of labor was defined. Rekha Pande, a historian, classified the functions of temple girls in the sacred realm as ritualistic and non-ritualistic.⁷³ The ritualistic services were considered as dancing, performing *tirualatti* or *karpura alattai* (a mixture of turmeric, lime and camphor) and *tiruchulam* (the sacred trident)⁷⁴. The non-ritualistic works were carrying lamp⁷⁵, maintaining perpetual lamp⁷⁶, bringing water for worship⁷⁷, fanning idol, husking paddy⁷⁸, cleaning rice⁷⁹ and kitchen vessels⁸⁰, washing clothes⁸¹, decorating surroundings⁸², waiting upon the Gods with fly whisk on occasions when she was stalled during the day⁸³ and prepared scented powder and burnt incense⁸⁴, sacred flower and

plates⁸⁵. Tiruvacakam, the Saiva canon, mentioned that garland making, sweeping, smearing and dancing were the duties of devadasis.⁸⁶

3.3.1. The non-ritualistic services

Holding *chamaram* (fly whisk) in honor of the god was one of the important functions of devadasi.⁸⁷ Manickkavacakar, the prominent Saiva saint, pointed out that devadasis who fanning the idol as *koyirppinap pillaikal*.⁸⁸ A copper plate probably 868 C.E. mentioned that a servant girl who was an expert in waving the *chamaram*.⁸⁹ An epigraph engraved on the Chinthamaninathar temple at Vasudevanallur registered a gift of land to devadasis for waving the fly whisks.⁹⁰ Devadasi Pirainarusiradiyar of the Vyaghrapurisvara temple at Tiruppulichchanam was granted the privilege of waving the *chamaram* in during the car processions.⁹¹ Konda Komati Pratapa Singa provided for holding of *chamaram* by two dancing maids named Nagadeva Gangasani and Bhudhi Singasani at the temple Simhachalam.⁹² Yasodadevi referred that the *chamaram* was hold by Sutasani and Saorasani from the morning and in evening.⁹³ Usually, devadasis were tending flowers in temple gardens. The tradition was explicated in the life of Vipranarayanan, the famous Alvar saint, and Devadevi, his wife.⁹⁴ An Inscription of Tiruvallam temple detailed the engagement of devadasi in the making of flower garlands.⁹⁵ A bilingual inscription from Andhra Pradesh mentioned the allotment of a share of paddy to a devadasi for preparing garlands for the god.⁹⁶

In Suchindram temple, devadasis lit the lamps in the shrines of the first *prakara* (premise) on the occasions of the evening *diparadhana* and accompanied the procession with lamps.⁹⁷ The inscriptions of the Kachchapesvara temple mentioned the dedication of the two families of dancing girls to look after the lamps in the temple.⁹⁸ A record from Mantrapurisvara temple at Kovitur in the Thanjavur district registered an agreement by the dancing girls of the temple to burn a lamp in the shrine of Bhuvanapet Nachchiyar.⁹⁹ In 11-9 (?), an endowment of 6 *uttamangadamada* was entrusted to three hundred *sanis* of Kommauru for maintaining a perpetual lamp in the temple of Agastisvara.¹⁰⁰ In Tiruparkadal Bhattaraka temple at Kilimanur devadasis were ordered to carry the hand lamps for the god.¹⁰¹

Devadasis performed the duties such as pounding rice and turmeric, preparing scented powders and burning incense. In the temple of Tiruparkadal Bhattaraka devadasis were given rice offered to the temple for performing the work of pounding the paddy.¹⁰² A record belonging to the reign of Chola Kulottungan III mentioned that the allotment of a share of the temple land to a devadasi in return of her services like pounding of rice.¹⁰³ A record of 15th century C.E. of Visvanathasami temple at Thenkasi mentioned that the appointment of some servants including devadasis for performing the works such as holding *chamaram*, pounding turmeric, burning incense, preparing scented powders, etc.¹⁰⁴ The 19th regal year of the Rajarajan, a Vayiradaran sold Thai and her 4 daughters for the husking of the paddy in the Adhipurisvara temple in Tiruvorriyur.¹⁰⁵

3.3.2. The ritualistic services

The ritual performance was the one of the ancient phenomenon in the South Indian history. The sources for the origin of the tradition traced from the literary records of ancient Tamils, particularly in *Tolkappiyam* and *Chilappathikaram*. The Tamil countryside, the Tamil *pan* or music, communal singing and dancing derived from the early indigenous rituals of worship at Murukan shrines.¹⁰⁶ The practice of ritual dancing performed by the ancient Tamil tribes such as the Maravar hunters, and the gradual transformation of it under the influence of the brahmanical religion, seems to point towards the probable inspiration for the system temple dancing.¹⁰⁷ In Sangam literature, the dancing women and prostitutes are frequently mentioned. However, there was no evidence about the temple women. From the early medieval period onwards, the devotional literature of Alvars and Nayanmars (6th century C.E. to 9th century C.E.) were referred women as celestial and to offer them in the temple.

Normally devadasis were good dancers and singers. Trivandrum Archaeological Series (T.A.S.) volume noted that the devadasis were expert in seven kinds of music.¹⁰⁸ They had undergone many rigorous training in dance and music.¹⁰⁹ Their songs and dance performance became a source of attraction for the lay worshippers and pilgrims.¹¹⁰ Campantar, the notable Saiva saint, mentioned that dancing girls came round the temple in singing and dancing.¹¹¹ K.K. Pillai recorded the dance performance of devadasi in the Suchindram temple.¹¹²

The temple festivals with dance and music concerts became an important role for the interaction between mass and temple.¹¹³ The temple dancers performed music and dance recitals every day after the *puja* and temple festivals. In the 28th year of Kulottungan Chola, Sivan Thillainayakan *alias* Cirutthondanambi of Tannirkunram in Nenmali *nadu* made the following gifts to the temple of Mahadeva of Tirukkalar in Purangarambai *nadu* (a subdivision) of Rajendrachola *valanadu*, for the purpose of conducting the festival of Aravabharanadeva on the day of the new moon.¹¹⁴ An Inscription in the time of Kulottungan III (1215 C.E.) recorded that the king resumed fifty-six *tirunals* (sacred days) in the temple¹¹⁵ and also revived some of the old practices found mentioned in some earlier records.¹¹⁶ An inscription mentioned that the temple girls performed dance during the temple procession.¹¹⁷ The 1486 C.E. inscription of Tirumalai temple executed the following *silasasanam* in favor of Valandi, daughter of Tiruvidhisani Anaimadi, viz., Tiruvidhi *sani* and Anaimadi of the temple accompanied the processions of the deities through the streets with her set of pipers, drummers, dancers and dancing masters and exhibits her skill in dancing in the streets before the deities.¹¹⁸ In Suchindram temple, devadasis staged the drama of *Sarangadhara* in *natakasala*.¹¹⁹

An epigraph engraved on the Chinthamaninathar temple at Vasudevanallur registered gift of land to devadasis for performing dances.¹²⁰ In the 16th year of king Parakesarivarman, thirty *kalanju* of gold was used for the *nibanda* (expenses) for the *Chittirai tiruvila* (festival).¹²¹ Out of 30 *kalanju* of gold, 7 *kalanju* of gold was used for oil which required for the seven days of the festival, 2 *kalanju* of gold was used for flowers and scented sandal-paste and 5 *kalanju* of gold was utilized for food to serve the devotees whom form the *kotti* (*goshthi*).¹²² During the festival, Sivan Thillainayakan of Tannirkunram made a provision for feeding the devotees (*devaradiyar*) of the god Mahadeva who had sprung at Tirukkalar in Purangarambai *nadu*, of Rajendrachola *valanadu*.¹²³ An inscription of 2nd year of Vairamegavarman mentioned that Mullikkudaiyan Adittanali made the gift of land for conducting *tiruppali* (a ritual service) in the temple Tirukkulichcharattu-Alvar at Palkalam in Damar-kottam.¹²⁴

A record dated 1235 C.E.¹²⁵ of the time of Rajarajan III registered the presence of the king at the time of dance performance by a devadasi named Uravakkinathalaikkoli of the temple *mandapam*. On her performance, the king granted a village of sixty *veli*¹²⁶ of land to her.¹²⁷ The 17th year of Vikrama Chola's reign in 1135 C.E. made provisions for the recital of the songs in every Sunday at the Siva shrine of Elvanasur.¹²⁸ Devadasis had participated in the dramatic performances in the temples during the festival seasons and re-enacted various kinds of dance (*aryakkuttu*, *santikkuttu*, etc.) with meticulous care, devotion and dedication. These performances were held in the specific halls like *natakasalai* (drama hall), *nirutta mandapam* (dance auditorium) etc. For their performance they had received remuneration or *manya* (gift) or *jivita* (grants of allowances) which was granted by kings, nobles, temples, villagers and *sabhas*.¹²⁹ In course of the period, their artistic qualities became an iconic identity for them. Monier-Williams described that devadasi had no other duty but to dance before the shrine.¹³⁰ Altekar pointed out that the group of people visited temples not to respects the deities, but they intended to fulfill their love intrigues with the singing girls of the sacred shrines.¹³¹

During the festivals and trade fairs large amount of entertainments happened and the devadasis performed different rituals. An inscription mentioned that the temple girls performed dance during the temple procession.¹³² In the temple at Suchindram, devadasis staged the drama of Sarangadhara in *natakasalai*.¹³³ In the 16th year of king Parakesarivarman, thirty *kalanju* of gold was used for the expenses (*nibanda*) for the *Chittirai tiruvila* (festival).¹³⁴ The out of 30 *kalanju* of gold, 7 *kalanju* of gold was used for oil which required for the seven days of the festival, 2 *kalanju* of gold was used for flowers and scented sandal paste and 5 *kalanju* of gold was utilized for the food and presents to the devotees who form the *kotti* (*goshthi*).¹³⁵ In the 28th year of Kulottunga Chola, Sivan Tillainayakan *alias* Chiruttondanambi of Tannirkunram in Nenmali *nadu* made the following gifts to the temple of Mahadeva of Tirukkalar in Purangarambai *nadu* (a subdivision) of Rajendrachola *valanadu*, for the purpose of conducting the festival of Aravabharanadeva on the day of the new moon.¹³⁶ During the festival Sivan Tillainayagan of Tannirkunram made provision for feeding the devotees (*devaradiyar*) of the god Mahadeva who had sprung at Tirukkalar in Purangarambai *nadu*, (a subdivision) of Rajendrachola *valanadu*.¹³⁷

An inscription of the time of Kulottungan III (1215 C.E.) recorded that the king resumed fifty-six sacred festivals (*tirunals*) in the temple¹³⁸ and he revived some of the old practices found mentioned in earlier records.¹³⁹ The process of the system further extended the system during period of Kulottungan III and Rajarajan III.¹⁴⁰ It is evident from two inscriptions dated 1204 C.E. and 1235 C.E.¹⁴¹ It state that the system received royal support in the Tiruvorriyur temple. Another inscription recorded that Rajarajan III seated in the Rajaraja *mandapam* in the temple, enjoyed the dance performance of a devadasi in the *Ani* festival.¹⁴² During the 7th and 10th years of Partivarmam, a devadasi named Kumaradi Nangai, daughter of Nanri Nangai donated 96 sheep for perpetual lamp and the same devaradiyar donated 92 *kalanju* of gold and 92 *kadi* of paddy for the sacred expenses of the deity of Jalathesvara temple at Takkolam.¹⁴³

3.4. Remuneration

The remuneration for the services of devadasis was provided in the form of house, land, food, tax exemption or remission, certain rights, etc. In most of the time, devadasis received the grant in a two or more combination of above. The rights included receiving tax, taking water from well, preference in the performance. Some of them were granted tax free lands and house sites for their service.¹⁴⁴ The kings and temple authorities had been granted village to devadasis. Based on their remuneration and rights, the service of the devadasi was drafted. The rights were issued to any individual devadasi or the group of devadasi. A number of records registered the sale of land¹⁴⁵ and house sites¹⁴⁶ to them and sale of villages to maintain them.¹⁴⁷ Frequently devadasi was asked for a surety.¹⁴⁸ Usually, houses and lands were granted to devadasi. The living area of devadasi was generally called as *cheri*¹⁴⁹, *madaivilakam*¹⁵⁰ and land was situated around the temple complex. Protection by the king was considered an important one. The employees received their wages in terms of land, money or in kind, house-plot, paddy and food. The assembly (*ur*) of Palkalam entrusted the endowed land to Arayanichchingan, *uvaichchan* (drummer) residing in the village for the temple service.¹⁵¹ According to the damaged record of 1474 C.E., devadasi Udaiyammal was taken into its establishment as the first devadasi and she was granted the privileges of *tiruvandikkappu* and *mudaladaivu* (the right to do the first dance service).¹⁵²

In 1494 C.E., a record from the village of Kunrakkudi of Thennari *nadu* referred the gift of garden and house to a number of dancing girls for the service in the Kasivisvanathasami temple at Thenkasi.¹⁵³ In Rajarajesvara temple, the recruited women were allotted with one *veli* of land, which was calculated at 100 *kalam* of paddy and a house in the three quarters of the temple premises of North Street (191 houses), south street (184 houses) and west street (25 houses).¹⁵⁴ The Chebrolu inscription of Jaya, the famous general of Kakatiya Ganapatideva contains a list of the temple servants who were allotted their shares in lands. The list further detailed that each of the 300 dancing girls of the temple.¹⁵⁵ A certain Varadarajan provided houses, lands and certain privileges to the newly appointed dancing girls for her service in the temple.¹⁵⁶ Another inscription from Tiruvalisvara temple also stated that a gift of house and land for the service of the dancing girls in the temple of Tiruvalakkoyiludaiya Tambiranan.¹⁵⁷ An epigraph of 1532 C.E. recorded some of the girls were granted house sites on both sides of a new street, called *bhogarajap perunthenruvu* which was close to the big tower of the temple.¹⁵⁸ In 1478 C.E. some dedicated girls were permitted to live in some houses in the north street of the Nachchiyar shrine near the *tirumadaivilagam* of a temple.¹⁵⁹

In 1117 C.E., the Hoysala king Vishnuvardhana granted villages to the Chennakesava temple of Belur for conducting ceremonies, offerings and the livelihood of dancing girls, Brahmins and others in the temple.¹⁶⁰ An inscription from Narththamalai in the Tiruchirappalli district mentioned that the authorities of the Tirumalaikadambar temple assembled at the *tirumandapapam* (temple hall) and distributed one *ma* of land to ten devadasis for the service in the temple twice a day.¹⁶¹ A 15th century C.E. record mentioned that devadasi of the Isvaran *koyil* was granted full freedom to live in the first house of the street.¹⁶² A damaged inscription of Chennakesavasvami temple stated the gift of 3 *kha* land to the dancing girls in the temple of Ramesvara at Siripuram.¹⁶³

A record of 1235 C.E. registered that the pleased king Rajarajan III (?) ordered to grant a village of sixty *velis* of land to devadasi.¹⁶⁴ An inscription of Mallikarjunadeva Maharaya referred the grant of some lands to devadasi. Besides other rights in full freedom (*devasimai suvandram*), devadasi was allowed to possess two hundred *kuli* land and water for cultivation from nearby well.¹⁶⁵ An inscription of 1498 C.E. mentioned the

temple authorities granted full right over a grant of two *ma* (land measures) of tax-free lands and one *ma* of land in Kuttakkudi and rice *kuruni* (measure) paddy for three devadasis.¹⁶⁶ A record of 1208 C.E. stated that the temple authorities were pleased to grant the small village of Arumpulippadi as *jivita* to a devadasi.¹⁶⁷ A record of 958 C.E. of Kannaradeva registered the grant of land in Kodyur to one Nrtta Vitanki, devadasi.¹⁶⁸

Rajakesarivarman undertook to protect and feed Kana Kavirakurattiyar, a female disciple and follower of Guna Kirti Bhatara of Vidal (a) Madevi Annadimangalam on eastern side of Singapura *nadu*.¹⁶⁹ In 1168 C.E., temple of Tirupparkadal Bhattaraka at Kilimanur mentioned that the total daily offerings prepared with thirty-one *nali* and one *uri* of rice was to distribute among the temple servants, including the devadasi. According to it, devadasis who pounded the paddy and carried hand lamps was to receive two *nalis*.¹⁷⁰ At Suchindram temple, 12 *nali* of rice was granted to devadasi, Parapanada Perumal and her lineal descendants.¹⁷¹ The king Kulottungan III gifted five thousand gold coins for the specific rituals such as the sacred bath for the images, twilight lamps and garlands silken clothes offerings of food.¹⁷² The 12th century C.E. Tiruvalla Copper Plate mentioned that four devadasis received 12 measures of rice.¹⁷³ The record of 1496 C.E. registered the presentation of two *panams* to a devadasi for her services in the temple of Tirumalai.¹⁷⁴ The Rudramahesvaras (priest) of the temple were granted one *padakku* (measure) grain every day and two *panams* every month to the temple devadasi.¹⁷⁵ An epigraph of 1370 C.E. registered a gift to a devadasi for having conducted the daily worship in a temple.¹⁷⁶

In general, tax remission and exemption was granted to devadasi. An inscription of Kampaharesvara Temple recorded the tax remission made on *puravari* to the temple servants.¹⁷⁷ The 1483 C.E. record stated an order of Narasa Nayaka, who exempting devadasi from the payment of certain taxes, which were not included in Koliyanallur simai.¹⁷⁸ An inscription of Srirangaraya referred one such remission of certain taxes on some lands of the Kaikkolas and devadasi of the temple of Tiruvennainallur.¹⁷⁹ The Konerirajapuram inscription of Chembiyan Madevi mentioned that the temple servants who lived in the old tax free *devadana* land.¹⁸⁰ In 1582 C.E. inscription, registered the five musicians and *nattuvan* of the Simhaputrinathasvami temple of Melchittanur allowed to water their gifted lands from the *tangal* (northern tank) as *padijivitam* (livelihood).¹⁸¹

A record from Achchiruppakkam dated 1361 C.E. referred to a gift of land to a monastery at Kanchipuram by Somappa and Koppanar.¹⁸²

3.4.1. Gifts made by devadasi

History partially recorded the contribution of the devadasi women. Some temple women utilized their resources for charitable activities. Based on its nature, the endowments of devadasi was classified as secular and non-secular. The non-secular gifts included the dedication of people, livestock and other articles to temple¹⁸³ or other religious institutions. The secular gifts of devadasi were largely from the renovation and repair of the temple and other public domains.

In general, the donations were in kind of people, land, money, livestock and etc. A *thalaikkoli* gifted land by purchase to repair the sluice of a tank.¹⁸⁴ During the period of Kumara Kampana, certain Tiruppani Nachchiar dug a pond called *Vengalamma-kuttai* in a village of Madam in Wandiwash taluk, Tiruvannamalai district.¹⁸⁵ The standing figures of the devadasis were sculptured on the eight pillars of the *natakasala* of the Suchindram temple. K.K. Pillai interpreted them as donors of the *natakasala* of the temple.¹⁸⁶ An epigraph of 1533 C.E. recorded some of them deposited a sum of 330 *narpanam* (gold coin) in the temple treasury as an offering to the God, which was invested for the improvement of the tanks and canals in the temple village and for increase in production.¹⁸⁷ The year 1486 C.E. inscription recorded the donation of 300 *narpanam* by a devadasi to a Tirupathi temple and they contributed their mite to the renovation and repair of the big tank in Tirupathi.¹⁸⁸ An inscription of 875 C.E. mentioned certain devadasi donated some amount of gold for a *nundavillakku* (perpetual lamp) to the God of Thenkilayattu Mahadeva.¹⁸⁹ A record of c. 1351 C.E.-1352 C.E. from the temple at *Madam* registered the construction of *kalyana mandapam* (marriage hall) of the temple by a dancing girl of the Kulandaiantavar temple.¹⁹⁰

In 1495 C.E., a devadasi of Srirangam temple granted four *parivattam* for having sung the *Ula* of Kandadai Ramanujayyengar in the sanctum.¹⁹¹ A devadasi donated to the Guhanadesvarar temple, Kanyakumari in 1040 C.E.¹⁹² A certain *kaikkolan* stole away the *pattai karai* (a kind of gold ornament) of the Goddesses of a temple, and he was unable to

pay the fine of ten gold sovereigns. A generous devadasi remitted it on his behalf in the temple treasury and her deed was recorded. A devadasi also granted a gift to the maintenance of perpetual lamps in temples.¹⁹³ An inscription from the Saptarishisvara temple of Lalgudi stated that Vaidyanatha-*Manikkam*, a dancing-girl of the temple was presented a *kolgai* (ornament) of 360 *varahan* to the god.¹⁹⁴ A gift of six *achchu* by the dancing girl Bhuvani Pandi alias Atkonda Nayamanikkam for the offerings to the god Alalacundara Nayanar set up in the same temple by a certain Kulacekara Bhatta and his consort Paravai Nachchiyar.¹⁹⁵

3.5. Devadasis in the later medieval period

The devadasi system received a little setback during the later medieval period due to the decline of the imperial Chola and later Pandiya. The interlude of non-Hindus and the non-Tamils happened in the later phase of Tamilakam. It questioned the existence of devadasihood and later it influenced the characteristic changes in it. Frederique Apffel Marglin, an anthropologist, noted that the successive Muslim invasions and weak political authority must have led to the moral degradation on the part of *maharis* (was a word for devadasis in Odia).¹⁹⁶ The civil war between Sundara Pandiya and Vira Pandiya¹⁹⁷ led Malik Kafur, the army general of Ala-ud-din Khilji¹⁹⁸ into Tamil country. Ala-ud-din Khilji could not tolerate the temple women being a prostitute. Therefore, he ordered forcible marriage of the temple women.¹⁹⁹ Sadasivan mentioned that the institution of devadasi in Tamilakam suffered a hardship of sixty-eight years from 1310 C.E.-1378 C.E. due to political convulsions.²⁰⁰ K.K. Pillai also pointed out that the invasion damaged the temple institution.²⁰¹ As in the case, the Muslim raid and plunder of South India would destruct the temple institution and it accelerated the decay of the devadasi system. The Telugu work *Acharyasuktimuktavali*²⁰² dealt the history of Srivaishnavism. It recounted the entry of the Muhammadan in the Srirangam temple and the vicissitudes of the idol of Sriranganathar. The work detailed the incident of how a dancing girl of the temple of Srirangam prevented the utter destruction of the temple by Muhammadan chief. According to the record, the military general was enamored by devadasi. She treacherously murdered him and threw him down from one of the towers of the temple and immediately she committed suicide. Her descendants are entitled to

certain privileges in the temple of Srirangam even today in commemoration of this act of their ancestress.²⁰³

With establishment of the Vijayanagar Empire in the 14th century C.E., the Kannada and Telugu Nayakas emerged as a prominent patron of the temple institution. The emergence of the Vijayanagar rule in South India reformulated the system. Kumara Kampana, the chieftains of Vijayanagar emperor, restored the devadasi tradition and assured their safety.²⁰⁴ Kumara Kampana restored the worship and services that had been discontinued since the non-Hindu began to rule over Madurai.²⁰⁵ Krishnaswami Ayyangar, a historian, also mentioned that the restoration of the ritual practices of Srirangam temple by Kumara Kampana.²⁰⁶ Tirumalai Nayaka (1625 C.E.-1659 C.E.) of Madurai and Ragunatha Nayaka of Thanjavur further extended their support to the religious endowments. The Vijayanagar rule faced political and cultural encounters with Muslims and Christians (as travelers). Therefore, Vijayanagar needed to construct its religious and cultural domain. Champakalakshmi mentioned the Vijayanagar rulers consciously promoted a high degree of Sanskritization.²⁰⁷ They created the Vedicization-Sanskrit ‘cosmopolitan’ culture for pan Indian Vedic authentication.²⁰⁸

According to the epigraphical sources, Kumara Kampana was a person who restored the status of the devadasi.²⁰⁹ An epigraph of 1368 C.E. recorded that Kumara Kampana appointed Kamarasa Vittappa of Anaigundi as his officer to enquire the problems of devadasi.²¹⁰ In the 5th year of Rajanarayana Sambuvarayar, there was a disorder between *ishabattaliyilar* and *devaradiyar*.²¹¹ The poor service condition and low remuneration are the reasons for the outbreak of the protest. The temple authorities of Adhipurisvara temple assembled in the *Vyakaranadana* hall under an *adhikari* (officer) called Tunaiyirunda nambi Kongarayar. The officer was able to settle the problem of the devadasis.²¹² Kumara Kampana ordered his one subordinates to give material protection to the affected devadasi.²¹³ He appointed an officer called Mahapradhani to monitor the gifts to the temples and other religious institutions.²¹⁴ An inscription from Tittaikkudi mentioned his gift of the village of Attiyur to the temple.²¹⁵ An inscription of 1460 C.E. recorded a royal order as to the appointment of some devadasi to a temple.²¹⁶ In 1479 C.E. one Ettappa Nayaka left a number of maid servants as devadasi in the temple of

Tirumalai Nayanar for the merit of Isvara Nayaka.²¹⁷ An incomplete inscription recorded the appointment of a certain Tentiruvengada-*manikkam* as a musician of the temple with her two brothers as a hereditary servants of the temple.²¹⁸

3.6. Devadasi as property

Devadasis were treated as temple property, and they primarily served Brahmins and other patrons. The hierarchy existed within the devadasi institution. Usually, devadasis were divided according to their hierarchal gradation. According to their grade, their nature of work was determined. An inscription of 1208 C.E. elaborated the duties of the devadasi.²¹⁹ A Koppam inscription of Andhra Pradesh²²⁰ and Sudi inscription of Karnataka²²¹ detailed the hierarchy within the devadasi institution. In 1350 C.E., a kind of disagreement happened among devadasis of Tiruvorriyur temple due to the hierarchy. The *patiyilar* of the temple had high status than *devaradiyar* and *ishabattaliyilar*.²²² The *ishabattaliyilar* were to assist *patiyilar*. The *ishabattaliyilar* were also to perform dance but they were exempted from carrying the flywhisk during festivals. The *patiyilar* carried the superior social status to that of *devaradiyar* and that those in those turn were superior to *ishabattaliyilar*.²²³

An inscription of the period of Kumara Kampana recorded that the poverty, death and migration among the devadasi women.²²⁴ The two inscriptions, which dated 1188 C.E. from Tamaraippakkam, recorded the self-immolation of two women who were probably devadasis. The first record stated that a woman musician usually accompanied a dancer of the temple Tiruvagnisvara Mahadeva. When the dancer expired, the woman musician, out of her love for him, committed *sati*. It was recorded in the inscription as *udan pallikonda*.²²⁵ The replacement of devadasi was immediately caused due to the incidents of the death and migration of any devadasi. In general, the immediate descendent or relative of the devadasi was underwent the service of her predecessor. The failure of any qualified successor, the temple authorities had a right to appointment a qualified person.²²⁶ According to the sources, the temple priests exploited the devadasi women. A 1239 C.E. record from Sivapuram registered the immoral behavior of the two Siva Brahmins of the temple with the devadasis.²²⁷

The dedicated women were punch marked as a sign of life long servitude. An inscription stated the following phrase, “agreed to serve God as long as Sun and Moon exist and therefore branded with the sacred symbols”.²²⁸ Sadasivan remarked that the symbol marked some significance to show the bondage of the women to the temple.²²⁹ In general, women, slaves and animals were marked with sacred symbol of the respective temples.²³⁰ The devadasis and cows were branded with the *sulam ilanchinai* (trident mark).²³¹ The branded devadasi could not enter the outside service, even in a royal household.²³² Usually, devadasis of the Siva temple were branded with the trident mark and those of Vishnu temples with *sanku* (shell) or *chakram* (discus) marks.²³³ Siva devotees branded themselves with the *sulam* (trident), or *rishabham* (bull) mark. Appar, the prominent Saiva saint, had the impression of *sulam* or *rishabham* (bull symbol) on his body. Soundara Rajan mentioned that *chitrameli* (the plough) was used as a symbol for the devadasi of the Chola period.²³⁴ Alvares refereed the process of *arakkilacchinai seithu* (the branding with sealing wax).²³⁵ The damaged record of 1474 C.E. revealed that Udaiyammal, a famous devadasi was marked with the trident symbol on her body.²³⁶ The 1119 C.E. Tiruvallam temple inscription noted a sale of *trisul* pierced *devaradiyar*.²³⁷

3.7. Devadasi in the 17th Century C.E.

3.7.1. The moral questions

According to the patriarchal norms, family is considered as sacred and the role of women was subordinate. The sexual code for women was strictly imposed, restricted and monitored. During the medieval period, the association of devadasi was considered auspicious. The social acceptance of the auspiciousness of devadasi made free from the strict restriction as compare to other Indian womenfolk. However, the later medieval records reflected the transcended condition of devadasi women. The later medieval records such as travelogues, hagiographies and other literary records highlighted the loose character of devadasi. The association of devadasi became an immoral act. An epigraph of 17th century C.E. from the Vahesvarar temple at Malayadipatti provided us with some evidence of the immoral life of the devadasi. It stated that the *devidiyal* (devadasi) named Vadvulamangal was found with a Brahmin in an amorous way. The record runs thus *marupadiyumoru piramananai alaicchu vittille trundapadiyinale*.²³⁸

3.7.2. Travelers account

During the later medieval period, the foreign travelers such as Domingo Paes, Abraham Rogerius (1651 C.E.), Francois Valentyn (1726 C.E.), Bartholomous Ziegenbalg (18th century C.E.) and Jacob Haafner²³⁹ (19th century C.E.) (*See Appendix: - 8*) recorded the devadasi tradition in their visit to South Asia, especially to the Indian subcontinent. Dutch pastor Francois Valentyn (1726 C.E.) was the first one who mentioned the word *devadasikal* (plural form of devadasi) in his book *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien* (Old and New East India).²⁴⁰ The Venetian jeweler Gasparo Balbi (1590 C.E.) used the derogatory term *puttane del pagoda* (temple whore).²⁴¹ Della Valle referred that some of the dancers fanned the deities with flywhisks, and others were guided by a man who danced with them and was their masters.²⁴²

The 17th century C.E. Dutch Calvinist minister, Abraham Rogerius pointed out that devadasis as whores. His travelogue *De Open-Deure tot het Verborgten Heydendom* (The Doors an Open to the Hidden Heathendom) (1651 C.E.) specifically pointed out that the lewdness of the women.²⁴³ He criticized the attitude of Brahmin priests to encourage the dancing and singing of the women in the pure and sacred spaces like temple.²⁴⁴ In his own words:

“It seemed a very strange affair, that while the Brahmins regarded the *Pagodas* (temples) as holy places, and the images were so holy that the Soundraes might not even touched them, that they also allowed such lewd women to serve their Gods. They let those women dance for them who were not only indecently clad, but whose lewdness was known to everyone.”²⁴⁵

Pietro della Valle, a Italian traveler, mentioned them as ‘public dancers’ (*pubbliche ballatrici*) were prostitutes and that their songs and dances were lascivious.²⁴⁶ Francois Bernier mentioned that the Brahmin priests of the Jagannath temple ‘raped’ the young dancers after they were ‘married’ to the god. He pointed out that the selection of the beautiful girls as maiden of the God Jagannath by the priest. Further, he noted that the selected girls were accompanied the god to the temple with all the pomp and ceremony, in temple she remained the whole night, and having been made to believe that God will

come and lie with her. The girl was commanded to inquire the god about the productive years. In the night, one of the impostors entered the temple through a small back door, enjoyed the unsuspecting damsel, and made them to believe whatever might be deemed necessary.²⁴⁷

Domingo Paes, a Portuguese traveler, detailed the general status of devadasi women in the Vijayanagar period. He referred the dancers of Vijayanagar as *baylhadeiras* or *bailadeiras* (female dancers).²⁴⁸ He noted that devadasi had to perform dance during the feeding of idol in a regular basis²⁴⁹, and during the festivals, the *bayaderes* were ordered to dance before the idol for long hours.²⁵⁰ He referred the loose character of the devadasi. Further, he mentioned that the rich attirement of temple women, and their pleasure of shewing.²⁵¹ Devadasi in the Vijayanagar period were lived in the best streets in the city, and their streets carried the best rows of houses. Usually, they were desired to display her belongings, and they were much respected, and they classed amongst the honored ones, who were the mistresses of the captains, and any respectable men might visit their houses without any shy.²⁵² He wondered that devadasis had a right to enter the palace, remained to stay, and could eat the betel with the aristocrats.²⁵³

Bartholomous Ziegenbalg was a Protestant Missionary, who reached Tranquebar (Nagapattinam district in modern Tamilnadu) in 1706 C.E. The account of Ziegenbalg was considered as an important record in the history of South India.²⁵⁴ The knowledge about the native language helped Ziegenbalg to refer authentic sources. His travelogue, *Malabarishes Heidenthum*²⁵⁵ detailed the existence of thirteen kinds of temple servants. Among them, the *Gotterdienerinnen* (female servants of the Gods) was listed in the eleventh category. He detailed the temple services of devadasi and their special duty of dancing and singing in a separate complex. The travelogue mentioned that the devadasis had to learn to read and write. Ziegenbalg acknowledged their talent in the poetic genres. In general, the cleverest and finest maidens were selected as devadasi. They were insisted to carry a flawless body, and did not allowed getting married a mortal. They adorned well, and could be easily recognized by their external appearance. The larger temples had a great number of devadasis, and some of the smaller temples did not have

them. However, everyone considered them as whore, who had a privileged way of carrying their business, and thus, the Europeans were called them as dancing whore.²⁵⁶

Ziegenbalg detailed the ceremonial marriage of devadasi. The temple priest carried out the dedication ceremony as a representative of God. The young girl was brought to the temple for the dedication. The priest bind devadasi to the gods with a bridal necklace, which was the sign of all those who were married. After the marriage ceremony, all the young married girls were given a marvelous procession around the streets.²⁵⁷ He further emphasized that devadasis were free to prostitution with whomever they desire, and their houses became 'public brothels'. He mentioned that Europeans enjoyed watching the songs and dances of devadasi in the streets, and that many of them visited their houses. In his view, the devadasi system was a great shame and an insult to Christianity.²⁵⁸

Some of the indigenous literature reflected the condition of the later medieval period. The minor literary works such as *Virali Vitu Tutu* (messenger literature), ballad and *Thanippadal Thirattu* (compilation work) focused the issues of the devadasi. The later medieval literatures did not have any ambiguity between the temple women and prostitutes. They were well aware of the uniqueness of the devadasi women. The works of Arunakirinathar and Kalamekam discussed the exploitative nature of the devadasi women. The most of authors had a personal with devadasi women.

The literary work of Arunakirinathar revealed the encounter and love intrigues of a common person with the temple women.²⁵⁹ Arunakirinathar was a 15th century mendicant who composed Tirupukazh, the sacred text on Lord Murukan. The life of Arunakirinathar was called as *Arunakirinathar Puranam*. He had a personal relationship with *dasis* of the Annamalai temple.²⁶⁰ The text *Arunakirinathar Puranam*, pointed out that devadasis were *ganikai* who married the deity of Lord Annamalai (Lord Siva).²⁶¹ It added that the *dasis* were born for a single mother and many fathers.²⁶² Kalamekam was a contemporary of Virupaksha Raya II (1466 C.E.-1485 C.E.), the emperor of Vijayanagar kingdom. The poet was known for his immoral life. He had a personal relationship with devadasis. His works praised, criticized and cursed the devadasi women. Especially, his work referred the affair of Mohanki, a devadasi of Tiruvanaikka temple. He converted from Vaishnavism to Saivism.²⁶³ Soma of Arrur was another devadasi with whom Kalamekam

lived for some time. He praised the beauty of Somi. According to him, the lord Vishnu and Brahma were astonished to witness the beauty of *dasi* Somi.²⁶⁴ He praised devadasis named Kuththal, her elder sister, her mother and grandmother at Madurai. He associated the eyes of Kuththal with sharp spear, her elder sister's with sapphire, her mother with lotus and grandmother with arrow.²⁶⁵ In addition, another devadasi was known as Kamalatchi who had eyes like spear.²⁶⁶ He visited Inchikudi (Tiruvarur) and had a physical relation with a devadasi named Kalaichi, and later he cursed her. He compared the breast of a *dasi* as a bitter guard, and her waist with pestle.²⁶⁷ He criticized and mimics the language usage of Telugu *dasi*. He said that *emira ori, enthundi osth*.²⁶⁸ He blasphemy the voice of *dasi* of Nagappattinam. He stated that the voice of devadasi was a kin to a donkey.²⁶⁹ His literary work, *Thanippadal Thirattu* addressed issues of devadasi and prostitute.²⁷⁰

Usually, the Tamil word *dasi* pointed out the temple women, and the word *veshi* referred prostitutes. He compared the prostitutes with monkey, betel leaf²⁷¹, coconut²⁷² and palm tree.²⁷³ He mentioned that it was not easy to escape from them, and they always moved with us until the material vanished. They cheated everyone and did prank on others.²⁷⁴ The *Udaiyar Kathai*, a 16th century C.E. Tamil ballad, referred the demoralized lives of devadasis of the Nellaiappar temple (Tirunelveli) and Kasivisvananthar temple (Thenkasi). The ballad stated a quarrel of the devadasi of Nellaiappar temple to share a night with a rich Udaiyar.²⁷⁵ The ballad further mentioned that the Udaiyar lived with Nallamangal, a *muraikkari* (devadasi) of the temple of Thenkasi.²⁷⁶

The *Virali Vitu Tutu* (the messenger poems) is one of the literary genres in Tamil literature, which extensively discussed about the relationship of devadasi and the composer. It was popular between 1600 C.E. and 1750 C.E. The genre is structured like a conversation between *virali* (messenger), who was a female messenger and the protagonist. Therefore, the particular genre of literature was called as the messenger poem. The content dealt with the morality and misconduct of devadasi. The text flooded with the sexual elements and extreme metaphors. The sexual activity of the devadasi women was vividly portrayed in the poems. Usually, the content of the poem is uniform. According to the literary genre, the educated pious Brahmin was the protagonist of the

poems. In general, the protagonist had a quarrel with his family, especially with his wife, and then, he made pilgrimages. In the end of the travel, he was attracted by the performance of devadasi, and felt love on her. Later, he spent his entire earnings to her. After the economic drain, the family of devadasi, thrown out the protagonist from their house, but he refused to leave her. The annoyed protagonist complaint about the *dasi* in the village assembly, but his efforts were refused and mocked by the assembly. Subsequently, the protagonist started to criticize her, and met a local chieftain, who became a patron of him. Ultimately, he expressed his experience to the *virali* who could convince his wife and help him to reunite with his family.

Deivachchilaiyar *Virali Vitu Tutu*, Muvaraiyan *Virali Vitu Tutu*, Sethupathi *Virali Vitu Tutu*, Nannavur Sangamechuvaram Svami Vedhanayaki Amman peril *Virali Vitu Tutu* and Kulappa Nayakkan *Virali Vitu Tutu* are the works, which are going to discuss. Deivachchilaiyar *Virali Vitu Tutu* is the oldest *tutu* literature.²⁷⁷ Kumaraswami Avadani wrote the poem on Deivachchilaiyar of Krishnapuram near Tirunelveli. Tiruchchendur Nadalingappattan was the protagonist of the poem who lived with his wife and children. The family issues led him to pilgrim to Krishnapuram, Neiveli, Tiruvudaimaruthur, Brahmadesam, Papanasama and Punnaivanam. He watched the dance performance of Adhiruparattinam (devadasi of Rajasinga *mangalam*) on *Chithirai* festival in Punnaivanam temple. He desired her and vested his wealth on her. In mean time, he built a friendship with Gothandan of Manur who was already exhorting by a *dasi* Mohavalli, a sister of Adhiruparattinam. After some time, the mother and sister of Adhiruparattinam abandoned Nadalingappattan. He was confused and filed a complaint against her in the village assembly. The assembly refused the plea. The worried Nadalingappattan met Deivachchilaiyar of Krishnapuram, a chief of Tirunelveli province under Madurai Nayaka. The pleased chief gifted a huge amount. Later he met *virali* and asked to share his experience with his wife.²⁷⁸

The 17th century C.E. Muvaraiyan *Virali Vitu Tutu*²⁷⁹ of Mallaiyur Chirampalak Kavirayar belonged to the period of Tirumalai Nayaka. Chanthai nagar Vasudeva *maraiyon* was a protagonist and his wives were named Abhirami and Mohavalli. The quarrel between the wives made him to flee and wandered to Tirupathi, Kalahasthi,

Chidambaram, Tiruvarur, Tiruvaiyar, Tirupperunthurai, Kalaiyar *koyil*, Tiruppullani, Tiruppunalur, Rameshvaram, Kanyakumari and Srivilliputtur. The wandering Vasudevan met Indrani, the daughter of Kamakalavani of Srivilliputtur Vaishnava temple. He was curious to know about her. He was informed that the requirement of *dasi* was 700 to 800 *pon* (gold). It was interesting that the money was distributed to different categories such as 120 *pon* for a night to her, 10 *pon* for *suganthanal*, 10 *pon* for bed and 20 *pon* for brokerage. The admired Vasudevan agreed and spent his entire earnings. He praised her expertise in linguistic and dance skills.²⁸⁰ After a while, she deserted him. Afterward, he met a philanthropist named Virai Venkatanathan of Muvarain, who secured his life.

Another *Virali Vitu Tutu* named, Saravana Perumal Kavirayar's Sethupathi *Virali Vitu Tutu* detailed an experience of Avathani, a Brahmin who had a personal relationship with a *dasi* called Inbavalli.²⁸¹ According to *virali* literary genre, Avathani met *dasi* in the Uttirakosamankai festival that led the quarrel in the family. He made pilgrimages and reached Tirumarudhur. There, he encountered Mohanamuthu, a *dasi*.²⁸² Avathani compared her with a deer and her eyes with spear. Further, he mentioned that her physical beauty completely charmed him.²⁸³ After the separation, Avathani worried about her relationships, and noted that the money should be spent for charity works instead of satisfying her.²⁸⁴ He criticized her as worst among all *dasi*.²⁸⁵ Another *tutu*, Nannavur Sangamechuvaram Svami Vedhanayaki Amman *Peril Virali Vitu Tutu* mentioned the story of Sodatha Avathani of Tirupathi who married the daughter of Timma *pattar*. The unhappy Avathani led to Tiruvorriyur, Chidambaram, Tiruvanaikka, Madurai and Palani. There he met Kamarasakkulikai, daughter of Manamalai who danced in *Nrutta mandapam* of Palani temple. As usual, he lost everything and met Punaladi Sangamechurar for a gift.²⁸⁶ He worried that he gifted garlands, silks and pleasures to her, but in return, he received the disease alone.²⁸⁷

The 18th century C.E. Kulappa Nayakkan *Virali Vitu Tutu* of Supradeepak Kavirayar of Nilakottai dealt the life of Avathani of Srirangam. Punkavanam was his wife. He had an extra marital relationship with *dasi* of Chevvanthisar temple. It broke the family and he went away to Tiruvanaikka, Thenmadurai, Tirumaraikkadu, Muthukunram, Sivasamudram, Tirukkazhukunram, Avinasi, Chenkattankudi, Chidambaram,

Tirukkalathi, Kasi, Alvarthirunakari, Krishnapuram, Kurralam, Srivilliputtur, Tiruchuzhi, Tiruppuvanam and Cholaimalai. In Cholamai, an unknown saint warned the notorious activities of devadasi of Tiruvorriyur, and explained how the king Konthi lost his kingdom due to her. However, Avanthi did not listen the words of the saint and went to Minakshi temple of Madurai. There he met Madanapishekam, the daughter of Manikkamalai of Minakshi temple. Manikkamalai was not a dancer. She did the non-ritualistic performance in the temple, but her daughter became a notable temple dancer. The story revealed that the *dasi* used some medicine to mesmerized Avathani and later, he was thrown away from the house. The depressed Avathani encountered the Nilakottai Nagendra Bhoopathi and started working with him to earn wealth.²⁸⁸

All these minor literature carried similar details. The bard who lost was always from a Brahmin caste. They had a personal problem in their family life and left for pilgrims to various brahmanical temples in the Indian subcontinent. They admired with the beauty of *dasis* of any particular temple. The relative of *dasi*, especially her mother was powerful persona in the family. They lost their wealth to *dasis* and thrown away from the house of *dasis*. The depressed bards launched a complaint in the public assemblies. However, the assemblies rejected their plea. The unnoticed bards attended the procession of any local chief. Usually, the local chief might be a philanthropist and donated a sound resource to the bard. Then the bard met a messenger and request for his reunion with the family.

3.8. Conclusion

The establishment of the devadasi system was parallel with the temple organization. During the medieval period, devadasi system was well established in Tamilakam. The Kings, nobles, and the temple institutions were liberal to patronage the devadasi institution. In general, devadasis were recruited on voluntary and non-voluntary basis. The dedicated devadasi did ritualistic and non-ritualistic services in the temples as well as in the society. The devadasis were honored with several titles such as *manikkam* (ruby) and *thalaikkoli* (an expert in the dance performance), etc. The functions of devadasi in the sacred realm were classified as ritualistic and non-ritualistic. The ritualistic services were considered as dancing, performing *tirualatti* or *karpura alattai* (a mixture of turmeric, lime and camphor) and *tiruchulam* (the sacred trident). The non-ritualistic works included

carrying lamp, maintaining perpetual lamps, bringing water for worship, fanning idol, husking paddy, cleaning rice and kitchen vessels, washing clothes, decorating surroundings, etc. The historical remains exhibited the engagement of devadasi in the charitable activities.

The decline of the Chola emperor witnessed the degradation of devadasi system. The political instability of the later Pandiyas had worsened the condition of devadasi. Devadasi did not have any agency to communicate their problems and issues. However, the emergence of Vijayanagar revived the condition of devadasi. There was a strict code of conduct drafted and maintained by the state, caste and religious institutions. The dedicated women were punch marked as a sign of lifelong servitude. The branded devadasis were not allowed to do the outside services. The later medieval records such as travelogues, hagiographies and other literary sources detailed the mischievous lives of devadasi women in the public domain.

End Notes

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² *Annual Report of Indian Epigraphy (A.R.I.E.)* of 1935-36. No. 190.

³ It is in the present day Ramanathapuram district of modern Tamilnadu.

⁴ Pillai, K.K. *The Sucindram Temple*. Madras: Kalashetra Publications, 1953: 287-289.

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⁶ *A.R.I.E.* of 1919. No. 680.

⁷ The information was collected through an in-depth interview by the researcher from P.R. Thilakam at Thanjavur on March 15, 2011. The column of Sriram in *Sruti* magazine substantiated the details of the interview. (Sriram, V. "P.R. Thilagam: A Tiruvarur Kuravanji." *Sruti*. Issue. 255. (December, 2005): 25-39.)

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Pudukkottai State Inscription (P.S.I.)*. No. 152.

¹⁰ Mahalingam, T.V. *South Indian Polity*. Madras: University of Madras, 1955: 336.

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¹³ *P.S.I.* No, 814. p. 553.

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- ²⁴ A.R.I.E. of 1925. No. 411.
- ²⁵ A.R.I.E. of 1912. No. 147.
- ²⁶ A.R.I.E. 1929-30. No. 269.
- ²⁷ *South Indian Temple Inscription (S.I.T.I.)*. Vol. X. No. 249.
- ²⁸ S.I.I. Vol. XIX. No. 263.
- ²⁹ I.A. Vol. XLIII. 1914. p. 10.
- ³⁰ A.R.I.E. of 1916. No. 223.
- ³¹ A.R.I.E. of 1936-37. No. 49.
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- ³³ *Epigraphia Indica*. Vol. V. No. 17.
- ³⁴ T.A.S. Vol. I. p. 9.
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- ⁴³ Yasodadevi, V. "The History of the Andhra Country (1000 A.D. to 1500)." *Journal of the Andhra Historical Research Society* XXVI, Parts. 1-4. (July, 1960-April, 1961): 27.
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- ⁴⁵ A.R.I.E. of 1916. No. 564.
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- ⁴⁸ S.I.I. Vol. II. Part. 3. No. 66.
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- ¹²⁰ *A.R.I.E.* 1950-51. No. 363.
- ¹²¹ *S.I.I.* Vol. XIV. No. 128.
- ¹²² *S.I.I.* Vol. XIV. No. 128. The words *devaradiyar* and *kotti* may also be taken in the sense of dancing girls.
- ¹²³ *S.I.I.* Vol. XIV. No. 210.
- ¹²⁴ *S.I.I.* Vol. XII. No. 114.
- ¹²⁵ *A.R.I.E.* of 1912. No. 211.
- ¹²⁶ One *veli* of land is equal to 26,755 square meters.
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- ²²³ *S.I.T.I.* Vol. I. No. 525. p. 513.
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- ²²⁹ Sadasivan, K. 1993. *Op.cit.*, 48.
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- ²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 274.
- ²⁵² *Ibid.*, 242.
- ²⁵³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵⁴ *Malabarishes Heidenthum* was written in 1711 C.E. but published in 1926 C.E.
- ²⁵⁵ The document was written in 1711 C.E. but it was published in 1926 C.E.
- ²⁵⁶ Caland, W. *Ziegenbalg’s Malabarishes Heidenthum*. Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1926: 131-132.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 228-229.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 229.

²⁵⁹ Sadasivan, K. 1993. *Op.cit.*, 150.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 150-151.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ *Abithana Chintamani: Tamil Kalaikazhanjiyam (Abithana Chintamani: An Encyclopedia of Tamil Language)* (in Tamil). Comp. A. Singaravelu Mudaliyar and A. Sivaprakasa Mudaliyar. Chennai: Seethai Pathippakam, 1899 (Rpt. 2004): 260-261.

²⁶⁴ “*aarayum muththamil arruril somi azhakukandu; naaraa yanannedu maal aaki naan antha naan mukanum; orraa yirammadal oornthaanvil maaran uru alinthaan; per aana vaanavar konumkan aayiram perranane.*” (Kalamekam. *Thanippadal Thirattu*. Song no. 46.)

²⁶⁵ “*kooththaal vizhikal nedum koor velaam; kooththal than; muththaal vilikal muluneelam; - muththaal than; aaththaal vilikal aravintham; aaththaal than; aaththal vilikal irandu ambu.*” (Kalamekam. *Thanippadal Thirattu*. Song no. 48.)

²⁶⁶ “*murraatha kaanjiyinum mullaiyinum paalaiyinum; kaarraan pin chenra karunaimaal- perraan than; aalaip pathithaar alakathithi yatku ayanaar; velaip pathiththaar vizhi.*” (Kalamekam. *Thanippadal Thirattu*. Song no. 181.)

²⁶⁷ “*aintha thanankal irandumiru paakarkaai; vaainthaidai chekkuulakkai maaththirame- theinthakuzhal; mukkazhamchik kumpidikkum muthevi yaalkamalaik; kukkalichchik kumkalachchikku.*” (Kalamekam. *Thanippadal Thirattu*. Song no. 38.)

²⁶⁸ “*yemiraa ori enpaal enthundi vasthi enpaal; thaam iraach chonna ellaam thalaikadai therinthathu illai; pom irach choolum cholai poru kondaith thimmi kaiyil; naam irap patta padu naman kaiyil paduthane!*” (Kalamekam. *Thanippadal Thirattu*. Song no. 205.)

²⁶⁹ “*vaazhththu thirunaakai vaaku aana thevadiyaal; paazhththa kural eduththup paadinaal- nerruk; kazhuthaiketta vannaankan ten kanden enru; pazhuthai eduththu odivanthan paar.*” (Kalamekam. *Thanippadal Thirattu*. Song no. 40.)

²⁷⁰ *Thanippadal Thirattu* is the collection of the poems of 15th century C.E. poet called Kalamekam.

²⁷¹ “*kollukaiyaal neeril kulikkaiyaal mel erik; killukaiyaal kattik kidakkaiyaal-thellu pagalch; chennra varai venra thirumalairaa yan varaiyil; verrilaiyum vesai aame.*” (Kalamekam. *Thanippadal Thirattu*. Song no. 141.)

²⁷² “*paarath thalaivirikkum pannaadai melchurum; chora ilaneer chumanthirukkum- nere mel; eri irankave inpamaam thennaimaram; koorum kanikai enre kol.*” (Kalamekam. *Thanippadal Thirattu*. Song no. 140.)

²⁷³ “*kattith thaluvuvathalaal kaalsera eruthalaal; ettip pannadai iluththalaal- muttap poi; aasaivaai kallai arunthuthalaal appanaiyum; vesai enal aame virainthu.*” (Kalamekam. *Thanippadal Thirattu*. Song no. 139.)

²⁷⁴ “*ottam kadiyathaal ullavarai mevuthalaal; chettai evaridaththum seithalaal- naattamudan; kaaththiraththil kuttiyurak kattuthalaal thettuthalaal; koothiyarkku ner aam kuranku.*” (Kalamekam. *Thanippadal Thirattu*. Song no. 143.)

²⁷⁵ Sadasivan, K. 1993. *Op.cit.*, 151.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Nagasamy, R. “Introduction.” In *Muvaraiyan Virali Vitu Tutu*. Mithilaippattich Chitrampala Kavirayar. Chennai: Mahamahopaththiyaya Dr. U.Ve. Saminathaiyer Library, 1982: I.

²⁷⁸ Murugesan, C.S. *Varalaatril Devadasikal* (in Tamil). Chennai: Kurinji, 2009: 253-256.

²⁷⁹ *Muvaraiyan Virali Vitu Tutu*. Mithilaippattich Chitrampala Kavirayar. Chennai: Mahamahopaththiyaya Dr. U.Ve. Saminathaiyer Library, 1982.

²⁸⁰ “...senjchol; kalai ellam karruk kidanthal sankitha; nilaiellam saathiththuk ninral-thulaiyaap; paravitham aththanaiyum paarththal.” (*Ibid.*, xxv.)

²⁸¹ *Sethupathi Virali Vitu Tutu*. Sadhavathanam Saravanap Perumal Kavirayar. Karaikkudi: Ilakkiayap Pathippakam, 1947.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, v-vi.

²⁸³ “*makana mandapathil vanthunirkum nirkum pothu kanden!; mohanamuth thennum orumoikulazhai- ekanuthal; vilazhakum painthavizhi vel azhakum kaal azhakum; sol azhakum malaiitta thol azhakum- pal azhakum; kai azhakum marpazhakum kathazhakum mookkazhakum mei azhakum kandavudan meimaranthen.*” (*Ibid.*, ix.)

²⁸⁴ “*sandalikku itta thanaththaiyellam ippadi orr; mandapaththaik kattiththaan vaiththoma?.*” (*Ibid.*, xii.)

²⁸⁵ “*selvattak kannanunth thevadimai thettuvenil; Melvattap penkalukku mirinaal*”

“*thevadimai thettunil-thevadiyar sampaththiyaththil, mikach chirantha penkalaiyum minchinaal.*” (*Ibid.*, 24.)

²⁸⁶ *Nannavur Sangamechuvara Svami Vedhanayaki Amman peril virali vitu tutu*. Srirangam: SriVani Vilasa Achakam, 1969.

²⁸⁷ “*malai koduththen; soolai vankinen; pattu koduththen; (santhu santhaik) kattu vankinen; moham koduththen; moham vankinen.*” *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁸⁸ *Kulappa Nayakkan Virali Vitu Tutu*. n.d. Supradeepak Kavirayar. Karaikkudi: South India Press. Murugesan, C.S. 2009. *Varalaatril Devadasikal* (in Tamil). Chennai: Kurinji. pp. 273-288.

CHAPTER - IV

The Devadasi System: - The Colonial Tamilakam

This particular chapter discusses the changes in the devadasi institution during the colonial intervention in the course of the nation building. The process of colonization made a huge impact on the colonized countries. The period, 18th century C.E to early 20th century C.E. witnessed a rift between traditionalism and modernity. The European renaissance and industrial revolution resulted in colonial power establishing colonies around the world. The politically strong European culture encountered the traditional Indian subcontinent. The dominant ideologies of the colonial state and brahmanical social order discriminated and excluded the natives. The new social and economic changes questioned the existing social customs and practices of the local people. The introduction of the Christian missionaries criticized the superstitiousness of the brahmanical religion and practices. The monopoly of the colonial state resulted in the identity crisis among the colonized. The new market economy introduced new forms of production. It created a new power relationships. The newly emerged elites placed them in an important position in the colonial state.¹ The colonial modernity questioned the indigenous customs and social settings. It resulted a kind of thirst of historicity among the natives. The traditional Indians started to search their identities and it initiated the move of glorification of their ancient past. The orientalism provided a supportive base for it.

The institution of devadasi was not a discrete entity and it fused with the political economy of the society. The life of devadasi constantly shuttled according to the policies of state. The new social order questioned the place of women. The concepts such as morality, chastity, purity and sin became important denominators for the good women. This construction and reconstruction process questioned the existence of the devadasihood. The transition from the “sacred” to “secular” realm created a tension. The ritualistic roles of devadasi was overshadowed the performing abilities. Their artistic qualities turn out to be popular. The colonial administrators recorded the public performances as *nautch* (dance). Generally, the *nautch* was performed by courtesans and devadasis. In South India, devadasis occupied a prominent position in the *nautch*

performances. During the 19th century C.E., “the sacred” identity of devadasis was lost and their *nautch* became the devadasi phenomena. Their artistic qualities became an iconic identity for them. Edgar Thurston in his book *The Caste and Tribes in Southern India* mentioned that *dasis* or devadasis as dancing girls who attached to the Tamil temples and who subsisted by dancing and music.² During the colonial period, the condition of devadasi was becoming critical and they were treated as prostitutes.

4.1. Devadasi in the Maratha court

The fall of Vijayanagar led the emergence of the new regional powers that were established in the region of Madurai, Thanjavur and Chenji under Nayaka. During the reign of Nayaka, the boundaries between courtesans and temple women had become indistinguishable. It collapsed the homogenous identity of devadasihood.³ Devadasis were assigned to a new role as an artist who performed both at the temple and court. Usually these women were allowed to be a mistress, wife, or queen at the Nayaka court.⁴ The scattered and fragmentary references of the temple women, court dancers, and other public women only conjoined in the reign of Nayakas and following that the independent roles fully collapsed the identity of the devadasi.⁵ In 17th century C.E., Venkoji alias Ekoji I (1676 C.E.), the elder brother of Shivaji I initiated the Maratha power in Thanjavur. The Maratha invasion brought the political changes in South India especially in the fertile region of Cauveri. The pan Hindu ideas of Marathas continued the earlier practices.

The Thanjavur Maratha kings patronized music, dance and drama tradition. The Marathas were well trained in art and were instrumental in the evolution of the different kinds of art forms. The period witnessed the fusion of western musical instrument in the Indian musical tradition such as harp. Thanjavur was considered as a seat of music and fine arts like the dance and drama.⁶ There were several records of Marathas referred the performance of *natyam* (dance) as *abinayam*, *adal*, *nadagam*, *natyam*, *baratham*, *sadhir* and *kelikkai*.⁷ The temple dancers started to perform in the royal court, especially in the court of Serfoji II (1798 C.E.-1832 C.E.).⁸ During the Maratha period, the dance of devadasi used to be called as *sadhir-attam* instead of *dasi-attam*. The Marathi word

sadhar meant durbar (court). The dance which performed in the *sadhar* called *sadhar-attam* and later it became *sadhir-attam*.⁹ The dance performances were held in dance auditorium in the palace, drama house, stages in temples, open auditorium, *sadhar* building in music *mahal*, *nattuvan chavadi* and stages of *kuravanchi*.¹⁰ These dance performances were denoted as *sadhir* or *kelikkai* (enjoyment).¹¹ Hari Krishnan mentioned that the systemized and organized dance performance of devadasi dance forms was *sadhir kacheri*.¹² The *sadhir* and *kacheri* were held in the palace auditoriums, drama houses, stages in temples, open auditoriums, *sadhir* building, *nattuvan chavadi* and music *mahal*.

There is a lot of evidence showing that the devadasi's performed in the palace. The official record detailed the participation of the devadasi in the *sadhir* and *kelikkai* (entertainment) performances in the palaces.¹³ Usually the dance performance of *dasis* occurred in *pournami* (full moon) days in the palace. The Modi records mentioned the performance of dancing girls in the royal court on *pournami*.¹⁴ Devadasi regularly performed in the palace of Amarasimmar in Tiruvidaimarudur.¹⁵ Usually, the songs of Sahaji II, the Maratha king were performed with musical notes by dancers in the palace. The *Pancha Ratnap Pirabandam* and *Thyagaraja Vinotha Chitrap Pirabandam* mentioned about dance performance of the devadasis in front of lord Siva.¹⁶ Maratha court poets such as Vasudevakavi, Ramabharathy, Kirirajakavi and Sethraiyyar composed songs in different languages in Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit for the dance performance.¹⁷ In 1801 C.E., devadasis Periya and Unnamalai did their performance in the Maratha court.¹⁸ The Modi record stated the performance of dancing girls in the royal court and for that they received 23 *cakrams* and five *panams*.¹⁹ At the requisition made by ten dancing girls of the Venugopalasvami temple, 25 *cakrams* were given to these *dasis* and the two dancing girls who had performed in the court on *pournami* were given five *cakrams*.²⁰

During the Maratha period devadasis public appearance became visible. They performed *sadhir* on special occasions in temple, palace and other public places. The programs were regularly held during the festivals such as *Vinayakar sadhurthi*, *navrathiri*, *Saraswathi*

puja and *dipawali* and other special occasions like government functions and marriage. According to Modi document, the *sadhir* performance on the Navarathiri festival was refereed as *navarathiri sadhir*.²¹ Tiruvudaimarudur Nondi Nadakam of Ananda Bharathi Iyengar (1786 C.E.-1864 C.E.) referred the public appearance of the temple dancers and their different dance forms. The work detailed the temple dancers and their different *padas* (dance forms). It stated that the performance of the temple girls in the Tiruvudaimarudur *pusam* festival.²² On Saraswathi *puja*, a special performance was done by *dasis* of Pancanada temple of Tiruvaiyar and the *melakkarars* were given *inam* of 5 *cakrams*.²³ In 1797 C.E., during the festival of Kaman²⁴, several artists were invited from Tiruvaiyar, Tiruvarur, Kumbeshvara temple of Kumbakonam. They performed *sarangapani* and *lavani*.²⁵ Devadasis and *melakkarars* of Panchadiswara Swamy temple of Tiruvaiyar were getting five *chakras* as *inam* for their temple service²⁶ and another record stated that the temple of Tiruvaiyar had eighty temple dancing girls.²⁷ The official records mention that the marriage engagement of Tulaja II 4618 *chakra* money was spent²⁸ and *sadhir* and *kelikkai* dance performances were held in a palace.²⁹

Marathas systematized the devadasi system. Tulaja II brought Mahadeva Annavi, a prominent *nattuvanar* from Tirunelveli and Subbaraya *odhuvar*³⁰ to Thanjavur to strengthen the art of dance. Tulaja II gifted a big house in upper-street and 10 *veli* land to Mahadeva Annavi.³¹ Subbaraya *odhuvar*, another *nattuvanar* also got a palace from Tulaja II.³² In modern days this place is popularly identified as *Nattuvachavadi*.³³ In the marriage of Rajashabayi (the daughter of Shivaji II), the Maratha king ordered that all the devadasis in the kingdom had to learn Hindustani and Carnatic dance. The Thanjavur Quartet³⁴ received an order and taught dance to all devadasis in the Maratha territory.³⁵ The dancing master or teacher received fifty to five hundred rupees with other presents for teaching a girl the usual dances. This generally form a contract which was greatly dependent on the wealth and position of the parties.³⁶

The devadasis continued to have a predominant position in the medieval society. The 17th and 18th century C.E. historical evidences highlighted the slip up in the position of the devadasi from the earlier state. During the 17th and 18th century C.E. period devadasis

were identified for their performing abilities. Interestingly, the Maratha documents did not carry the word ‘devadasi’.³⁷ But the existence and engagement of devadasi was there. It was explicable through the documents which characterized the performance of women, their matrilineal identification and the association with a particular temple. A record mentioned that the five daughters of *dasi* Ramamani were given five *panams* and two *kalams* paddy each for every month by the court who in turn was dedicated to Chidambaram temple by the palace authorities.³⁸ The record clearly stated that matrilineal claim and connection with a particular temple. According to Maratha documents and literature, Muthumangai, Muthupalani, Kaveri daughter Periya, Unnamalai, Chinnikkutty daughter Chellakkutty, Varalakshmi daughter Ramamani, Krishnaji daughter Nagarathnam, Kaveri daughter Krishna and Chandrap Piraba were the few dasis who performed in the Maratha palace.³⁹

Muthupalani (1739 C.E.-1790 C.E.) was a prominent devadasi of the Maratha period. She was born in Thanjavur as a granddaughter of Thanjanayaki and daughter of Muthyalu. She was named after Lord Murukan of Palani temple. She was associated with the court of Pratapa Singh (1739 C.E.-1763 C.E.). Later she became a concubine of Pratapa Singh. The versatile Muthupalani was expert in Tamil, Sanskrit and Telugu. The semi-autobiographical poems *Radhika Santwanam* (Appeasing Radhika) revealed her ancestral lineages and her literary genius. The work used a different literary style called *saptapadam* which carried seven lines in a verse.⁴⁰ Her erotic poetry articulated the perspective of the courtesan’s love and hinted the condition of the devadasi of the 18th century C.E.⁴¹ Bangalore Nagarathnam praised the work saying that it was filled with the elements of *shringara rasa* (erotic essence) which was written by a woman one who was born from the devadasi community.⁴² The work highlighted the high status of the devadasi and also suggested that their intense knowledge in the fields of dance, music and literature.

4.1.1. The devadasi and the code of conduct

The Maratha court enforced a rigorous code of conduct for devadasi and the code severely punished the violators.⁴³ Usually, devadasi had to get an approval from the temple authority and government officials.⁴⁴ A temple street dancer from Kottai Ellaiyamman had a daughter named Krishna. She wanted to become devadasi but the temple authorities refused to admit her for more than two years. According to the source, she appealed to the king and pleaded for jobs at least in any other government departments for her livelihood.⁴⁵ In general, the girls were dedicated before their puberty.⁴⁶ The Maratha royal court and temple institutions purchased girls for temple service. The royal household purchased *dasi* Ramamani with five persons for the Chidambaram temple. They were allowed to get five *panam* and two *kalam* of paddy per month.⁴⁷ In 1819 C.E., Muthambalpuram Kasivisvanathasvami temple *dasi* Heera registered for usual ceremony called *pottu kattu*.⁴⁸ Few girls got some amount from the temple and they received monthly salary as well.⁴⁹ The particular temple devadasis were allowed to render their services to other temples.⁵⁰ Kamatchi Amman temple devadasi Kulivai (age twelve) and Kambalayam (age ten) were transferred to the Rajarajesvara temple of Thanjavur.⁵¹ The dancers were prevented to use palanquin except with prior permission from the court with royal order and seal. In general, there was a provision for the use of the palanquin only on two occasions such an occasion of the maiden performance and the case of illness. Devadasi Angu's daughter Nagu was asked to pay a fine of one *cakrams* and 2 panams as her bullock cart happened to cross the British resident's vehicle who had come to see the river in floods.⁵²

In general, these women were distinguished from other women of their contemporary period and were respected for their learning and other accomplishments.⁵³ The Marathas made many rules and restrictions to control the sexuality of the devadasi. The records of the years 1820 C.E., 1846 C.E. and 1847 C.E. mentioned those rules and restrictions under the titles of *The Duties of the Dancers and Nattuvanars* and *Dress and Jewels which were restricted to the Dancers*.⁵⁴ These rules were strictly imposed on devadasi and *nattuvanar*. It distinguished devadasi from the other women. Devadasi should wake

up at dawn and complete her bath and offer daily prayers. They were to perform a new peculiar service such as *kumbarati*, which was not evident from the earlier periods. Saskia Kersenboom-Story noted that the devadasis of Thanjavur court performed three significant functions such as accompanying king's processions, performing *kumbarati* and generated an auspicious atmosphere at the court by the performance of their song and dance.⁵⁵ Abbe Dubois noted that devadasi strictly performed the *arati* over idols in the morning and night, which avert the fatal influence of the looks and glances of evil minded persons.⁵⁶

The God and king must be the theme of their dance performance. During the procession, devadasis were accompanied by *Miruthangam*, *Vina*, *Sarangi* and *Talam*. There was a kind of dress code that was followed. During *puja*, devadasis were permitted to wear shirt, sarees and *vijar* (*pyjama* kind of dresses). They were instructed to wear sarees with *sali* (kind of shawl). They were not allowed the embroidered blouses which were attached to the golden and *mahathabi* (silk) border. They were not allowed to use stitched grand tape (borders of saree, blouse, etc.) and *doomal* (handkerchief). Though they were allowed to use *dupatta*, but the color should not be in white. The musicians who accompanied the procession were ordered to wear *muntasu* (a cloth which tied around forehead by men), shirts for their upper body, *nijar* for their waist and *dupatta* for their hip.⁵⁷

Devadasi were restricted to put lengthy *kumkum* and *abir* on their forehead. They could not use the decorated silky ribbon for their hair decoration instead of that they were allowed to use golden ribbon. They must strictly avoid *salangai* (anklet), which was made out of pearl. They were restricted to use the *punki*, a musical instrument. They were instructed to use only *sisapani jarigai* (ornament) on their head but not the *nagathi jalar* (golden ornament for head). In some occasions they were allowed to use *nagathi jalar* but strictly prohibited to use flowers on the occasions. They were permitted to use *kumkum*, golden ornaments and anklets during the processions only. Lemon was not kept for *pandi* (arrangement during the feasts).⁵⁸

In spite of many restrictions, few devadasis, because of their personal relations had privileged position and enjoyed few concessions. The *Modi* records mentioned Sundari, a chief devadasi was one among them who was relieved of the restrictions which are mentioned earlier. She was a favorite of Serfoji II and she had a privilege to perform the first dance in the court during the celebration of four festivals of Gudyaca Padva, Navrathiri, Diwali and Sankranti. She received 15 rupees for every dance and 20 rupees on *Vijayadasami* festival along with a shawl. She was allowed to use palanquin.⁵⁹

4.2. The *nautch* performances

In general, the devolution of royal cosmologies to lower levels of political organization in South India occurred in the 18th century C.E. The doctrine of lapses ended the independent rule of Marathas in Thanjavur to British in 1856 C.E. The newly emerged political power settled in the entire region. The traditional pre-colonial governance was a complex one. The colonial officials had settled their power over the already functioning networks of the state and authority. The arrival of British and their impact was felt on the temple institutions. Historically, the administration of the temple was state managed. The traditional kingship was much depended on the religious institution to retain its power structure. The colonizers understood the irrelevance of the temple patronage to sustain their imperial power over the natives. So they withdrew its support from the temple.

The withdrawal of patronage created a kind of vacuum. The Brahmin priests and other temple servants had to seek their new patrons. K.N. Panikkar pointed out the changing pattern of patronage structure in the 18th century C.E.⁶⁰ The transformation of society required a new system of patronage. In the meantime, the introduction of the *zamindari* and *ryotwari* systems resulted in the creation of the new political lobby, who were frequently known as new elites in South Indian society. The traditional local chieftains were replaced by the new elites such as *zamindars*, *dubashis*⁶¹ and etc... The new elites functioned as mediator between the local and colonial administrators. Gradually, they became powerful. Susan Neild-Basu detailed the influence of *dubashis* in Madras and addressed Madras as a city of *dubashis*.⁶² The newly emerged new elites became new patrons to the powerful religious institutions. Interestingly, these new elites came from a

different social background. Daveshe Soneji mentioned that the Vellalar *dubashis* and other native elites such as *Smarta* Brahmins, Mudaliyars, Nayudus, and Chettiyars sponsored the performances of vocal music and poetry in their homes at the times of calendric festivals.⁶³

The temples and other religious institutions came under the power of the local elites such as little kings, *zamindars*, *dubashis*, wealthy Brahmins and merchants. The local landlords started to patronize it by virtue of their socio-economic power. These patrons controlled and influenced devadasihood. It valued the character of the devadasi. The auspiciousness symbols of devadasi had become an important part of the ritual celebrations of non-royal elites.⁶⁴ In general, the 'Hindu' scriptures acknowledged the personal relationship of devadasi women with the worldly men. According to the 'Hindu' notion, any person or thing relating to a deity or temple is sacred, pure and incapable of polluting others. Usually devadasi shared the domain of divinity in the living world. The body of devadasi was considered as 'pure'. The nobles believed that the association with that 'sacred body' was also sacred. There was no pollution in it. The powerful patriarch such as kings, little kings, *zamindars*, *dubashis*, wealthy Brahmins and merchants would like to become a patron of devadasi and desired to share the 'sacred body'.

The decline of temple economy led devadasi to lose temple patronage. Devadasi started to face the economic hardship and underwent through difficult circumstances. Largely it led them in engaging concubinage and prostitution to support their basic needs. Gradually, the activities of devadasi shifted from sacred to profane sphere. The sexual activities of devadasi were highlighted rather than their earlier ritual services. The most of the devadasis became an unskilled performer.⁶⁵ The temple staffs sent the daughters of devadasi to the palace after the vacancies filled in the temple.⁶⁶ Devadasi became the de facto concubines of the new elites. John Shortt, the Superintendent of Vaccination in the Madras Presidency mentioned that the devadasi were permitted to prostitute to any individual of an equal or superior caste to themselves and they lived as professional concubinage.⁶⁷ Frederique Apffel Marglin mentioned that originally the devadasis were

chaste and associated with the temple only and not with the court. The later association with the court brought the custom of concubinage.⁶⁸ The disassociation from the ritual temples and association towards the worldly court would make them to depend on the new elites who were not necessarily patron of art would keep them as concubines. The Modern Rationalist weekly highlighted that the devadasis became an illegal life partner of the local elites who maintained their expenses by keeping them as their concubines.⁶⁹ Pamela G. Price mentioned the concubinage of devadasis in the royal court of Ramanathapuram.⁷⁰ The devadasis Ramamani and Kunjara were the concubines of the king of Ramanathapuram.⁷¹ A *zamindar* in the North Arcot district maintained a large establishment of devadasi or pagoda (temple) dancers of Kalahasti temple who exclusively lived in concubinage. Their sons, who know no father, pass by the appellation of Nagari kunraradas, or sons of the country, and are slaves to the *zamindar*.⁷²

The local elites funded and hosted professional performances of music and dance in the profane space. An account of the 18th century C.E. Sanskrit work *Sarvadevavilasa* (sport of all divinities)⁷³ described the meeting of the patrons and scholars in the garden of Kalingaraya which was situated near Tiruvallikeni in modern Chennai. It stated that the patrons were the part of the management of the temples in Madras. The patrons came from social settings such as Brahmin and Mudaliar.⁷⁴ The devadasi one who associated with the particular religious institution came under the hold for the patrons. Venkatadri or Venkatachalam, the *dharmakarta* (temple trustee) of the Tirunirmalai temple rebuilt the temple tower and car.⁷⁵ Devadasi became increasingly dependent.

Usually, devadasis participated in most of the palace ceremony such as coronation and festivals. But in the changed historical context, devadasis were made to dance in the private parties other than the ritualistic services which were regularly conducted in the temples and royal houses. During the colonial period, the private dance performance was called as *nautch* or *nautch* parties. So the dance performance of devadasi was also identified with that popular term *nautch*. John Shortt detailed in his account that the performance of dancing girls was well known and it was addressed as *nautch* or dance.⁷⁶

In general, the term *nautch* was a North Indian which was derived from Sanskrit word *natya* and it became a generic word for any dance.⁷⁷

The dance performance of the traditional dancers was considered as a high honor to the guests. The service of devadasi was demanded outside the temple and huge amount was remunerated.⁷⁸ They travelled to different places to perform which was peculiar from the earlier custom of devadasihood. Here, the service was rendered to petty kings, *zamindars* and *dubashis* rather than the deities of the temple. Usually, devadasis were contracted for many days to perform in profane and the pleased masters were gifted with the valuables such as money, shawls, and other gold ornaments.⁷⁹ Arumuka Navalar (1822 C.E.-1879 C.E.), a Tamil scholar from Ilankai (modern Srilanka) referred the association of *nautch* with the kingdom of Ramanathapuram who had the practice of hiring devadasi to dance at major occasions.⁸⁰ Similarly the *Madurai Mail* referred the *nautch* performance of the devadasi in the Ramanathapuram palace.⁸¹

The *nautch* was performed in all the occasions of marriage, feast, and other public occasions. John Shortt noted that the *nautch* was a daily routine of little kings, *zamindars* and other new elites.⁸² The expensive *nautch* performance was mostly held in either private houses or public assemblies.⁸³ John Shortt mentioned that the performance of the temple girls on the marriage occasions.⁸⁴ Ramachandram also referred the people's engagement with devadasi during the performing occasions such as festivals and marriages.⁸⁵ Ramachendrier, assistant collector of Tiruchirappalli mentioned that no marriage of a Hindu family of some position passes without the presence of dancing girls for four days.⁸⁶ E. Krishna Iyer, the Secretary of Music Academy of Madras explained his experience that the rich families in Tirunelveli were conducted a number of marriage functions in every summer. In those grandeur marriages were celebrated over four days and the wedding would not complete without music and dance performances. The *sadhir* performance was done by famous devadasi such as Muthurathnam Ammal.⁸⁷

Often the dancing girls were also patronized by the Europeans. Throughout 19th century C.E., the *nautch* performance was provided to English officials and elites.⁸⁸ After the settlement, British conceived India as their second home. They found themselves pitch

forked overnight into unfamiliar and uncongenial surroundings. Biswanath Joardar pointed out that the separation from their kinsfolk of the British was racked and the dance performance of the native dancing girls provided a kind of entertainment. The *sahibs* and *memsahibs* were entertained to the *nautch* performance.⁸⁹ James Cordiner mentioned in his travel record that in the 1794 C.E. the arrangement of the *nautch* programs was a custom of the ladies and gentlemen for their friends who had visited their places.⁹⁰ Usually, Europeans compared the *nautch* performance with the European ballet.⁹¹ Their taste towards the *nautch* was spectacle. Hunter in his journal highlighted the English presence in the *nautch* parties and used the word ‘extraordinary’ to note the performance of the dancing girls.⁹² William Tennant pointed out the attendance of the *nautch* party was treated as a matter of courtesy.⁹³ From 1880 C.E. onwards Europeans in India, especially the higher officials such as Viceroys, Governors, Collectors, District Magistrates and other law enforcing echelons used to attend the *nautch* parties.⁹⁴ The *nautch* performances were organized to honor the visit of the Prince of Wales (1875 C.E.) and his son, Prince Albert Victor (1890 C.E.) to British India.⁹⁵

In general, the local elites, wealthy merchants and other eminent persons conducted the *nautch* parties. The *dharmakartas* in the temple regularly conducted *nautch* performance in the temple and invited high officials and friends for the occasions. *Sarvadevavilasa*, the Sanskrit work elucidated the relationship of *dharmakartas* and devadasi in the 19th century C.E.⁹⁶ Devanayaka, a Sanskrit scholar was invited by the *dharmakarta* of the Agastisvara temple in Nunkambakkam for the temple festival. A *dharmakarta* of the Krishnan *koyil* in Coral Merchant Street was holding a performance on Sunday.⁹⁷ Vedachalam a merchant and *dharmakarta* in Madras invited his friends Kalingaraya, Sriranga and Devanayaka for the festival and the public performance of courtesans.⁹⁸ The work mentions three courtesans Narayani of Kumbakonam, Manga of Thanjavur, and Minakshi of Salem who were renowned for their music and dance.⁹⁹ The document mentioned that Minakshi migrated to Madras to teach music to the daughters of *Pattanam* Subrahmanya Ayyar. These *dasis* were moved from their home town to Choolai, the place in modern Chennai. The patron, Vedachalam asked them to compose a *varna* (musical note) in Sanskrit and *kirtana* (psalmist) in Telugu on the god of

Chidambaresvara and Agastisvara. The record highlighted the performance of an unknown Nachchiyar in the party of Venkatachalam. The work further documented the meeting of musicians and courtesans in the garden of Kalingaraya. The patrons such as Chinnaiah Mudaliar of Manali (patron of the Dikshitar's family) and Sundaresa or Sundara Mudaliar of Kovur (patron of Vina Kuppier) were also engaged in the gathering.¹⁰⁰

4.3. Devadasi system and the colonial state

The following section is going to discuss about the various issues related to the institution of devadasi under the direct control British rule. The 19th century C.E. India was in the process of transformation in all spheres. The European Renaissance and industrial revolution widened the colonial power over its colonies. The politically strong European culture had encountered with Indian intelligentsia. The rapid growth of Christian missionaries highlighted the superstitious of the brahmanical religion and the colonial modernity questioned the existing Indian system. The orientalist substantiated the colonial conditioning. The new Indian society was looking for its glorious past. These changes influenced indigenous people to search their new purified social identities and also it encountered the problem of glorification of their past. The newly 'enlightened' Indian intelligentsia critiqued superstitiousness in the brahmanical religion. The reformers engaged in the abolition of sati, child marriage, purdah system, etc... The reformers did not question the religion but they worked for its revival. In general, these reforms did not happen in the lower level and also it did not question the widely existed practices such as caste. With reading women, freedom, education and single or unmarried life was completely denied to 'good' women in the country.¹⁰¹ In the meantime, British authenticated the native practices and legalized some of the Indian believes. The brahmanical rituals became a Hindu code of conduct and it universalized to all natives.

4.3.1. The question of morality

Though the British were interested in attending the *nautch* parties, missionaries and few other colonial officials regularly voiced their opinion against the *nautch* performance and participating in it. They believed *nautch* and devadasi system were symbol of degradedness. The attending or witnessing *nautch* was considered as stigma. Kimiko Ohtani, the art historian revealed the degradation of the standard dance performances and the expectation of the audiences transferred to view the beauty of dancers rather their performance.¹⁰² P.N. Appusvami expressed his hesitation to watch the dance performance of devadasi because of their vulgar gestures.¹⁰³ Sarada, a noted dancer recollected her childhood memory about the restriction to see the dance performance. But she used to hide and watch the performance behind a pillar when she visited temples.¹⁰⁴ Parthasarathy was also opinionated devadasi dance as ‘vulgar and indecent’.¹⁰⁵

In 19th century C.E., there was a series of problems in the engagement with tradition and modernity. The period witnessed the displacement of rural sector leading towards a miserable life for the lower strata of the society.¹⁰⁶ Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid mentioned that the colonial intervention in the agrarian economy generally intensified the oppression of the majority of rural women.¹⁰⁷ Janaki Nair noted that the transformation of the colonial economy produced series of realignments in the nature of family and in gender relations.¹⁰⁸ At the end of the 19th century C.E., the process of the nation building played a key role in the construction of the Indian culture and Indian womanhood. The colonial modernity as much as the traditions it supplanted or incorporated, continued to be the bearer of patriarchal ideologies.¹⁰⁹ The evolution of the national consciousness was very relevant in the transformation of the devadasi tradition.

The Indian intelligentsia, especially middle class started to acquire the Victorian morals and ethics, especially after 1858.¹¹⁰ K.N. Panikkar illustrated that the familiarity with European history, institutions and languages and the concomitant influence of the European ideas of liberty, rationalism and humanism made Indians critical of their own institutions and consequently led them to reform.¹¹¹ The Indian intelligentsia thirsted on their historical antiquity and retrieved their past. It became an important agenda of the

anticolonial project. It provoked a kind of cultural superiority and then they started to criticize the superstitious elements in the society. The historical consciousness was being reshaped to construct their 'superior' culture. Women became a part of the reformist agenda. The women's question became important. The reformers voiced their concerns on *sati*, child marriage and widow remarriage. The characters such as coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense and sexual immorality were questioned and simultaneously the national consciousness developed the notions of womanly virtues as chastity, self-sacrifice, submission, devotion, kindness, patience and the labors of love. Partha Chatterjee mentioned that the entire phase of the national struggle was to protect, preserve and strengthen the national culture.¹¹² The 'national' morality was constructed on a woman's body. These ideas led into the image of submissive women, service-minded wife and glorified mother.¹¹³ Ramachendrier mentioned that freedom, education and single or unmarried life had been denied to any family or caste women in this country.¹¹⁴ They are kept in utter ignorance of the art of singing and dancing, as it was believed erroneously that most of those who sing lead necessarily a loose life.¹¹⁵

The entire arguments of the reformers were placed on the core of the revival of the Hindu tradition otherwise super ego of their indigenous culture. They voiced for social purity rather than liberation and empowerment of human being, particularly on the issues of women. Usually these reformers did not interrogate with the fundamental attitudes of religion. They wanted to hold the caste Hindu social order. Lata Mani established argued that the activity of the early colonial reformers had been just an attempt of reformulating Indian tradition, specifically Hinduism.¹¹⁶ The tradition was reconstituted under colonial rule. Sumit Sarkar also questioned the inception of the colonial modernity.¹¹⁷ Lata Mani stated that women and brahmanical scripture became interlocking grounds for the colonial articulation.¹¹⁸ The concept of Aryan women occupied the centre stage in the recounting of the past. Uma Chakravarti said that the amalgamation of the Brahman and Kshatriya and Aryan values was an ideology for the reconstruction of a new identity for Indian womanhood.¹¹⁹ Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid mentioned that the early constellation of the Aryan women was an elitist concept in class and caste.

The Vedic model became a popular consciousness and organized reform.¹²⁰ The 19th century C.E. reformers portrayed women as *pativrata* (chaste woman).¹²¹ An idea of temperance, social purity, an ascetic like tendency of self-denial, vegetarianism and sexual abnegation were invoked to create the modern Hindu women.¹²² Their primary issue was on to retain the ‘purity’ of their culture.

Partha Chatterjee in his article, the *Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question* discussed the concept of the domain of culture as ‘material’ and ‘spiritual’ sphere.¹²³ The dichotomy between outer and inner, home and world, spiritual and material, feminine and masculine was the basic argument. The material domain lied outside and spiritual was inner. The new patriarchal institution placed men in the outer domain which meant material and the female was in the spiritual inner world. The inner otherwise home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture and women were instructed to take the main responsibility of protecting and nurturing quality of it. The external conditions of life for women must not lose their essentially spirituality.¹²⁴

The Hindu womanhood was constructed through the Orientalist scholarship of the Indian past.¹²⁵ It was this very blend of eroticism and devotional worship that shocked the missionaries.¹²⁶ India’s temple dancers and singers have a long history in European travel literature.¹²⁷ Marco Polo was the first European to provide a lengthy account of India’s temple dancers.¹²⁸ He mentioned the dedication of the young girls in the temples of Malabar.¹²⁹ Jan Huyghen van Linschoten mentioned that the existence of the practices such as sati (in Goa) and Balliadera. In Portuguese language, Bailadeira meant *Nautch* girls or dancing girls.¹³⁰

The reformers articulated a notion of ‘true’ womanhood and restricted women within the family. The female sexuality was controlled and marriage became essentialized. The subsuming of all Indian womanhood to the idealized Indian middle class women translated in legal terms into instituting a brahmanical patriarchal family from with its reproductive sexual economy at the centre.¹³¹ The colonial discourse on Indian womanhood identified devadasi as aberrations, archipelagos of un-Hindu practices.¹³² The placing devadasi was a big question. In general devadasi were educated, independent

and shared the public space in the patriarchal structure. The non-conjugal sexuality of devadasi became problematic. These changes constructed the devadasi as a prostitute.

A section of reformers believed that the degradation of the society was mainly caused by devadasi women. Their arguments were more on safeguarding the purity of Hindu religion and accused devadasi as a cause for the institutional failure of Hindu religion. In general, they shared the view of the fundamentalist principle of Hindu orthodoxy. They concerned for the 'pure' religious sphere which the body of devadasi would be polluted the sacred sphere of the Hindu religion. Yande mentioned that the attainment of salvation of the soul or emancipation from the worldly misery requires man to be pure in word, thought and deed.¹³³ Yande stressed the importance of social and moral purity of the Hindu Pantheon.¹³⁴ R.B. Sarma, the author of *Pottukkattum Vazhakkam Ikkalaththirkup Poruthuma?* (Is the *pottu* ceremony relevant for this Age?), stated that the Hindu religious custom was not responsible for the illegal activities of temple women and the abolition of the *pottu* ceremony would purify the human society and help the South Indian woman for empowerment.¹³⁵ Ramachandram in his monograph *The Devadasi* noted that these women of ill fame were ruining the country with their shameless trade.¹³⁶ Further, he opined that the system was created a lot of negativity.¹³⁷

In 1927 C.E., M.K. Gandhi visited South India and Srilanka. During the visit, he engaged in series of conversation with devadasi and addressed the issues of devadasi in the public and private gatherings in Mayavaram, Chidambaram, Madras, Trichur, Ernakulam, Coimbatore and Yalpanam (modern Jaffna, Srilanka). He was grieved to hear about devadasi and asked society to help them to reconstruct their lives.¹³⁸ In Ernakulam, Gandhi cleared that there was no credit in the institution of devadasi and warned the society that the existence of devadasi would disgrace every young man.¹³⁹ He warned the people calling them as devadasi would insult God under the sacred name of religion.¹⁴⁰ He further mentioned that the institution of devadasi was shameful¹⁴¹ and their occupation would be immoral¹⁴² and inhuman¹⁴³. He advised people to get rid of the disgraceful and immoral institution.¹⁴⁴ Thiru.Vi. Kalyanasundaram was a social reformer, who was popularly known as Thiru.Vi.Ka. presided many conferences which

were related to devadasi and voiced for their resurrection. He noted that they could not accept the degraded tradition of devadasi which was practiced in the name of Hindu religion.¹⁴⁵ He was concerned about that the cultural epicenter such as temples which were known for its immoral activities and he specified that the main functions of devadasi was selling their body.¹⁴⁶

The Naik-Maratha Mandal reported that devadasis invariably carried the most nefarious trade of prostitution.¹⁴⁷ Sarma questioned the misconduct of devadasi as a prostitute. Further, he highlighted that devadasi system was the cultivating ground for the young prostitute.¹⁴⁸ Kalyanasundaram criticized the temple institutions in India were the place of production of devadasis.¹⁴⁹ He further stated that the duty of devadasi caste was prostitution, but the prostitution was not only restricted to *patiyilar* community.¹⁵⁰ Ramachandram pointed out that the system of devadasi was nothing but prostitution and attached to the temple.¹⁵¹ The dedicated women had to closely associate with a priest and secretary of the temples. Their relationship led them into an immoral life. In modern times, the term servant of the Gods now denoted as a prostitute and prostitution.¹⁵² It mentioned that this custom of dedication of girls to the gods had been responsible for bringing into existence and perpetuating these castes of hereditary prostitutes.¹⁵³ Gandhi worried about the temple being a brothel house. In a public meeting at Karaikkudi, Gandhi quoted

“...not every structure made of brick and mortar labeled temple is necessarily a temple. There are, I am sorry to say, many temples in our midst of this country which are no better than brothels.”¹⁵⁴

4.3.2. Purification of the Hindu religion

Usually, reformers endorsed Hindu religion and acknowledged the ancient glory of the temple women. They considered the devadasi custom would pollute the Hindu religious order. Parthasarathy pointed out that the dancers were appealed to the baser instincts of men and brought disrepute to the Hindu society.¹⁵⁵ In Madras, Gandhi stressed the purification of Hindu religion and asked people to remove the custom of devadasi.¹⁵⁶ He

marked devadasi as persons who transferred temples into brothels.¹⁵⁷ Ramachandram stated that the devadasi women who once lived an ascetic life, whom generally prayed and danced with deep devotion to God and their mind too centred on God alone. But now these women devotees were in out of temples and most of them survived a debauchery and it rendered the abominable situation of the temple institution.¹⁵⁸ Further, he quoted

“Alas! Our houses of prayer and worship have been perverted into dens of debauchery and vice and our holy shrines are a nursery of men and children of shame.”¹⁵⁹

Sarma expressed a similar ideas. He stated that once devadasi were *rudraganikai* whom practiced the strict moral conduct and well received by the devotees due to their asceticism.¹⁶⁰ But the loss of their asceticism led devotees to disrespect the community.¹⁶¹ Sarma suggested that the system could be retained when the dedicated women became pious like the ancient one.¹⁶² Kalyanasundaram noted that there were many myths and histories existed with regarding the origin of the custom. The myths revealed that the women were dedicated from each family to the particular deity for the temple service and those women believed, god as their husband and led a mendicant life. But later, these women led indisciplined life.¹⁶³ Kalyanasundaram considered that few devadasis had a relationship with many men because of their sexual pleasure rather than monetary benefits.¹⁶⁴ According to him, men and wealth were the prime causes of the existence of the devadasi custom.¹⁶⁵

Yande stated that the holiness of the life was the prime condition and un-chastity and voluptuousness were reckoned as extreme sin.¹⁶⁶ He further recommended that those who indulged in them were threatened with all sorts of terrible punishment in a future existence.¹⁶⁷ In the Women’s Meeting at Coimbatore, Gandhi expressed his idea of the Ramarajya and stressed women to live like Sitha¹⁶⁸. According to him, Sitha was purified in her heart and body.¹⁶⁹ In another meeting, he referred that the beauty of a virtuous woman did not consist in the fineness of external appearance, but it was in the possession of a pure heart and virtuous life.¹⁷⁰

The reformers placed their arguments within the religious context. They tried to establish the devadasi custom was not an integral part of the Hindu tradition. Kalyanasundaram had an assumption that the Indian rulers resembled the ancient Greek tradition of dedication of the women to the deity.¹⁷¹ Yande explained that the dancing women were not mentioned in the Hindu text.¹⁷² Sarma stated that there was no truth that the *Vedas* and *Sastras* insisted the dedication and on the other hand it brought bad names to the religion.¹⁷³ Yande detailed that the custom was not at all sanctioned by our Hindu religion which had been based on *Vedas*.¹⁷⁴ And he explained that there were no records in Sanskrit and Prakrit legends which existed regarding the idols which were supposed to require service of such dedicated prostitutes and the custom was entirely against the genius of all religious cults which have their root in Vedic teachings.¹⁷⁵ Manu had not the least conception of this most baneful and irreligious custom. The Hindu laws were strictly prohibited in all kinds of immoral conduct and enjoined purity of thought, speech and conduct.¹⁷⁶ Yande mentioned that *puranam* or religious legends taught and inculcated the importance and sublimity of pure life.¹⁷⁷ He mentioned that this was as ungodly affair “for the nearer the temple, but farther from God”. People were not caring for the culture of the moral being.¹⁷⁸ Yande detailed that there was no god who claimed any sanctity would brook such highly insulting and utterly unholy services of prostitutes, and own them as maid servants or wives as they were usually made out to be by means of the ceremony of dedication.¹⁷⁹

The reformers glorified womanhood. C.S. Lakshmi noted that Kalyanasundaram worshipped the divinity in each woman and he visualized motherhood as the centrality of femininity.¹⁸⁰ Kalyanasundaram frequently referred women as Goddesses.¹⁸¹ He clarified that the some of the highly cultured persons unfortunately hesitate to pronounce their honest verdict against the custom, because of the fact that it is associated with a phase of religious worship.¹⁸² He stated that the sisters (devadasi) of ours serve our lust. There was no evil in their eyes- they were capable of fine perceptions and as pure feelings as any other woman in the world.¹⁸³ The false idea that theirs is the ideal religion and it needs no reform; and think that all those who propose any reform in it are atheist and deserve to be despised and hated.¹⁸⁴ In Jaffna Student Congress, Gandhi worried that the ancient

tradition and laws had been degraded. He warned that against being misled into wrongdoing under the name revival of ancient culture. Perhaps, you will understand the significance of this warning coming as it does from a man who is himself not only a lover of ancient culture but endeavoring in his own life.... ancient practices may have been perfectly good and perhaps absolutely necessary at the time when those practices were adopted, but they might be entirely out of date with modern needs such as untouchability, the devadasi institution, drunkenness and sacrifice of animals.¹⁸⁵

In general, the social reformers believed that the engagement of the state and some individuals could stop these social problems like devadasi system. Kalyanasundaram gave a solution that men had to give opportunity to women to get rid of this evil practice.¹⁸⁶ It mentioned that it is impossible to expect the custom to disappear of its own accord, for it will take a long time for education and enlightenment to reach the lowest strata of our society.¹⁸⁷ The people pursued pleasure of the devadasi women and would not be prepared to get rid of it.¹⁸⁸ The devadasis led an immoral life due their ignorance. The men should teach the values of the womanhood.¹⁸⁹ He mentioned that the few good women also existed among the devadasi community. They should marry and lead moral life. Male should selflessly and even dare to accept those kinds of women.¹⁹⁰ Naik-Maratha Mandal noted that the law alone would free our society for this most immoral highly injurious and greatly unjust custom.¹⁹¹ It further stated that the Government was perfectly justified to prevent such superstitious and self-interested persons from sacrificing the well being of their innocent girls.¹⁹² Sarma mentioned that the Government has the responsibility for the moral conduct of its subjects.¹⁹³ Ramachandram also shared the same idea that the Government should appeal to help the reformer to much needed reform.¹⁹⁴

Kalyanasundaram stated that every Indians should think that they all are their brothers and sisters.¹⁹⁵ It was not that easy to reform devadasis. The moralist should establish a rescue home for them and provide food, education, vocational training and provided remarriage.¹⁹⁶ Gandhi suggested two basic things before the enactment of the bill in the Public Meeting at Coimbatore. According to him, the young or old men who are making

unlawful use of these dear sisters refrain from making them the object of their lust. Then he welcomed everyone to join in the crusade against the existence of this system, whether it is by legislation or by creating an active enlightened public opinion against the evil.¹⁹⁷ He continually stressed that the sexual union with a prostitute would spoil the health.¹⁹⁸ God and its mercy would bless for the reform of the devadasi system.¹⁹⁹

In 1891 however, the Vrittanita Chintamani, echoing the fears that were voiced in the Madras press, conceded that the concern for the abolition of the devadasi system was rooted in fears of female empowerment within the new colonial dispensation. Thus, it noted that some dancing girls' of Madras were very rich, lived in large houses, kept carriages and paid large amounts of municipal taxes: this entitled them to vote in municipal committees. The paper suggested that these rights be withdrawn to reduce the embarrassment faced by respectable gentlemen who had to beg these 'low women' for their vote.²⁰⁰

Within this context, the entire colonial debate questioned the existence of devadasi women. In general, devadasi could not be compartmentalized within the inner sphere which meant spiritual because devadasis were vibrant, educated and possessed property which was not common to other women. The reformers, however wanted to bring devadasi women into the private domain of a 'home', through marriage.²⁰¹ Marriage and family were recommended as a solution to the plight of women and this is required them to be placed under the security of *pati* (husband). The status of the wife respect to her husband in the opinion of reformers like Veerasalingam was that the husband is to be held as God, since he provides all comforts and caters to the pleasures of the wife: and hence she should dedicate herself to his service, if need be, tolerate his anger, abuse and patiently endures even beating and physical violence... the wife should not wear flowers and jewels and should not laugh loudly when the husband is away.²⁰²

The nationalist flagged the concept of the Indian motherhood and compared the nation with mother. They visualized the morality of a country soulfully depends on the character of the Indian women.²⁰³ The concepts such as purity, righteousness and discipleship played a key role in nation making.²⁰⁴ Venkataratnam Naidu mentioned the dignity was

the high and solemn relationship of the human being which distinguished human from animals.²⁰⁵ They stressed the social purity was important for the national growth.²⁰⁶ According to them, the social purity meant chastity in body and mind.²⁰⁷ The masculine ideas of the nation initiated the process of constructing the Indian womanhood. R.G. Bhandarkar praised the land which was cultivated the noble qualities of women.²⁰⁸ These characters were the backbone of the nationalist ideologies and questioned the existence of the devadasi on the basis of morality, purity, and chastity, etc. The devadasis were universally discouraged for the strict purity. They insisted the moral values were more important than art and pleasure.²⁰⁹ It was insisted for the devadasis that moral value was more important than art and pleasure helped to lead a life accordingly. Ananda Charlu, member of the Imperial Legislative Council opinioned that the Hindu temples could not improve unless the dancing girls were removed from the religious premises.²¹⁰ R.G. Bhandarkar mentioned that patronizing devadasi was debasing effect on the morality of men and women of the country. He considered that attending or conducting *nautch* parties would spoil the boys and girls of the family.²¹¹

There was a series of engagement on the issue of *nautch* performance of devadasi women. In Madras Presidency the purity and the *anti-nautch* movements found their chief advocates. The Purity Movement, the Indian National Social Conferences (1885 C.E.) and Madras Hindu Reform Associations (1892 C.E.) marked the significant beginning in the Indian social reform activities. It actively campaigned for the *anti-nautch* movements.²¹² In 1894 C.E., Venkataratnam Naidu introduced a resolution in the National Social Conference in Madras to condemn *nautches*.²¹³ The campaigners were against the *nautch* on the basis of morality, not on their aesthetic values. Even they were not ready to accept the concept that devadasis were the remains of the medieval nunnery.²¹⁴ Their aim was not mere elegant breeding, but pure living.²¹⁵ They raised the questions on the principles of the system and favored Indian nation would to compete in morals.²¹⁶ According to them, the *nautch* was a form of impurity which destroyed the glory of the nations. They perceived devadasis were the national weakness. They contempt employing the dancing girls' entertainment was to disapprove open impurity wherever it was found.²¹⁷ M.G. Ranade critiqued the system that *nautches* in our temples

were the chief cause for impurity.²¹⁸ Annie Besant worried about the shameful association of devadasi and the music.²¹⁹ Venkataratnam Naidu also said that no woman can by custom be a musician in calling, unless she was also a public woman by profession. It is her fallen condition that makes her eligible for that occupation.²²⁰ He further worried that the Indian music, rich in devotional and unfortunately pretty full in the amorous element, will have to be considerably improved on the purely social side.²²¹ M.G. Ranade²²², Justice N. G. Chandavarkar²²³ also supported these arguments.

The British were trying to implement various laws to ensure the moral progress in the Indian subcontinent.²²⁴ There were recurrent demands to the officials to shun the *nautch* parties which were given by the wealthy Indians.²²⁵ The participation of the Prince Albert Victor in the *nautch* performances was criticized by some of the English settlers and Indian elites. Ralph Johnson, the Bishop of Calcutta condemned the prince participation and mentioned it as an immoral.²²⁶ But British officials stated that the participation in the proceedings had been perfectly decorous.²²⁷

In the meantime, William Miller (1838 C. E.-1922 C.E.), the founder of Madras Christian College expressed his disappointment with the *nautch* parties. In 1893, he organized a meeting with the help of the Indian elites to discuss the issues which were related to the *nautch*. Subramaniya Aiyar, the editor of *The Hindu* daily played a key role in the meeting. The public gathering drew a memorial and dispatched to Wenlock, the Governor of Madras Presidency and Lord Lansdowne, the Viceroy of India to shun receptions at which *nautch* girls were to dance.²²⁸ Both the Governor of Madras and the Viceroy of India hesitated to interfere with the religious susceptibilities of Indians.²²⁹ Wenlock's official reply politely rejected the campaigners' plea. Wenlock and Lord Lansdowne considered that they did not see any impropriety in the *nautch* performances. Further, they mentioned that the performance was their professional exhibition of their skills as dancers and it was in accordance with the customs of the country.²³⁰ *The Hindu* daily, severely commented on their reply to the *nautch* campaigners.²³¹ *Madras Mail*, the English daily also supported the *anti-nautch* campaign and advised Europeans to favor it.²³² In a letter to the *Madurai Mail* (May 5, 1894), Baskara Sethupathi, the ruler of

Ramanathapuram explained his noninvolvement in *nautch* parties which was organized by Virasamy Naidu.²³³ And in 1894 C.E., Baskara Sethupathi barred the participation of devadasi in the Navarathiri festival.²³⁴ Naik-Maratha Mandal condemned the Government responsible for continuing of the custom.²³⁵ It mentioned that the trade of prostitution brings some lucre and incurring to get better facilities to carry it, and hence they secure better patronage than other ordinary prostitutes. It further mentioned that they make large gains by singing and dancing.²³⁶

4.3.3. The civilizing role of the colonial government

The colonial intervention by the devadasi system in the Indian subcontinent made a great impact. The social and economic changes affected the life of the devadasis. The 'sacredness' of the devadasi was questioned and they were forced to search their identity. The colonial officials struggled to differentiate the public women of the West and the religious women of the East. Abbe Dubois compared the devadasi and their alluring demeanor with lascivious European women.²³⁷ Frederique Apffel Marglin mentioned that the cultural meaning of the feminine has been profoundly altered for both Indian and non-Indian eyes by colonialism.²³⁸ These brought up to the profession of dancing.²³⁹ Throughout their regime, they had problems in the policymaking issues with regard prostitution and devadasi system.²⁴⁰ The establishment of the colonial settlement and introduction of the colonial administration initiated the new economic policies of the British which were influenced the devadasi customs in a multiple way. In general, the colonizer was not able to distinguish between the devadasi and prostitutes. Most of the colonial officials compared devadasi and prostitutes. Abbe Dubois pointed them as prostitutes.²⁴¹ Edgar Thurston mentioned that the *dasis* or devadasis were practicing the oldest profession in the world which meant prostitution.²⁴² They believed that the system was a corrupted one.²⁴³ Alice Van Doren worried and stated that *karma* (destiny) condemned devadasi to a life of religious prostitution.²⁴⁴ Priyadarshini Vijaisri pointed that the fluidity on lack of links with the temple and economic pressures resulted in their cultural marginalization.²⁴⁵ The exodus of outcaste sacred prostitutes to the metropolis,

especially cantonment areas as commercial sex workers was a marked feature during this period. Some of them also worked as laborers or coolies in factories.²⁴⁶

The unmarried soldiers, slavery, concubines, polygamy, prostitution and drunkenness were the prominent issues in the colonial period.²⁴⁷ Philippa Levine mentioned that in every cantonment after dusk, the vicinity of the European lines was haunted by women of the lowest and poorest class who, though not prostitutes by professions, were willing to prostitute them for an even smaller sum than is claimed by the regular courtesan.²⁴⁸ Philippa Levine pointed out that the shortage of European women was made to foray the every spinster and widow irrespective of their physical charms. And devadasi became an easy prey to them.²⁴⁹ The age old 'sacred prostitution' with trained 'professional lewdness' had been marked to sell sex. The expansion of the vice was such that 'dancing girls and prostitutes' were levied a tax of the soldiers who were suffering from diseases. This practice was proposed in Madras as well.²⁵⁰

The evidence of the child trafficking in the colonial period was witnessed. During famine agents were sent out to purchase girls to recruit as the dancing girl.²⁵¹ Eamalingum Moodelly of Wallajapet (modern Taluk in Vellore district of Tamilnadu) two little daughters while they were playing in the street went missing. The parents launched a complaint and police ascertained a woman, who crossed the river towards Arcot with two little girls. The police inspector found the girls and the woman, who kidnapped the girls. The woman confessed that the girls were kidnapped to recruit as a dancing girl in Chittoor (modern district in Andhra Pradesh). The woman was convicted five years imprisonment by the magistrate of Chittor.²⁵²

The 19th century C.E. account of Abbe Dubois's *A Description of the Character, Manner and Customs of the People of India* detailed the lewdness attitudes and upbringing of devadasi women. According to the document, devadasi were the performers who were supported out of the revenues and considerable share from the temple. The document highlighted their profession as dissolute. It further added that in order to stimulate more briskly the passion which their lewd employment was intended to gratify that they had recourse to the same artifices as were used by persons of their sex and calling in other

counties. Shameless as the dancing girls of India appeared to be, they would not venture, upon any occasion, to stop a man in the streets, or to take any indecent liberty in public. And, on the other hand, a man who would take such liberties, even with a prostitute, so far from being applauded, or joked with, by the spectators, as happens in some other countries, would be obliged to hide his head in shame, and would be treated with marks of indignation,²⁵³ and used perfumes, elegant and attractive attire, particularly of the head, sweet scented flowers intertwined with exquisite art about their beautiful hair, multitudes of ornamental trinkets adapted with infinite taste to the different parts of the body, a graceful carriage and measured step, indicating luxurious delight; such are the allurements and the charms which these enchanting syrens display to accomplish their seductive designs.²⁵⁴ The dancers in the temples were the most decently clothed. They are so nice in covering every part of the body, as to have the appearance of being affectedly precise, or as if they intended, by the contrast with the more open attire of other dames, to excite more strongly the passion which they wished to inspire, by carefully veiling a part of the charms which it covets.²⁵⁵

The description mentioned that these women were instructed from infancy to the various modes of kindling the fire of voluptuousness in the cold hearts; and they would know how to vary their arts and adapt them to the particular disposition of those whom they wish to seduce.²⁵⁶ Abbe Dubois pointed them as prostitutes were the only females in India who may learn to read, to sing and to dance. Such accomplishments belonged to them exclusively, and were, for that reason, held by the rest in the same profession in such abhorrence, that every virtuous woman would consider the mention of them as an affront.²⁵⁷ As soon as a girl attained maturity, her virginity, if not debauched by the temple Brahmins, was sold to outsiders in proportion to the wealth of the party seeking the honor, if such it might be termed, after which she led a continuous course of prostitution²⁵⁸

John Shortt was the one who differentiated prostitute and devadasi by using the vernacular terms such as *dasi* (to note temple women) and *veshi* (common prostitute).²⁵⁹ John Shortt mentioned that the one of the worst institutions connected with Hinduism and

the poor unfortunate women being the victims of such a system.²⁶⁰ The first they executed with grace, though with lascivious attitudes and motions. Their chanting was generally confined to the obscene songs which related to some circumstance or other of the licentious lives of their god.²⁶¹ They were also obliged to assist at all the public ceremonies, which they enlivened with their dance and merry song. As soon as their public business was over, they opened their cells of infamy, and frequently converted the temple into a stew.²⁶² They were bred to this profligate life from their infancy. Joardon mentioned that the missionaries in India focused their attention on the *nautch* as one of the moral issues. In fact, a section of missionaries felt that the practice of *nautch* was growing among European Christians and increased anti-Christianity feeling.²⁶³

4.4. Legal issues

In the early 19th century C.E., an important task of the colonial government was that to document the 'native' religious practices. In 1861 C.E., the Indian Penal Court (IPC) was formulated and the Indian High Courts Act of 1861 C.E. established the high courts in Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. The colonizer made an effort to universalize the legal code in the Indian subcontinent. The colonial administration structured 'tradition' through the agency of the courts, serving to equalize structurally unequal people.²⁶⁴ The process of universalization benefited the Brahmin community in the Indian society. The process authenticated the brahmanical textual tradition and its culture as universal. Their caste customs and religious practices became the law for all. In 1864 C.E., a substantial body of Hindu legal texts had been translated into English. The newly emerged native law officer such as Brahmins was able to officiate their religious principles as the basis of the vast and diverged culture like India.

The homogenization of Indian law had a problem in addressing the indigenous cultural and religious practices such as family law, inheritance, child marriage, property rights, etc. There was a contestation raised on the basis of the Dravidian ideology. A non-Brahmin Justice Devadoss arbitrated that *srutis* and *smrithis* were applicable only to the Aryans and it did not make any impact on other races that inhabited the country. In his judgment, he established the concept of Dravidian and the incapability of the uniform

legal code on the basis of religious principle. According to him, the laws, especially which were related to family relations, succession and inheritance were based on Manu, Yajnavalkya and Vignaneswara. According to Manu, the term *sudra* was used to define a section of people who were different from Aryan like the word ‘native’ from Europeans. So fundamentally those laws were applicable to Aryan not to all the people in the society.²⁶⁵

There was scene tension between the traditional and modern legal systems. The colonizers preferred to implement the British model of public law and Indian mode of private law. Kay. K Jordan mentioned that the Anglo-Indian legal system recognized inheritance, marriage, and adoption based on religious laws and customs linked to a uniform criminal code based on foreign secular sources which complicated the legal status of the devadasis.²⁶⁶ The colonizer believed that the judicial decisions had silently promoted the cause of female emancipation and progress.²⁶⁷

The patriarchal Hindu law is constructed on the sexual activity of women. Kunal Parkar noted the under new patriarchal marriage instantiated itself in law.²⁶⁸ Marriage was absolutely indispensable for the Hindu women and it became the source for all legal status and rights. The sexual activity outside the marriage was considered as sin and designated as ‘un-chastity’, ‘incontinence’ or prostitution. It severely punished as incontinence. The Hindu community was organized around marriage. The Hindu law conditioned women’s property rights upon their chastity.²⁶⁹

The colonial judicial law established the rights of the temple women and it recognized the institution. The High Court observed that the dancing girls was a separate community and had no caste, or belonged to any caste, and that consequently they could adopt a girl from any caste or no caste.²⁷⁰ In 1888 C.E., the Madras High Court observed that the existence of the dancing girl connection with temples is the ancient established usage in the country. Justice Muttusami Iyer in the case of Venku vs Mahalinga (1888 C.E.) observed that the existence of dancing girls connection with temples is according to the ancient established usage of the country, and this Court would, in our opinion be taking far too much upon itself to say that it is so opposed to ‘the legal consciousness’ of the

community at the present day as to justify the court in refusing to recognize existing endowments in connection with such an institution.²⁷¹ In the case of Vengamuthu vs Pandaveswara Gurukul (1883 C.E.) explained that the plaintiff, dancing girls brought offerings according to custom and placed them before the god when he came to the Raja mandapam in the temple on the seventh day of the *Chittrai Vasantha Vizha* (April 21, 1880 C.E.) and asked the defendants to present the offerings to the god, burn incense, and then distribute them; the defendants refused to take the offering on the ground that the plaintiff had gone to a Komati's house to dance. She sued for damages, for the rejected offerings and for loss of honor, and a perpetual injunction against the defendants to allow the plaintiff to perform, according to custom, the *mantapa padi* (placing god) in the Raj Mandapam in the seventh day of the *Chithirai Vasantha Vizha*. Turner CJ delivered the following Judgment that the members of a sect are entitled, subject to the rules made by the duly consisted authorities of the sect, to take part in the public worship of the sect, and if any one of them was wrongly prevented from so doing, he was entitled to seek from the Civil courts such remedies as they could afford him. If the Judge finds that on an occasion when public worship was being carried on the appellant was entitled to take part in it, but was wrongly prevented from doing, she would be entitled to some relief.²⁷²

The colonial judicature occupied central stage in disputes over temple honors and rituals. Devadasi had some laws and special rights which were not applicable to the common womenfolk of the Indian subcontinent. The dancing woman was recognized by the Hindu law. According to the law, women who were married or unmarried were not allowed to perform in a stage as an actress or a songstress however they were chaste and virtuous. The violation of the particular law led them an outcaste.²⁷³ But this particular law was not applicable to devadasi. On the other hand, they had some other special provisions such as adoption and inheritance.

The colonial law recognized the adoption rights of the dancing girls which was an immemorial custom. The introduction of Penal Code in 1861 C.E. showed that a dancing woman may make an adoption of a girl, carrying with it civil rights for purposes of inheritance and collateral succession, and that such right was to be adjudicated upon, in

the absence of a positive rule of law to the contrary, with reference to the custom of the caste, and the analogies of Hindu law as a pointed out in *Kamakshi vs Nagarathnum* (1870 C.E.).²⁷⁴ John Shortt mentioned that the dancing girls could adopt a daughter with the permission of the authorities of the temple to which she belonged.²⁷⁵ In general, devadasi could not adopt a son and it was not possible to transfer the property to the adopted son. On the other hand, the adopted girl had right to relish her mother's property after her lifetime when she was an heiress. The Madras High Court recognized a custom of adaptation in the *Venku vs Mahalinga* (1888 C.E.) case.²⁷⁶ In April 1856 C.E., three judges of the *Sudder Dewanny Adawlut* addressed the case of *Venkatachellum vs Vencatasawmy*, (Special Appeal No. 6 of 1856) opinioned that it was irrelevant to point out that the girl was adopted either by purchase or in any other manner by dancing girls. It questioned the formalities for the adaptation and recognized adopted girl as a daughter.²⁷⁷ In the case of *Narasanna vs Gangu* (1890 C.E.), a girl who was not formally adopted, but introduced into the temple by one of two sisters from the dancing girl was recognized as the adopted daughter of that sister.²⁷⁸

4.4.1. Inheritance

The colonial judiciary relied on the Hindu law and the patriarchal law sanctioned the rights to property to devadasi women. The Bombay High Court insisted in the case of *Tara Naikin vs Nana Lakshman* (1890 C.E.) that the incumbent of the nomination of the successor by devadasi to inherit her rights in the temple endowment. It further refused the involvement of the court of law in the custom which was recognized by the country.²⁷⁹ There was case between *Muttukannu and Paramasami* (1889 C.E.) regarding the inherit property of the adoptive mother. The son of the adopted daughter and the second adopted daughter filed a case for the adoptive mother. The second adopted daughters succeeded the rights of the adoptive mother.²⁸⁰

During the colonial period, the most of the cases were registered for the inheritance of the property. There was a case in the Madras High Court between *Narasanna vs Gangu* (1890 C.E.) regarding the property. The property was divided between the two brothers and sisters. The two sisters shared the each on fourth and lived as dancing women. After the

death of one sister, a dispute arose on an heir. The brother claimed her property, but his right was denied by her niece. Even though she was not formally adopted by the dead sister, she was introduced as her hereditary successor. The Madras High Court acknowledged the claim of the niece.²⁸¹ Had she lost the case, the property of the dancing girl would have reverted back to the temple to which she was attached.²⁸²

In a case of *Chinna Ummayi vs Tegarai Chetti*²⁸³ in 1876 C.E. stated that dancing woman who was attached to a temple filed a case against the *dharmakarta*'s right by custom to veto the introduction of a new dancing girl into the temple. The court opined that the right claimed was that of an association of dancing women to enjoy a monopoly of the gains of prostitution held that a Court of Justice could not countenance such a right. But in 1878 C.E., in *Kamalam vs Sadagopaswami* (I.L.R., 1, Mad, 356) the court recognized the right, observing that it was necessary to inquire into the existence of such right as it would affect the question whether the plaintiff has sustained injury by the defendant's interference. This case was distinguished from the former on the ground that there was no allegation of any endowment attached to the office. Justice Muttusami Iyer observed that it is not, how, if the custom which is the source of the hereditary right to the office is an immoral custom and one to monopolize the gains of prostitution, the existence of an endowment makes a difference and removes the legal taint in the source of the right.²⁸⁴

4.4.2. The controversy regarding the right age for dedication

On some occasions, the Anglo-Indian courts expressed hesitation in recognizing specific legal claims made by dancing girls.²⁸⁵ From the 1860s, temple dancing girls, temple servants and others were convicted under the IPC. The colonial writers consistently essentialized temple dancing girls as 'prostitutes'.²⁸⁶ Whitley Stokes in his *The Anglo-Indian Codes* mentioned that the crimes peculiar to India, such as thuggee, professional sodomy, dedicating girls to a life of temple harlotry, human sacrifices, exposing infants, burning widows, burying lepers alive, gang-robbery, torturing peasants and witnesses, sitting *dharna*.²⁸⁷ The IPC prohibited the adoption of minor girls as dancing women. The IPC sections 372 and 373 preventing the dedication of minor girls and adoption of infant girls by dancing women for the purpose of making them devadasis as such treated as

penal offences. The IPC section 372 mentioned that whoever sell, hire, or otherwise disposes of any minor under age of 16 years with intent that such minor shall be employed or used for the purposes of prostitution, or knowing it likely that such minor will be employed or used for such purpose, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which extended to ten years and shall be liable to fine.²⁸⁸ It was insisted that they obtain a Medical Officer's certificate if the girl was above sixteen years before adopting and dedicating them.²⁸⁹ The prescribed age limit is insufficient.²⁹⁰ But the Act of 1924, Chapter. XVIII raised the age limit of the dedication to eighteen.

Arunachalam worked as a servant in the house of a dancing girl and lived in the same household. He was interested in dedicating his minor daughter to the temple service. In 1876 C.E., Madras High Court upheld the conviction of a father for arranging the dedication of his daughter to temple service while she was under the age of sixteen. The High Court opined that the dedication ceremony did not carry any violation because there was no specific evidence which proved that the adoptee would be a prostituted.²⁹¹ In 1891 C.E., the Madras High Court underwent a trial against Basava, a father who was dedicating his minor daughter to the god. Justice Parker considered that the dedication was equivalent to disposing a girl for the purpose of prostitution. But the customary law provided rights to the devadasi to have promiscuous intercourse with any men.²⁹² The Bombay High Court convicted Tippa, for dedicating his five or six years age of daughter to the temple service. The case exhibited the sexual exploitation of the minor girl and the convicted father found guilty. But the verdict was lenient.²⁹³ There was a case (Queen Empress vs Ramanna) suited against the temple trustee for the dedication of the minor girls and their involvement in the prostitution. As per the case, the adopted daughter of a devadasi was dedicated to the temple when she was under sixteen years and she also was employed as a prostitute.²⁹⁴

Subsequently, a devadasi adopted a second girl from her caste. The devadasi and the parents were charged under the IPC sections of 372 and 373. The accused were convicted by the Deputy Magistrate. Later, the Session Court Judge reversed the conviction on the appeal with respect of the similar caste affiliation of the girl's parents and devadasi. The

Session Judge further observed that the adopted minor girl's economic position was not worse than that which she was before the adoption and that the Section of IPC could not apply to adoption among the dancing women class themselves which do not alter for the worse the status of the child.²⁹⁵ On the revision of the judgment, Justice Parker opined that the session judge had not determined the circumstances of the case and its intention of the adoption either it was for sexual service or her obsequies or hereditary property. Justice Muttusami Iyer observed that there was no offense if the intention should be an inheritance of the lineage and he added that the girl should be brought up as a daughter until she matured state and she was allowed to select either married life or the profession her prostitution mother.²⁹⁶

4.4.3. Prostitution

Kunal Parker mentioned that the growth of urban society engendered a new urban prostitution, with Hindu women as its principal practitioners.²⁹⁷ In general, prostitutes were chiefly deserted women, abandoned widows and orphans.²⁹⁸ According to Hindu Law, they were all considered as outcasts and they did not exist as a separate community like devadasi. The state struggled to differentiate devadasi from prostitutes. And somehow, the government recognized the civil rights of dancing girls because the Hindu law considered devadasi as a separate class.²⁹⁹

In 19th century C.E., the British Government enacted Contagious Disease (CD) Acts of 1864 C.E., 1866 and 1869 C.E. in England to safeguard the health of the British soldiers from the venereal diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea. The British Government protected the health of soldiers through the control of the female body.³⁰⁰ According to the act, female prostitute were instructed to undergo a regular checkups and treatment in health centers. Later the act was extended to all its Colonial courtiers. In 1868 C.E., the Indian Contagious Diseases Act (Act XIV of 1868) was enacted with similar provisions for the supervision, registration, and inspection of prostitute women in major Indian cities and seaports.³⁰¹ The colonial government was required to keep registers and issue the licenses to prostitutes. The examining hospitals were infamously called Lock Hospitals.³⁰² The process excluded the dancing girl community from its provisions. In

many cases devadasi were exempted to attend the Lock Hospital for examination and certificate due to their religious status.³⁰³ Ramachendrier noted that the government recognized somewhat their status by not classing them with the common whores and prostitutes who were actually brought under the act and compelled to attend the Lock hospital for examination and certificate.³⁰⁴

Another major issue that arose in this period was the conflict between the private and public law. If the government agreed to continue with the institution of the devadasis which was recognized in personal law, this would violate the spirit of the public law which banned prostitution, child marriage, *nautch* performance, etc. The government kept strict accordance with the personal law of devadasi who were frequently violated the spirit of the public law. Yande mentioned that the duty of the colonial government was believed as to prohibit persons who set apart their girls for prostitution.³⁰⁵ The colonial law did not recognize the hereditary lineage among the prostitutes. Ramachendrier said that the courts had made no distinction between the dancing girls and other common prostitute in the application of the rule of succession to the extent that prostitute daughters succeed to the estate of their prostitute, mothers to theirs.³⁰⁶ Mathura Naikin vs Esu Naikin (1880 C.E.) an adopted daughter of a professional prostitute like a dancing woman sued for a share of property from her adoptive mother. But the Justice West dismissed the suit on the grounds that professional prostitution tainted the custom of the caste on which the claim was based.³⁰⁷

In general, reformers believed that the engagement of state and individuals would end the social problems such as devadasi system. Reformers understood that the immoral life of devadasi continued because of their ignorance. So reformers stated that it was impossible to expect the custom to disappear of its own accord, for it would take a long time for education and enlightenment to reach the lowest strata of our society.³⁰⁸ People pursued devadasi women for pleasure and would not be prepared to get rid of it so easily.³⁰⁹ Kalyanasundaram mentioned that there also existed the 'good' women in the devadasi community and requested men to help devadasi to get rid of the evil practices. He further appealed that the selfless men should marry those women.³¹⁰

Naik-Maratha Mandal noted that the law alone would free our society for this most immoral highly injurious and greatly unjust custom.³¹¹ It further stated that the Government was perfectly justified to prevent such superstitious and self-interested persons from sacrificing the wellbeing of their innocent girls.³¹² Sarma mentioned that the government had the responsibility for the moral conduct of its subjects.³¹³ Ramachandram appealed government to help the reformer to the much needed devadasi reform.³¹⁴

4.4.4. The abolition acts

In early 20th century C.E., temple dancing girls had been criminalized.³¹⁵ The movement of the abolition of the devadasi system occurred since 1868 C.E. onwards. In 1906 C.E. and 1907 C.E., the World Conferences seriously discussed the abolition of the devadasi institution.³¹⁶ The government of British India had its serious interest in the reform bill. The abolition discourses occurred in two different spaces such as in the British India and the princely states of the Indian subcontinent.

The *nautch* parties were banned on the arrival of the Prince of Wales in 1905 C.E. In 1906 C.E., people of Bombay appealed the Governor to ban the custom. Bultler, the home secretary, of British India circulated a letter in March 3, 1911 C.E. about the sections of the IPC, 372 and 373. Narayana Iyer, the magistrate of Madurai court replied that the devadasi were the women who traditionally protected the chastity of the married household women. He further added that the poverty forced them into prostitution.³¹⁷ The magistrate reasoned the spate of invitation to the public performance, such as marriage due to the reform activity and the famine of 1876 C.E. were the causes of the degenerated condition of devadasi women. He suggested various measures to deal with the devadasi such as isolation of prostitutes, frequent monitoring, severe punishment and the prohibition of adaptation.³¹⁸

In 1912 C.E., three prominent persons Kanammani Gajjitha Bhai, Mudholkar, Metkith of the Imperial Law Assembly worked for the abolition of the custom and introduced three different Bills. The government of British India sent the Bill into the presidencies to

know their opinion. Based on the recommendation, the colonial government enacted a Bill in September 1913 C.E. Further the content was sent to the expert committee to review the Bill. In March 1914 C.E., the reviewed report was circulated for the public opinion. The Bill was most appreciated by the public, but some of the primary issues such as protection of the devadasi women created a lot of uproar and the Bill failed.

Later 1922 C.E., H.S. Gour carried the Bill in the Imperial Legislative Council and recommended the banning of *nautch* and the tightening of the IPC provision in the adoption of minors. The parliament members discussed the issue. But the Bill failed by a huge margin on the basis of the public opinion. In 1924 C.E., the Bill was passed and it revised the sections IPC 372 and IPC 373. On January 1, 1925 C.E., the law was enacted. The Bill banned the dedication of the girl after 14 years. Because the Hindu doctrines mentioned that the dedication of the girls should be held before their puberty. The Bill was contradictory in its nature with the earlier Bills. According to the IPC, the marriage of the minor was illegal. The Bill did not address the greedy nature of society who could dedicate the children for profit. The reformers criticized the Bill.

Sarma mentioned that the prevention of the dedication of the girls to the temple is for the sake of the goodness of the humanities.³¹⁹ Muthulakshmi Reddi mentioned that the training of the devadasi was cruel to Indian society. There should be no objection from the religious doctrines to the enactment of the abolition law. She questioned the fundamentalist notion and criticized the practice of public opinion in the enactment of the law. In 1924 C.E., the first Act (XVII of 192) was passed by the Central administration to stop the dedication and introduced two amendments in the IPC 373 section. In 1927 C.E., the Madras Legislative Council (MLC) passed a resolution which recommended the Madras Government to intervene to prevent the dedication. V.R. Pantulu mentioned in the Central Legislature that the devadasi issue was regionally based. Muthulakshmi started to campaign against the custom and she helped to convene and addresses several conferences by members of the devadasi community to debate the issue.

Following the event, in 1928 C.E. a Bill for the Suppression of Brothels and Immoral Traffic was passed in the Legislative Council. The Bill raised the issue of inclusion of the devadasi women under this particular act. The rationalist argued that the conviction that it was the only institution of the devadasis that encouraged prostitution in the country.³²⁰ It further stated that the dedication of the girls to temples has attracted bigger crowds to these places, and consequently the profession has extended to other communities also. The rationalist considered that there was no distinction between devadasi and prostitute. According to them, devadasis earned from the temples, but it is undeniable that they earn through the temples. This is the special advantage which the devadasis had over the prostitutes, hence the greater necessity for wiping out the former.³²¹ Ramamirtham pointed out that the law should be very rigorous and should come into force immediately because the dedication of devadasi for religious reasons would be very narrow. The temple trustees and wealthy people trafficked the children for prostitution with the support of the religion. The dedication of girls to prostitution in the name of religion should be abolished by means of strict legislation.³²² In 1928 C.E., an amendment to the Hindu Religious Endowments Act of 1926 enfranchised devadasis 'freeing' from service in temples, and granting the lands to them permanently. In 1930 C.E., the Act of 1930 restricted the *pottu* ceremony in the temple.³²³ According to the Act, the dedication of the women in the name of *pottu* and *gejja puja* (anklet ceremony) in the temple premises and the other prayer hall was considered illegal. The Law further warned that the participation and performance in the *pottu* and *gejja* ceremony was punishable up to one year and fined. The Act permitted and recognized the marriages of the earliest dedicated women.

4.4.5. The prevention of devadasi in princely states

In 1909 C.E., Mysore presidency ordered to stop the *gejja puja* and later in the same year the state completely abolished the devadasi institution. The government further allowed devadasi and her family to enjoy the allotted grants.³²⁴ Muthulakshmi appreciated the Mysore princely state for setting a good example.³²⁵ Janaki Nair mentioned that the abolition of the custom in the Mysore state was not merely as a protector of dharma but

restorers of purity.³²⁶ Subsequently the officials of the Pathmanabha temple stopped the dedication of the Nayar girl at Suchindram temple in 1909 C.E.

The Pudukkottai princely state in Tamil country disseminated a memorandum to its assembly member to opinion about the devadasi system in March 1914 C.E. The seventeen, out of thirty members were replied. Among those seventeen, eight were favored for the prohibition of devadasi practices. The five argued for the continuation of the custom with certain conditions and three were insisted for the perpetuation of the existing practice and one felt that the importance of the consultation of the *sastras*. Finally, the princely state hesitated to completely prohibit the devadasi service in the temple and also disagree with the performance of the devadasi girl in the temple. The state was ready to accept the IPC sections of 372 and 373 which restricted the minor girls in the temple service. The Divan of the state ordered to prohibit the *pottukattuthal* ceremony. The state took some measures to safeguard the minors in the state. According to it any women from the devadasi community who were dedicated to the temple either single or married nor widowed should be accomplished in the performing arts. It restricted the dedication of the minor girls who were not less than sixteen and it were exempted those who already dedicated.

In 1926 C.E., the regency of the Sethulakshmi Bai (1924 C.E.-1931 C.E.) of Travancore Princely state issued the proclamation to stop the dedication of the girls in the temples. The proclamation was well received by the reformers. Gandhi appealed the Princely States in Kerala to stop the customs and referred the process of devadasi abolition in Mysore State in 1909 C.E.³²⁷ *Kudi Arasu*, the newspaper of Self-Respect Movement welcomed the efforts of the Princely State of Travancore for the abolition. It commented that the abolition act could abandon the prostitution in the state.³²⁸ During the Virudhunagar Women Conference, Indirani Balasubramanian (the member of Self-Respect Movement) praised the State for the banishment of the devadasi tradition in the Kerala temples and highlighted that the ruler of the Travancore Princely State as women, so she could clearly understand the problems.³²⁹ Further, the Conference appealed the rest of the Princely States such as Baroda to the enactment of laws to prevent the devadasi.³³⁰

On different occasions, Nilavathi (the activist of the Self-Respect Movement) appreciated and welcomed the efforts of the brahmanical Travancore Princely state for the abolition of the devadasi institution in the state.³³¹

Apart from the State, some of the individuals initiated and made their personal efforts to prevent the customs from the temple institutions. E.V. Ramasami, the leader of the Self-Respect Movement was one among them. E.V. Ramasami served as a secretary and head of the Temple *Devasthanam* Committee between the years of 1904 C.E.-1927 C.E.³³² During his tenure, he made some of the progressive initiation to improve the condition of devadasi. He was considered as one of the earlier person, one who stopped the process of dedicating girls to the temple. He declared that the transfer of title was invalid and he mentioned that devadasis sold their title for the amount of rupees 15 to 90. Further E.V. Ramasami stated that the title was purchased by fallen women who were economically depressed and misused the titles. He ordered to restrict the recruitment of new *dasis* in the temple and also banned the continuation of the heirless *dasis* in the temple.³³³ Like E.V. Ramasami, a Nattukottai Chettiyar who had taken the management of some of the temples also stated that the society, should have the goodness to remove the dancing women from our sacred temples.³³⁴

4.5. Conclusion

Hence, if we look at the past, we see a continuous deterioration in the status and position of the devadasis. In the early period, the devadasis were very popular and had a great reputation. But the position of devadasi was degenerated in the period of Thanjavur Marathas. Devadasis were identified for their dance performance rather than their ritual services in the temple. The independent role of devadasi was collapsed. The terms such as *sadhir*, *kelikkai* was associated with them. The Maratha kings imposed severe code of conduct for devadasi women. The Colonial government introduced the new agrarian orders such as *zamindari* and *ryotwari* system in the Indian society. The new social order created new political lobbies, and they were known as 'new elites'. The failure of the temple economy questioned the existence of devadasis. The newly emerged elites came from different castes, and they became the patrons of devadasis and the temples. In the

meantime, devadasis were directed to satisfy the needs of the new elites, who were consisted little kings, *zamindars*, *dubashis*, etc. During the colonial period, devadasi used to dance in the private functions of the rich. In 19th century C.E., the public performances was called as *nautch*. Therefore, the dance performances of devadasis were also identified with that popular term *nautch*. Throughout 19th century C.E., the *nautch* performance was organized to English officials and elites.

The missionaries, reformers, nationalist and few colonial officials condemned the *nautch* performances and the devadasi system. The early reformers and nationalist were concerned for the purification of the 'Hindu' religion. They perceived devadasi system as degraded, which brought defame to the 'Hindu' religion. Meanwhile, the colonial government had dilemma to distinguish the prostitutes and the devadasi women. However, the colonial leagal proceduures acknowledged the privilages of devadasis. The reformers campaigned against the devadasi system. The Princely States in South India especially, Mysore, Pudukkottai and Travancore responded positively with the reformers. In the beginning of the 20th century C.E., most of the Princely States initiated the process of abolishing the custom in their provinces.

End Notes

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⁵ Soneji, Daves. 2012. *Op.cit.*, 30.

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¹⁵ Arivudai Nambi, M.S. 2006. *Op.cit.*, 240.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 234.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Saraswati Mahal Modi Tamil Translation* (S.M.M.T.). MS. 1. p. 7. 1801 C.E.

¹⁹ *Saraswati Mahal Modi Records*. Bundle No. 315. p. 19. 1817 C.E.

²⁰ *Saraswati Mahal Modi Records*. Bundle No. 123 (C). p. 36. 1811 C.E. (Venkatramaiah, K.V. 1989. Vol. I. *Op.cit.*, 130-147.)

²¹ *Saraswati Mahal Modi Records*. Bundle No. 31 (C). 1807 C.E.

²² Arivudai Nambi, M.S. 2006. *Op.cit.*, 236.

²³ *Saraswati Mahal Modi Records*. Bundle No. 123 (C). p. 11. 1811 C.E. (Venkatramaiah, K.V. 1989. Vol. I. *Op.cit.*, 130-147.)

²⁴ According to Hindu mythology Kaman means god of love.

²⁵ *Saraswati Mahal Modi Records*. Bundle No. 123 (C). p. 14 and 35. 1811 C.E. (Venkatramaiah, K.V. 1989. Vol. I. *Op.cit.*, 130-147.)

²⁶ *Saraswati Mahal Modi Records*. Bundle No. 123 (C). 1811 C.E. (Venkatramaiah, K.V. 1989. Vol. I. *Op.cit.*, 130-147.)

²⁷ Arivudai Nambi, M.S. 2006. *Op.cit.*, 239.

²⁸ Bundle No: 138c/ 1776.

²⁹ *Saraswati Mahal Modi Records*. Bundle No. 2c Sub Bundle No. 23. (Venkatramaiah, K.V. 1989. Vol. II. *Op.cit.*, 414-419.)

³⁰ Nattuvanar of Thulaja II court and father of Chinnaiah, Ponnaiah, Sivanandam and Vadivelu. They popularly known as Thanjai Nalvar (Thanjai's Four)

³¹ Arivudai Nambi, M.S. 2006. *Op.cit.*, 237.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Thanjavur Quartet is the famous brothers of Chinnaiah, Ponnaiah, Vadivel and Sivanandam. They were exponent in performing art especially in dance. They were belonged the Isai Vellala

community of south India. They are considered as the chief architects of Indian classical performance of sadhir, which is popularly known as Bharatanatyam of modern day.

³⁵ *Saraswati Mahal Modi Records*. Bundle No: 160C/1844. (Venkatramaiah, K.V. April, 1989. Vol. I. *Op.cit.*, 414.)

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⁴⁴ Venkatramaiah, K.M. 1984. *Op.cit.*, 323.

⁴⁵ *Saraswati Mahal Modi Records*. 22-24. (Venkatramaiah, K.V. September, 1984. *Op.cit.*, 323-324.)

⁴⁶ Venkatramaiah, K.M. 1984. *Op.cit.*, 322.

⁴⁷ *Saraswati Mahal Modi Records*. 6-418; Venkatramaiah, K.M. 1984. p. 322.

⁴⁸ *Saraswati Mahal Modi Records*. 9-18.

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⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

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⁵³ *Ibid.*, 117.

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⁵⁶ Dubois, Abbe J.A. *A Description of the Character, Manner and Customs of the People of India*. Madras: J. Higginbotham, 1862: 297.

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- ⁷³ *Sarvadevavilasa* is a Sanskrit work which was written in 18th century C.E. The meaning of the word *Sarvadevavilasa* is the sport of all divinities. The work was identified and translated by V. Raghavan, an eminent musicologist.
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³²⁹ *The Speeches Delivered by Indirani Balasubramanian in the Second Self-respect Conference* which held in Virudhunagar. 09/08/1931. *Kudi Arasu*.

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CHAPTER - V

The 20th century C.E. Debate on Devadasi System

Towards the end of 19th century C.E., reformers lead the first phase of *anti-nautch* and anti-dedication campaign. Usually, the reformers were nationalist and they believed in Brahmanical doctrines. Their primary concern was on social purity and they wished to construct a 'pure' nation. But in early 20th century C.E., a section of reformers brought different arguments for the abolition of devadasi system which was centred on radicalism. The second phase got its momentum with emergence of the Self-Respect Movement in South India. There was a significant difference between the groups of reformers regarding the reasoning for the abolition of the system in the society. The radicals understood the religious nature of the system and criticized it, because they envisaged that the degraded devadasi system could entertain the subordination, trafficking and sexual exploitation of women.

Among the reformers, Muthulakshmi Reddi was a prominent personality who tirelessly argued for devadasi abolition. Ideologically she had a complex position. It was a mixture of two phases of the reforms. On one hand, she was concerned about the puritan Hindu religion but on the other side she argued for the abolition of the system for the empowerment of womanhood. Interestingly, the campaign of Muthulakshmi was supported by the rational arguments of Self-Respect Movement. The effort of reformers were able to create awareness among the people. Following these development, in 1930 C.E. Madras Legislative Council (MLC) passed a resolution to prevent the dedication of devadasi.

In general, reformers were engaged in arguments with the revivalist who were generally nationalist and conservatives. The revivalist could not encounter the strong radical questions of reformers. But in the early 1930s, the revivalist entered into a different political move to revive the cultural dance of devadasis which was popularly known as *sadhir attam* and *dasi attam*. The 'Renaissance' process stigmatized and renamed the dances of devadasi as 'Bharatanatyam' and positioned it in a 'sacred space'. The entire

20th century C.E. devadasi discourse raised the multiple voices from the society. This particular chapter is located in this particular historical context and trying to bring out the different discourses on the issues of devadasi. This chapter extensively used the records of the contemporary writings of devadasi, activist and revivalist in different newspapers, magazines and journals such as *Kudi Arasu*, *Ananda Vikatan*, *Sudesamitran*, *Navasakthi*, *New India*, *The Hindu* and the *Journals of Music Academy*.

5.1. The 20th century C.E. reformers and the devadasi discourse

5.1.1. Muthulakshmi Reddi

Muthulakshmi Reddi (July 30, 1886 C.E.-July 22, 1968 C.E.) was a prominent woman who actively engaged in the abolition discourse and pioneered the women's movement in India (*See Appendix: - 9*). She was inspired by the efforts of Josephine Butler one who questioned the Contagious Diseases (CD) Acts in England and its colonies in 1885 C.E.¹ Pudukkottai born Muthulakshmi was a daughter of devadasi called Chandrammal and Narayanasami. The childhood of Muthulakshmi broke many hurdles of orthodox-patriarchal-caste society. She joined as a physician in the Egmore Government Hospital, Madras as a Women and Children's specialist. Later she was chosen as a Legislative member (1926 C.E.-1930 C.E.) of Madras Presidency and became the Deputy President of the Assembly. She always gave her primary concern for the welfare of children and women.

As a first woman legislator, Muthulakshmi brought out two important bills such as abolition of devadasi system and removable of brothel houses in the Madras Presidency. She strongly criticized devadasi practice and worked for the abolition of the tradition. She considered that the system was a great piece of injustice, a great wrong, a violation of human rights and a practice of immorality.² In her autobiography, she noted that the acts for the suppression of brothels and immoral traffic were the most important legislation of her career.³ She stated that the eradication of the evil practice should be done for the interest of humanity.⁴ She acknowledged Women's Association and MLC for the support of her efforts in women's issues in the Local Council.⁵ She was worried about the party

members in the MLC who were not recognized her social works so her medical and educational work were acknowledged.⁶

Muthulakshmi firmly believed in the institution of the State. According to her, the State should have a responsibility and power to rescue the young girls from the treachery and deceit. She stated that the state ought to guard the morals of the individual and the society. She suggested that the State should understand the evils which sanctioned the practices, thus encouraged the immoral trafficking of women.⁷ In general, Muthulakshmi compared the devadasi system with the institution of prostitution.⁸ On the basis of the brothel house report, she urged the government to take immediate steps to remove the minor girls from brothels to a safe custody and separated the minor girls from the prostitute mothers. She further stressed the inclusion of the prostitute devadasis within the purview of the bill.⁹ Muthulakshmi referred to the earlier order of the colonial state which rescued women from the treachery. She recalled Lord William Bentinck as a good governor because of his strict measures and his orders in the eradication of social evils which severely punished the culprits. She also criticized her contemporary government for its failure in the enactment of the important acts such as Sarda Act and the prohibition of the dedication of minor girls as devadasis into Hindu temples.¹⁰

Muthulakshmi understood the regional variation of the devadasi custom which was largely practiced in Indian Subcontinent.¹¹ During the MLC debate, she established facts that devadasis were recruited from various castes among the Hindus and having different names in different districts.¹² She suspected if the liberation of the country would benefit the welfare of devadasi women. She was aware that there was no guarantee that the self-governed Indian state could secure the Indian women from all the disabilities such as the custom of early marriage, purdah, unequal marriage laws, unjust inheritance laws, etc...¹³

5.1.2. The life of young devadasi

Muthulakshmi was much concerned about the childhood of devadasi girls. She mentioned that the custom was great wrong and injustice to the innocent young of the country.¹⁴ She highlighted the contradiction within the Indian Legal framework. According to Indian

Penal Code, the dedication of girls of tender age under eighteen years was prohibited. But the Law indirectly permitted parents or guardians to dedicate the children after the age of eighteen.¹⁵ In this particular circumstance, Muthulakshmi established the fact of the incapability of young girls in decision making about their carrier. She stated that the childhood of the devadasi children were tutored and advised by the actions of both perditions and orthodox relations (*See Appendix: - 10*).¹⁶

Muthulakshmi mentioned that the concepts such as caste duty or *dharma* could not insist the young girls in the training and practice of the wicked custom. She mentioned that the training for the immoral trade began for these girls from their childhood when they even could not think and act for themselves.¹⁷ In her words, it was a little tender, innocent child in the hands of a wicked power when the fashioning process began.¹⁸ In general, the innocent girls, both adopted and legitimate children of *dasis* were taught music, dancing and all other fine accomplishments to make them attractive to vice. Such unhealthy and superstitious notions are constantly imbibed into the minds of young girls during their young age. So after their matured state, they could not think rationally.¹⁹ The parallel ideas were shared by Thiru.Vi. Kalyanasundaram and Gandhi. Kalyanasundaram, who is popularly known as Thiru.Vi.Ka., bothered about the daughters of devadasi who were also identified as devadasi or *dasi*.²⁰ Gandhi referred devadasi system as an institution of trafficking children. He recommended Law to punish such wicked people who traded upon the souls and bodies of children.²¹

Muthulakshmi mentioned that these women do not belong to the brothel class and they were only victims of tradition, custom or mistaken religious fervor.²² She specified about the *pottu* ceremony that prohibited the girls from lawful marriage and gave a license for promiscuity. She understood that ignorance, superstition and poverty were the chief causes for the continuation of devadasi tradition. She mentioned the unhealthy and superstitious notions were constantly dinned into the minds of girls in their very impressionable age. So the girls even after their maturity could not choose on their free will and it led them a life of shame.²³ Further, the fear of God and punishment would create a panic in the minds of the young girls that God would curse them if they were not

married to the Almighty.²⁴ She recommended the persuasive method and educative propaganda work among those illiterate to recover from the evil customs. The custom prevalent among the unenlightened of the community and who with their persuasive methods and educative propaganda work among those illiterate.²⁵

5.1.3. Muthulakshmi's dilemma

Muthulakshmi established a fact that the institution of devadasi was not a universal practice of Hindu religion. She provided an example that the custom of practice was largely restricted within South India.²⁶ She pointed out that the customs were introduced into the Hindu society during the turbulent period of the Indian history for the safety and protection of its women, but still allowed to exist through the ignorance and illiteracy of the masses and the neutrality of the government towards social evil.²⁷ She felt that the association of caste and religion were the main reasons for the existence of the system.²⁸ She referred as to how one could tolerate young innocent girls to be trained in the name of religion to lead a life of promiscuity, a life leading to the disease of the mind and the body.²⁹

Muthulakshmi had a dilemma while placing the Hindu religion and devadasi system. She was concerned with Hindu religion. She believed in Hinduism, Hindu life and ritual tradition. She added that the exploitation of women in the society led her to move the resolution otherwise reform was not needed.³⁰ According to her, the system affected the morality, health and wellbeing of the Hindu society at large, loses its communal nature and became a question of national importance and interest.³¹ In MLC meeting, she addressed that without civilizing the Hindu community it was not possible to boast of any culture or civilization.³²

Muthulakshmi mentioned that the existence of the system was not only degrading the Hindu society, it was a greater curse to Hindu religion. She said that a woman who manipulated religion and god for this profession they were cheaper than any other else.³³ The Hindu temples, holding out *inams* or salaries for dedication, created an impression in the minds of the ignorant people that impurity and immorality in a particular caste were

no sin, no crime so long they underwent the ceremony of dedication.³⁴ Her conservative positions were criticized by the rationalist especially her decision regarding the importance of the religious education in the schools.³⁵ E.V. Ramasami, the founder of the Self-Respect Movement, criticized the approach of Muthulakshmi towards the abolition of the system. He mentioned that the intention of Muthulakshmi was not to abolish the prostitution, but her primary concern was on the revival of the Hindu religion because she believed that the devadasi system was a symbol of degradation of the Hindu religion.³⁶

Muthulakshmi was quite concerned about the concept of chastity and morality. She stated that chastity in women had been looked upon as the supreme virtue of womanhood.³⁷ She spoke about her mother in *My Experience as a Legislator* as a person who was an example of piety, purity and truth.³⁸ She gave much importance to sexual purity and believed it was the highest ideal of human character. According to her, the height of spirituality could be attained through morality.³⁹ Muthulakshmi in her monograph, *Why Should the Devadasi Institution in the Hindu Temples be abolished?* illustrated the Hindu mythology of Viswamitra and Ahalya.⁴⁰ The myths suggested that an immoral life would ruin the character of the human being. She further perceived the structure of devadasi system as a system of social injustice, moral monstrosity and a religious crime, but not as a social hygiene.⁴¹ She believed that system could affect the morality, health and well-being of the Hindu society. So that these reforms would strengthen the moral tone of the society.⁴²

Muthulakshmi condemned the criticism of the Hindu religion. In November 4-5, 1933 C.E., Muthulakshmi delivered a presidential address at *the Seventh Andhra Provincial Women's Conference* at Ellore. In her address, she opposed the works which were criticized the Hindu religion and society. She said

“I have come across books, purposely written to slander the Hindu society and to say to the worlds that the Hindus are a worthless race of people, are unfit to associate with and are unfit for any self-rule or self-government and to wield any responsibility.”⁴³

Muthulakshmi shared the platforms of nationalist, reformers, radicals and revivalist. She had a great respect for the nationalist Gandhi and Annie Besant. She praised Annie Besant. She mentioned that Besant had made a valuable contribution to the causes of the Indian women.⁴⁴ She also participated in the Self-Respect Movement under the leadership of E.V. Ramasami (*See Appendixes: - 11 and 12*). She presided *the Second Self-respect Women's Conference*, which was held on May 11, 1930 C.E. at Erode. The Conference honored Muthulakshmi for her tireless efforts towards women's liberation through legislative, public media and changes the attitudes of patriarchy.⁴⁵

5.2. Self-Respect Movement and devadasi question

Suyamariyathai Iyakkam (The Self-Respect Movement) was initiated in 1925 C.E.⁴⁶ The Movement did not possess a singular moment of origin.⁴⁷ The Movement voiced the concern of marginalized sections of the society and questioned the hereditary monopoly of Brahmins in the caste society.⁴⁸ The Movement criticized the existing caste structure and cultural hegemony of Brahmanism. Geetha and Rajadurai have mentioned that the movement was mounted on a radical opposition to Brahmins and Brahmanism.⁴⁹ There was a huge difference between the earlier reformers and later reformers who were generally called Self-Respecters.⁵⁰ In general, the radicals came from the Self-Respect Movement who chiefly advocated for universal brotherhood, anti-Brahmanical and anti-ritualistic society. It gave much priority to the self-respected life of the common people.⁵¹ The social engagement of Self-Respecters was unique. E.V. Ramasami, the ideologue of the Self-Respect Movement always insisted on people not to accept his words blindly, he asked them to understand and analyze the content in it.⁵² They argued that rationality, self-respect were the birth right of all human beings.⁵³ They established the irrelevance of devadasi custom and proved the exploitative nature of religion on the female body.

Women's liberation was one of the prominent aims of the Self-Respect Movement.⁵⁴ The rationalist mentioned that the liberation of country was depended on women's liberation.⁵⁵ The Self-Respecters did not bother about political freedom but about social freedom. In 1929 C.E., *the Women's Conference* declared that 'Self-Respect' was the

birth right of every one rather than 'Self-Rule'.⁵⁶ According to them, self-rule was only an abdominal right.⁵⁷ They did not give any relevance to the nation state in reform activities. E.V. Ramasami stated that social reforms were not an agency for the regeneration of the nation.⁵⁸ They announced that the liberation of woman was one of the primary concern for the empowerment of the society.⁵⁹ In *the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana* (S.N.D.P.) *Conference*, the woman Self-Respecter Alarmelmangaiyath Thayammal stressed the importance of the women's liberation.⁶⁰ E.V. Ramasami believed that the liberation of women would not only liberate women's body, but it could even create a huge impact on the society.⁶¹ The liberation could resolve problems such as widowhood.⁶² The Self-Respecters worked for gender equality and the gender sensitization of the society.

Women understood the relevance of the Self-Respect Movement for the process of women emancipation.⁶³ *The Women's Conference* of 1929 C.E. signified equal rights for men and women.⁶⁴ The Movement voiced the reformation of the resurrected women.⁶⁵ The Self-Respecters insisted that the devadasi system was danger to the 'self-respect' and 'discipline' of human society.⁶⁶ The Movement provided a space for women to express their ideas. Geetha and Rajadurai stated that the women self-respecters were the active historical agents who were made and re-made their everyday lives and therefore history.⁶⁷ Nilavathi⁶⁸, Jnanammal⁶⁹, Lakshmi Ammal⁷⁰, Ramamirtham, Rukmani Ammal, Alarmelmangaiyath Thayammal, Janaki, Jothi, Saraswathi Ammal, Lakshmirathan Bharathi⁷¹, Sivakami Chidambaranar⁷² were a few women writers of the Self-Respect Movement who continuously raised women's question in the patriarchal society.⁷³

E.V. Ramasami (September 17, 1879 C.E.-December 24, 1973 C.E.) was the chief campaigner of the Movement. The Self-Respect Movement largely owed its ideas and concepts to E.V. Ramasami.⁷⁴ Usually, his conceptions critiqued ignorance, superstitions, fundamentalism, meaningless customs and baseless manners in the society. E.V. Ramasami questioned Brahmin Nazism and introduced Self-Respect Movement and was instrumental in various other movements such as the Non-Brahmin Movement in

Tamilnadu (1925 C.E.), Temple Entry Movement (1924 C.E.-1925 C.E.), Anti-Hindi Movement (1935 C.E.) and etc.

E.V. Ramasami is popularly known as 'Periyar' or 'Thanthai Periyar'. There was a political move behind the name of E.V. Ramasami which is quite interesting and relevant to the particular historical context. According to the caste tradition, generally caste name was affiliated with the personal name. So he was usually called E.V. Ramasami Naicker. As a rationalist, E.V. Ramasami condemned the custom of using the caste name. From December 25, 1927 C.E. onwards he started to write his name as E.V. Ramasami and became a model for others. But people were hesitant to call him by name due to respect. So they used to address him as '*Periyar*' which meant 'Elder'. In 1938 C.E., *the Women's Conference* of Tamilnadu passed a resolution to call him as *Periyar* for his service towards women and their empowerment.⁷⁵

5.2.1. *Kudi Arasu*, the rational newspaper

The radicals, strongly believed education would liberate the people from their social clutches. *Kudi Arasu*, the radical newspaper of the Self-Respect Movement mentioned that education brought knowledge, culture, discipline, and good character.⁷⁶ E.V. Ramasami understood the prominence of the media. Geetha and Rajadurai referred the understanding of Self-Respecters about the power of media. They noted that the concern of the Self-Respecters was that the single most secular index of Brahmin power in these modern times was newspapers.⁷⁷ The Self-Respecters were so convinced of interlinks between the power of words (newspaper) and the authority of the Brahmins that they began newspaper and weeklies of their own whenever they could.⁷⁸ The Self-Respecters considered print media as a prime tool for the propagation of the ideas of the Self-Respect Movement.⁷⁹ They considered that the popularity of the press was laid in its principle.⁸⁰ The Self-Respecters believed that the newspapers were generally established as a guiding factor of the society's growth, human solidarity and national development. It should enlighten layman.⁸¹ He insisted people, especially non-Brahmin to read the magazines⁸² such as *Kudi Arasu* (The Republic), *Dravidan*, *Justice* and *Nava Sakthi*.⁸³

Through the newspaper, the Self-Respecters were continuously engaged in the criticism of the fundamental ideas which was propagated in magazines such as *Swadesamitran*, *Suyarajya* (Self-Rule) and *Tamilnadu*⁸⁴ and *Ananda Vikatan*.⁸⁵ An intellectual debate between the bipolar ideologies took place in the newspaper. So they were interested in establishing a print media.

In 1922 C.E., E.V. Ramasami and Va.Mu. Thanga Perumal Pillai had a discussion in Coimbatore prison to establish a newspaper for the propagation of ideas of Self-Respect, brotherhood and socialism.⁸⁶ On May 2, 1925 C.E., *Kudi Arasu* was started from Erode by Thanga Perumal and E.V. Ramasami.⁸⁷ Until July 1925 C.E., they were the editors of the newspaper. After the death of Thanga Perumal (March 6, 1926 C.E.), E.V. Ramasami became the sole editor.⁸⁸ Usually, E.V. Ramasami wrote a column and expressed his opinion towards multiple social issues. Frequently he wrote columns under the pseudonym of *Chitraputtiran*. In general, *Kudi Arasu* was accepted as the official newspaper of the Self-Respect Movement. It brought out the multiple voices and ideas of Non-Brahmin, women and religious minorities. It carried substantial rational arguments of Non-Brahmin thoughts especially on the social issues such as reservation, Brahmanism and women. It further questioned patriarchy, child-marriage, prostitution, devadasi system, brahmanical marriages and etc.⁸⁹ *Kudi Arasu* continually engaged for the reformation of the resurrected women.⁹⁰ It encouraged the Non-Vedic and inter-caste marriages⁹¹ and also campaigned for the widow marriages.⁹² Along with news of political non-Brahmanism and the Self-Respect Movement, it carried articles on contemporary politics, social reform and carried regular columns on science, religion, and atheism.⁹³

Generally, *Kudi Arasu* engaged with a series of discussion with the arguments of revivalist. It condemned the promotion of caste ideologies, caste order and concealing caste atrocities through the magazines.⁹⁴ It opposed the attitude and content of fundamentalist magazines, journal, etc. On June 19, 1927 C.E. *Kudi Arasu* wrote a column, *Itharku Yen Mounam? Parppanappaththirikkaikalin Purattu* (Why there is silence? the twist of the brahmanical magazines) detailed the double standards of the Brahmanical newspapers in the social issues.⁹⁵ Another column revealed how the

newspapers were published news without any ideologies and used the opportunities for their political advantages.⁹⁶ *Kudi Arasu* carefully countered the superstitiousness and anti-feminist ideas of prominent leaders such as Gandhi, Anne Besant⁹⁷, Sathyamurthi, Srinivasa Iyengar⁹⁸, Krishnamachariyar, etc. The *Revolt* questioned the statement of Gandhi that the women was queen in her home.⁹⁹ *Kudi Arasu* condemned the criticism of the Justice magazine on the resolutions of *the Women's Conference* about the equal rights for both sexes.¹⁰⁰

5.3. Questioning patriarchy

The Self-Respect Movement was aware that patriarchy and religion were the prime causes for the continuation of the devadasi practice and the reason for other problems such as women's subordination in the society. Lakshmi Ammal mentioned that irrational religion and patriarchal religious doctrines were the root causes of the social evils.¹⁰¹ The Self-Respecters understood that the general condition of women was the worst.¹⁰² E.V. Ramasami said that the position of women in society was worse than even that of untouchables. Self-Respecters believed that the empowerment of women would improve the general condition of the society. E.V. Ramasami requested women to believe in their selves, act boldly and move forward to break their bonds and get rid of the servitude.

The Self-Respect Movement questioned the patriarchal system of society. It stated that in a patriarchal structure, women were treated as sexual object and property¹⁰³ and the society treated women as a child bearing machine and equated women with animal.¹⁰⁴ Nilavathi criticized the notions that delivering girl child was a curse.¹⁰⁵ Kunjitham, a Self-Respecter stated that women were morally and spiritually subjugated and their world restricted to the kitchen and that they were kept out of the public domain.¹⁰⁶ *The South Indian Social Reformers Conference* passed resolutions to abolish distinctions on the bases of birth. It recommended the establishment of equality between sexes and suggested the rights of widow to inherit the entire property of their husband.¹⁰⁷

5.3.1. The masculinity

The Self-Respecters were critical towards various issues such as masculinity, marriage, property rights, *purdha*, divorce, child-marriage, devadasi system, prostitution, language and contraception.¹⁰⁸ The Self-Respecters were much concerned with the subjugation of women bodies. They deconstructed myths which were imposed on women's bodies. E.V. Ramasami said that the servitude of women made them 'mobile corpse'.¹⁰⁹ The Self-Respecters believed that the real liberation of women would happen after the abolition of masculinity. The society should work hard to abolish the notion of masculinity, then only women could empower.¹¹⁰

E.V. Ramasami critiqued the concept of *anmai* (masculinity). According to him, the term *anmai* itself harassed womanhood. As long as the concept of masculinity existed in the society women would not get any liberation and emancipation.¹¹¹ The Self-Respecters were critical towards the linguistic politics on women body. E.V. Ramasami commented on the word *vibachari*, meaning prostitute which was widely used to refer to women who engage in prostitution. He stated that there was no equivalent word in Tamil for a man who was involved in prostitution and also he referred a word *vibacharan* to the Tamil etymology to point to a male prostitute.¹¹² In the same way, he depoliticized the word *karpu* (chastity) and gave rational arguments for it.¹¹³

In general chastity was believed to be the foremost duty of womanhood. E.V. Ramasami mentioned the importance of the deconstruction of the word *karpu* for a gender sensitive society. He stressed that the concept of *karpu* should be uniform to both the male and female body.¹¹⁴ He stated that the concept of *karpu* was embedded in the slavery which was imposed by the Brahmin patriarchy in the Tamil society and he further stated that there were no word or any equivalent concept had been used to define the male body.¹¹⁵ He reasoned that the masculinity of the language was the basis for the unavailability of such words.¹¹⁶ Lakshmi Ammal also criticized the religious theories which did not mention any *dosha* (stain) for men practicing prostitution.¹¹⁷

The Self-Respecters understood the construction of caste on women body and so they encouraged love marriages, choice marriages and inter-caste marriages which could deconstruct the caste structure in the society.¹¹⁸ They argued that love marriages would eradicate casteism in the society.¹¹⁹ They propagated Self-Respect Marriages which excluded brahmanical rituals.¹²⁰ Usually, *Kudi Arasu* popularized Self-Respect Marriages.¹²¹ On November 21, 1926 C.E. *Kudi Arasu* reported the Self-Respect Marriage of a Baljiya Naidu in Thathampatti village, near Salem.¹²² In 1929 C.E., a marriage was held between Gurusamy of Mudaliyar caste and Kunjitham of *Isai Vellalar*.¹²³ However, Self-Respecters were critical about the marriage institution. They did not believe that marriage was only system which could rescue a woman. Kunjitham stated that the social customs of India brought up girls for getting married. As marriage became a prime goal, there were no women who escaped from its clutches.¹²⁴

5.3.2. Women's Choice

The Self-Respecters understood the potential of women and acknowledged the credibility of women's choice. They were reluctant to let men take decisions on women's issues. The Self-Respecters strongly believed that women's liberation could never happen in the hands of men.¹²⁵ *Kudi Arasu* mentioned that the main reason for the subjugation of women was their dependence on men.¹²⁶ Kunjitham noted that women alone could understand their rights, difficulties and capacities.¹²⁷ A wife of Venkatasubba Rao stated that women should no longer leave men to decide what was best for them. The downtrodden condition of women all over the world was occurring due to the fact that they were governed by 'man' made laws.¹²⁸ According to the Self-Respecters, the participation of men in the women's liberation movement did not give any freedom to women. It condemned women into being slaves forever. E.V. Ramasami used metaphors to signify the issue, such as, "the fox will not liberate the goat and chickens."¹²⁹ So *Kudi Arasu* advised women to take decisions for themselves.¹³⁰ Nagalingam wrote that the independence of women was in their mental freedom and in free expression of their thoughts.¹³¹ *Kudi Arasu* stated that women were the real obstacle for themselves rather

than their male counterparts because women still did not considered them as worthy of being liberated.¹³²

Women's education was seen as an important criterion for women's liberation.¹³³ A column *Woes of Indian Womanhood in Revolt* detailed how women were denied access to certain rights such as education.¹³⁴ In a column *Kulanthaikaludan Manamakkal Thirumanam* (The Marriage among Children) insisted that education should not carry any partiality towards male or female.¹³⁵ In 1928 C.E., the *South Indian Social Reformers Conference* passed resolutions on the compulsory elementary education for all irrespective of caste, creed and sex. It insisted on a special provision for the children of depressed classes of school-going by providing free boarding, books and other materials.¹³⁶ *The Second Self-Respect Conference* (1930 C.E.) declared that illiteracy was the source for women's subordination.¹³⁷ It mentioned that the deplorable position of Indian women was due to the lack of education.¹³⁸ It stressed the importance of the free education for both sexes at least till sixteen years.¹³⁹

Lakshmi Ammal said that the property rights for women and the right to choose a marriage partner were the two important concerns for women's subordination.¹⁴⁰ E.V. Ramasami argued for women's choice in motherhood. He established the fact of subordination of womanhood in the form of motherhood. He appealed to women to stop giving birth and further stated that women should understand that they were not responsible for the reproduction of the human society. So even if it caused a reduction in the population, there was no reason for women to worry.¹⁴¹ The rationalist thought that *sati* was far better than child marriages. They considered the sorrow of *sati* was for only one day but child marriages made women suffer much longer.¹⁴²

The Self-Respect Movement argued for the economic empowerment of women. It also voiced the property rights for women.¹⁴³ *The Second Self-Respect Conference* welcomed equal rights for males and females in property, guardianship, adoption.¹⁴⁴ The Conference welcomed the Divorce Act.¹⁴⁵ It emphasized on the importance of property rights to women.¹⁴⁶ Ramamirtham, the Self-Respecter stressed the usage of the *swadesi*

(indigenous) goods for economic prosperity and women's empowerment.¹⁴⁷ The conference gave much importance to the vocational education of women and also encouraged women to do social work such as maintaining orphanages.¹⁴⁸

The Self-Respecters de-mystified various metaphors which were related to women subservience. They questioned the concept of beauty which was associated exclusively with women. E.V. Ramasami pointed to the irrelevance of having long hair.¹⁴⁹ When it came to love marriages, E.V. Ramasami encouraged them but questioned the myths related to the concept of love. He pointed out that the concept of love was a constructed one and he recommended the society to discontinue those beliefs.¹⁵⁰ He criticized the phrases such as *love is forever and it cannot be changed* and *love at first sight*. His rationality questioned exaggeration and longevity of love.¹⁵¹

E.V. Ramasami mentioned that in society, no one had the right to construct or even discuss an individual's affection, desire, love, lust, companionship, passion etc.¹⁵² The concept of love did not carry any greatness in it. It was just as like other feelings such as affection, ignorance, lust, friendship, sorrow etc. Every relationships and bonds was made for human satisfaction alone. So it was nothing extraordinary and did not mean anything more than that.¹⁵³ The word made people mad. They exaggerated concept of love could ruin the harmonious life of individuals. It would be a burden for spouses. According to him, woman was bounded to live with an annoying man forever in the name of love. He believed that love was not a natural feeling and argued that if love was natural then why the feelings should occur only between male and female bodies.¹⁵⁴ The material reality instigates the feeling of love. Otherwise it could not occur between men and women or women and men.¹⁵⁵ E.V. Ramasami condemned that the negligence of real love in the name of chastity and so on. He argued for the abolition of religion and its customary law which promoted patience and chastity for women. A woman should have the rights to divorce and the right to choose partner for herself.¹⁵⁶

E.V. Ramasami did not have faith in the institution of marriage, but he overwhelmingly encouraged the Self-Respect and inter-caste marriages. He criticized the arranged and forced marriages and he believed that these kinds of marriages were the prime causes for the women subjugation and servitude. According to him, the marriage institution was an incalculable harm for the womanhood. E.V. Ramasami believed that the marriage institution was nothing but the institution of female slavery.¹⁵⁷ He criticized the 'sacredness' of the marriages. He stated that if marriage was sacred then why did conjugal murders and crimes occur? He said that marriage was nothing but a convenient bond between men and women for a better life.¹⁵⁸ He opined that marriages were unnatural. The restriction of the sexual freedom of the women, the marriage system and its rituals symbolized the bondage of woman to a particular man.¹⁵⁹

The Self-Respecters believed that the servitude womanhood was caused due their ignorance. E.V. Ramasami stated that the long process of socialization had made woman to acknowledge 'the superiority' of masculinity and trained them to observe the masculine structure in the society.¹⁶⁰ The Self-Respecters questioned the notion of curse and sin. A column in Revolt stated the construction of the society in seeing women as sin and even crossing shadow of women was crime. In general, women were compelled to do household duties. So the columnist recommended Indian women to give their attention to their social problems and attain freedom.¹⁶¹

5.4. Devadasi system and the Self-Respect Movement

The Self-Respecters strongly believed that the abolition of the devadasi system was desirable and important.¹⁶² E.V. Ramasami considered that the abolition of the *dasi* system and child marriage would lead to women's empowerment.¹⁶³ The rationalists considered devadasi system as a system of professional prostitution.¹⁶⁴ Indirani Balasubramanian said that in the initial stages the dedicated ones believed that they were slave to the *Devas* and served God. But in later days these slave women became prostitute, it was clearly understandable from the word *devaradiyal* or *devadasi*.¹⁶⁵ She mentioned that people considered devadasi as a profession.¹⁶⁶ In 1929 C.E. *the Women's*

Social Conference strongly condemned the continuation of devadasi system in the Hindu Temples.¹⁶⁷ *Kudi Arasu* worried that the devadasis had to dance in temple throughout the day and then have sex with priests at night.¹⁶⁸ It further stated that devadasi institution was a danger to the disciplined and self-respected life of the human society.¹⁶⁹ It questioned that devadasis were dedicated to temple for performing dances, but they dressed well and exposed their body and invited devotees to their houses and looted their money. All these notorious things happened in the name of the Hindu pantheon.¹⁷⁰

5.4.1. Devadasi and prostitution

E.V. Ramasami understood that the *pottu* ceremony was a license for prostitution in the name of God.¹⁷¹ He raised questions such as why the Hindu temples needed *dasis* or prostitutes?; why did service to God need prostitutes? and what is a need for prostitutes in temple? He perceived that these prostitutes were kept to attract the devotees. He mentioned that in our country none of the devadasis ready to accept the reason the poverty was the cause for the entry in this profession. He added that they were in the profession due to the gods' desire.¹⁷² In these days even the *nautch* party was not considered as disciplined act. In the meantime, they said that the dance was needed by god and it was a religious matter.¹⁷³

The Self-Respecters were able to understand the differences between prostitution and devadasihood. They opined that prostitution could be a cause for other social evils such as murder, robbery, and etc.¹⁷⁴ *Kudi Arasu* used the Tamil term *vesi* to refer to prostitute and *dasi* to denote devadasi. An article in *Kudi Arasu* mentioned that devadasis were cursed as *dasi* as well as *vesi* too.¹⁷⁵ A Column, *Vibachcharam Oliyuma* (Will the prostitution be eradicated?) reasoned that the prostitution occurred due to male chauvinism and the concepts such as 'chastity' and 'chaste wife'. The social restriction on love, widow marriage, lack of choice in selecting life partner, property rights were prime causes which made women became prostitutes.¹⁷⁶ The term *vesi* (prostitute) was coined by mean to hide their role and blame the woman.¹⁷⁷ The term prostitute was referred to women being slaves to men.¹⁷⁸ There was no term to identify men as

prostitutes. The rules and regulations in our country were mostly against the nature and humanity. It only gave rise to slaves.¹⁷⁹

In some occasions, reformists considered that prostitution was the profession of devadasis. *The S.N.D.P Conference* of Calicut (modern Kerala) mentioned that the devadasis considered prostitution as their duty by birth.¹⁸⁰ Nilavathi remarked that the devadasi institution was comparable to prostitution and also worse than any other social evil.¹⁸¹ She pointed out that the revival of the *pottu* tradition would encourage prostitution in our society.¹⁸² She criticized that the life of the devadasi was to sell their chastity for their livelihood and further added that no other country practiced such custom.¹⁸³ In 1930 C.E., *the Women's Conference* commented on that devadasi sisters practicing dancing and singing and thus propagating the degraded profession of prostitution.¹⁸⁴

E.V. Ramasami stressed the importance of the abolition of the *dasi* system and considered it a profession.¹⁸⁵ He appreciated the Mysore government for abolishing devadasi system in their temples and freeing their deities from prostitution.¹⁸⁶ Raghavan, a Self-Respecter wrote that religion gave license to prostitution in the name of *pottu* ceremony.¹⁸⁷ He further stated that many devotees made pilgrimages to visit devadasi and satisfy their lust through them.¹⁸⁸ The religious rituals and festivals which the devotees performed were indirectly popularized as notorious characteristics of the Hindu pantheon.¹⁸⁹ Hindu Saiva religions encouraged prostitution in the name of dedication.¹⁹⁰ The priest kept the belongings of devotees who brought materials for *puja* in order to keep for their *dasis*.¹⁹¹ *Kudi Arasu* mentioned that Rameshwaram, Madurai, Tiruchendur, Chidambaram, Srirangam, Palani, Kasi and Ghaya were the places where the practice of religious prostitution was common among the people.¹⁹²

In general, common people were interested in engaging the process of social reform. The letters to the editor of *Kudi Arasu* showed the eagerness of the people to participate in the process. Minatchi, a reader of *Kudi Arasu* commented that prostitution was not only the job of *dasis*. It had been in existence since the medieval period. She further stated that in modern times, upper caste women were competitive and a part of the prostitution of the

particular castes such as devadasi.¹⁹³ Another reader, Thandapani also wrote that prostitution had existed among *dasis* from the medieval period onwards and that the *dasis* conference were worried about the dominance of the other caste women in prostitution. So at the conference they decided to do marriage for their girls in order to move away from this custom.¹⁹⁴ During *the Second Women's Self-Respect Conference*, Ramamirtham suggested devadasi sisters to break the tradition of *pottu* and marry a person in whom they were interested.¹⁹⁵ A reader from Nagercoil appreciated the activities of *Kudi Arasu* and mentioned that during those days *Kudi Arasu* was actively involved in the process of eradicating social evils, for instance prostitution, that were prevalent in the Hindu temples in the name of religion. He further complained about the prolonged performance of devadasi in the temple premises following the religious sermons.¹⁹⁶

5.4.2. Writings of the devadasi

The Self-Respect newspapers gave special attention to the issues of devadasi. Devadasi and other activists of the Self-Respect Movement frequently wrote columns in the newspapers. In June 17, 1928 C.E., Masilamanip Pillai wrote a column *Devadasikalukkor Vendukol: Namathu Nokkam* which meant *An Appeal to Devadasis: Our Intention* in *Kudi Arasu*. The content mentioned that the burning of the *pottu* would resurrect the life of women.¹⁹⁷ According to him, all the hardships of devadasi women occurred due to the *pottu* ceremony. He stated that women lost their lives because of this ceremony. A column in *Kudi Arasu*, *the Abolition of the Pottu Ceremony in Hindu Temples of Madras Presidency* noted that the *pottu* ceremony, devadasis, prostitution and even concubines would accept prostitution as their next profession.¹⁹⁸ Masilamanip Pillai stated that people from the devadasi community may be possessed better-clothes, ornaments and other luxurious goods according to their social and economic status. So the ignorant parents tried to imitate other and brought up their children in a superstitious ambience. The young minds did not understand the truth that the custom would degrade their future. Even within their families, the dedicated women were not considered to be as good as others. Their children were humiliated as *vesi mahane* which meant son of a prostitute.¹⁹⁹

Masilamanip Pillai mentioned that these actives naturally denied the self-respecting life of the young girls.²⁰⁰

A column in *Kudi Arasu, Naan Vilaimagala?*²⁰¹ (Am I a prostitute?) detailed the woes of devadasihood. The letter was written by an anonymous author under the identity of Devadasi. The column mentioned

“She (Devadasi) could not marry and lead an ordinary life because she was born to a devadasi community and brought up for dedication. The *pottu* was the one ornament which made her discernible from others. The *pottu* was a tag, it indicated that she could be purchased like materials in a shop and that they could have control over her body. Other girls like her were married, and society considered them ‘family girls’ and treated them well. Those girls had a good family life with love, care and affection. But her condition was pathetic. Even though she had gone to school with them, the society now labelled her as a ‘prostitute’. In the name of tradition, she had to control her desires and sell her body. The society controlled her completely and made her carry the burden caused by it. She tried to carry the heavy burden but lost her conscience. It was a violation of the law. Her ‘responsible’ mother and society kept her in an unreturned hell. If even her caretakers behaved like this, where could she find shelter? The society savored her misery.”

The columnist raised the question of rescued life of devadasi. They further pointed out that the epics, religious doctrines, religion, tradition witnessed the existence of the notorious custom as it became the duty to the particular community. She worried about the redemption of the girl. According to her, her own community and the country put heavy weight on the little minds. The unbearable weight made them ‘slave’ for centuries. She compared the *pottu* with the ‘poisonous snakes’. The fundamentalist poisoned the people regarding the reformers. Though reformers considered the evil practices and tried to eradicate them. But the fundamentalist criticized them as atheist and portrayed them as religious traitor and further that the reformers wanted to protect the people to get their

salvation. She mentioned the statement of Mayo and replied of the fundamentalist. Mayo stated that in India, traditionally young girls in the particular families sold their chastity. The revivalist counters that the Indian traditions keep faith on truth and kept the young girls with chastity as an ornaments. She wrote that these selfish fundamentalist not allow them to live a decent life. She strongly believed that the future would be eclipsed. She welcomed the upper caste women to take care of their 'divine professional' and provided rest to them because the devadasi tradition was established and protected in the name of God. The small section in the society kept the particular group for exploitation.²⁰²

5.4.3. Religion and the devadasi institution

The Self-Respecters stressed the importance of religious reforms in the society.²⁰³ A column, *Swamikalum Devadiyalkalum* (Gods and prostitutes) stated that all the social evils in the society occurred in the name of religion alone.²⁰⁴ Self-Respecters strongly believed that religion was the root causes of social evils.²⁰⁵ They sarcastically referred that the mythologies of the Hindu Gods were known for their mischievous activities and prostitution.²⁰⁶ An article, *Pengal Viduthalaikku Je! Je! Je!* (Hail Women's Liberation) mentioned the same that in India all miserable events occurred in the name of religion.²⁰⁷

E.V. Ramasami believed that religious sentiments were the root causes for all social evils. The deities of our country were the markers for all the notorious activities.²⁰⁸ He considered the Hindu Gods and Goddesses to be the greatest guiding factor of gambling, treachery, falsehood, theft, deceit, prostitution, concubine, murder, and life torture were the partially otherwise more or less completely symbolize the Hindu pantheon. He questioned how people could be disciplined under such a God and how they could hope for justice.²⁰⁹ E.V. Ramasami insisted that religion was not considered for the disciplined way of life it was instructed for rituals alone.²¹⁰ He said that he wondered whether God should protect the people or the people should protect the God.²¹¹ He said that the people would understand God as the reason to love their neighbors and to lead a disciplined life. It was for this that they established religion too.²¹² But Hindu religion did not have any

control and made one slave.²¹³ E.V. Ramasami said that the God themselves made women as prostitutes.²¹⁴

The Self-Respecters strongly condemned the prostitution in the name of religion.²¹⁵ E.V. Ramasami criticized the Hindu religion for considering the establishment of the devadasi system as one of the thirty two *dharma*s of the Hindu religion.²¹⁶ All the suppression happened if in the name of religion meant we should destroy the religion.²¹⁷ E.V. Ramasami mentioned in *the Tirunelveli Conference* that the existence of devadasis in the name of god and religion was shameful to the Hindu society. So he recommended people to stop the custom.²¹⁸ Nilavathi referred that the reformation of religion was more important rather than the abolition of it. Further, she requested for the removal of corruptions in religion and its institution.²¹⁹ Nilavathi said that if religion faded away from our country then only the country would prosper.²²⁰ She said that the abolition of devadasi system was laid in the abolition of the religion and the abolition of the religion would free the innocent women.²²¹

The Self-Respect Movement questioned religion for the continuation of the devadasi custom. A column in *Kudi Arasu Iniyavathu Puththi Varuma?* (Will awareness come after this?) mentioned that the prostitution occurred with the support of the temple institution.²²² Lingam, a columnist of *Kudi Arasu* insisted that the devadasis should be sent away from the temple institution and leave the God without any worldly wife or concubines.²²³ *Kudi Arasu* criticized that the establishment of the rituals which insisted that the gods keep their concubines with them and insisted on devadasis in temples. The devotees visited temple in the name of *bhakti* to see these girls and make an agreement.²²⁴ A column in *Kudi Arasu* stated

“in politics we worked hard to eradicate social evils. But it was not fruitful. We understood that the religious doctrines were root causes for all these evils. After that we planned to work remove the superstitions of the society.”²²⁵

The Self-Respecters strongly condemned the exploitative nature of the priests. *Kudi Arasu* in an article stated that the trustees of the village temple and their children decided

the life of the beautiful devadasis and rest were left to the devotees, the ones who visited the temple.²²⁶ In major temples, it was mostly the priests who acted as pimps for the devadasis. They destroyed the lives of the youngsters. Most of the temples witnessed that they were places for harlotry²²⁷ and the most of the priests took devadasis with them even during their travels.²²⁸ Even if they themselves could not go, they would dispatch their *dasis* for that work (prostitution).²²⁹ Nilavathi mentioned that the members of the dominant caste and priests acted as pimps and encouraged the devadasi institution.²³⁰ During festival times, the houses of most priests functioned as brothels.²³¹ For the sake of religious service to the deity, women were made devadasis but in the name of service the priests would exploit them and make them sell their bodies for their livelihood.²³²

The Self-Respecters were critical of the superstitious attitudes of the devadasi institution. Indirani Balasubramanian questioned the dedication practice of devadasi to fulfill their wishes.²³³ Raghavan, a rationalist, criticized devadasi women for considering that their dedication would lead them to heaven. He added that the notion increased the number of devadasis in the country. The devotees also supported prostitution in the name of God and religion. The devotees were pleased to keep devadasis in the temples and inviting them for their household functions such as marriages, puberty functions and other functions. Sexual union with devadasis was considered a prestigious issue to the elite.²³⁴ The social recognition of the devadasis also encouraged others to enter this evil profession. The immoral life led them to suffer from venereal disease. It was also communicable to their male partners. It would then spread all over the families of these men. And later, the entire country would become sick.²³⁵

E.V. Ramasami stated that even going to hell was a better option than being a slave.²³⁶ According to the rationalist Raghavan, the Gods whom men worshiped were themselves a symbolic representation of the patriarchy of the society. Religion and scholars stood for prostitution instead of abolition of the devadasi system.²³⁷ In a column in the *Kudi Arasu*, the rationalist mentioned that one section of the people married god in the name of religion and were considered as divine wives, but they were later molested by the priests and then everyone used their bodies and it was through this that they earned money.²³⁸ He

also noted how the Hindu gods were depicted as having their wives on their hands, tongues or shoulders. People did not learn chivalry from their Gods and did not treat their women with decency. It resulted in the servitude of women and children. The socialization process encouraged the slavery and the whole country became enslaved. If these kinds of systems were made by Gods, then those Gods should be destroyed.²³⁹ E.V. Ramasami sarcastically stated that it was a great pity that such a great burden should be foisted upon the head of poor God. He explained that Hindu religion considered that women were created to be prostitutes and so had to be kept under surveillance. He hence believed that the Hindu religion would not give any freedom or liberation to women.²⁴⁰

5.5. State and devadasi system

In 1927 C.E. Muthulakshmi initiated a motion regarding the dedication of girls to temples. Muthulakshmi forwarded the legal enactment for the abolition of the devadasi system. She believed that the introduction of the bill would rescue thousands of young innocent children from a life of immorality and vice, from suffering alone throughout their lives, and from disease and death resulting from being infected with venereal disease.²⁴¹ She was a little disappointed with the legislative process regarding the abolition of the devadasi system. She mentioned that the prevention process went back to 1868 C.E., but still, the Central Government was interested in receiving the opinion of the Local Government where the evil practice was quite prevalent.²⁴² She urged the Government to stop the custom immediately.

In the MLC debate on the devadasi issue, Muthulakshmi recommended the Government of India to implement the Abolition Act to stop the practice of dedicating young girls and women to Hindu temples for immoral purposes under the pretext of caste, custom or religion.²⁴³ She worked hard to pass the resolution in the MLC. In the Council meeting, she attempted to justify the need for the bill

“I beg to move this resolution which stands in my name in response to the wishes of all the women’s associations in this Presidency who feel this practice of dedicating young girl or young women to temples for immoral purposes as a slur

on Indian womanhood and a great wrong and injustice done to the innocent young of the country... in deference to my own personal conviction that in the cause of humanity and injustice, we can no longer delay this piece of beneficial legislation, a reform by which we can rescue thousands of young innocent children from a life of immorality and vice, from life-long individualism, suffering disease and death resulting from infection with venereal disease.”²⁴⁴

In general, the historicity of devadasi was highlighted by the revivalist group who argued for the preservation of devadasi tradition. They believed the devadasi system was of divine origin and so the abolition would question the religious faith and customs of the Hindus. In 1932 C.E., *the Brahmin Conference* was held in Thanjavur. It made decisions for the continuation of the child marriages and orthodoxies principles. It also sought the removal of the act of abolition of the devadasi system.²⁴⁵ The Conference criticized *the Women’s Conferences* and mentioned that these kinds of conferences would break traditional Indian values such as family, unity, art, etc.²⁴⁶ According to them, the Women’s Conference violated the norms of the Hindu doctrines.²⁴⁷ C. Vijayaraghavachari, a revivalist pointed out that the devadasi custom was a sacred one.²⁴⁸ Muthulakshmi replied to this argument and stated in the assembly of MLC,

“... aged devadasis often bought girls from other caste, Hindu and so. Of late, there has been an unnecessary quarrel in the Press about the origin of this class because the different communities disown these people. but I may inform the hon. Members that however much the other communities might try to disown them, still none can deny the fact that the devadasis are one of us, and our own kith and kin and are not descended from heaven nor imported from foreign countries to the Hindu temples.”²⁴⁹

The introduction of the Bill received a mixed response. Muthulakshmi mentioned that the vested interests became alarmed at the move and tried with all their influence to dissuade her from moving the resolution but she was adamant and almost took a vow that she would not rest till she got this pernicious custom eradicated.²⁵⁰ A section of the devadasis

appreciated the effort of Muthulakshmi and invited other devadasi women to join the protest against the illegal custom.²⁵¹

There was a strong criticism towards Muthulakshmi's efforts on devadasi issues. Muthulakshmi stated that people did not have courage to oppose her directly. She understood the ignorance of women folk who opposed the bill.²⁵² Her opponents began to attack her through the press, both the vernacular and the English.²⁵³ A section of the public began underhanded work and set up one or two bogus associations to write petitions to Government and distribute unworthy literature to the public to prevent the bill from becoming law. She therefore had to use all the resources at her command to counteract such evil propaganda.²⁵⁴ She compared women who were opposed the Hindu reform to frogs in a well.²⁵⁵ In response to Sathyamurthi²⁵⁶ who claimed that the Devadasi system was a divine one, Muthulakshmi said that then the priests and their castes should themselves allow their sisters to dance and sing in temple rituals and earn fortunes.²⁵⁷

Munusamy Naidu, an MLC member said that the introduction of the bill was unnecessary and he was clear in not casting his vote.²⁵⁸ Sulthana pointed out that the implementation of the bill would not make any difference.²⁵⁹ On the other hand, Kalyanasundaram welcomed the bill initiated by Muthulakshmi.²⁶⁰ R.K. Shanmugam spoke for the abolition of the devadasi system in the Delhi Legislative Assembly.²⁶¹ Anjaneyalu stated that the general condition of devadasis was not satisfactory, and that the introduction of the devadasi bill was important for the improvement of the community. He further praised Muthulakshmi in the MLC meeting for introducing the devadasi bill.²⁶² Somayajalu was worried that the bill had been introduced rashly without any further debate.²⁶³ Kotti Reddy favored the bill and stated that the main aim of the bill was to ban the devadasi dance and songs.²⁶⁴

The revivalist was trying to establish the importance of the dance in the ritual tradition of Hindu religion. The fundamentalist compared the system of devadasi with Christian nuns. During the discussion in the house of Sami Venkatachalam, Sathyamurthi compared devadasi with the Christian nuns.²⁶⁵ Sathyamurthi worried that the claim of abolishing the

pottu ceremony would entitle others to question the other Hindu values such as removing the priest from the temple services also.²⁶⁶ In another occasion, a *dasi* claimed that they are not prostitute but *devaradiyar* and served the deity for life.²⁶⁷

The arguments of reformers concerned the livelihood of devadasi women. Yande stated that the law should ensure that the devadasis enjoyed the lands which had originally been granted to them.²⁶⁸ Muthulakshmi stated that the temples had been allotting lands to these families which they had been enjoying from the time immemorial as an inheritance in lieu of their service in the temples.²⁶⁹ She further stated that devadasi women were going to the extent of buying girls from other communities for dedication to ensure the benefits of their lands and other rights.²⁷⁰ The princely state of Mysore understood the issue and ordered the confirmation of the *inams* which had been specifically granted to devadasi under Rule VII, Clause F of the *Inam* rules.²⁷¹

The speaker replied to the debate that the bill had been discussed well for nearly three times before being introduced.²⁷² Initially, the bill had not been passed. Only 17 votes had been in favor of the bill and 42 votes had been against it.²⁷³ Muthulakshmi worried that the Justice Party MLC members had cast their vote in favor of the public opinion on the issue. The reformists shamed the attitudes of the Justice Party members in the assembly.²⁷⁴ Muthulakshmi criticized the Government machinery and its authorities for their lackadaisical attitudes towards prohibiting the dedication of minor girls to Hindu temples as devadasis.²⁷⁵

During the discussion on the bill, the fundamentalists and some devadasis protested against the initiation of Muthulakshmi. The conservative devadasis stated that the abolition of the system would make their lives miserable.²⁷⁶ In 1927 C.E., Duraikkannu and Parvathi from the devadasi community wrote a letter to the members of the MLC requesting the prevention of the abolition of the devadasi act.²⁷⁷ Their appeal stated that the passing of the act would question the livelihood of devadasis and affecting the harmonious life of household women, because it was widely considered by devadasis themselves that their community was preventing the world from the practice of

prostitution.²⁷⁸ Muthulakshmi was pained to observe that the upper-caste people did not help the devadasi community in their efforts to reform.²⁷⁹ She wrote a letter to Gandhi asking for his support in the Abolition bill. In it, she mentioned that the most of the Congress men opposed her reform measures and defended the infamous institution.²⁸⁰ Gandhi replied saying that he appreciated her efforts and noted that her proposal was mature enough and wished her the support of the lovers of purity in religious and general social life.²⁸¹ Regarding the efforts of Muthulakshmi, Gandhi appreciated her works in Legislative Council and advised her not to adopt completely western methods.²⁸²

The Women's Social Conference appealed to the Government, the Hindu Religious Endowment Board, temple committees and trustees for the prohibition of the dedication ceremony of girls within the premises of any temple or any other place of worship. It supported the Prevention of Dedications Bill. The Conference called on the local legislature and the Government to enforce the Brothel Bill as a law on the lines drafted by the Madras Vigilance Association, with ample provision by the State for the moral and mental training of minor girls up to the age of twenty one on the lines of the Madras Borstal School system.²⁸³ *The South Indian Social Reformers Conference* passed resolutions on the demand of abolition of the devadasi institution. This Conference strongly condemned the attitude of the members in the legislature who opposed the measure incorporating this reform.²⁸⁴

With respect to the abolition of the *pottu* ceremony, the Madras government asked for public opinion. The Self-Respecters supported Muthulakshmi and criticized the government move for wanting to know the public opinion regarding the abolition of the devadasi act. It mentioned that the act of the Government was foolish. In this country, women were dedicated to temples in the name of God and religion. It made a certain kind of public legitimization on prostitution. In the beginning, the custom was common among all castes but currently it was restricted to a particular community.²⁸⁵

In a letter in *Kudi Arasu*, E.V. Ramasami mentioned that the *pottu* ceremony of the Hindu women in the Hindu temples led them into prostitution. For the sake of money, devadasis performed prostitution. So their lives moved against nature and they were made to lead shabby lives. They often fell victim to venereal diseases.²⁸⁶ He claimed that Muthulakshmi was not trying to prevent prostitution, but her efforts were only to close down the main entrance to prostitution.²⁸⁷ He was aware of the problems in abolishing prostitution in a colonial country like British India. He noted the inability of the western countries in the prevention of prostitution. But he opined that the practice of prostitution in the name of religion should be stopped in the country.²⁸⁸ Further, he stated that the system of dedicating girls after eighteen years did not prevent them from entering prostitution as they were trained in dance, music and prostitution in the name of custom and religion since childhood. Usually, young girls were tempted by concepts such as heaven after death and also because it was an easy way of making money.²⁸⁹ So, he recommended the Government to enact the prohibition of the prostitution in Madras Presidency to prevent parents from their daughters who were considered children as their future profit.²⁹⁰ He also pointed out that arguments such as the endurance of the custom 'in the name of religion' were unacceptable and he cited the ineffectiveness of the earlier enactment of the abolition of minor girls as devadasis.²⁹¹ E.V. Ramasami clarified that the religious doctrines did not support the dedication of the girls after their puberty. Further he sarcastically remarked that the desired act of Muthulakshmi would revive the Hindu religion. So, the Government and the legislators had nothing to worry about in enacting the devadasi abolition bill, as it would not affect the Hindu religion.²⁹²

Vijayaraghavachari, the revivalist, pointed out that the custom was a sacred one. But *Dravidian*, the Self-Respecters newspaper explained to him about the functioning of Hindu temples as brothels.²⁹³ The content criticized the establishment of the rituals which insisted that the Gods keep their concubines with them and insisted that devadasis remain in the temples. Devotees visited temples in the name of *bhakti* to exploit these girls by establishing physical relationships with them. These acts affected ordinary household women as well.²⁹⁴ The column mentioned that the colonial rulers had received help from the Brahmin caste in continuing their rule in India. So, they had been reluctant to carry

out any social reforms. But in modern times, people had the power to criticize or even appreciate the government, and so the Government must heed the words of the reformers.²⁹⁵

The Self-Respecters understood the importance of the legal engagement of the Colonial Government on the abolition of devadasi system. They spread awareness among the public about the legal action against the devadasi institution. Nilavathi worried about the ignorance of the people and relevance of the legal sanction in creating awareness among the ignorant people.²⁹⁶ E.V. Ramasami favored the abolition of the devadasi system and wrote a letter to the Secretary of Madras Presidency.²⁹⁷ *The Self-Respect Conference of Tirunelveli* appreciated the efforts of Muthulakshmi. It condemned the activities of Sathyamurthi and the fundamentalists in supporting the system due to their ignorance.²⁹⁸ *Kudi Arasu* vehemently condemned Sathyamurthi's statements such as that the dedication of girls to the temples was religious and a matter of honor and hence the custom should continue to exist.²⁹⁹ It stated that the religious fanatics did not allow either reforming the mutt or abolishing prostitution in order to protect their religion and its principles.³⁰⁰ Nilavathi mentioned that the members of the MLC questioned the future of women in order to retain their caste and religious rites in the society.³⁰¹

Kudi Arasu expressed its sadness at the ineffectiveness of the Act in the abolition of the *pottu* ceremony. Even after the legal enactment strongly insisted on by Muthulakshmi, the system did not function properly.³⁰² *The Second Self-Respect Conference* condemned the attitudes to the dedication of young girls and the profits made from their dancing and singing. It also welcomed Jeyakkar's raising the issue of the abolition of the *pottu* ceremony in the Indian Parliament and the efforts of Muthulakshmi in the abolition of the *pottu* ceremony in Madras Legislative Assembly.³⁰³ *Kudi Arasu* mentioned that the Sengunthar³⁰⁴ organizations and the Legislative Assembly worked for the abolition of the system.³⁰⁵ *The Chidambaram Youth Conference of Isai Vellalar* made a decision that the birth and work of people should not make them be considered as low. There should be free education to youngsters and *pottu* ceremony should be abolished completely.³⁰⁶

When the Government of Madras sought public opinion on the abolition the devadasi act, it welcomed the notion and instructed people to support the bill.³⁰⁷ There were many public gatherings to oppose devadasi dedication and welcome the bill implemented by Muthulakshmi Reddi.³⁰⁸ *The Isai Vellalar Conference* which was held in 1930 C.E. at Nagappattinam condemned the dedication of women to temples as an uncivilized act.³⁰⁹ There was a meeting held in Tiruvarur on March 5, 1930 C.E. to support Muthulakshmi Reddi's abolition of the devadasi act and it also condemned the dedication young girls in the name of religion and leading them into evil life.³¹⁰ It stressed that all the self-respected women should marry as it was for their salvation from a miserable life.³¹¹ Indirani Balasubramanian condemned the obstacles created by the legislative members in the enactment the abolition of the devadasi act.³¹²

5.6. Bharatanatyam, the dance tradition of devadasi

Usually, devadasi and their artistic performance were inseparable. The livelihood of the devadasi largely depended on their performing ability. Frederique Apffel Marglin stated that the dance was very close to devadasi.³¹³ But the process of abolition and stigmatization questioned the existence of the devadasi women. The strong protest against the devadasi system established a public opinion against the performance of devadasi women. The reformers, radicals, missionaries, doctors, journalists and social workers considered the custom was a serious problem to the society and then its community too. Sundar Kaali, the art historian mentioned that the moral and sexual economies of nationalist modernity could not accommodate either the *dasi* or her art. In consequence, the *dasi* was pushed to the cultural margins of Tamil society.³¹⁴

The Self-Respecters did not bother about the aesthetic values of the devadasi dance performance. More than that, they considered the exploitative and the submissiveness nature of the female body thorough the performance. *Kudi Arasu* mentioned that the performance of devadasi during the *puja* hours would disturb the minds of the devotees.³¹⁵ Kuppusami, a columnist in *Kudi Arasu* mentioned that younger *dasis* were singing songs and danced during the marriage procession for money. But they did not

consider modesty and public discipline and their performance tried to seduce the audience.³¹⁶ *Kudi Arasu* criticized the attitude of devadasi. It mentioned that the devadasis were dedicated to temples for performing dances, but they dressed well and exposed their body to invite the devotees to their houses and looted their money.³¹⁷ These kind of performance seduces our young students and created a bad name for the country.³¹⁸

The Self-Respect Movement propagated for the restriction of the performance of devadasi women. In 1928 C.E., *the Youth Conference of Isai Vellalar* at Chidambaram passed resolutions that the musical system of devadasi was degraded and recommended for reform.³¹⁹ In 1930 C.E., *the Women's Conference* asked the devadasi performers to leave their degraded profession, such as prostitution and it appealed to the people not to engage in *nautch* parties.³²⁰ *The Musical Conference* of Erode in between May 12 and 13, 1930 C.E. advised the musician and other performers to maintain dignity.³²¹ These kinds of performance defame our country and seduce our young students.³²² In the name of the God women became prostitutes.³²³

5.6.1. The term, Bharatanatyam

Historically, the dance tradition of devadasi was popularly known as *sadhir attam*, *dasi attam* and *karnatakam*. Since the dance used small drum orchestra was called as *china melam* (small troupe) which was opposed to *periya melam* (big troupe). The *periya melam* was performed in the outdoor engagements and generally included the musical instruments like *Nathaswaram* and *Tavil*.³²⁴ Ananda Vikatan, a Tamil weekly mentioned that the *basis* of their time was well paid. They earned nearly hundred to two hundred rupees for their public performances.³²⁵ In late 1920s, the processes of revival started to misinterpret the history of devadasi's dance. They renamed *sadhir attam* as Bharatanatyam.³²⁶ T.J.S. George, the biographer of M.S. Subbulakshmi called the revival process as Brahminization of music and dance.³²⁷ Anand, a columnist in Outlook magazine used the phrase that the total hijack of the South's rich classical arts into airless by Brahmins.³²⁸

There was a huge discussion on renaming of devadasi's dance. It is difficult to find the exact person who coined the word Bharatanatyam. Kimiko Ohtani, an art historian mentioned that the term Bharatanatyam was used only sixty years ago.³²⁹ She assumed that the term Bharatanatyam began to be used around 1935 C.E. and by 1940 C.E. it had already become common.³³⁰ In general, the revivalist claimed its credit. Rukmini Devi, V. Raghavan (musicologist) and E. Krishna Iyer were the leading personalities in the process. In earlier articles, often Rukmini Devi dance was called Indian classical dance and the word, Bharatanatyam was seldom used.³³¹ However, Gowri Ramanarayan wrote that Rukmini Devi was the one who began to use it. According to her, at first, E. Krishna Iyer called his dance Natya, which means drama. The meaning of Bharata, as Rukmini Devi explained, was a combined word that was *bha* from *bhava* (emotion), *ra* from *raga* (melody) and *ta* from *tala* (rhythm).³³² Rukmini Devi authenticated her role in the process of renaming the devadasi dance tradition. She mentioned that so far as she knew that she was the first person, who began to dance in the early 1930's, to give the (new) name to the dance and since then the word Bharatanatyam had been acceptable in common use.³³³ However, Sarada, a close associate of Rukmini Devi did not know whether Rukmini Devi was the first one to use the name, Bharatanatyam.³³⁴

Ramasubramaniam wrote that the term was first coined by E. Krishna Iyer in the twenties of this century to honor the mythical name of *Bharata*, the author of the *Natya sastra*.³³⁵ In 1932 C.E. *the Madras Music Conference* of the Music Academy passed a resolution to renaming of *sadhir* into Bharatanatyam. The idea was to remove the unsavory connotations of the priory existing names like *sadhir*, *dasi attam*, etc. The 'depraved' *sadhir* entered a 'respectable' home of Brahmin elites. The *Centenary Issue* of Krishna Iyer mentioned that it had been given a new lease of life under a new name just like girl given in marriage.³³⁶ It was obvious that the new name helped tremendously to de-associate dance from its old image.³³⁷ V.K. Narayanan Menon, president of Sangeet Natak Akademi mentioned that term Bharatanatyam was coined by Raghavan to give the dance respect and a change of outlook about it.³³⁸ Further, *Sruti* magazine stated that

Raghavan used the word Bharatanatyam for the first time in his article (1933 C.E.) which was titled *Bharatanatya Classical Dance-South Indian Nautch (In the Background of the Controversy over the Art)* and it was published in the journal *Sound and Shadow*, Madras, Vol. II, Issue 6, 1933.³³⁹

5.7. The revival of devadasi's dance

The revivalist had a strong disagreement with the reformers. C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar was criticized the reformist in *the Madras Music Conference, 1932*. He said that an object of the *anti-nautch* party was to abolish the prostitution which was common among the class who were practicing the art.³⁴⁰ He further stated that the reformers were working hard to eradicate it. But the abolition process did not prevent the custom of prostitution. So it clarified that prostitution had nothing to do at all with the practice of dance.³⁴¹ The pressure from the colonizers and radicals made the conservatives to resist the reform activities. The Brahmin, revivalist and other conservatives worked for the revival of their cultural and religious elements. Their arguments were largely supported by the ideologues of the Theosophical Society and Music Academy of Madras.³⁴²

The entire colonial politics on the devadasi practices was renamed the dance art of devadasi as Bharatanatyam. Usually, the revivalist claimed that the art of devadasi was 'sanitized' and 'revived'. Kaali Sundar noted that the so called respectable upper caste-well-read Brahmin men and women took up the task of reviving the devadasi dance tradition.³⁴³ Daves Soneji, an art historian stated that the practice and politics of Bharatanatyam make tangible both realist and utopian visions of culture, nation, religion and aesthetics.³⁴⁴ The devadasi figure stood at the centre of Bharatanatyam discourse.³⁴⁵ Frederique Apffel Marglin mentioned that the view of the devadasis as morally degenerate women, and of the royal courts and the kings as the instruments of this degeneration solved a contradiction for the nationalist elite who were concerned with the 'revival' of Indian arts, a contradiction created by the West.³⁴⁶

5.7.1. Rukmini Devi

Rukmini Devi was one of the prominent women in the process of the renaming Bharatanatyam. Ananda Vikatan praised Rukmini Devi as a reviver of Bharatanatyam.³⁴⁷ Rukmini Devi was born into a Brahmin family to an engineer father in Madurai. During her teenage, her family was shifted to Madras because of their parents' involvement in the activities of the Theosophical Society. She was interested and worked for Annie Besant, the president of the Society. There she met George Sydney Arundale (1878 C.E.-1945 C.E.), an English theosophist who had become the president of the Society after the death of Annie Besant.

In 1920 C.E., George Sydney Arundale married Rukmini Devi. The marriage provided her an international exposure and the opportunity to witness the performance of famous Russian dancer Anna Pavlova at Covent Garden, London in 1924 C.E. The performance of Anna inspired Rukmini Devi to meet her in Australia and learn dance steps from her troop. Anna advised Rukmini Devi to concentrate on the revival of the art forms of her country.³⁴⁸ Rukmini Devi learnt *sadhir attam* from devadasis and *nattuvanars*³⁴⁹. Maylapore Gauri Amma (?-1970 C.E.), a devadasi was the first *sadhir* teacher of Rukmini Devi. Later, she learnt from Minakshi Sundaram Pillai (1869 C.E.-1954 C.E.), the famous *nattuvanar* of Panthanainallur.³⁵⁰ But Minakshi Sundaram was reluctant to teach a girl from other communities. However, with the help of Krishna Iyer, she managed to persuade him to accept her as a student in 1934 C.E.

Rukmini Devi's first performance was held in December 1935 C.E. at the Adyar theatre within the compound of the Theosophical Society (*See Appendix: - 13*). She claimed that the performance was a part of the convention of the Society rather than a private function. It largely drew public attention. The particular performance of Rukmini Devi was considered as the first public presentation of Bharatanatyam.³⁵¹ The dance was performed in a big hall in front of diverse audience such as whites and black, Judges, Lawyers, Secretaries, Nationalist, Government employees, and children. The huge crowd witnessed the changing scenario in relation to Bharatanatyam.³⁵²

R. Krishnamurthy³⁵³ (September 9, 1899 C.E.-December 5, 1954 C.E.) who was popularly known as Kalki wrote a column *Adal Padal* (Dancing and Singing) in Ananda Vikatan stated that the performance of Rukmini Devi was a great momentum of the revival of the ancient tradition.³⁵⁴ The journals of Theosophical Society encouraged Rukmini Devi and published her dance activities between 1936 C.E. and 1937 C.E. But her Guru Minakshi Sundaram was not satisfied with her immediate *arangerram* (first public stage performance). Minakshi Sundaram in his article *Bharatha Natyam* questioned the talent of the modern performers who were generally performing the traditional dance and criticized the changes in the dance style. He mentioned that the changes were unwanted and there was no need to incorporate this in the traditional dance style of the devadasi tradition. He further worried about the improper training and their selection of western dress and ornaments.³⁵⁵

Immediately after her *arangerram*, Rukmini Devi established an institution called the *International Academy of Arts*. It was officially registered in January 1936 C.E. under the Charitable Societies Act.³⁵⁶ Initially, the institution recruited the students from the members of the Society and friends. Later she renamed the institution as *Kalakshetra*. Until 1945 C.E., Kalakshetra was financially supported by the Theosophical Society.³⁵⁷

5.7.2. The revivalist and dances of devadasi

The revivalist undervalued the traditional techniques of devadasi dance. Rukmini Devi criticize the performance of devadasi as a stunt. According to her, the dance performance of devadasi did not have any soul.³⁵⁸ Avanthi Meduri mentioned that Rukmini Devi and others of her 'high social class' considered that the existing dance forms as being too crude and literal.³⁵⁹ In an interview with Kimiko Ohtani, Sarada Hoffman, an associate of Rukmini Devi, shared her *Kalakshetra* experiences. In the interview, she said that Rukmini Devi instructed her students to forget the dance techniques which were taught by the early teachers, because she believed that the traditional dance steps were not correct.³⁶⁰

Geetha and Rajadurai discussed about the arguments of Self-Respecters on political Brahmanism.³⁶¹ Rukmini Devi was ambigant to substantiate her position. She was not from a traditional dancing community and so, she critiqued the traditional methods of learning dance. She stated that a creative artist expressed the Divine Geniusness, so nobody could teach something which was related to divinity. The expressions must come from the inner-self, as something no one could help to express.³⁶² She further stated that in the modern day performances, *psyche* played a predominant role rather than the body.³⁶³ There were differences between the acrobatic steps and dance movements. There was no need to dancer to do the tricks of acrobat. The real dancer could make just a few gestures with a higher knowledge.³⁶⁴

Rukmini Devi stressed that the body could fulfill its highest dharma not only by giving to the world an expression of physical grace with an embodiment, an expression, of the cosmic being.³⁶⁵ The essential elements of the dance was a joy, the inner bliss which was a deep experience.³⁶⁶ Rukmini Devi said that art could be one of the greatest achievements of humanity. The dance transcended the physical with the body as a vehicle and lifted humanity into a world of the higher emotion of joy and the pure intellect or wisdom.³⁶⁷ On the other hand, she mentioned dance was an expression of the physical body. The physical expression was both dangerous and magnificent instruments. The weakness of the physical body was its coarseness and vulgarity.³⁶⁸ There was no place for vulgarity in dance.³⁶⁹ The sensual and vulgar expressions which were introduced into life were always a sign of deterioration of civilization.³⁷⁰

The queen of Travancore addressed in *the Madras Music Conference*, 1930 of the Music Academy. There, she expressed that the need for an organized and sustained effort for the revival of art by conserving and developing its beauties and removing its excrescences.³⁷¹ The critical Rukmini Devi, made many changes in the dance tradition, especially in music, background and presentation.³⁷² She blended *sadhir attam* with the new and old forms. During the dance performance, *nattuvanars* were traditionally accompanied by devadasi. In general, the audiences were distracted by the gestures of *nattuvanars*.³⁷³ Rukmini Devi replaced *nattuvanars* by *Kalakshetra* singers in the dance performance and

seated them in the corner of the stage.³⁷⁴ Krishnamurthy appreciated these changes in his column *Adal Padal*.³⁷⁵ But in late 1920s, E.V. Ramasami was critical of Brahmin attempts at appropriating all honors in the field of music to themselves. He had, then argued that non-Brahmin musicians were deliberately undervalued, denied respect and honors and humiliated while their Brahmin peer, even if younger in years and lacking talent, had been encouraged by the Brahmin press.³⁷⁶

Usually, *shringara* (love or eroticism) was considered as the chief element of the traditional dance. Krishnamurthy mentioned that the beauty of Bharatanatyam was based on the element of *shringara*.³⁷⁷ Rukmini Devi believed that the portrayal of *shringara* was “ordinary and low”.³⁷⁸ Kalyanasundaram, a *nattuvanar* mentioned about his personal experience of his hesitation to explain the meaning of a text or movement to young girls.³⁷⁹ Rukmini Devi also felt that expressing *shringara* movements in the profane area would not suit her and the students. So Rukmini Devi and other Brahmin elites thought to differentiate the so called vulgarity from sublime.³⁸⁰ She selected her repertoire carefully. She choose *bhakti* (devotion) as a concept and used songs which were based on religious theme.³⁸¹ Kimiko Ohtani mentioned that Rukmini Devi discarded 11 *padams* whose main theme was on *shringara* and introduced *kirtana* which had not been part of the traditional devadasi dance form.³⁸²

Rukmini Devi approached the dance reforms through body control, mind and awareness. In a typical Brahmanical manner, she focused on ritual, style and form. She considered form as a revealing content and perceived it as a dynamic thing.³⁸³ She visualized the process of reform as a secularization of the devadasi dance.³⁸⁴ She gave much attention to the personal experience of the dancer rather than the perspective of the audience.³⁸⁵ According to her, the creative spirit (dance) did not mean always new ideas and everything must be done differently. She believed the person who had the creative genius could do the same movements a hundred times, but it seemed different because each time the concerned person perceived it new.³⁸⁶

Rukmini Devi believed that the Indian dance was ruined due to the savagery of war like the destruction of magnificent monuments of ancient culture.³⁸⁷ She further stated that the Indian art forms were not just meant for merely displaying show off to others.³⁸⁸ In ancient India, art forms were part of the everyday life.³⁸⁹ But in modern times, there was no creative art in modern performances.³⁹⁰ So she suggested the modern dancer could change and adapt the ancient art to suit the modern needs.³⁹¹ Especially, Bharatanatyam needed such combination of old and new styles. She wished that the glorious traditional dance should not be stopped by telling in the following ways.

“Wherever God has left His work comparatively undone, we must finish it. We must carry on His Beauty and if we want to be expressive and creative, we must add and not subtract.”³⁹²

Rukmini Devi mentioned the incapability of Indians to discover the ancient treasures such as dance.³⁹³ According to her, the great personalities usually discover the greatness and bring out that greatness to the foreground.³⁹⁴ Art in the West was the Parthenon of Greece. It was in a ruined state, but the enormous efforts were made to reconstruct the Art. The reconstruction was happened because of the beauty of the art and it could inspire the society for thousands of years.³⁹⁵ Rukmini Devi stated a following story about the conservation of the ancient culture,

An old bronze had been kept for years in a brass shop. The material was considered as neglected and unwanted one. But later, sometimes a person came with the aim of collecting the beautiful brass from the shop. The shop keeper got surprised and then replied that the material was very old and nobody liked it. So he sold it for a cheap price. On the other hand, the visitor was extremely happy and wondered the ignorance of the shopkeeper who possessed the bronze material.³⁹⁶

5.8. Nationalism

As a Theosophist and a Brahmin, Rukmini Devi was interested to continue the age old Hindu practices especially, the dance tradition. She considered that dance was an ancient culture and religion.³⁹⁷ Many Indologists and nationalist historians advanced the claim that Bharatanatyam was a direct descendant of the arts of the Tamil Sangam age.³⁹⁸ Minakshi Sundaram Pillai addressed that Bharatanatyam was ancient and it could explain the mythical history.³⁹⁹ The upper class Brahmin elite claimed the dance form from the age old Sanskrit tradition. The veteran musicologist, Raghavan acknowledged the term *sadhir* during his discussions on the dance traditions of South India.⁴⁰⁰ Raghavan mentioned that the music of ours had been age old and it was the outcome of our spiritual and religious fervor.⁴⁰¹ He considered Bharatanatyam as an authentic Indian dance art. He traced its antiquary from the *Rig-Vedic* hymns, *Mahabharata* and *Chilappathikaram*.⁴⁰² He stated that the Bharatanatyam was same dance that Arjuna taught the *Virata* princess in the *Mahabharata* and also it was the same dance of Malavika danced in the play of Kalidasa and Madhavi did in *Chilappathikaram*.⁴⁰³

Theosophical society had great respect for the Hindu tradition and for the devadasi institution. Annie Besant stated that the dancing class woman of temple were established to exonerates the ancestors from any such evil motives and was worthy of their earnest attention. Further she mentioned that the devadasis were a band of pure virgin devotees who attached to the ancient Hindu temples and used to preach religion to the common place that resort to the temple for their daily worship. She further noted that in ancient times they were held in high esteem and had a respect and very well looked after. They would spend their time in doing religious service to the Gods and the devotees of the temple as the word '*dasi*' itself signifies. They would follow the procession of Gods addressed in the simplest *sanyasi* garbs and singing pious hymns suitable to the occasion.⁴⁰⁴

Sathyamurthi spoke about the importance of the musical revival of India, especially South India. He insisted that music has always played a larger role in helping the achievement of freedom to other countries.⁴⁰⁵ He recommended that Indian National

Congress should use the new spirit which emerged among Tamils with regards to music and dance for Indian nationalism.⁴⁰⁶ Hence, the Music Academy was established to fulfill the national dreams.⁴⁰⁷ Sathyamurthi mentioned that one of the aims of the music academy is to rescue South Indian music from the stagnation into which it had fallen at the present day.⁴⁰⁸ He worried that in Tamilnadu music is considered as an ordinary feature of every home.⁴⁰⁹ The Music Academy assimilates all the rich musical elements of the non-Brahmin traditions of South India.

In the 19th and early 20th century C.E. aestheticians and scholars involved in formulating the history of Indian dance, attempting to compensate for its progressive “degradation,” elevated dance to a new high.⁴¹⁰ Annie Besant (1847 C.E.-1933 C.E.) mentioned that the ‘native’ culture was superior to that of the colonizers.⁴¹¹ Krishnamurthy stated that nationalism was the chief causes for the revival of the dances and music in Tamil regions.⁴¹² In a public gathering, Rukmini Devi mentioned that the self-rule would not occur unless the Indian art forms were revived.⁴¹³ Krishnamurthy recommended that Indian National Congress should use the new spirit which emerged among Tamils with regards to music and dance for Indian nationalism.⁴¹⁴ In 1935 C.E., Kothai Nayaki presided the Music Conference in Nagappattinam and it, passed a resolution that all women would learn music and Bharatanatyam.⁴¹⁵

5.8.1. Religious spirit

The revivalists placed the dance and music within the religious context. They stressed the importance of spirituality in dance performance. The Madras Music Conference of 1930 mentioned that music was divine origin because it communicated the divine qualities such as healing, soothing and softening the distressed human minds and bodies.⁴¹⁶ The Madras Music Academy recommended the Hindu Religious Endowments Boards to revive the tradition of reciting *Tevaram* and *Prabandham* and performances of Bharatanatyam and Nathaswaram as a part of the daily offerings to the God in all temples.⁴¹⁷ In 1927 C.E., Conference of the Indian Music Club was held in Tiruchirappalli. The Conference extensively discussed about the dance performance of devadasi and passed resolution under P.G. Sundaresu Sastry. The resolutions stressed the

importance of the revival of dance tradition in Madras Presidency. According to it, dance was one among the 16 *upachchara* of Vedic agamas and dance of woman was considered as a part of the *Asvamedha yagna*. Further it stated that the reformers were ignorant, so the temple institution should not remove *natyam* (dance) during the *aradhana* (puja).⁴¹⁸ *Kudi Arasu* condemned the resolution of the Conference of the Indian Music Club and questioned the supporters of the resolution that would they dare to make their wives dance in temples with devotional rapture.⁴¹⁹

The revivalist voiced for spirituality. Raghavan mentioned that the temples had rare ragas and forms of composition and it serve art as well as the moral and spiritual regeneration of the people.⁴²⁰ Rukmini Devi stressed the importance of the religious spirit in the dance and she noted that the elements and inspiration of dance should be influenced by the religious values alone.⁴²¹ She admitted that Indian dance was merged with the rhythmic movement with music, philosophy and spiritual ideals and these elements could not be separated.⁴²² In Annual Music Conference, G.N. Balasubrahmanyam mentioned that the modern music was the highly evolved development of our ancient music.⁴²³ He stressed that the music of the west is mainly secular, orchestral, recitative, and collective as against ours which is spiritual, vocal, interpretative and individual. It was mainly as a means for uplifting the human spirit towards Godhead.⁴²⁴

The revivalist believed that the problem of modern civilization was based on its thought processes.⁴²⁵ Except among the purest classical dancers, the body was the chief instrument of ugliness. But they concealed this ugliness through their dance performances. They conceived that the dance performance in the music halls, night clubs and other entertainments would not only degrade the dance but also womanhood.⁴²⁶ According to them, in the entire world India alone had a perfect system of dancing which the ancient classical text revealed that how the dance had the highest conception of beauty in their respective age.⁴²⁷

Rukmini Devi mentioned that in earlier days Indian art was performed because of its unconscious efforts, but nowadays people were trying to do it consciously.⁴²⁸ The revivalist gave much attention to the real experiences.⁴²⁹ Rukmini Devi stated that

dancers while performing the themes from the religious books should feel the spirit of Radha in everyday life while performing the story of Sri Krishna and Radha.⁴³⁰ The beauty of the argument was the witness of the soul rather than of the mind.⁴³¹ Further she stated that the Indian dance was the magnificent conception of Lord Natarajar, the divine dancer, and who was considered as the father of all arts, the teacher and the great *yogi*. The world got salvation not only through His meditation but also His dance. So the dancer should understand the spirit of Natarajar and the pure essence of the Art.⁴³²

The revivalist condemned the approach of criticizing the Indian *nautch* and mentioned that it was a fashion in modern times to question the Indian *nautch*. Inadequately, they pointed out that the condemnation was least deserved. The performance of Krishna Bhagavatar of Thanjavur of Harikatha exposed the unworthiness of the criticism. The performance altered the public opinion and properly placed the concept of *abhinayam* in a modern dance tradition.⁴³³ Following these developments, the Academy invited Srimati Gowri to dance in its Annual Conference on January 3, 1932 C.E. with the musical accompaniment of Balaraman of the Nadamuni Band.⁴³⁴

The decisive discussion on the fate and future on dance was held on the sixth day of the sixth annual Conference of the Music Academy. The venue was a special *pandal* erected for the occasion to the north of the Ripon Buildings in the then People's Park. The *pandal* was circular in shape and very spacious. It could accommodate two thousand persons easily. A big dais was also erected for the artists who were to give model performances every evening. A huge gathering of prominent people attended the conference and many took part in its deliberations. Several dignitaries attended the conference.⁴³⁵

5.8.2. The Music Academy of Madras

The relationship between the Music Academy and Bharatanatyam was inseparable. Stan Harding supported the Academy for its initiation towards dance.⁴³⁶ The Music Academy was considered as one of the early premier Music Academies in South India. The history of the Academy went back to mid-twenties. In 1928 C.E., the Music Academy was established and it addressed *nautch* question.⁴³⁷ The well-wishers and music lovers were

interested to establish an organization to stimulate the concentration of a musical culture in South India. The All-India Music Conference was held in 1927 C.E. at Madras, while following the Conference of the Indian National Congress. The All-India Music Conference recommended the formation of a Music Academy in Madras for the preservation and encouragement of the traditional arts. Later, the organization played an important role in the revival of Indian classical dance form.

Srividya Natarajan mentioned that the Music Academy was an important institution for the promotion of classical music and dance.⁴³⁸ Usually, the members of the Music Academy were part of the cultural wing of the Indian National Congress who was projecting devadasi as performer of Bharatanatyam and identified themselves as the 'pro-art progressives'.⁴³⁹ Avanthi Meduri mentioned that the institution of Music Academy was involved in the political reformulation of Bharatanatyam which actually helped to make the dance more respectable.⁴⁴⁰ Sathyamurthi praised the Academy for the restoration of Bharatanatyam to its pristine honorable place.⁴⁴¹ *Centenary Issue of E. Krishna Iyer* explained that the executive and academic works of the Academy laid the foundation for rescuing Bharatanatyam from its danger of extinction and reviving.⁴⁴²

The Academy played a key role in the revival of devadasi dance. *The Centenary Issue of E. Krishna Iyer* stated the Music Academy of Madras and E. Krishna Iyer acted as knight in shining armor, stepped into the battle to help save the dance in distress and assist the transfiguration of the sullied *sadhir* into blessed Bharatanatyam significantly.⁴⁴³ The formation of the Music Academy was in the interest of India. The Academy was established to promote the Brahmanical art tradition of South India. It primarily concentrates on the encouragement and promotion of the Hindu tradition. The Brahmin elites and orthodox Hindus would like to construct the national art. Nationalism was the chief causes for the revival of the dances and music in Tamil regions.⁴⁴⁴ Krishnamurthy noted the performance of *sadhir* in the Congress sessions.⁴⁴⁵ Mostly these performances were held in the premises of the Congress.⁴⁴⁶

5.8.3. E. Krishna Iyer (August 9, 1897 C.E.-1968 C.E.)

E. Krishna Iyer played a decisive role in the renaissance of *sadhir* dance into Bharatanatyam. He was born in Tirunelveli as one of the fourteenth children of Kailasa Iyer and Ananthalakshmi. He was a trained musicians and dancer. Since 1925 C.E., he learnt *sadhir* from Madurantakam Jagadambal, a celebrated devadasi and later Melatur Natesa Iyer taught him a dance.⁴⁴⁷ As a Law graduate, he was active member in the Home Rule League under the leadership of Annie Besant.⁴⁴⁸ Later, he engaged with the several political movements which were initiated by Gandhi. As a freedom fighter, he was jailed in 1930 C.E. and 1932 C.E. He became an associate-editor of the Free Press News which was the young nationalist news agency in the 1930s.⁴⁴⁹ After that he was more deeply engaged in journalism and he also became an art critic of newspapers such as The Mail and the Indian Express. However, art activities dominated his later life.⁴⁵⁰ He favored the devadasi abolition but concerned for the revival of the dance forms. E. Krishna Iyer considered the effort of reformers to discourage the devadasi custom as reasonable.⁴⁵¹ He fought vigorously with the *anti-nautch* troop. He did not defend the system. He accepted the evils of the system but he made out a persuasive case for preserving the art of dance.⁴⁵² He fought against the *anti-nautch* campaign through performance, writing, lectures, and encouraged and helped other dancers. In 1932 C.E. Krishna Iyer fought a crucial battle in the press with Muthulakshmi Reddi over the abolition of the devadasi system.

E. Krishna Iyer, was one of the Secretaries of the Academy who was interested in including *sadhir* programs in the Academy.⁴⁵³ He invited devadasis to perform in the Academy. According to the *Centenary Issue of E. Krishna Iyer*, the executives of the Academy were keen to understand the development of dance discourse and willing to rescue the traditional *sadhir* dance. They strongly condemned the efforts of the reformers which regarding the abolition of the devadasi and their performances. Mrs. Harding forewarned in her speech that the ritual dances should not be transplanted (to the secular stage) because it had struck roots deep already; and that only tender shoots can easily be transplanted, not trees.⁴⁵⁴ V. Varaha Narasimhcharlu, member of the Academy Experts'

Committee criticized that if there was any defect in the morals of these persons (devadasi), steps should be taken to remedy that defect but to destroy the art itself on that ground is neither an effective remedy nor a wise step.⁴⁵⁵

Diwan Bahadur N. Pattabhirama Rao Pantulu gave an illustration of 'ghee'. He mentioned that everyone admitted that ghee as a necessary nutrition diet. It ghee got spoiled by being stored in a brass or copper vessel, people did not even think of giving up the use of ghee. But they tried to secure its purity by taking care to see that it is stored in a better vessel.⁴⁵⁶ His argument was supported by P.G. Sunderasa Sastriar of National College, Tiruchirappalli. He said that it was true that ghee would be spoiled if kept in a brass or copper vessel. But there was a remedy for it; it was to provide a coating to the vessel. Similarly if we teach respect to the people who are already practicing this art, there can be no fear of immorality creeping in.⁴⁵⁷ Further, he stated that this was like 'giving a dog bad name and hanging it'. So it was most unfair that just because somebody wrote something in the papers about dancing, we should let the art die once for all.⁴⁵⁸

Srinivasa Raghava Ayyangar, noted authority of Tyagaraja's compositions, said that the immediate task of the art lovers should be to encourage the fine arts, particularly among the reclaimed members of the devadasi class, as their heredity in the art, it is enough, for the present they are induced to cultivate a sympathetic and an appreciative attitude towards it. Time will work out the rest.⁴⁵⁹ Stan Harding accepted the immemorial history of dance tradition and she mentioned that the disassociation of the dance from the temple would be like uprooting an old tree. Further she argued for the irrelevance of the modern costumes changes of devadasis.⁴⁶⁰

5.8.4. The new stage of devadasi

The Music Academy's attention towards dance was at its peak during the period between 1930 C.E. and 1935 C.E. The Music Academy made an effort to revive the devadasi dance tradition. The Music Academy started to organize the dance performances of devadasi. The academy noted that it has almost become a fashion nowadays to condemn the Indian *nautch* and look askance at it. They felt that this condemnation was least

deserved. They hoped that in the days to come public opinion will veer round and give unto *abhinayam* its proper place.⁴⁶¹ Later, the Annual Music Conference of Music Academy of 1932 marked the significant event in the revival of *sadhir attam*. The sixth day (December 28, 1932) of the Conference was devoted to the discussion on the *Nautch* Question. E. Krishna Iyer prepared a resolution on the dance.

The resolutions favored and encouraged the art of Bharatanatyam. It stated that Bharatanatyam was a great and ancient art which was unexceptionable. It appealed to the public and art associations for the necessary attention to encourage Bharatanatyam. The conference requested the Music Academy to take steps to disseminate correct ideas regarding the art and to help the public to a proper appreciation thereof. It agreed to initiate the move with women's organizations who should give a proper training in the art, by instituting a course of instruction. It suggested that to make dancing respectable it was necessary to encourage public performances before respectable gatherings.⁴⁶² The resolution was intended to reform devadasis and suggested the importance of an alternative profession.⁴⁶³ Krishnamurthy public opinion for softening the desirability of saving sadhir dance with its good qualities.⁴⁶⁴

The executive functionaries of the Academy continued to encourage the art of dance under its new name of Bharatanatyam. The academy provided a space for the dance performance and the Academy allowed the dancer to perform their dance. In a decade between 1930 C.E. and 1940 C.E., a significant number of devadasi performed in the Academy. The Academy helped to stage dances by outstanding devadasi. The Music Academy organized its first performance concerts of Kalyani daughters of Thanjavur in March 1931 C.E.⁴⁶⁵ The performance drew a small crowd but marked a significant event in the history of dance in Tamil culture.⁴⁶⁶ During the concert, the academy instead tried to move public opinion against the condemnation of the Indian *nautch* and it focused on the performance and the grandeur of the art.⁴⁶⁷ Further the note welcomed the changing notions of the public towards the dance.⁴⁶⁸

E. Krishna Iyer reported that the renaissance of the Bharatanatyam might be said to have begun on January 1, 1933 C.E. the date of the second recital of the Kalyani daughters at the Academy.⁴⁶⁹ The Annual Conference of the Music Academy, 1934 witnessed the intention of the Academy for dance reforms. Sathyamurthi praised the Academy for its efforts towards the restoration of Bharatanatyam to its pristine honorable place.⁴⁷⁰ Artists from families which considered dance as a hereditary profession dominated the stage until 1936 C.E. The first non-professional dancer at the Academy was Balachandra, a Brahmin girl about whom not much information is available and danced in December 1938 C.E.⁴⁷¹ After the 1935 C.E., a new factor emerged in the South Indian dance tradition. A group of Brahmin women who were associated with the Theosophical society started to learn the dance.⁴⁷² These Brahmin dancers had infused their upper caste values to the dance.⁴⁷³ The Music Academy provided a platform for these 'new' dancers. The participation of the devadasi's performance in the Academy started to decrease. Douglas M. Knight Jr referred that from the formation of Music Academy there were twenty-one dance performances that were held by the end of 1940 C.E. He enumerated between 1931 C.E. and 1937 C.E. thirteen dance performance of devadasi occurred but between 1938 C.E. and 1940 C.E. witnessed the growing number of the performance of non-devadasi.⁴⁷⁴

5.9. Conclusion

The two decades 1920's and 1930's were significant in the history of devadasi system. In 1920's the devadasi system was in for abolition. Muthulakshmi and Self-Respecters from the Self-Respect Movement argued, worked and campaigned for the abolition and propagated the irrelevance the custom in the name of 'sacredness' and 'divine duty'. The hard work of Muthulakshmi and Self-Respecters was able to create a public opinion against the practices and passed the resolution of the devadasi dedication in the MLC in 1930 C.E. Following the historical event, the revivalists who generally accepted Brahmanical ideas initiated the move of reviving the dance of devadasi. They renamed devadasi dance as Bharatanatyam. The Theosophical Society and Music Academy of Madras helped the initiatives of Rukmini Devi and E. Krishna Iyer. They made some of

the changes in the traditional dance for the convenient. In the 1930's, the dance of devadasi was staged in the so called secular and prestigious stages of Music Academy. In mean time, some of the Brahmin girls started to learn dance from the traditional *nattuvanars* and gradually occupied the stages of devadasi and questioned the cultural economy of the devadasi community.

End Notes

¹ Muthulakshmi Reddi, S. *Why Should the Devadasi Institution in the Hindu Temples be Abolished?*. Madras: Central Co-Operative Printing Works, Ltd, 1927: 4.

² Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. *My Experience as a Legislator*. Madras: Current Thought Press, 1930: 56.

³ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴ *The Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council: Second Session of the Third Legislative Council*. Vol. XXXVIII. October 31-November 5, 1927: 415.

⁵ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1930. *Op.cit.*, 227.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁷ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1927. *Op.cit.*, 4.

⁸ *The Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council: Second Session of the Third Legislative Council*. Vol. XXXVIII. October 31-November 5, 1927: 415.

⁹ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1930. *Op.cit.*, 59.

¹⁰ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. *The Presidential Address of Dr. (Mrs.) S. Muthulakshmi Reddi*. Delivered at the Seventh Andhra Provincial Women's Conference held at Ellore. November 4-5, 1933: 6.

¹¹ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1927. *Op.cit.*, 2.

¹² *The Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council: Second Session of the Third Legislative Council*. Vol. XXXVIII. October 31-November 5, 1927: 416.

¹³ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1930. *Op.cit.*, 232.

¹⁴ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1927. *Op.cit.*, 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *The Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council: Second Session of the Third Legislative Council*. Vol. XXXVIII. October 31-November 5, 1927: 416- 417.

²⁰ Kaliyanasundaranar, Thiru.Vi. *Pennin Perumai allathu Vazhkkaitthunai* (The pride of women and the partner) (in Tamil). Chennai: Saratha Pathippakam, 2006: 263-264.

²¹ *Young India*, 29/08/1929. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (June-October 1929)*. Vol. 41. New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Division, 1970: 337.

²² Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1927. *Op.cit.*, 8.

²³ *Ibid.*, 2- 3.

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- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ²⁶ *The Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council: Second Session of the Third Legislative Council*. Vol. XXXVIII. October 31-November 5, 1927: 415.
- ²⁷ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1930. *Op.cit.*, 232.
- ²⁸ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1927. *Op.cit.*, 6.
- ²⁹ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1930. *Op.cit.*, 56.
- ³⁰ *The Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council: Second Session of the Third Legislative Council*. Vol. XXXVIII. October 31-November 5, 1927: 416-417.
- ³¹ *The Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council: Second Session of the Third Legislative Council*. Vol. XXXVIII. October 31-November 5, 1927: 415.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 416-417.
- ³³ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1927. *Op.cit.*, 10.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.
- ³⁵ *Thirumigu Muthulakshmi Ammalin Thermanam* (The Decision of Muthulakshmi Ammal) (in Tamil). 27/05/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ³⁶ *Pottukkattu Niruththum Chattam* (The Prevention of Pottu Ceremony Act) (in Tamil). 30/03/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ³⁷ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1927. *Op.cit.*, 10.
- ³⁸ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1930. *Op.cit.*
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ⁴² Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1927. *Op.cit.*, 13.
- ⁴³ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1933. *Op.cit.*, 6.
- ⁴⁴ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1930. *Op.cit.*, 232.
- ⁴⁵ *The Welcome Speeches of Mrs. Lakshmi Ammal in the Second Self-respect Women's Conference* (in Tamil). 04/05/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁴⁶ *Thoughts of Periyar E.V.R.: Publisher's Introduction*. Compiled by V. Anaimuthu. Chennai: Periyar E.V. Ramasamy-Nagammai Education and Research Trust, 2009: 45.
- ⁴⁷ Geetha, V and S.V. Rajadurai. *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothee Thass to Periyar*. Calcutta: Samya, 1998: 302.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 312.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 308.
- ⁵⁰ The word 'Self-Respecters' indicated the activists who were largely engaged in the social field and intellectual sphere to propagate the rational ideas of the Self-Respect Movement.
- ⁵¹ *Samayach Sirthirutham*. (The Religious Reform) (in Tamil). 23/10/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*,
- ⁵³ The speech was delivered by E.V. Ramasami in 14th Sengunthar Community Conference which held at Chennimalai, Coimbatore. (Ramasami, E.V. *Pirappurimaiyum Athan Thadaikalum* (The Birth Rights and its Obstacles) (in Tamil). 09/01/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.)

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- ⁵⁴ *Periyar Kalanchiyam: Kudi Arasu-Puratchi. (An Encyclopedia of Periyar: Kudi Arasu and Puratchi)* (in Tamil). Vol. 18. (1935- I). Compiled by K. Veeramani. Chennai: The Periyar Self-respect Propaganda Institution, 2010: 308.
- ⁵⁵ Sakthidas. *Pengal Viduthalai* (The Women Liberation) (in Tamil). 29/06/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁵⁶ *Sthirikal Mahanadu* (The Women's Conference) (in Tamil). 08/12/1929. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁵⁷ 30/07/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁵⁸ Presidential address of E.V.Ramasami at the South Indian Social Reformers' Conference held on 26/11/1928 at Madras *Revolt.*, December 5 and 12, 1928.
- ⁵⁹ *Devadasi Olippu Murai* (The Abolition of Devadasi Custom) (in Tamil). 31/08/1959. *Viduthalai*.
- ⁶⁰ *S.N.D.P Yogam Endru Sollappadum Thiyar Mahanadu* (The Conference of Thiyar which was popularly known as *S.N.D.P Yogam*) (in Tamil). 08/06/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*,
- ⁶² *Kulanthaikaludan Manamakkal Thirumanam* (The Marriage among Children) (in Tamil). 21/09/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁶³ *S.N.D.P Yogam Endru Sollappadum Thiyar Mahanadu* (The Conference of Thiyar which was popularly known as *S.N.D.P Yogam*) (in Tamil). 08/06/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁶⁴ *Sthirikal Mahanadu* (The Women's conference) (in Tamil). 08/12/1929. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁶⁵ *Vibhachcharath Thadaich Chattam* (The Prostitution Prevention Act) (in Tamil). 01/05/1932. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁶⁶ *Engum Suyamariyathai Sathyakirakam* (The Non-Violence Protests for Self-Respect Everywhere). 06/11/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁶⁷ Geetha, V. "Gender and Political Discourse." *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 7. (February 16, 1991): 388.
- ⁶⁸ Nilavathi. *Indhu Madha vizhchchikkum Idhara madha Valarchchikkum Udhavi Purivathu-Pazhum: Thindamaiyum-Vidhavaikalin Thuyaramume!* (Helping for the growth of other religions and degrading the Hindu religion make dissolute: The sorrows of widows and unsociability) (in Tamil). 09/03/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁶⁹ Jnanammal. *Pengalukku Vendiya Seethanam Yathu?* (The gift which women needed?) (in Tamil). 06/04/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁷⁰ *The Welcome Speeches of Mrs. Lakshmi Ammal in the Second Self-respect Women's Conference* (in Tamil). 04/05/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁷¹ Lakshmirathan Bharathi. *Hinthu Vithavaikal Nilamaiyum, Avarkal Marumanathirrkuch Chatta, Samugath Thadaikalaum* (The condition of the Hindu widows and the social cum legal obstacles for their remarriages) (in Tamil). 15/03/1931. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁷² Sivakami Chidambaranar. *Pengal Nilamai: - Angalaivida Pengal Ilivanavarkala?* (The condition of women: Are Women more ignominy than men) (in Tamil). 18/10/1931. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ⁷⁴ Srilatha, K. *The Other Half of the Coconut: Women Writing Self-Respect Moment*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2003. p. 3.
- ⁷⁵ Anaimuthu, V. 2009. *Op.cit.*, 46.

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- ⁷⁶ Jnanammal. *Pengalukku Vendiya Seethanam Yathu?* (The gift which women needed?) (in Tamil). 06/04/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁷⁷ Geetha, V and S.V. Rajadurai. 1998. *Op.cit.*, 314.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 315.
- ⁷⁹ Kunjitham, S. *Kudi Arasum Namathu Iyakkamum* (*Kudi Arasu* and our organization) (in Tamil). 15/05/1932. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid.*,
- ⁸¹ *Swadeshmitranaum Sriman Kirshnamachariyarum* (Swadeshmitran and Mr Krishnamachari) (in Tamil). 04/12/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁸² *Puratchi*, the Tamil weekly, was established in November 26, 1933 C.E. And in March 26, 1934 C.E. Tamil weekly *Pagutharivu* was established. E.V. Krishnasami, the brother of E.V. Ramasami, became the editor of the both the Tamil weeklies. In November 7, 1928 C.E., E.V. Ramasami established *Revolt* English weekly. It became the first English language weekly to be published by the Self Respect Movement, and it was edited by E.V. Ramasami. *Viduthalai*, the bi-weekly, was published from June 1, 1935 C.E. for Justice Party, later it became daily.
- ⁸³ *Swadeshmitranaum Sriman Kirshnamachariyarum* (Swadeshmitran and Mr. Krishnamachari) (in Tamil). 04/12/1927. *Kudi Arasu* and The decisions which made were under the leadership of E.V Ramasami in Tirunelveli Self-respect Conference. 11/12/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁸⁴ *Errukkondom* (Accepted) (in Tamil). 08/04/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁸⁵ *Naan Alakkum Moottai* (The bag which I am measured) (in Tamil). 08/04/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁸⁶ Anaimuthu, V. 2009. *Op.cit.*, 38.
- ⁸⁷ The office of *Kudi Arasu* was inaugurated by Tiruppathirip Puliyur Sivashanmuga Meingana Sivachchariyar Samikal alias Gnaniar Samikal in April 18, 1925 C.E. Usually the newspaper was published from Erode. But a short time, between June 16 and December 15, 1929 C.E. the newspaper was published from Chennai. The newspaper was banned by the colonial Government in 1934 C.E., 1941 C.E. and 1942 C.E. As a newspaper *Kudi Arasu* was published between May 2, 1925 C.E. and November 5, 1949 C.E. From November 5, 1949 C.E. onwards *Kudi Arasu* became weekly.
- ⁸⁸ After the arrest of E.V. Ramasami for anti-Hindi agitation E.V. Krishnasami became an editor. After the release E.V. Ramasami regained its position as editor of the *Kudi Arasu* until 1949.
- ⁸⁹ *Brahmaniya moliththa Thirumanmum Nankodaiyum* (The marriage and gift that abolish the Brahmanism) (in Tamil). 18/09/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁹⁰ *Vibhachcharath Thadaich Chattam* (The Prostitution Prevention Act) (in Tamil). 01/05/1932. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*,
- ⁹² *Oru Vidhavaippenn Thevai* (A widow wanted) (in Tamil). 13/01/1929. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁹³ Geetha, V. and S.V. Rajadurai. *Revolt: A Radical Weekly from Colonial Madras*. Chennai: Periyar Dravidar Kazhagam, (n.d.): 8.
- ⁹⁴ *Swadeshmitranaum Sriman Kirshnamachariyarum* (Swadeshmitran and Mr Krishnamachari) (in Tamil). 04/12/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁹⁵ *Itharku Yen Mounam? Parppanappaththirikkaikalin Purattu* (Why there is silence? the twist of the brahmanical magazines) (in Tamil). 19/06/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.

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- ⁹⁶ *Hindhumadha Pirachcharam* (Propagation of the Hindu religion) (in Tamil). 15/04/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁹⁷ *Srimathi Besantammaiyar* (Ms. Besant) (in Tamil). 20/11/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁹⁸ *Srinivasaiyengarum Mirattalum* (Srinivasa Iyengar and his threat) (in Tamil). 11/12/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ⁹⁹ Balan, K.M. *Woes of Indian Womanhood*. 27/10/1929. *Revolt*.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Vivaha Rathu* (Divorce) (in Tamil). 29/12/1929. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁰¹ *The Welcome Speeches of Mrs. Lakshmi Ammal in the Second Self-respect Women's Conference* (in Tamil). 04/05/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁰² Natarajan, Srividya. "Another Stage in the Life of the Nation: Sadir, Bharathanatyam, Feminist Theory". PhD diss., University of Hyderabad, 1997: 13.
- ¹⁰³ *Pengal Viduthalaikku J! J! J!* (Hail! for women liberation) (in Tamil). 24/11/1929. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁰⁴ Nilavathi. S. *Penn Makkalum Swedesha Samasthanangalum* (The Princely States and Women) (in Tamil). 28/06/1931. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁰⁵ *The Self-Respect Women's Conference*, Salem district (in Tamil). 15/05/1932. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁰⁶ Kunjitham, T.S. *The Position of Indian Women*. 06/10/1929. *Revolt*.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Revolt*. December 11, 1928.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Pengal Munnetra Mahanadu* (The Womens' Progressive Conference) (in Tamil). 24/11/1929. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁰⁹ Periyar. *Pen Yen Adimaiyanal?* (Why women became enslaved?) (in Tamil). Chennai: Periyar Self Respected Propaganda, 1992 (Rpt. 2004): 64.
- ¹¹⁰ *Pengal* (Women) (in Tamil). 12/08/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹¹¹ Periyar. 1992 (Rpt. 2004). *Op.cit.*, 74-79.
- ¹¹² *Thoughts of Periyar E.V.R.: Speeches and Writings of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy*. Vol. 1. Part. 2. Compiled by V. Anaimuthu. Chennai: Periyar E.V. Ramasamy-Nagammai Education and Research Trust, 1974 (Rpt. 2009): 258-262.
- ¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 208-211.
- ¹¹⁴ Anaimuthu, V. 1974 (Rpt. 2009). *Op.cit.*, 208-211.
- ¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 211-218.
- ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 258-262.
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- ¹¹⁸ *Mahalir Urimai* (Women's rights) (in Tamil). 01/12/1929. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ¹²⁰ Self-respect marriages are nothing but the marriage which is happened without any rituals and waste of time. (*Kulanthaikaludan Manamakkal Thirumanam* (The Marriage among Children) (in Tamil). 21/09/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.)
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- ¹²⁵ *Pengal* (Women) (in Tamil). 12/08/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ¹²⁸ *Revolt*. November 24, 1929.
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- ¹³⁰ *Vivaha Rathu* (Divorce) (in Tamil). 29/12/1929. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ¹³⁶ *Revolt*, December 11, 1928
- ¹³⁷ *The Welcome Speeches of Mrs. Lakshmi Ammal in the Second Self-respect Women's Conference* (in Tamil). 04/05/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ¹³⁹ *Mathar Mahanattil Niraiveriya Thermanangal* (The Decisions which made in the Womens' Conference) (in Tamil). 18/05/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ¹⁴² Kaivalyam. *Udankattai Eruvathu Oru Naal Thukkam, Baliya Vivaham Palanaal Thukkam* (Sati is the one day sorrow but child marriage is everyday sorrow) (in Tamil). 21/09/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁴³ *Iniyavathu Puththi Varuma?* (Will awareness come after this?) (in Tamil). 05/10/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
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- ¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵⁷ Periyar. 1992 (Rpt. 2004). *Op.cit.*, 32.
- ¹⁵⁸ Anaimuthu, V. 1974 (Rpt. 2009). *Op.cit.*, 309-315.
- ¹⁵⁹ Periyar. 1992 (Rpt. 2004). *Op.cit.*, 12.
- ¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 309-315.
- ¹⁶¹ Balan, K.M. *Woes of Indian Womanhood*. 27/10/1929. *Revolt*.
- ¹⁶² *The Abolition of the Pottu Ceremony in the Hindu Temples in Madras Presidency* (in Tamil). 30/03/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁶³ *Sriman Nayakkar Alachanthapurathil 20-03-1928-il Nigalthiya Chorpholivin Charam* (The highlights of the E.V. Ramasami's speech which delivered at Alachandapuram) (in Tamil). 15/04/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁶⁴ *Revolt*, December 11, 1928
- ¹⁶⁵ *The Speeches Delivered by Indirani Balasubramanian in the Second Self Respect Conference which held in Virudhunagar* (in Tamil). 09/08/1931. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶⁷ *Revolt*, November 24, 1929
- ¹⁶⁸ *Avarkal Enna Pesukirarkal?* (What are they speaking?) (in Tamil). 19/08/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁶⁹ *Engum Suyamariyathai Sathyakirakam* (The Non-Violence Protests for Self-Respect Everywhere) (in Tamil). 06/11/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*
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- ¹⁷² *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷³ *Engum Suyamariyathai Sathyakirakam* (The Non-Violence Protests for Self-Respect Everywhere) (in Tamil). 06/11/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁷⁴ *Vibachcharam Oliyuma* (Will the prostitution be eradicated?) (in Tamil). 29/05/1932. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁷⁵ *Kulanthaikaludan Manamakkal Thirumanam* (The Marriage among Children) (in Tamil). 21/09/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ¹⁷⁷ Chidambaranar, Samy. *Sivanesarkalin Seikai* (The Activities of Saiva Saints) (in Tamil). 02/11/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*
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- ¹⁸⁰ *S.N.D.P Yogam Endru Sollappadum Thiyar Mahanadu* (The Conference of Thiyar which was popularly known as *S.N.D.P Yogam*) (in Tamil). 08/06/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ¹⁸² Nilavathi. *Saratha Sattam* (The Sarada Act) (in Tamil). 10/08/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ¹⁸⁴ *Mathar Mahanattil Niraiveriya Thermanangal* (The Decisions that made in the Womens' Conference) (in Tamil). 18/05/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁸⁵ *Sriman Nayakkar Alachanthapurathil 20-03-1928-il Nigalthiya Chorpolivin Charam* (The highlights of the E.V. Ramasami's speech which delivered at Alachandapuram) (in Tamil). 15/04/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁸⁶ *Swamikalum Devadiyalkalum* (Gods and prostitutes) (in Tamil). 04/09/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁸⁷ Raghavan, A. *Jeevakarunyach Chamayam Mahalir Urimaiyai Marukkuma?* (Did the religion which preach love as its principle would restrain the women's rights?) (in Tamil). 06/12/1931. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸⁹ *Swamikalum Devadiyalkalum* (Gods and prostitutes) (in Tamil). 04/09/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁹⁰ Raghavan, A. *Jeevakarunyach Chamayam Mahalir Urimaiyai Marukkuma?* (Did the religion which preach love as its principle would restrain the women's rights?). 06/12/1931. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁹¹ *Alaya Archakar* (The temple priest) (in Tamil). 05/02/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁹² *Kovil* (The Temple) (in Tamil). 23/10/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁹³ *Vedikundukal* (Bombs) was a column for the readers in *Kudi Arasu*. Minatchi. *Vedikundukal* (Bombs) (in Tamil). 30/07/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁹⁴ Thandapani. *Vedikundukal* (Bombs) (in Tamil). 30/07/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁹⁵ *Mathar Mahanattil Niraiveriya Thermanangal* (The Decisions that made in the Womens' Conference) (in Tamil). 18/05/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁹⁶ *Kanam 'Kudi Arasu' Paththirathipar Avarkatgu* (Letters to *Kudi Arasu* editor) (in Tamil). 18/12/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁹⁷ Masilamanippillai. *Devadasikalukkor Vendukol: Namathu Nokkam* (An Appeal to Devadasi: Our Intention) (in Tamil). 17/06/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁹⁸ *The Abolition of the Pottu Ceremony in the Hindu Temples in Madras Presidency* (in Tamil). 30/03/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ¹⁹⁹ Masilamanippillai. *Devadasikalukkor Vendukol: Namathu Nokkam* (An Appeal to Devadasi: Our Intention) (in Tamil). 17/06/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰¹ *Naan Vilaimagala?* (Am I a prostitute?) (in Tamil). 21/12/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²⁰² *Ibid.*
- ²⁰³ *Swamikalum Devadiyalkalum* (Gods and prostitutes) (in Tamil). 04/09/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰⁵ Nilavathi. S. *Penn Makkalum Swedesha Samasthanangalum* (The Princely States and Women) (in Tamil). 28/06/1931. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ²⁰⁷ *Pengal Viduthalaikku Je! Je! Je!* (Hail! for Women's Liberation) (in Tamil). 24/11/1929. *Kudi Arasu*.

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- ²⁰⁸ *Swamikalum Devadiyalkalum* (Gods and prostitutes) (in Tamil). 04/09/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²⁰⁹ *Ibid*.
- ²¹⁰ *Madhaththai Parriya Vibaretham* (The Perversity of the Religion) (in Tamil). 18/09/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²¹¹ *Ibid*.
- ²¹² *Ibid*.
- ²¹³ *Sriman Nayakkar Alachanthapurathil 20-03-1928-il Nigalthiya Chorpholivin Charam* (The highlights of the E.V. Ramasami's speech which delivered at Alachandapuram) (in Tamil). 15/04/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²¹⁴ *Chiththira Puththiran*. (in Tamil). 02/03/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²¹⁵ *Thirumigu Muthulakshmi Ammalin Thermanam* (The Resolution of Muthulakshmi Ammal) (in Tamil). 27/05/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²¹⁶ *Vidhava Vivakam* (The Widow Remarriage) (in Tamil). 27/10/1929. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²¹⁷ *Sriman Nayakkar Alachanthapurathil 20-03-1928-il Nigalthiya Chorpholivin Charam* (The highlights of the E.V. Ramasamy's speech which delivered at Alachandapuram) (in Tamil). 15/04/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²¹⁸ *The decisions which made were under the leadership of E.V Ramasami in Tirunelveli Self-respect Conference* (in Tamil). 11/12/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ²²⁴ *Kovil* (The Temple) (in Tamil). 09/10/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²²⁵ *Samayach Sirthirutham*. (The Religious Reform) (in Tamil). 23/10/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²²⁶ *Swamikalum Devadiyalkalum* (Gods and prostitutes) (in Tamil). 04/09/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²²⁷ *Ibid*.
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- ²²⁹ *Ibid*.
- ²³⁰ Nilavathi. S. *Penn Makkalum Swedesha Samasthanangalum* (The Princely States and Women) (in Tamil). 12/07/1931. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ²³³ *The Speeches Delivered by Indirani Balasubramanian in the Second Self-respect Conference which held at Virudhunagar* (in Tamil). 09/08/1931. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ²³⁷ Raghavan, A. *Jeevakarunyach Chamayam Mahalir Urimaiyai Marukkuma?* (Did the religion which preach love as its principle would restrain the women's rights?) (in Tamil). 06/12/1931. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴⁰ Periyar. 1992 (Rpt. 2004). *Op.cit.*, 9-79.
- ²⁴¹ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. 1927. *Op.cit.*, 1.
- ²⁴² *The Proceedings of the Madras Legislative Council: Second Session of the Third Legislative Council. Vol. XXXVIII. October 31-November 5, 1927:* 414.
- ²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 415.
- ²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 415- 416.
- ²⁴⁵ Nilavathi, S. *Penmakkalae Elungal* (Arise Women) (in Tamil). 03/07/1932. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
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- ²⁵¹ Masilamanippillai. *Devadasikalukkor Vendukol: Namathu Nokkam* (An Appeal to Devadasi: Our Intention) (in Tamil). 17/06/1928. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²⁵² *Ibid.*, 58.
- ²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 59.
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- ²⁵⁵ *Ammamikal Azhukural* (The cry of the middle aged Women) (in Tamil). 14/01/1945. *Dravida Nadu*.
- ²⁵⁶ Satymurthy was an active Congress person, nationalist and conservative in Madras Presidency.
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- ²⁵⁸ *Chennai Sattasabhai Devasthana Sattathirutha Masotha* (The Hindu Religious Endowment Bill of Madras Presidency) (in Tamil). 02/02/1929. *Dravidan*.
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- ²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

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- ²⁶⁵ *Yaar Poiyar?* (Who is the liar?) (in Tamil). 20/11/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷¹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷² *Chennai Sattasabhai Devasthana Sattathirutha Masotha* (The Hindu Religious Endowment Bill of Madras Presidency) (in Tamil). 02/02/1929. *Dravidan*.
- ²⁷³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷⁴ *Devadasi Ozhippoch Chattam* (The Devadasi Abolition Act) (in Tamil). 23/03/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²⁷⁵ Muthulakshmi Reddy, S. *The Presidential Address of Dr. (Mrs.) S. Muthulakshmi Reddi*. Delivered at the Seventh Andhra Provincial Women's Conference held at Ellore. November 4-5, 1933: 5-6.
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- ²⁷⁷ *Devadasi Vinnappam* (An Appeal of Devadasi) (in Tamil). 30/10/1927. *Kudi Arasu*.
- ²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷⁹ *Young India*, 29/08/1929. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (June-October 1929)*. Vol. 41. New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Division, 1970. p. 338.
- ²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 337.
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- ²⁸⁴ *Revolt*. December 11, 1928
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- ³⁰³ *Mathar Mahanattil Niraiveriya Thermanangal* (The Decisions that made in the Womens' Conference) (in Tamil). 18/05/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ³²⁰ Mathar Mahanattil Niraiveriya Thermanangal (The Decisions which made in the Women's Conference) (in Tamil). 18/05/1930. *Kudi Arasu*.
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- ³³⁷ Ohtani, Kimiko. 1991. *Op.cit.*, 306.
- ³³⁸ "The Renaming of an Old Dance: A Whodunit Tale of Mystery". *Sruti*. Issue. 27/28. (December, 1986-January, 1987): 30.
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- ³⁴⁹ *Nattuvanars* are the dance teachers. They are belonged to the devadasi community.
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- ³⁵³ Krishnamurthy was a prominent Brahmin novelist, journalist, nationalist. He was actively engaged in the discourse of dance and music. Usually, Krishnamurthy wrote columns in *Ananda Vikatan*, the Tamil weekly under the pseudonym of *Adal Padal*.
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CHAPTER - VI

The Life Stories of Some Selected Devadasis of South India

In 1969 C.E., Carol Hanisch published an article in Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt edited *Notes from the Second Year* on “The Personal is political”. These papers detailed on how personal problems are associated with political problems. They explained that there was nothing called personal. The personal experiences are always a political experience. The content stressed the importance of ‘experience’. So the ‘personal’ experience or problem of a woman is not only a problem of a particular women, it is collective issues of womanhood. The life of devadasi was much intertwined with society and it was an integral element of South Indian history. It helps us to understand the real conditions of the devadasi women during early 20th century C.E. Here, this particular chapter focuses the lives of some selected devadasis from South India, especially the lives of Muvalur Ramamirtham, Bangalore Nagarathnam, Balasaraswati and M.S. Subbulakshmi.

There is a rationale behind the selection of these women. All the four women were from the devadasi community and they belonged to the period, when the abolition of devadasi discourse was at its peak. The lives of these women directly or indirectly reflect the developments related to the abolition of the system in the 20th century C.E. Indian society. And also these women represented the different discourses of the devadasi issue. Bangalore Nagarathnam was from Mysore who voiced her opinion for the continuation of the devadasi system. Muvalur Ramamirtham was firmly against the devadasi custom and intensively worked hard to the abolition of the system. She became a social reformer and close associate of E.V. Ramasami of Self-Respect Movement. Balasaraswati came from the strong devadasi lineage of Vina Dhanam of colonial Madras. She questioned the Sanskritization of devadasi dance tradition and represented the devadasi’s dance to the modern world. On the other hand, M.S. Subbulakshmi, the musical legend from devadasi community, signified the transition of the autonomous nature of devadasi womanhood to submissive woman of modern patriarchal society.

Writing live story is a complicated process. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson mentioned that the axes of subject's identifications and experiences are multiple, because locations in gender, class, race, ethnicity and sexuality complicate one another and not merely additively.¹ In the way, writing live story of devadasi or women from the devadasi community was much complicated process, because the association of social stigma with devadasi woman caused a serious damage to the personal life of devadasi women. It made critical to any researcher even to get basic information about the concerned women. In modern times, usually devadasis were hesitant and reluctant to reveal and share their life. In the transformed social setup, family members of devadasi did not encourage the discussion and the process of documentation of a woman from her family. B.M. Sundaram, musicologist and compiler of the book *Marbu Thantha Manikkankal* (The Gifts of the Tradition) mentioned in his field experience that Tirukkokarnam Pakkiri Ammal, a devadasi, deliberately misguided the author with regard to her identity.²

Jeevasundari, the biographer of Ramamirtham, faced a problem with the family members of Ramamirtham while writing and publishing a book on Ramamirtham. In her personal communication, she explained that the family members of Ramamirtham considered it a humiliation on re-searching the life of the ardent Ramamirtham.³ T.J.S. George, the biographer of M.S. Subbulakshmi, has mentioned in his preface the absence of any kind of records about M.S. Subbulakshmi's life and the fortress erected around by her husband, Thiyagaraja Sadasivam.⁴ He further explained that the first was a familiar problem of not preserving paper, maintaining records and having a sense of history and second was non-negotiable Sadasivam who controlled all access and information. He stated that nothing was ever known that Sadasivam did not want to know.⁵ He pointed out that Sadasivam made sure that he was the only source of information about himself and M.S. Subbulakshmi. Moreover, he further stated that there was no choice for any interviewers.⁶

6.1. Muvalur A. Ramamirtham (1883 C.E.-June 26, 1962 C.E.)

Muvalur A. Ramamirtham (*See Appendix: - 14*) was a pioneer woman in Tamil region who initially shared the public sphere in the Congress and began her political career in

the 1920's. Later she joined the Self-Respect Movement and became a leading campaigner of the movement. In her 50 years of political career, she worked hard for women empowerment and advocated Self-Respect Movement. Kunjitham Gurusami, the Self-Respecter, has mentioned in the preface of Ramamirtham's novel *Dasikal Mosavalai alladhu Mathipetra Minar* (*Dasis web of deceit or enlightened playboy*) that Ramamirtham was the first among the women who staged a public meeting and campaigned for the cause.⁷ Jeevasundari also mentioned that the writings and sources for Ramamirtham were available only from the printing press of Self-Respect Movement.⁸ Here her life history was largely derived from the sources of the magazines of Self-Respect Movement and other pamphlets. Unfortunately, she was not recognized like Muthulakshmi Reddi for her contributions against the devadasi tradition by the historians.

Ramamirtham was born in Tiruvarur and brought up in Muvalur near Thanjavur in modern Tamilnadu. Her parents were Krishnasami and Chinnammal. Her family lineage was traced from Paravai Nachchiyar, a medieval *bhakti* saint women. Her childhood was miserable. Her father was depending for his survival on his devadasi sisters Chayavathi and Thangappappu. The sisters were interested in Ramamirtham following the tradition of the devadasis. Though her parents belonged to the devadasi community, they hesitated to dedicate their only daughter. Because according to tradition, the daughter of a male member of the devadasi family was generally not welcomed as a devadasi.⁹ But the furious sisters threw them out of the house. In her fourth year, they migrated to Muvalur, the home of Chinnammal. Later due to poverty, her father abandoned his family and moved to Madras. The destitute mother worried about the life of Ramamirtham and sold her for an old sari and 10 rupees to a wealthy *dasi* Achchikkannu.¹⁰ The unexpected child started to cry when she saw that her mother had disappeared. The *dasi* provided some jewelry and new clothes to her. The innocent child Ramamirtham was quite happy. Ramamirtham had a respect for her adopted mother and she used to write her name as Muvalur A. Ramamirtham. The initial 'A' signified Achchikkannu.¹¹

Achchikkannu arranged a teacher to teach different languages such as Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit to Ramamirtham. Within three years she could have a good command over the languages. Then she started to learn music. These advantages helped Ramamirtham to

forget her parents. It was customary that learning music was necessary to become a *dasi*.¹² She learnt dance from *nattuvanar* 'Peralam' Suyambup Pillai. At the age seven, she underwent a *gejja* puja (anklet ceremony) and at the age of ten, she became an expert in artistic skills. In the meantime, Ramamirtham's real parents became economically prosperous in Madras. But they were reluctant to accept their daughter because of their social status.¹³ The educated Ramamirtham had a discourse on religion with the field experts and enriched her knowledge. *Dasi* Achchikkannu decided to conduct *pottu* ceremony for Ramamirtham at the age of seventeen. The other *dasies* did not agree for this dedication and they argued that Ramamirtham belonged to a daughter of the male member of the *dasi* caste.

The distressed Achchikkannu tried to make money from other ways. A local merchant aged sixty-five years old was interested in the teenager Ramamirtham. The *dasi* insisted her to marry the old merchant. Ramamirtham wanted to leave her adopted mother. She worried about her future shelter. Then she decided to marry her teacher Suyambup Pillai and expressed her interest towards him. Initially Suyambup Pillai was hesitant and later he accepted her. The simple marriage was performed without any rituals in Valuvur temple, near Mayiladuthurai in modern Tamilnadu. They had three children, but the first two died of illness. Chellappa was the only survived son of the couple. But the marriage was rejected by the society. In the course of time, the hatred Achchikkannu reconciled and nominated Ramamirtham as her heir. Achchikkannu bequeathed his entire property to Ramamirtham and it made her financially stable. Later she invited her parents from Madras.

6.1.1. The public life of Ramamirtham

At the age of thirty-five, Ramamirtham was impressed by Gandhi, especially his views towards devadasi. She started to propagate the ideology of Gandhi in the streets of Madras Presidency. She started to wear *khaddar* dresses and actively involved in the *khaddar* campaign and Non-Cooperation Movement. She campaigned for women liberation, Anti-liquor, education and widow marriage. She was against untouchability and child marriage. She helped untouchables to wear *dhoti*. She influenced many

devadasi women to use the *khaddar* and sold it and she was imprisoned for this theft. On the demand of Gandhi, Ramamirtham started to live a simple life in a hut. Once the *khaddar* materials were stolen and it was found that a poor woman had stolen it to wear. Ramamirtham was very much moved by this incident and she asked the judge to free her.¹⁴ Ramamirtham mentioned that she joined Congress at the age of thirty eight and initially she was happy. She believed that Congress provided a space for *dasi* and for the abolition of the custom. The Congress members praised her and she became very popular.¹⁵ She participated in her maiden Congress Conference at Peralam under the leadership of Thiru.Vi. Kalyanasundaram.

6.1.2. Ramamirtham and the question of devadasi system

Ramamirtham inspired other *dasies* to leave their profession and lead an independent life. Koorainadu Tillaiammal and Chidambaram Janagaththammal were encouraged to get out of the devadasi custom. Initially her campaign against the devadasi system happened in an unorganized manner. She visited devadasi houses and discussed about the evils of the custom secretly. She explained her experiences and asked young women to leave the life of a devadasi. She promised to help for their reformed life. She organized marriage for those girls. The furious devadasi filed cases against her, but she had not relented. With the help of T.N. Rajaraththinam Pillai, the musician and self-respecter, she protested against the initiation of Sathyamurthi, conservative Congress leader, who sent two devadasis for dance performance to England. Usually public criticized Ramamirtham for her public participation, but she never bothered about it.¹⁶ The efforts of Ramamirtham were acknowledged by then Congress leaders such as Thiru.Vi. Kalyanasundaram, Varatharajulu Naidu, S. Ramanathan, E.V. Ramasami and N. Thandapani. Thiru.Vi.Ka praised Ramamirtham as a savior of the fallen women.¹⁷ In 1956 C.E., C.N. Annadurai appreciated her efforts and specially mentioned her assistance to Gandhi during his South Indian visit.¹⁸

E.V. Ramasami and Kalyanasundaram were interested to establish an organization for devadasi and abolish the institution. Ramamirtham started an association called *Nagapasaththar* Sangam (Devadasi Association) for the welfare of devadasi.¹⁹ S.V.

Lingam, a friend of Ramamirtham, assisted her in the works of association. They visited Ramanathapuram, Tiruchirappalli, Thanjavur and North Arcot in Madras Presidency. They started to recruit the members. Her initiation was supported by E.V. Ramasami. Kalyanasundaram and Varatharajulu Naidu.²⁰ Ramamirtham was interested to rename the *Nagapasaththar* Sangam. She felt the name was not inclusive in its nature because the dedication happened in heterogeneous way with the practice of different caste and rituals. She had a discussion with Pundit Singaravel about the name of the association and found a name as *Isai Vellalar*, which meant cultivators of music.²¹

Ramamirtham spent her money and organized the first *Isai Vellalar* Conference in Muvalur under the leadership of Singaravel. And later she organized three conferences. The second *Isai Vellalar* Conference was held in November 15 to 16, 1925 C.E. at Mayavaram under the leadership of Perunthurai S.A. Ganeshan. Kalyanasundaram, E.V. Ramasami, and M.R. Kumarasami participated in the conference. Ramamirtham acted as a general secretary and Tillaiaimmal assisted her.²² In November 6, 1925 C.E., S.A. Ganeshan paid his tribute to the people for selecting him as the leader of the Conference and also refused to accept the offer.²³ The third conference was held in Tiruvaluthur and Gandhi had been invited as a chief guest.²⁴

6.1.3. The difficulties faced by Ramamirtham

There were a strong protest among the conservative devadasi, priest, fundamentalist, land lords, zamindars and pimps. Ramamirtham stated that we could even protest against British colonialism and Brahmanism, but not against devadasi system.²⁵ The agitators were trying to assault Ramamirtham. In general, Ramamirtham used to participate in the social dramas and condemned the devadasi practice. The fundamentalist entered into the drama hall and cut her hair during the performance. The incident freed her from fear and also made her bold enough to move in public with short hair.²⁶ In Omampuliur, a devadasi woman gave her milk laced with poison. Fortunately she was saved. But Ramamirtham refused to file a case against the perpetrators.²⁷

Ramamirtham in her short notes on the life history has mentioned that at the age of twenty five she started to criticize her devadasi community. So people created trouble for her. They filled a fraudulent charges and comments on her. One of the charges levied against her was that she gave 1000 rupees and 15000 worth jewelry and mesmerized people. Her husband was afraid to face these encounters. Ramamirtham convinced her husband that if anything went wrong, they would again go back to singing in the street. She stated that they were expert in music taught dance and music to others and could earn lot of money.²⁸

There was a murder charge filed against Ramamirtham. But Ramamirtham proved it was a false charge and produced the so called dead person who was allegedly said to be killed by her.²⁹ There was another case filed against Ramamirtham. She campaigned against the institution of devadasis and organized marriages to hundreds of girls dedicated to the immortal trade. Ramamirtham tried to help *dasi* Thangam from her diseased condition. But her mother filed a case against Ramamirtham and six others in Mayavaram Sub-Magistrate Court that the accused used criminal force against the complaint and her two attempted to take *dasi* Thangam away with a view to rescue her from the profession.³⁰

6.1.4. Ramamirtham in the Self-Respect Movement

The Self-Respect campaign of E.V. Ramasami inspired Ramamirtham a lot. In 1925 C.E., she left the Congress party and actively involved in the Self-Respect Movement. She propagated the ideologies of the Self-Respect Movement and campaigned for Self-Respect marriages and women liberation. She appreciated the initiation of Muthulakshmi Reddi and had a communication with her. She met Muthulakshmi in Madras. Muthulakshmi asked Ramamirtham to continue her work and assured her support.³¹ Ramamirtham was invited by Muthulakshmi for the Madras Legislative Council (MLC)'s select committee meeting to witness the problem of devadasi. She advised Muthulakshmi to tackle the encounters of Sathyamurthi.³² But Muthulakshmi did not acknowledge and mention her association with Ramamirtham in her autobiography.³³

She participated in various programs of Self-Respect Movement. In 1938 C.E., she participated in the Anti-Hindi agitation and made a rally for creating awareness of the politics behind the imposition and construction of Hindi in non-Hindi regions such as modern Tamilnadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The rally was extended to 42 days, 577 miles and 87 public meetings. In the meantime, she was imprisoned for six months for participating in the anti-Hindi campaign in front of the school with Nilavathi and Dharmambal.

After the establishment of *Dravidar Kazhakam* in the Madras Presidency, Ramamirtham actively engaged herself in the public debates. In 1949, C.N. Annadurai founded the *Dravida Munnetra Kazhakam* (DMK), a prominent political party from South India. Ramamirtham joined the party and became its forefront campaigner.³⁴ During her last days, she functioned as an honorary magistrate in Mayiladuthurai Court. But in the party, she slowly lost her significance in the movement. She was worried about her recognition in the organization. C.N. Annadurai, the founder of DMK, honored her with the award of *Suyamariyathai Iyakka Viruthu* in 1956 C.E. She was only person to receive the award.³⁵ Karunanidhi, then Chief Minister of Tamilnadu, referred that her hair was like milk; white dress; confident walk; speech; fire arguments.³⁶ He introduced a welfare government marriage scheme in her name in 1989 C.E.-1991 C.E.³⁷ The scheme was introduced after her death in June 27, 1962 C.E.

6.1.5. Ramamirtham, as a writer

Ramamirtham was a prolific writer and continually wrote columns in the newspapers of the Self-Respect Movement. In her writings she campaigned for the self-respected life of the people. In 1936 C.E., she published her semi-fictional novel called *Dasikal Mosavalai alladhu Mathipetra Minar* (*Dasis web of deceit or enlightened playboy*). The novel was written on the basis of her experience in the devadasi community.³⁸ Later in 1945 C.E., she started to write a fictional series in *Dravida Nadu* of *Dravidar Kazhakam* (Dravidian Organization).³⁹ The fictional series was entitled as *Thamayanthi*.⁴⁰ Through her writings, she criticized the life of the devadasi women and explained the exploitative nature of the society.⁴¹ Apart from fiction and novel, she extensively wrote on other social issues.

Ramamirtham scripted a monograph *Islamum Indhiyarkalin Nilamaiyum* (Islam and the position of Indians) and personally published it in 1939 C.E.⁴² The content analyzed the principles of Islam and compared it with the values of the Self-Respect Movement.

6.2. Bangalore Nagarathnam (November 3, 1878 C.E.-May 19, 1952 C.E.)

Bangalore Nagarathnam was born to a devadasi called Puttalakshmi Ammal Vaishnavi of Heggade Devanna Kotha, a village in the Princely State of Mysore. Her mother was attached to the Sri Kanteswaram temple of Nanjangud, in modern Mysore. There was a speculation with regard to the identity of her father. Generally Subbanna, a wealthy Brahmin from Mysore, was accepted as her father.⁴³ M. Subba Rao, a lawyer from Mysore, was the patron of her mother. But in her childhood, the patron of her mother led them into poverty. The family migrated to Mysore and found a new patron Giribhatta Thimayya, Sanskrit scholar, musician and instructor at the *Shakuntala Nataka Sabha* of the Maharaja Chamarajendra Wodeyar X (1868 C.E.-1894 C.E.) stage plays. Giribhatta Thimayya became the teacher of Nagarathnam. At the age of five, Nagarathnam completed her music and Sanskrit lessons from him. Bidaram Krishnappa, the leader of Mysore Palace of Yakshagana troupe, taught music to Nagarathnam.

The intelligent of Nagarathnam threatened the minds of Giribhatta Thimayya. He thought the growth of Nagarathnam would defame his existence. So suddenly he withdrew all his support. At the age of nine, the family of Nagarathnam once again had to undergo poverty. According to *Grihalakshmi* (journal), Nagarathnam and her mother started collecting cow dung in the streets of Mysore.⁴⁴ Puttalakshmi forced to move away from Mysore. She pledged that in future the return of her daughter to Mysore would happen only on the invitation of the kings' palace. Otherwise she would commit suicide rather than returning to Mysore.⁴⁵ The destitute mother and daughter migrated to Kanchipuram to meet Dhanakoti sisters (Dhanakoti, Kamakshi and Palani Ammal), a famous devadasi from Kanchipuram and a friend of Puttalakshmi. The sisters were popular in Tamil and Telugu regions. They received a warm welcome here. However, Dhanakoti could not help them and recommended Puttalakshmi to shelter under a renowned violinist in Srirangam. However, financially exhausted Puttalakshmi hesitated to migrate to

Srirangam and left for Bangalore to take shelter with her brother Venkitasamappa, a violinist.

6.2.1. The destitute mother

In Bangalore, Puttalakshmi started working hard for her daughter's career.⁴⁶ Nagarathnam learned violin from her uncle Venkitasamappa. Her efforts were appreciated by Hyderabad Munuswamappa, a famous violinist. In the mean time, she studied Telugu and English. Later she became proficient in many languages such as Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, English etc. Bangalore Kittanna, a niece of Munuswamappa, taught her dance and *abhinaya* (gesture) was taught by Madras Tiruvenkatachar. Puttalakshmi was very strict with regard to the performance of Nagarathnam. The visit of Prince Albert Victor (1889 C.E.) to Bangalore encouraged the devadasi's performance and the mother and daughter witnessed the performance of devadasis.

Puttalakshmi was diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1891 C.E.⁴⁷ Puttalakshmi considered that Nagarathnam did not possess conventional beauty. Though she was short and fat, she had a flawless skin, fair complexion and possessed curly hair and great eyes.⁴⁸ The dying mother understood that her brother's intention was not good for her daughter's future. She realized that her brother would exploit her daughter, so she gave the responsibility of her daughter to Munuswamappa. In later days, he was loyal to the words of Puttalakshmi and rescued her.⁴⁹ Nagarathnam used to perform in the public gatherings and it established a firm place for her in field of performing art. She had a chance to perform in the house of Vina Seshanna, a legendary musician of Mysore court. Nagarathnam and Munuswamappa travelled to Mysore as a palace artist and her performance was appreciated by the experts. The incidents fulfilled the pledge of Puttalakshmi that she made in her earlier days. Later in 1893 C.E., she was invited to perform at the Amba Vilasa Palace. This performance was witnessed by Giribhatta Thimayya and he praised her a lot.⁵⁰ She began to live in Mysore with fortune and fame.

The death of Chamarajendra Wodeyar X led the rule of Krishnarajendra, a ten years old. The widowed queen became the acting regent and she ordered to stop the dance performance at the *Muzrai* (state controlled temples) in 1895 C.E. and later in 1898 C.E.

she banned the recruitment of women for dance performance. *Tafe*, the dance performance of the devadasi, was prohibited in the Princely state of Mysore. In the meantime, her *Guru* Munuswamappa passed away. Nagarathnam suffered a lot and she again migrated to Bangalore and continued her public performance. T. Narahari Rao, the Judge of Mysore Court at Bangalore admired the performance of Nagarathnam and became her patron. Narahari Rao's wife Sethamma had a cordial relationship with Nagarathnam.

The relationship between Narahari Rao and Nagarathnam was criticized by the people of the royal court. Divan K. Seshadri Iyer opposed the open relationship and he did not question the patronage. Therefore, Narahari Rao shifted her to a new house near the hillock forest in Bangalore town. The people generously visited the house of Nagarathnam and attended her performance. Even Seshadri Iyer was also present in her performance. In later days, the hillock was known as Mount Joy or *Narahari Raya Gudda* (the hillock of Narahari Rao).⁵¹ The shift prevented Nagarathnam from plague when it was widely spread in the Bangalore town in 1898 C.E.-1899 C.E. The association with him made her happy and safe. In the course of time, a difference of opinion between the two led to separation. Narahari Rao passed away in 1902 C.E.

T. Sankaran in *Sruti* magazine had mentioned that Nagarathnam had a child, but it lived for a short period.⁵² According to the devadasi tradition, the childless devadasi women could adopt the child. *Grihalakshmi* noted that Nagarathnam adopted a child and taught her traditional technique. The parents of the child tried to poison Nagarathnam with the help of the adopted daughter.⁵³ Later Nagarathnam had a third daughter from Alamelumanga Thayar of Dorasani, a close friend. The relationship between Alamelumanga Thayar alias Banni Bai and Nagarathnam was cordial till her death.

6.2.2. Nagarathnam and her new fortune

The death of Narahari Rao led her to migrate Madras in 1903 C.E. At the age of 25, she decided to stay permanently in Madras city. C.S. Rajarathna Mudaliar of Madras became the patron of Nagarathnam.⁵⁴ As an extrovert, she could make friends easily. Nagarathnam who was financially sound struggled to establish her name as a singer in the

new city.⁵⁵ She has had a friendship with Vina Dhanam, a devadasi and grandmother of veteran Balasaraswati and Coimbatore Thayi. Slowly she could able to establish herself in Madras city. She was appreciated by Ramanathapuram 'Poochi' Srinivasa Iyengar who traced his lineage from Thiagarajar and Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, a Hindustani maestro. The title *Vidyasundari* (beauty is knowledge) was conferred on Ngarathnam by the queen of Bobbili.⁵⁶

From 1905 C.E. onwards, Nagarathnam started to pay income tax and constructed a house, which comprised of two floors.⁵⁷ She used to move in the city with a horse carriage, which was not common in this period. She always surrounded by her servants. During the performance, her servants used to walk in front of her with a silver pot of coffee, another with hot water and yet another with a box of betel leaves. People started to address her as BNR Ammal.⁵⁸ She conducted elaborate daily rituals and invited eminent personalities such as Kasturi Ranga Iyengar, the managing director of The Hindu between 1905 C.E. and 1923 C.E.⁵⁹

Nagarathnam was eager to accept the modern changes in the field of music. In the early 20th century C.E., music companies introduced phonographs, blank cylinders, gramophone and discs into the British India from Europe and United States of America (U.S.A).⁶⁰ The recording companies made efforts to record the native voices. The traditional artists such as devadasis were the first choice for the recording companies. The Gramophone and Typewriter Limited (GTTL) recorded the voice of Nagarathnam and popularized the disc as Miss Nagarathnam of Bangalore.⁶¹ She became one of the popular recording artists in the contemporary period. The increasing anti-nautch agitations demanded devadasi to avoid the public dance performance and so she became a vocalist.⁶² Nagarathnam also stopped the dance performance from 1907 C.E.-1908 C.E.⁶³

6.2.3. The controversies over Nagarathnam

The glory of Nagarathnam created a powerful lobby. She continued to receive the patronage of the princely courts of Mysore, Travancore, Bobbili and Venkatagiri. Her talent was appreciated by the Bobbili Coronation Gazette.⁶⁴ Nagarathnam did performance throughout South India. According to *Grihalakshmi*, Nagarathnam

performed in 146 towns, especially 1235 concerts were performed in Tamil region and her concerts in Madras itself were 849.⁶⁵ She was the only vocalist from the devadasi tradition who performed in the All India Congress Session, which was held in December, 1927 C.E. at Madras.⁶⁶ The admired Pundit Vishnu Digambur, a Hindustani musician rewarded a gold medal to her.⁶⁷ Along with concerts, she used to perform in marriages and other festival occasions. Nagarathnam frequently attended the festival of *Ganda Penderam* in Rajamundry, modern Andhra Pradesh. Her concert raised much expectation even in *Ilankai* (modern Jaffna, Srilanka).⁶⁸

During her travel to Tiruvarur region, she witnessed the performance of *Tyagesa Kuravanji* (kind of dance drama) which was exclusively performed by devadasis of *kondi* lineage. Nagarathnam desired to perform the drama within the temple complex. The temple authorities refused to violate the tradition. However, she sought the help of local patrons and forced temple authorities to allow her. She started to perform the dance drama with strong protection. Kutti Ammal, a devadasi and the head of *kondi* family disguised as a Brahmin woman, intercepted the performance with the lawyer and brought legal stay order to stop the performance. Nagarathnam was ready to accept the legal notice and stopped her performance.⁶⁹

Kandukuri Veerasalingam, a social reformer who was actively engaged in the anti-nautch campaign, criticized the 18th century C.E. text of Muthupalani's *Radhika Santawanam*.⁷⁰ He condemned that several references in the book were disgraceful and inappropriate for women to hear or utter from a woman's mouth.⁷¹ However, Nagarathnam admired the text and encountered the comments of Veerasalingam about the *Radhika Santawanam*.⁷² She responded to him, whether the question of propriety and embarrassment apply only in the case of women, not men? Did Veerasalingam imply that it was acceptable for Muthupalani to write about conjugal pleasures in a minute detail and without reservation because she was a courtesan? Are the 'obscenities' in *Radhika Santawanam* any worse than the obscenities in *Vaijayantivilasam*, a book Veerasalingam had personally reviewed and approved for publication?⁷³ Later she was able to publish the work of Muthupalani in Vavilla Press, Madras. *Sasileka*, the Telugu literary magazine, commented that a prostitute had composed the book and another prostitute had edited it.⁷⁴ The book was

sent to Goteti Kanakaraju, the official government translator for the censorship. He banned the book on the ground that it had obscene content and noted that both the author and editor were prostitutes.⁷⁵ The ban was lifted only after the independence in 1952 C.E.

The conventional Nagarathnam firmly believed in the devadasi tradition. During the abolition campaign, she was actively engaged in retaining the devadasi system in the society. She mobilized devadasi to form an organization to counter the reformist agenda of abolition. Vina Dhanam, T. Doraikannu and Jeevarathnam were the other prominent devadasi women who encountered the anti-nautch activities. They formed an organization, Jeevarathnam and Doraikannu became the official head and secretary of the organization.⁷⁶ In November 3, 1927 C.E., a group of devadasi had sent a petition against the reformist activities.⁷⁷ They framed a memorandum titled *The Humble Memorandum of the Devadasis of the Madras Presidency*.⁷⁸ They argued that devadasi was not a prostitute, the act could damage the age-old tradition and the custom was religious in nature and even the act would question the survival of devadasi women.⁷⁹ They worried that the abolition process would destroy the unique art forms of devadasi tradition and the association passed a resolution that the art of dancing and singing were the inheritance of the community. Vina Dhanam, Salem Lakshmi, Salem Thayi, Minakshi, Rajalakshmi, Lakshmirathnam and Mylapore Gowri Ammal were the supporters and issued a statement in favor of the devadasi system.⁸⁰ The pace of the organization was slowed down in early 1928 C.E.⁸¹ Yet, Nagarathnam was proud to refer herself to as a woman from devadasi community.⁸²

6.2.4. Nagarathnam and Thiyagarajar, the saintly musician

Nagarathnam used to sing the canonization of Thiyagarajar whom she considered as her first *Guru* (teacher). Her association to Thiyagarajar and his songs had led her growing devotion towards the saintly musician. William J. Jackson noted that the verses of Nagarathnam that whom she dreamt of rare blessings of musical saint Thiyagarajar on a night in October, 1921 C.E. in the form in which she had conceived him in her daily worship.⁸³ In mean time, in 1921 C.E. she received a letter from her teacher Bidaram Krishnappa regarding the ruined state of the *samadhi* (memorial) of Thiyagarajar's which

was constructed in banks of River Cauveri in Tiruvaiyar (1847 C.E.) where Thiyagarajar was buried. He requested her help in the renovation of the memorial.⁸⁴ She travelled to witness the condition of the memorial in the company of Nagaraja Bhagavatar, one of the organizers of the *aradhana* (musical fest in Tiruvaiyar). She was so sad to witness the pathetic condition of her *Guru's* memorial which was surrounded by thorny bushes, bamboos and snakes and it was impossible to move here even in the day time.⁸⁵

Nagarathnam got involved in the restoration of the memorial and spent her entire money for this purpose. The work started in October 27, 1921 C.E. and completed the consecration on January 7, 1925 C.E.⁸⁶ She engaged in more public performance to earn money and sold her jewelry for the construction of the memorial. She settled the dispute, which took place over the memorial land between *Chinna Katchi* and *Periya Katchi*.⁸⁷ She purchased the land. With the help of others, she was able to renovate the memorial (*See Appendix: - 15*). In between 1933 C.E. and 1935 C.E., she acquired land in and around the memorial and later in 1937 C.E. and 1938 C.E. she constructed the remaining places with her efforts.⁸⁸ In November, 1938 C.E. she completed the assignments of the temple constructions.

Nagarathnam believed it to be the shrine of the great musical legend Thiyagarajar. She got carved a marble image in the memorial and worshiped it.⁸⁹ She composed an *ashtothram* to Thiyagarajar.⁹⁰ The shrine was open to all, which was not common during this period. Traditionally the musical festival was conducted in the honor of the saintly musician Thiyagarajar that was popularly called as *aradhana*. Nagarathnam desired to participate in the musical fest. The fundamentalists restricted women to perform in *aradhana*. However, the rebellious Nagarathnam distributed handbills about her maiden performance in *aradhana* in 1927 C.E. She invited other devadasis also to participate in the feast and this became a successful event in the history.⁹¹

Nagarathnam firmly decided to spend her rest of the life in Tiruvaiyar to pay her homage to her *Guru*. Her songs concentrated on the musical saint. Her house was situated near Shakuntala and Kamala, the native of Tiruvaiyar. In later days, all the three became close associates. In the meantime, she constantly sought patrons for conducting *aradhana*. In

the early 1940, she toured to Mysore court to meet the then king Jayachamaraja Wodeyar and visited Nellore in modern Andhra Pradesh. There she met a protest by a group of people who were against devadasi women. But she was able to receive the patronage from C.V. Rajagopalachari and conducted *aradhana* in 1941 C.E.⁹² The local administration warned the trustee not to conduct *aradhana* due to the spread of cholera in 1943 C.E. But Nagarathnam and the committee influenced the local government to permit *aradhana* celebration.⁹³

In 1942 C.E., some burglars entered Nagarathnam's house, stole her jewels and attacked her. The aged Nagarathnam was frightened to stay in the house because she felt alone and no one was there who could speak in her mother tongue Kannada.⁹⁴ Then she shifted to the house of Rama Rao, a wealthy Kannada person who was in Tiruvaiyar. During her stay, she used to teach Thiyagarajar songs to Rama Rao's children. However, Nagarathnam was reluctant to go away from Tiruvaiyar. Nagarathnam devoted her entire property and wealth for the charity purpose to the trust named *Vidyasundari* Bangalore Nagarathnam Trust and the trustees were C.V. Rajagopalachari, T.A. Ramachandra Rao and V. Minakshisundaram Iyer. She allowed using her memorial property to Tyagabrahma Mahotsava Sabha for conducting annual functions such as *aradhana*. Moreover, she insisted the memorial should be open for the public worship.⁹⁵ In 1951 C.E., the annual fest was inaugurated by then home minister of India C. Rajagopalachari. There he met Nagarathnam on January 27, 1951 C.E. and praised her that all musicians and *vidwans* should offer homage to this *sanniyasini* (women saint) of our times.⁹⁶

In May 19, 1952 C.E., Nagarathnam died in Tiruvaiyar. Her body was covered with traditional red sari with *kumkum* and *vibuthi* (sacred ash) on her face and her body was seated in her usual chair. Her funeral car and image of Thiyagarajar was brought out from the memorial of her patron deity of Thiyagarajar.⁹⁷ According to her last wish, she was buried near the memorial of her patron saint. But some fundamentalists and few people in the town objected to bury a woman near the saint. With the police protection her body was buried in the place where she had wished.⁹⁸ Later her image was sculpted and kept within the premise of Thiyagarajar memorial at Tiruvaiyar (*See Appendix: - 16*).

6.3. Thanjavur Balasaraswati (May 13, 1918 C.E.-February 9, 1984 C.E.)

Thanjavur Balasaraswati belonged to a traditional devadasi family. She had a strong matrilineal lineage (*See Appendix: - 17*). Her mother and grandmother were the great personalities and musicians of the 19th and early 20th century C.E. B.M. Sundaram mentioned that Balasaraswati was considered as one of the trios in the dance tradition with Kumbakonam Banumathi and Panthanainallur Jayalakshmi.⁹⁹ Douglas M. Knight Jr, the biographer of Balasaraswati, introduced her as a globally renowned performing artist of the 20th century C.E.¹⁰⁰ Karnatakam, a columnist in Ananda Vikatan Tamil weekly, appreciated the dance performance of Balasaraswati at the age of ten.¹⁰¹ Narayana Menon, the then secretary of the Sangeet Natak Academi, wrote a column after her death in 1984 C.E. that appreciated her contribution to the Indian dance tradition.

Balasaraswati was popularly known as 'Bala'. She was the second child of T. Jayammal, daughter of great devadasi Vina Dhanam and her patron Modarapu Govindarajulu, *dubash* in Madras. She was born in Madras where her ancestors migrated from Thanjavur. But she was always identified with her ancestral place Thanjavur, her initial 'T' referred to Thanjavur. The goddess Kamakshi was the family deity of the Balasaraswati's family and the temple was located in Thanjavur. Rajayi Ammal, a devadasi of Thanjavur, helped Balasaraswati's informal dedication in Thanjavur because she was minor at the time of dedication. And the dedication of minor was illegal at that time.¹⁰² In general, the extended family lived in Ramakrishna Chetty Street in Madras city. According to the devadasi tradition, she also learnt and became an expert in Telugu, Tamil and Sanskrit language.

6.3.1. Balasaraswati and her family

Balasaraswati admired the performance of devadasi such as Mylapore Gowri Ammal, the contemporary of Jayammal. She mentioned that her initial inspiration for dancing came after seeing the performance of Gowri Ammal when she was young.¹⁰³ She learnt singing from her mother and dance from Gowri Ammal. Later Jayammal selected a young *nattuvanar* Kandappa Pillai as a dance teacher of her daughter. Kandappa Pillai introduced modified traditional techniques to Balasaraswati such as the seating positions

of musicians who traditionally accompanied the dancer while they danced. Panthanainallur Minakshi Sundaram Pillai (1869 C.E.-1954 C.E.) witnessed the performance of the young Balasaraswati and appreciated her.¹⁰⁴

The ambitious Jayammal worked hard to cultivate the talent of her daughter. She used to be seated near Balasaraswati during her practices. Balasaraswati stated that she would not have become a dancer without the efforts of Jayammal. It was her untiring efforts and push that she learned the art.¹⁰⁵ Further, she mentioned that her mother, Jayammal had trained her as a dancer despite strong family opposition of the anti-nautch campaign and also the family pressure on against learning music. Jayammal restricted schooling of Balasaraswati because her teachers asked her to perform in the schools (*See Appendix: - 18*).¹⁰⁶ From the age of seven, she used to practice sixteen hours a day.¹⁰⁷ Usually, the house of Balasaraswati was a place for the amalgamation of different art forms. Balasaraswati was exposed to numerous kinds of arts. The Friday night concert at the house of Vina Dhanam was popular among the musical lovers of Madras. Douglas M Knight Jr mentioned that the every week, the performing fare was different and Vina Dhanam was used to perform in the evening of the fare.¹⁰⁸ R. Krishnamurthy who was popularly known as Kalki, the columnist in Ananda Vikatan, visited her house and mentioned that the house carried two *dhanams* (wealth) such as learning and material wealth.¹⁰⁹

6.3.2. The art of Balasaraswati

Balasaraswati performed her *arangerram* (initiation dance) in 1925 C.E. at Amanakshi Amman temple, Kanchipuram. On September 13, 1927 C.E., Balasaraswati's first official public performance was held at the home of Doraisami Naidu, homeopathic physician.¹¹⁰ But Balasaraswati's grandmother and veteran Vina Dhanam did not see her dance because since 1926 C.E. Vina Dhanam had lost her eye sight.¹¹¹ In 1932 C.E., Jayammal arranged Chinnaiya Naidu, popular dance master for the improvisation of the dance techniques of Balasaraswati.¹¹² In general, Balasaraswati was famous for her *padam* (expression/expressive) performance (*See Appendix: - 19*). Her repertoire of *padam* numbered nearly one hundred.¹¹³ The dance style of Balasaraswati was known as

Thanjavur style. In 1973 C.E., Balasaraswati acknowledged in the Music Academy that everything she received from her family and her *Gurus*.

Balasaraswati's maiden Music Academy performance was held at the age of fifteen in July, 1933 C.E. and later she performed on many occasions in the academy. K. Chandrasekaran, the musicologist, mentioned that Bala was not particularly beautiful, but that when she began to dance her eyes and pearl white teeth dominated and transformed her face.¹¹⁴ In the same year, she was introduced to Pundit Uday Shankar, an Indian dancer. Later in December, 1934 C.E., Balasaraswati attended the All Bengal Music Conference in Calcutta where Satyajit Ray, a popular Indian filmmaker, watched the performance of Balasaraswati. Interestingly, Satyajit Ray was a teenage boy at the time of performance.¹¹⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, the first Indian noble laureate also watched the performance of Balasaraswati. She was much excited to perform in the huge platform.¹¹⁶ Jayammal and Balasaraswati worked together to interpret the songs in the Carnatic style and did the Bharatanatyam.¹¹⁷ Balasaraswati performed to the song *Jana Gana Mana* in 1934 C.E. at Calcutta. Later she was invited to perform at the All India Music Conference at Banaras Hindu University by Madanmohan Malavya who was the then Vice Chancellor of the university in 1936 C.E. There she again performed for the song *Jana Gana Mana* and also performed it in Indian National Congress Exhibition in Madras in the same year. Douglas M. Knight Jr noted that these were the first and likely the last time that the song that became the Indian national anthem could be danced with *abhinaya*.¹¹⁸ Again at Banaras, Rabindranath Tagore witnessed the performance of Balasaraswati and then he offered a silk shawl to Balasaraswati's drummer.¹¹⁹

The introduction of Balasaraswati in North India provided new prospects and fame to her in South India. She became famous among other performers and had opportunities of more stage performance. On January 1, 1934 C.E., Balasaraswati performed in the People's Park behind the Ripon Building, headquarters of Madras Corporation. There she met R.K. Shanmukham, the first finance minister of India who came to watch the performance. R.K. Shanmukham admired her performance.¹²⁰ He was interested in having her as a life partner. In 1936 C.E., the family of Balasaraswati accepted the proposal of R.K. Shanmukham who was 26 years older than her. In the meantime, in

April 1936 C.E., Jayammal was able to purchase a small house in Dhanala Aravamudu Naidu Garden Street in Egmore, Madras and started living there.¹²¹

6.3.3. The gray days of Balasaraswati

On October 15, 1938 C.E., Vina Dhanam died. In the meantime, Pundit Uday Shankar invited *nattuvanar* Kandappa Pillai in 1938 C.E. to join as the faculty at the short lived Uday Shankar's Performing Arts Centre in the Almora District, modern Uttarakhand state. Within a short duration, Kandappa Pillai died in February, 1941 C.E. It created a kind of rift between Balasaraswati and Uday Shankar. This incident created a great loss to Balasaraswati and her crew. She was kind enough to help and improve the life condition of Ganesha Pillai, son of Kandappa Pillai. It was reflected in her performance at the Music Academy in December, 1939 C.E. R. Krishnamurthy mentioned that he could not find any improvement in the performance of Balasaraswati.¹²² The loss of Kandappa Pillai led Balasaraswati to search for a new *nattuvanar*, because the relationship between dancer and *nattuvanar* was important for the better performance. She found Kanchipuram Ellappa Pillai, cousin of Kandappa Pillai and accepted him as her *nattuvanar*, but not as her *Guru*. The transition improved the musical quality of her performance.

In the course of time, the dominant behavior of Jayammal created a rift between the relationship of the ambitious mother and daughter.¹²³ During the Second World War, Jayammal sold her house and moved to Chengalput, a sub urban of Madras due to the Japanese bomb threat in 1942 C.E.¹²⁴ The health of Balasaraswati was also deteriorating. In 1942 C.E., Balasaraswati gave birth to a girl child, which was considered as auspicious in the matrilineal community and following that she shifted again to Madras in 1943 C.E. Lakshmi, daughter of Balasaraswati, mentioned the period of 1940s as a hard time for Bala, and that time, she was little fat and people were not asking for her performances.¹²⁵ The relationship between R.K. Shanmukham and Balasaraswati had many ups and down due to the independent nature of Balasaraswati.¹²⁶

Balasaraswati desired to perform within the temple premises of Tiruththani, the temple of Lord Murukan. According to her statement, she dreamt about seeing Lord Murukan in 1954 C.E. She decided to travel Tiruththani with her friend C.P. Srinivasan, Jayammal and her daughter Lakshmi (*See Appendix: - 20*). But the temple priests restricted her to perform in the premises, which were based on the Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act, 1947 in the Madras Presidency. The clever Balasaraswati had sent priests to purchase the ritual objects such as coconut, camphor, etc. The gap was utilized and asked to close the doors of the temple premise and then she did a short performance.¹²⁷ In the same way, Balasaraswati was interested to perform in Krishna temple at Udipi, modern Karnataka state in 1960 C.E. The temple authorities could not succeed in stopping the performance, and after her performance, they admired and presented offerings.¹²⁸

Balasaraswati invited Kuchipudi exponent Vedantam Lakshminarayana Sastri in 1948 C.E. to improve her dance techniques. During his stay in the house of Balasaraswati, the orthodox Brahmin like him would not have even touched water there. She was reluctant to continue his teaching because she could not meet his expenses.¹²⁹ In the same year, Balasaraswati received an offer as a lead actor in a film which was based on the historical novel *Sivakamiyin Sabatham* (The vow of Sivakami) from R. Krishnamurthy. However, she rejected the offer and wanted to continue as a stage performer only.¹³⁰

6.3.4. Balasaraswati and Bharatanatyam

Balasaraswati's grace in dancing was growing stronger day by day. It reflected in the gradual increase of her programs. She did thirteen concerts in 1943 C.E. and eleven in 1944 C.E., which included her maiden foreign trip to *Ilankai* in April. She was able to do three programs in 1945 C.E. But following three years from 1946 C.E. to 1948 C.E. she did not do any public perform. In January 1945 C.E., Balasaraswati did one of the best performances of her career in the All India Dance Festival at Bombay.¹³¹ The dance festival carried the performances of Rukmini Devi (Bharatanatyam dancer), Achchan Maharaj (dancer), Shambhu Maharaj (dancer), Ali Akbar Khan (Hindustani musician), Vilayat Khan (Sitarist), etc.

The growing intervention of non-devadasis' towards Bharatanatyam questioned the existence of devadasi dance performers. The active Balasaraswati was fourteen years younger than Rukmini Devi who was firm to reply the counter arguments, which were imposed by revivalist especially to Rukmini Devi, dance reformer. Balasaraswati continually argued that there was nothing in Bharatanatyam which could be purified afresh; it was divine and was innately so.¹³² The inadequacies that were felt in this art raised from the inadequacies of the dancer herself. If Bharatanatyam had studied with devotion, dedication, patience and thoroughness, its completeness in its traditional form would have been crystal clear.¹³³ Balasaraswati stated in Women's World on October 25, 1953 C.E. that a dancer's basic concerns should first be to uphold the high standard of the art and then, through knowledge and practice, to pursue adaptation and innovation.¹³⁴

To Balasaraswati dancing was natural, therefore universal expression of the human species whereby it found its unity with the cosmos and its creator.¹³⁵ Balasaraswati compared a dancer with *yogi* (saint). According to her, both *yogi* and dancer could control breath and modify their body and acquired halo of sanctity. The Yogi achieves serenity through concentration that comes from discipline. The dancer brings together her feet, hands, eyes, ears and singing into a fusion which transforms the serenity if the yogi into a torrent of beauty.¹³⁶ The dancer has to surrender herself to the art. Such surrender makes her aware of the divinity and wholeness of Bharatanatyam. And the art will continue to flourish without the aid of new techniques which aims at "purifying" it or changes in dress, ornament, make-up and the interpolation of new items which seeks to make it more "complete". She hoped for this to happen.¹³⁷ Bharatanatyam reveals the inner spiritual meaning. Bharatanatyam cuts deep into the conscious and sub-conscious levels called Atman or God.¹³⁸ *Abhinaya* is a gestural interpretation of songs on divinities and divine themes alone. Bharatanatyam is God oriented.¹³⁹

She believed that the traditional order of the Bharatanatyam recital viz., *alarippu*, *jatiswaram*, *sabdam*, *varnam*, *padam*, *tillana* and *sloka* were the correct sequence in the practice of the art, which is an artistic *yoga*, for revealing the spiritual through the corporeal.¹⁴⁰ She wrote that if she has dedicated herself to the art, there would be no carnal distortions in her interpretations of the *padam*. Steeped in art and beauty, which

are pure spiritual states, she expressed the joy, which was as the basis of different moods and emotions. Such a dancer will feel not to “purify” any item in the traditional order of Bharatanatyam.¹⁴¹ She mentioned in her keynote address at the Research on Dance Congress in August 1979 C.E. that many *mudras* (symbols) were common in both the *Tantra Sastra* and Bharatanatyam.¹⁴²

Bharatanatyam was mainly practiced and performed by the fair sex. The basic reason may be that the dynamic power of the self (Sakthi) itself is always considered to be feminine and its static source of masculine.¹⁴³ It has been mainly a woman’s art. However, it is equally enjoyed and experienced by men as audience. By the fact of the lover being God, the union longed for is understood to be not of the physical but of the spiritual. It is the yearning of individual soul for merger in the cosmic soul. With this understanding, the dancer interprets the sensual in its spiritual settings.¹⁴⁴

Rukmini Devi pointed out that the respect of dancer’s was based on their choice of *shringara* elements.¹⁴⁵ If we approach Bharatanatyam with humility, learn it with dedication and practice it with devotion to God, *shringara* which brings out the great beauties of the dance, can be portrayed with all the purity of the spirit.¹⁴⁶ *Shringara* stands supreme in this range of emotions. No other emotion is capable of better reflecting the mystic union of the human with the divine. She stated this with deep personal experience of dancing to many great devotional songs, which had no element of *shringara* in them. Devotional songs were necessary.¹⁴⁷ Balasaraswati’s Presidential address at the 33rd Annual Conference of the *Tamil Isai Sangam*, Madras. December 21, 1975 C.E. She mentioned that *Chilappathikaram* and *Manimekalai* list dance, music and the personal beauty of the dancer in that order. Yet unfortunately, today it was personal beauty, which comes first. When so much importance was attached to the looks of the dancer, it was natural that dancing was considered carnal and *shringara* vulgar. The truth is exactly the opposite; it was her dance and music alone that make dancer beautiful.¹⁴⁸

“The greatest authorities on the dance would have definitely recognized that it was the orthodoxy of traditional discipline which gave the fullest freedom to the individual creativity of the dancer.”¹⁴⁹

The Statesman described that it was impossible to escape the magic of her great art; the dancer disappeared, and what remained was Bharatanatyam at its most perfect, in its purest and almost divine form.¹⁵⁰ Guhan, friend of Balasaraswati, explained his experience that in Bala's experience, the mythological characters portrayed in Bharatanatyam were not distant; they lived 'side by side' with her.¹⁵¹ Lakshmi mentioned that Balasaraswati did not realize when she was transported and "became that thing".¹⁵² Even Balasaraswati stated that she became the baby Krishna and Yasoda.¹⁵³ She created the illusion of doing *puja*, she created the illusion of the elements of the *puja*.¹⁵⁴ When Balasaraswati was dancing or when she was in her room talking about her dance, she used to forget everything, such was her dedication.¹⁵⁵

6.3.5. Balasaraswati and her international exposures

During the Eighth Tamil *Isai* (Music) Festival in Madras, Balasaraswati presented her new dance drama *Sarabendra Boopala Kuravanji* on December 17, 1949 C.E. After seven years of gap Balasaraswati danced in the Music Academy on January 2, 1950 C.E. In the Ninth Tamil *Isai* (Music) Festival conference also she did her dance drama in 1951 C.E. in Madras. The years 1950's Balasaraswati was exposed to western audiences. V. Raghavan, musicologist was inspired by the performance of Balasaraswati and directed many westerners to her.¹⁵⁶ Later in May 5, 1953 C.E. R.K. Shanmukham died and Balasaraswati planned to quite her public performances. However, this did not happen and she continued her dance until her death.

Balasaraswati's friends V. Raghavan (musicologist), M.S. Subbulakshmi and Rajagopalan always helped in her difficult days. The Music Academy invited Balasaraswati to perform on January 2, 1950 C.E. and the following years of 1955 C.E., 1956 C.E. and 1957 C.E. In mean time, the Music Academy and V. Raghavan established Balasaraswati School of Music and Dance in the premises of the Music Academy and also V. Raghavan initiated the enrollment process and admitted her daughter Priyamvada to the dance school. The School received a liberal patronage from the Sangeet Natak Akademi.¹⁵⁷ Later in March 27, 1955 C.E., Balasaraswati received the President's Award from Sangeet Natak Akademi for maintaining the highest standards in music, dance and

drama.¹⁵⁸ Kapila Vatsyayan arranged the performance of Balasaraswati at Sapru House in New Delhi on the next day itself. The Vice-President S. Radhakrishnan watched the concert. Jayammal and Balasaraswati sang in the All India Radio, Delhi program.¹⁵⁹ In November 3, 1955 C.E. she performed in the opening concert at the National Dance Festival at the Industrial Fair Theatre at New Delhi.¹⁶⁰ In January 1956 C.E., Martha Graham, an American dancer toured Asia with the help of U.S. consulate. Balasaraswati observed the performance of Martha Graham and following that Balasaraswati's private dance program was arranged for Martha Graham in Madras.¹⁶¹

In 1958 C.E., the Government invited her for the tour to Russia for projecting Indian culture abroad. But before a week of trip, the Government replaced another dancer for the tour and reasoned that the cancellation would save Balasaraswati from humiliation. The incident resulted in frustration and anger towards the Government and understandably Balasaraswati was very upset.¹⁶² Later she received a request from Kapila Vatsyayan, then member of Sangeet Natak Akademi for the representing the country in the festival of East-West Encounter which was organized by the Congress for Cultural Freedom and City of Tokyo at Tokyo from April 16 to May 6, 1961 C.E. Balasaraswati was suspicious of the offer and reluctant to participate in it because of her previous experience. Even the conference Director, Nicolas Nabokov suspected that the dance performance of Bala would be a disappointment for the expecting audience and create a dent towards the image of Indian classical dance. However, Kapila Vatsyayan firmly believed in the ability of Balasaraswati, she compromised her and argued with others for the Japanese program. Her Tokyo tour was a great success. After the program, Nicolas Nabokov approached and kissed her hands kneeling down and apologized for his second thought of replacing Balasaraswati for the concert. The Japanese newspapers declared the performance of Balasaraswati a tremendous success and she continued her trip in Osaka and Yokohama.¹⁶³

Balasaraswati loved the experience of the travel and dance in a foreign country and she felt that her performance was ideally suited to the West.¹⁶⁴ Later, she was invited to perform in the Asia Society in New York. The financial crisis of Balasaraswati made her to accept these offers and she left for United States of America (U.S.A.) in 1962 C.E.

Americans received her warmly. She performed in different places such as Becket in Massachusetts, Wesleyan University, Washington D.C., University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Princeton University and University of Chicago. The first lady of U.S.A., Jacqueline Kennedy was fascinated with the performance of Balasaraswati in Washington D.C. and expressed her desire to meet Balasaraswati.¹⁶⁵ In 1963 C.E., she visited London and performed eight shows continually on the request of her admirers which included the Edinburg Festival in Scotland. Further, she got an offer of thirteen concerts in Europe in 1965 C.E. The year 1966 C.E. Balasaraswati once again toured U.S.A.

The success of her international trips gave her enough money to purchase some land in Kilpauk, Madras and it created a new space and respect for her India. However, she was now becoming ill. She was diagnosed with tuberculosis. However, she accepted to perform at Krishna Gana Sabha in Madras (December 20, 1966 C.E.).¹⁶⁶ Jayammal died at the age of seventy-six in 1967 C.E. The late beginning of Lakshmi's carrier in dancing created a fear for Balasaraswati about the social stigma with regards to devadasi women. She had a dilemma about her daughter-learning dance. However, the international experience convinced her about her daughter's career in dance. And the period between 1950s and 1960s dancing was being accepted in the public as a cultural form and practice.¹⁶⁷ Balasaraswati started to teach dance from 1965 C.E. She did her daughters' formal *arangerram* in 1973 C.E.¹⁶⁸ Later in February 9, 1984 C.E. Balasaraswati passed away.

6.3.6. The honor given to Balasaraswati

The Government of India confirmed Balasaraswati with *Padma Bhushan*, third highest civilian award of India on October 14, 1957 C.E. M.S. Subbulakshmi sent a letter to inform Balasaraswati about the honor which was given by the Music Academy as *Sangitha Kalanidhi* and a request to preside over the Academy Festival in 1973 C.E.¹⁶⁹ In the meantime, Balasaraswati received the prestigious award of *Ratna Puraskar* (Akademi Fellow) from the Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1975 C.E. and in December she was designated as a honorary president of *Tamil Isai Sangam*.¹⁷⁰ At 1977 C.E., Balasaraswati received a *Padma Vibhushan* (Exemplary Golden Lotus) from the Government of India

and honorary Doctorate in Literature and the title *Desikottama* from Visva-Bharati University in November, 1978 C.E.

The Wesleyan University was interested in producing a documentary on Balasaraswati. The documentary was titled as *Krishna ni Begane Baro* in 1960s. In the meantime, the Narayana Menon approached Satyajit Ray to make a documentary on Balasaraswati. Satyajit Ray happily accepted the offer. He considered that the film would preserve the art of someone who was supreme in her field and was worth making.¹⁷¹ Balasaraswati was also interested in the process of documentation. But initially the project was shelved. Satyajit Ray mentioned that the performance of Balasaraswati in 1935 C.E. at Calcutta had not appealed the sponsors.¹⁷² In 1976 C.E., the idea was well received by then Tamilnadu Chief Minister, M. Karunanidhi. The film was sponsored by the Government of Tamilnadu. After ten years, Satyajit Ray received an opportunity of making film on Balasaraswati. She was fifty-eight, when the film was shot. The film was released in April 19, 1977 C.E. and named as ‘Bala’.

6.4. Madurai Shanmugavadivu Subbulakshmi (September 16, 1916 C.E.-December 11, 2004 C.E.)

Madurai Shanmugavadivu Subbulakshmi is a legendary Carnatic vocalist (*See Appendix: - 21*). Shanmugavadivu (1889 C.E.-1962 C.E.) was the mother of M.S. Subbulakshmi. Her mother was an expert in Vina playing. In general, Subramania Iyer, a lawyer in Madurai was considered as Subbulakshmi’s father but T.J.S. George speculated Madurai Pushpavanam Iyer as a father of Subbulakshmi on the basis of gossips among the musical lovers of Madurai.¹⁷³ Shanmugavadivu had a son named M.S. Shaktivel and two daughters M.S. Subbulakshmi and M.S. Vadivambal who was considered as the most beautiful in the family.

In general, the initials ‘M’ referred Madurai, an ancestral town of Subbulakshmi and ‘S’ denoted her mother Shanmugavadivu. *Sruti*, performing arts magazine had mentioned M.S. as Madurai Subramania Iyer Subbulakshmi.¹⁷⁴ But, according to the devadasi tradition, mothers’ name should be used as initial. Therefore, the articulation of the magazine was incorrect and it might be a deliberate attempt at interpreting the life of

Subbulakshmi. Usually, the family passionately called M.S. Subbulakshmi as *Kunjamma* or *Kunju*, which meant little one, and later her aficionados called her as ‘M.S.’. G. Venkatachalam, an art critic, personally met M.S. Subbulakshmi when she was at the age of thirteen and mentioned that Subbulakshmi was not a fragile child but she was simple, matured, self-willed, strong, stubborn and silent.¹⁷⁵ Suyambup Pillai, a famous dance teacher mentioned that her voice was excellent and she would become a great personality.¹⁷⁶

6.4.1. The childhood of M.S. Subbulakshmi

Shanmugavadivu was strict with her children for their career. In general, they were not allowed to move out of their house and insisted to practice vegetarianism. Shanmugavadivu was keen on formal western education for her son. Moreover, she encouraged him to learn *Mridangam* (kind of percussion instrument) to accompany her sisters in musical concerts. M.S. Subbulakshmi was interested in learning *tambura* and singing. On the other hand, her sister M.S. Vadivambal studied Vina. Shanmugavadivu chose Madurai Srinivasa Iyengar as a teacher for her children. Later Seithur Sundaresa Bhattar, violinist and Mayavaram V.V. Krishna Iyer became teachers of Subbulakshmi. The children used to travel with their mother in different concerts in Madras Presidency and other Princely States such as Mysore, Travancore and Ramanathapuram.

The house of Shanmugavadivu was famous among the musical lovers of Madras Presidency. The most of the eminents such as Subbarama Bhagavathar, Ponnusamy Pillai, Karaikudi Sambasiva Iyer, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar and Dakshinamurthi Pillai (*Mridangam* specialist) frequently visited the house of Shanmugavadivu to listen to her musical concerts. At the age of nine, M.S. Subbulakshmi was asked to sing in a public gathering at Madurai. Her songs became popular and invited by gramophone companies such as His Master's Voice (HMV).¹⁷⁷ Interestingly, her first recording happened at the age of ten in the name of Madurai Subbulakshmi, but later records carried her full name as Madurai Shanmugavadivu Subbulakshmi. She started to give her public concerts at the age of thirteenth year. M.S. Subbulakshmi became a vocalist.

The economic hardship compelled the family to do more concerts to lead a comfortable life. In the meantime, Shanmugavadivu sought a potential patron for her daughters' safe existence. The search ended with the offer from Ramanathapuram royal house. But Subbulakshmi rejected her mothers' plea to settle in Ramanathapuram palace. She was interested to be a musician for a while.¹⁷⁸ Subbulakshmi recalled her childhood in an interview with a Tamil writer Vaasanthi that during her childhood, men always thought to exploit her and the situations were often threatening.¹⁷⁹ Meanwhile, her mother found a patron Bhashyam Ayyangar, a wealthy man in Coimbatore for her younger sister Vadivambal. Unlike Subbulakshmi, Vadivambal accepted the proposal and lived a life with the selected man. However, she lived a very short she died of pneumonia at the age of twenty-two.

M.S. Subbulakshmi did her debut concert at the TVS cycle factory and following that Ramanathapuram palace invited her for solo performance. However, Shanmugavadivu was hoping for a chance to introduce her daughter in Madras to receive new prospects. In 1932 C.E., *Mahamaham* festival¹⁸⁰ was held in Kumbakonam, a temple town in modern Tamilnadu. K. Subramanyam, a film director was the organizer of the *Mahamaham* festival. Shanmugavadivu approached K. Subramanyam for her daughter to perform in the grand festival. S.D. Subbulakshmi, heroine of the film *Pavalakkodi* which was directed by K. Subramanyam and later whom she shared her personal life recommended Shanmugavadivu's daughter. Subramanyam initially hesitated, but could not reject the reference of S.D. Subbulakshmi, so he permitted M.S. Subbulakshmi to perform off the prime time hours. The sixteen-year-old girl did an excellent performance in the festival. It encouraged others to invite M.S. Subbulakshmi to Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Mysore, Travancore and Madras. In the same year, the Music Academy of Madras conducted a talent hunt. Shanmugavadivu and M.S. Subbulakshmi participated in the competition that was held in Madras city. The performance attracted spectators such as Tiger Varadachari and Muthaiah Bhagavatar.¹⁸¹

6.4.2. M.S. Subbulakshmi in a new floor

Shanmugavadivu shifted her family to Purasaivakkam in Madras city. The place was comparatively near to the house of Vina Dhanam and later they became family friends. It improved the personalities of M.S. Subbulakshmi. Ananda Vikatan, the Tamil weekly magazine was interested in interviewing M.S. Subbulakshmi. Later the interview turned her life topsy-turvy. T.J.S. George mentioned that the interview unveiled M.S. Subbulakshmi to the public gaze and led to much unexpected developments, transforming her life, her personality and career.¹⁸² Thiagaraja Sadasivam, a handsome advertising manager of Ananda Vikatan approached M.S. Subbulakshmi for an interview of the *Dipawali* special edition of the magazine. M.S. Subbulakshmi was attracted by Sadasivam and continued to meet him. He started to organize her programs and arranged things for her.

Thiagaraja Sadasivam (September 4, 1902 C.E.-1997 C.E.) was born in Triplicane, Madras from a big family of Brahmin parents from a village near Lalgudi in Tiruchirappalli. During his childhood, the call of Gandhi made him enter into public life. He left schools and joined the revolutionary camp in independent movement in Tiruchirappalli. In 1920 C.E., C. Rajagopalachari appealed people to participate in the Civil Disobedience movement in Madras Presidency. The excited Sadasivam participated in the movement and was sentenced for 15 months imprisonment. Later in 1922 C.E. he was again jailed for a year in Tiruchirappalli Central Jail and there he shared the cell with R. Krishnamurthy (1899 C.E.-1954 C.E.) alias Kalki.¹⁸³ They bonded and a close association formed between them over the period of their life. R. Krishnamurthy found an able salesman, propagandist and writer in Sadasivam.¹⁸⁴ The Congress party assigned him a task of vending *Khadhi* and later he became a manager of *Khadhi Vasthralayam* in Bangalore. When Krishnamurthy joined as an editor of Ananda Vikatan, Sadasivam became an advertising manager of the company.

Shanmugavadivu did not like the relationship between Sadasivam and her daughter. She decided to move back to Madurai to prevent her daughter meeting Sadasivam.¹⁸⁵ In Madurai, again she started to search a patron for her daughter from a wealthy family.

M.S. Subbulakshmi disliked this. She deserted her mother and moved to meet Sadasivam in Madras. Subbulakshmi found shelter in the hands of Sadasivam. Significantly, Sadasivam was already a married man with two daughters. During the visit of Subbulakshmi, the wife of Sadasivam was in her ancestral place for the second delivery.¹⁸⁶ After some times Sadasivam, his wife Apithakuchambal and their children and M.S. Subbulakshmi lived together in a same house. Meanwhile, Shanmugavadivu came to know about her daughter and feared her intimacy with Sadasivam. She pleaded her daughter to return from his hold. However, both Subbulakshmi and Sadasivam refused to do so.¹⁸⁷ Shanmugavadivu abducted her daughter and Sadasivam could not able to 'rescue' her from her family. Sadasivam referred Subbulakshmi's family as 'Madurai Group' and he was cautious to keep away Subbulakshmi from her family.¹⁸⁸ These incidents made Shanmugavadivu frail in mind and body. In later years, Subbulakshmi became more popular and tried to establish a cordial relation with her ancestral family, but this did not happen. In August 5, 1962 C.E., her mother passed away.

6.4.3. The marriage of M.S. Subbulakshmi

M.S. Subbulakshmi received an offer to act in a film called *Seva Sadhanam*, which was directed by K. Subramanyam in 1936 C.E. S.D. Subbulakshmi, a friend of her mother became the source of strength for M.S. Subbulakshmi for a while. The film centered on the social issue of young woman who was forced to marry an old man. In the title card, M.S. Subbulakshmi's name was mentioned as 'Kokilagana Madurai M.S. Subbulakshmi'. Her appearance and performance attracted huge audience. The popularity of Subbulakshmi provided a confidence to Sadasivam to establish a movie company in 1938 C.E. called Chandraprabha Cinetone and he sought new stories for M.S. Subbulakshmi.

Sadasivam found *Sakunthala*, the story of Kalidasa was an apt for the company's fortune. He chose a brilliant team. The crew included Ellis R. Dungan as a director, Papanasam Sivan as a music composer, T.G. Rangachari as a writer and N.S. Krishnan and T.A. Mathuram as supporting actors. Ellis R. Dungan was an American who came to India and made popular movies such as *Sathi Leelathi* (1936 C.E.), *Iru Sahodhararkal* (1936 C.E.), *Ambikapathi* (1937 C.E.) and *Kalamegam* (1940 C.E.). Among the crew, he casted an

amateur artist R. Parthasarathy as a protagonist of the film. T.J.S. George mentioned that Sadasivam was deliberately avoiding casting famous personality like G.N. Balasubramaniam as a protagonist of the film because he would be opposite to Subbulakshmi, the female lead.¹⁸⁹

G.N. Balasubramaniam was popularly called as G.N.B. and Jawaharlal Nehru of Carnatic music.¹⁹⁰ In general, G.N. Balasubramaniam was considered as the prominent male in the musical and film industry who could attract much audience. However, the financial distributors refused to accept any one else other than G.N. Balasubramaniam as a lead actor in the role of king Dushyantha. T.J.S. George highlighted the growing personal relations between G.N. Balasubramaniam and M.S. Subbulakshmi.¹⁹¹ Sadasivam could not tolerate the progress of the relationship, which surrounded the movie set. But he could not restrict them to meet because it was his film and it could be a problem for the film too. According to the expectation, the film came out well in 1938 C.E. and received a huge success in the contemporary film industry (*See Appendix: - 22*).

After completion of the film, immediately Sadasivam wanted to marry M.S. Subbulakshmi. The discussion of marriage created a problem in the family of Sadasivam as his wife opposed this. However, the dominant Sadasivam married Subbulakshmi in July 10, 1940 C.E. at Tirunirmalai, outskirts of Madras city. The age difference between them was fourteen years. He also used to call her as Kunjamma. Later some time his first wife died in her ancestral place. Subbulakshmi was submissive and being taken care. T.J.S. George referred Sadasivam as a man who completely transformed a life of women. Moreover, he stated if M.S. made melody and music as her career, Sadasivam made M.S.¹⁹² M.S. Subbulakshmi was babe in the woods, unable even to see the shadows around her. Sadasivam knew precisely what he wanted and precisely how to get it.¹⁹³

T.J.S. George, further noted that M.S. Subbulakshmi became an instrument of his strategies without realizing what was meant by strategies or what their aims were in this case. Her naïve nature added to her aesthetic appeal and to the luster of her achievements.¹⁹⁴ T.J.S. George pointed out that M.S. Subbulakshmi became an exemplar of 'Indianness' and also he stated that she was not part of a community wide movement

for higher recognition in the social hierarchy. It was the case of an individual feeling sufficiently motivated to transform her.¹⁹⁵

6.4.4. M.S. Subbulakshmi in the public gaze

After the marriage, Sadasivam left his job in Ananda Vikatan and he had an idea to start a magazine with the help of versatile writer R. Krishnamurthy. The concept was appreciated by C. Rajagopalachari, who was the mentor of Sadasivam. The shrewd Sadasivam wanted to use the popularity of R. Krishnamurthy, who was popularly wrote Columns in print media as 'Kalki'. So he named the magazine Kalki and in later days these people were identified with the magazine as 'Kalki' Krishnamurthy and 'Kalki' Sadasivam.¹⁹⁶ The establishment demanded money. In the course of time, Y.V. Rao a film director gave a chance to Subbulakshmi in a film *Savithri* for the role of Narada. He discussed the issue with C. Rajagopalachari and R. Krishnamurthy. Then Sadasivam accepted the offer on the condition that the shooting should not be held in Madras, because he did not want to create a chance of meeting between Subbulakshmi and G.N. Balasubramaniam. The film director was ready to shift the studio to Calcutta and the film took off. M.S. Subbulakshmi received one lakh rupee as remuneration.

In between the shooting of *Savithri*, Sadasivam and Subbulakshmi met Gandhi in 1941 C.E. at Wardha, modern district of Maharashtra. During the meeting, Gandhi asked her to sing and admired her talent. Hereafter, Gandhi used to call Subbulakshmi to perform in his gatherings. On October 2, 1947, Gandhi invited her to Delhi for his 78th birthday and requested to sing a *Hari Tuma Haro* (Thou God) of Meera *bhajans* (Songs of Meera). All India Radio requested her to record her songs and it happened on September 30, 1941 C.E. A copy of her song was sent to Gandhi who was interested to listen to her songs. After some time, the film was released in the year and the songs of Subbulakshmi made the film moderate success. Sadasivam used the money, which Subbulakshmi earned from the film *Savithri* to popularize the Kalki magazine.

Sadasivam searched for a new theme for his wife, which would appeal the entire India. He concluded that the story of Meera was the right choice. He felt the character of Meera, the medieval woman saint would ideal for his singer-wife to portray in pan Indian

scenario and the story did not require any lead actor who would pair Subbulakshmi.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, he convinced himself to make a film under his own banner. He carefully selected the cast crew. He chose popular and second level actors such as V. Nagaiah, T.S. Balaiah, T.S. Durairaj and M.G. Ramachandran who later became the chief minister of Tamilnadu. In technical side, he did not want to change the director, Ellis R. Dungan and chose R. Krishnamurthy as dialogue writer and lyricist of the film.

The film reached pan India level. The Tamil version was released in 1945 C.E. Subsequently, the Hindi version was premiered on April 4, 1947 C.E. that starred Subbulakshmi as a protagonist Meera (*See Appendix: - 23*). It received a major success in the South as well as North India. The critics acknowledged the film. The director responded to Randor Guy, the film collector that M.S. did not act in the film but she herself became Meera.¹⁹⁸ Sarojini Naidu, the Indian poet mentioned that the story of Meera is the story of India, the story of Indian faith and devotion and ecstasy. Subbulakshmi's performance was that she was not an interpreter of Meera, but Meera herself.¹⁹⁹ The film became a good launching pad for M.S. Subbulakshmi in North India. T.J.S. George stated that the North Indian political and cultural establishments would accept and honor Subbulakshmi as enthusiastically as South did.²⁰⁰ The movie was able to construct a devotional aura for Subbulakshmi and she became an icon of pan Indian culture of post-colonial India.

6.4.5. The high profile of M.S. Subbulakshmi

M.S. Subbulakshmi's portrayal of Meera created an opportunity to have relations with national leaders like Gandhi. On the request of C. Rajagopalachari, Subbulakshmi performed concerts to raise funds for Kasturba Memorial Trust. The series of concert was held in 1944 C.E. in various parts of Madras Presidency. The personality of Subbulakshmi pulled a maximum number of audiences and collected reasonable amounts. Gandhi wrote a letter to thank Subbulakshmi for her efforts. The success of the concert managed her to stay in the nationalistic life. These developments made the couple financially stable and able to purchase a land in Madras in 1947 C.E. and named it as Kalki Garden. Later the

house became a vibrant place for cultural and political activities in the history of modern India.

Subbulakshmi started to perfect her Hindustani musical skills of Northern India and did more performance in North India. Following the events, Sadasivam and her well-wishers such as Rajagopalachari decided to stop Subbulakshmi from acting in feature films. Subbulakshmi continued her public concerts. Usually she concentrated only on *bhakti* songs. Sadasivam did not like his wife to act in a film industry. Therefore, he preferred his wife to perform in more musical concert. He keenly observed the performance of Subbulakshmi and commented on it. Sadasivam could able to transform Subbulakshmi a lot, as a wife of Brahmin. He insisted her to be fit in a caste hierarchy of the society. He removed the *shringara* element and her songs asked her to extensively concentrate on the elements of *bhakti*. It resembled what Rukmini Devi did for dance forms of devadasi. T.J.S. George critiqued Sadasivam that he ‘sanitized’ M.S. Subbulakshmi’s music in his bid to ‘Brahminize’ her.²⁰¹ Further, he stated that R. Krishnamurthy, Sadasivam and Subbulakshmi, with Rajagopalachari hovering as a ‘presiding deity’, symbolized the vanguard of a virtual cultural renaissance on the Brahmanic world of Madras.²⁰²

In the meantime, India got independence and C. Rajagopalachari, the mentor of Sadasivam became the Governor General of Independent India. The cordial relationship between the couple and Rajagopalachari further extended the public space of Subbulakshmi. T.J.S. George noted that the political connection of Sadasivam ensured that a stream of VIPs attended the show.²⁰³ Jawaharlal Nehru (first Prime Minister of India), Rajendra Prasad (first President of India), Radha Krishnan (first Vice-President of India), Sarojini Naidu, Edwina Mountbatten (Lady of last Governor General of British India), C.D. Deshmukh (first Indian Governor for Reserve Bank of India) and G.D. Birla (entrepreneur) attended the concert of M.S. Subbulakshmi and appreciated her performances. During the charitable performance of Subbulakshmi for Madras Education Association at Delhi in 1949 C.E., Jawaharlal Nehru commented “Who am I?, mere a Prime Minister, before a Queen of Song?”²⁰⁴

6.4.6. M.S. Subbulakshmi and her charitable concerts

Sadasivam was selective in choosing the concerts for Subbulakshmi. The couple gave much preference to the concerts that were happened for charitable trust. V. Gangadhar, the author of *M.S. Subbulakshmi: The Voice Divine* noted that nearly 300 of Subbulakshmi concerts were organized for charity and it collected more than three cores Indian rupees for various charitable works such as schools, hospitals, cultural centers and religious institutions.²⁰⁵ In 1955 C.E., Jawaharlal Nehru invited the couple to his house in Teen Murthi Bhavan at Delhi for ten days. Indira Gandhi, daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru looked after the couple and provided a good hospitality. There Subbulakshmi participated in the fund raising concerts for Kamala Nehru Memorial Hospital. In the same year, she did a concert for Madras Music Academy Building Fund. She performed for the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund in 1976 C.E.

Subbulakshmi also performed for the benefit of Sankara Nethralaya, missionary institution for ophthalmic care in 1983 C.E. *Kundoosi*, a Tamil monthly magazine mentioned that a performance of Subbulakshmi in December, 1947 C.E. earned 98,000 Indian rupees for South Indian Educational Trust.²⁰⁶ Further, she performed for Railway Women's Welfare Fund, Madras Institute of Technology, Tuberculosis Sanatorium in Sengipatti, Athirudra Mahayagam in Thalaikaveri, Mysore District Police Benevolent Fund and Adi Sankara Vimana Mandap in Allahabad, All India Manufacturers Association and Christian Medical College in Vellore.²⁰⁷ In 1977 C.E., she sold her house for 16 lakhs and moved to Kotturpuram in Madras, named their house as *Sivam-Subham*. She also gave the money to different charities such as Ramakrishna Ashram in Gwalior, American College in Madurai, Mercara Hospital in Mangalore and Little Sisters of the Poor Organization in Madras.

Subbulakshmi also gave concerts for *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP)²⁰⁸ in different places Bombay (1970 C.E.), Nagpur (1972 C.E.), Calcutta (1973 C.E.) and Bangalore (1975 C.E.). Later she recorded the *Venkateswara Subrabhatham* in 1975 C.E. at Tirupathi and she contributed the royalty to *Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanams* (TTD). In the same year, TTD conferred her with the title *Aasthan Vidwan* of *Tirumala Tirupathi*

Devasathanam. The TTD started to broadcast the Subbulakshmi's version of Venkateshwara Suprabhatam at the temple complex of Tirupathi in 1975 C.E. She toured to perform in fund raising programs. In 1977 C.E., she toured U.S.A. to raise funds for Hindu Temples in New York and Pittsburgh.

The popularity of M.S. Subbulakshmi spread across the country. She was invited by various countries for public concerts. Her participation in the Edinburgh International Festival of Music and Drama in 1963 C.E. created a sensation. Later in 1966 C.E., she gave concerts at the United Nations and sung the English song which was specially composed by C. Rajagopalachari for M.S. Subbulakshmi. But her unusual English rendering did not appeal to the gatherings but the following trip to New York and Pittsburg became a successful event. Therefore, she did in the India Festival in Britain, Soviet Union 1982, and Festival of India in London.

6.4.7. The world renowned M.S. Subbulakshmi

Her contribution towards the art and public activities were well recognized nationally as well as internationally. Sarojini Naidu admired the charitable works of M.S. Subbulakshmi and addressed her as *Nightingale of India*.²⁰⁹ The Board of Trustees of Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation conferred the *Ramon Magsaysay Award for Peace* on her in 1974 C.E. The board referred to her as becoming the idol of millions and said that this woman (M.S. Subbulakshmi) had remained deeply religious, unpretentious and almost childlike in her simplicity. The Board of Trustees recognized her exalting rendition of devotional song and magnanimous support of numerous public causes in India over four decades.²¹⁰ In the award function, she offered her homage to the trinity of Sadasivam, C. Rajagopalachari and Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram.²¹¹

M.S. Subbulakshmi received *Bharat Ratna*, India's highest civilian honor in 1998 C.E. The Award was the first time given to an artist in the music field. Following her death, commemorative postage stamp was issued in December 18, 2005 C.E. (See Appendix: - 24). She was honored with the many Indian highest awards such as *Indira Gandhi Award for National Integration* (1990 C.E.) *Padma Bushan* (1954 C.E.) and *Padma Vibushan*

(1975 C.E.). Moreover, the different state governments in India honored her in multiple occasions. In July 21, 2004 C.E., the then Chief Minister of Delhi Sheila Dikshit conferred her *Lifetime Achievement Award*. Government of Andhra Pradesh honored her as *Asthana Vidushi* (1981 C.E.) and *Kalidas Samman* by Government of Madhya Pradesh (1988 C.E.).

M.S. Subbulakshmi's contribution was acknowledged by the most of the India's art academics. Lata Mangeshkar, popular singer referred to Subbulakshmi as *Tapaswini* (women saint). Subbulakshmi received *Sangeet Natak Academy Award* (1956 C.E.) and *Ravindra Bharathi Cultural Academy's Award* (1967 C.E.). Subbulakshmi became the first woman to receive the title of *Sangeetha Kalanidhi* from the Music Academy in 1968 C.E., and in 1970 C.E., she was conferred *Isai Periarinar Virudhu* by *Tamil Isai Sangam*. Later she was awarded *Honorary Doctorate* from *Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya* of Madhya Pradesh in 1979 C.E. Visva-Bharati University titled her as *Desikotamma* (1981 C.E.) and also be an elected *Membre d'honneur* by the UNESCO sponsored international Music Council in 1981 C.E. Google observed the 97th birth anniversary of M.S. Subbulakshmi with a *doodle* (See Appendix: - 25).

6.4.8. M.S. Subbulakshmi and Sadasivam

Her image satisfied the modern needs of new patriarchal stands such as pious, innocent, beautiful and controllable women. Her personality could bridge the gap of the transition of the modern Indian state. M.S. Subbulakshmi had occasional critic but never an enemy. Everybody loved M.S. Subbulakshmi because she was always above controversy, politics and cliques.²¹² Sadasivam was the planner, calculating one move after another, weighing pros against cons, a thoroughly practical materialist. M.S. Subbulakshmi was an artist and nothing else. She obeyed instructions, but the art was hers and hers alone.²¹³ She used to wash her husband feet every day with warm water at night.²¹⁴ She mentioned her husband for his love and care and specially mentioned her husband as her parent with unerring guidance and as her preceptor (See Appendix: - 26).²¹⁵

Here, I would like to mention the relation between Subbulakshmi and Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram on the basis of her

biography.²¹⁶ Sadasivam and M.S. Subbulakshmi were fond of meeting Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi Swamigal, *Paramacharya* of Kanchi *Kamakoti Peetham* at Kanchipuram. Sadasivam believed Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi Swamigal as a spiritual leader of his life. In 1954 C.E., the couple had a chance to meet him. The *Paramacharya* of Kanchi *Kamakoti Peetham* refused to meet and bless Subbulakshmi who was attired like a Brahmin woman. ‘*Paramacharya*’ concerned more on non-Brahmin caste identity of Subbulakshmi and objected her wearing *madisar*, a kind of Brahmin dress. However, Sadasivam convinced ‘*Paramacharya*’ and got the blessings with the changed attire of Subbulakshmi. Over a period, ‘*Paramacharya*’ acknowledged M.S. Subbulakshmi and mentioned her as pure as *brindavan tulasi* (a kind of medicinal plant). But while receiving the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Peace, she referred Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Sankaracharya of Kanchipuram as “almighty who has chosen my humble self as a tool. However, he is beyond my gratitude. Yet, in a way, I take Him to have come within my reach in the benign personality of the Sage of Kanchi, His Holiness Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Sankaracharya.”²¹⁷

M.S. Subbulakshmi was barred from media interviews too. When she gave an interview, Sadasivam sat beside her and answered all the questions. He ensured that no substantive information about their lives came out; his answers usually dwelt on the charity concerts she had given and the tributes she had received from various dignitaries.²¹⁸ Vassanthi was the only person interviewed her and even during the interview no one was permitted to be present.²¹⁹ During the interview with Vaasanthi, she stated that she had never been educated. She had been brought up listening to elders. Further, she replied on the question of Sadasivam that her nature was like that, and no one insisted her do to what she liked and she said that naturally she never get angry with any one on any issue.²²⁰

Sadasivam was strict about what kind of social life M.S. Subbulakshmi should lead. She was free to go on her own only to the houses of their daughters. Social visits were not permitted unless he accompanied her. No one was expected to visit their house either without his specific approval. She was friendly only with those persons with whom he was friendly.²²¹ T.J.S George mentioned that she never ceased being part of the social,

business and political whirl that was Sadasivam's life. She was Sadasivam's wife, Rajagopalachari's disciple, Krishnamurthy's friend, but she was always M.S.²²²

M.S. Subbulakshmi lived her complete life as a wife and mother. M.S. Subbulakshmi did not have children but she cared for the two children of Sadasivam (Radha and Vijaya) as her own. Sadasivam's second daughter Vijaya married Rajendran, son of R. Krishnamurthy. She was fond of Sadasivam's daughters. The death of Radha in 1982 C.E. shattered M.S. Subbulakshmi. After this, Subbulakshmi reduced her numbers of public concert. Later November 21, 1997 C.E. Sadasivam died of his old age and illness. M.S. Subbulakshmi was able to continue her live after her husband's death. But she stopped her public performances after her husband's death. On December 11, 2004 C.E., M.S. Subbulakshmi passed away.

6.5. Conclusion

However, the life of Muvalur A. Ramamirtham, Bangalore Nagarathnam, Thanjavur Balasaraswati and Madurai Shanmugavadivu Subbulakshmi represented four different devadasi lives but they had similar characteristics and experiences. The similarity starts from their birth. All the four were traced from their matrilineal lineage and they carried their mother's name and ancestral town as initials. Nagarathnam and Balasaraswati used their geographical location (Bangalore and Thanjavur) and Ramamirtham and Subbulakshmi used both their place and mother's name. Their mothers were strong and struggled hard to bring up their children. They were well trained and expert in many languages and arts. Their dedication to the temples did not occur in a grand manner because of the strict rules on both sides from the society and the state. Ramamirtham was not allowed to dedicate because of her lineage and Balasaraswati was secretly dedicated because of the state law. They had a tough childhood due to economic crisis especially Ramamirtham, Balasaraswati and Subbulakshmi.

The transition witnessed the control of female sexuality over the freedom, which devadasis had enjoyed earlier on. Except Nagarathnam, all the other looked towards a man who could rescue them from the clutches of the devadasi custom. Ramamirtham married her teacher Suyambup Pillai, Balasaraswati sheltered in the hands of R.K.

Shanmukham and Subbulakshmi married Sadasivam. Always their sexuality was controlled by the society. However, they protested for their liberty in different forms. They were aware of the modern changes and ready to utilize the opportunities. Nagarathnam became a singer of the recording companies, Balasaraswati toured abroad and popularized the devadasi's art tradition and Subbulakshmi married a Brahmin and assimilated the Brahmanical culture.

They were seriously engaged with society. Ramamirtham actively participated in politics. Initially she believed in Gandhi and Congress but later she campaigned for the Self-Respect Movement, *Dravidar Kazhakam* and *Dravida Munnetra Kazhakam* (DMK). She argued for the abolition of the devadasi system and moved with people to propagate the Self-Respect ideas among the people. On other hand, Nagarathnam struggled a lot but earned enough money to lead a comfortable life. She firmly believed in the devadasi practices. She wanted to continue the system. Therefore, she worked with other devadasi women and formed an organization to retain the custom. Later she dedicated her life in the construction and continuation of her Guru's memorial in Tiruvaiyar. Interestingly in the case of Ramamirtham and Nagarathnam, there were attempts of murder by their close associates. However, they were strong with their ideas and practices. In the meantime, Balasaraswati and Subbulakshmi received fame due to their art forms such as dancing and singing. Balasaraswati encountered strong criticism, which was imposed by the revivalist lobbies. She was firm enough to articulate her views among the audiences. Subbulakshmi was a classic example to understand the transition of a woman in the devadasi community to Brahmin patriarchy. However, she was always a great vocalist and well accepted due to this by all people.

End Notes

¹ Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson. Eds. *De/colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1992: XIV.

² Sundaram, B.M. *Marbu Thantha Manikkankal* (The Gifts of the Tradition) (in Tamil). Chennai: Dr. V. Raghavan Centre for Performing Arts, 2003: 135-136.

³ The information was collected through an in-depth interview by the researcher from B. Jeevasundari, the biographer of Ramamirtham, at Chennai on March 17, 2011.

⁴ George, T.J.S. *MS: A Life in Music*. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007 (Rpt. 2010): 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁷ Ramamirthammal, A. Muvalur. *Dasikal Mosavalai alladhu Mathipetra Minar* (Dasis web of deceit or enlightened Playboy) (in Tamil). Erode: Unmaivilakkam Press, 1939.

⁸ Jeevasunadari, B. *Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar* (in Tamil). Chennai: Arivai, 2007: 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰ *Kalaimandram*. 10/04/1954.

¹¹ Jeevasunadari, B. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 34.

¹² *Ibid.*, 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁵ The biographical notes of Ramamirtham was known as *Enathu Vazhkkai Chariththram* which meant My Life History. The work was referred in Jeevasunadari, B. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 51.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁷ Kalyanasundaram, Thiru.Vi. *Thiru.Vi.Ka Vazhkkai Kurippukal* (A Biographical Notes of Thiru.Vi. Kalyanasundaram) (in Tamil). Saiva Siddanta Kazhakam, 1982. p. 600.

¹⁸ Jeevasunadari, B. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 48.

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²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Ramamirtham. *Enathu Vazhkkai Chariththram* (My Life History) (in Tamil). In Jeevasunadari, B. *Op.cit.*, 55.

²² *Thanjai Jilla Isai Vellalar Mahanadu* (Isai Vellalar Conference of Thanjavur District). *Kudi Arasu*. 25/10/1925.

²³ *Kudi Arasu*. 08/11/1925.

²⁴ Jeevasunadari, B. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 70.

²⁵ Ramamirthammal, A. Muvalur. 1939. *Op.cit.*, 4.

²⁶ Jeevasunadari, B. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 59-60.

²⁷ *Thaiyarkalai*, May, 1959.

²⁸ Jeevasunadari, B. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 46-47.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁰ “A Social Work Prosecuted: Case Against Miss. Ramamirtha Ammal.” *Revolt*. 15/09/1929.

³¹ Jeevasunadari, B. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 77.

³² *Ibid.*, 78.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Revolt*. 15/09/1929.

³⁵ Chokkalinkam. Na. Vai. “Anna Aliththa Viruthu” (The Award which was given by Anna) (in Tamil). *Yathum Ure*. April 2, 2007:39.

³⁶ *Murasoli*. 27/06/1962.

³⁷ Chokkalinkam. Na. Vai. April 2, 2007. *Op.cit.*, 19.

³⁸ Ramamirthammal, A. Muvalur. 1939. *Op.cit.*

³⁹ *Dravidar Kazhakam* is a social organization which was established by E.V. Ramasami in 1944 C.E. The organization is voiced for social justice and equality.

⁴⁰ *Dravida Nadu*. 15/04/1945.

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- ⁴² Jeevasunadari, B. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 148-165.
- ⁴³ Sriram, V. *The Devadasi and the Saint: The Life and Times of Bangalore Nagarathnamma*. Chennai: EastWest Books (Madras) Pvt. Ltd, 2007: 1.
- ⁴⁴ "Tyagesevasaktha, Vidyasundari, Ganakalavisharada, Life History of Srimathi Bangalore Nagarathnamma." *Grihalakshmi*, Madras. (March, 1949): 11-12.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Sankaran, T. *Isai Methaikal* (The Great Musicians) (in Tamil). Madras: Tamil Isai Publications, 1962.
- ⁴⁷ *Grihalakshmi*. March, 1949. *Op.cit.*, 13-14.
- ⁴⁸ Sriram, V. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 7.
- ⁴⁹ *Grihalakshmi*. March, 1949. *Op.cit.*, 13-14.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ Sriram, V. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 11.
- ⁵² Sankaran, T. "Bangalore Nagarathnammal: A Devadasi True." *Sruti*. Issue. 4. (January-February, 1984): 15.
- ⁵³ *Grihalakshmi*. March, 1949. *Op.cit.*, 52.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 15-16.
- ⁵⁵ Sriram, V. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 11.
- ⁵⁶ Jackson, William J. *Tyagaraja and the Renewal of Tradition: Translations and Reflections*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited, 1994: 148.
- ⁵⁷ *Grihalakshmi*. March, 1949. *Op.cit.*, 13-14.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 52-23.
- ⁵⁹ Sriram, V. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 60.
- ⁶⁰ Kinneer, Michael S. *The Gramophone Company's First Indian Recordings, 1899-1908*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd, 1994: 9.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶² Sriram, V. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 29.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁴ Mulchandani, Sandhya. Trans. *The Appeasement of Radhika: Radhika Santawanam*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011: xvii.
- ⁶⁵ *Grihalakshmi*. March, 1949. *Op.cit.*, 15.
- ⁶⁶ Sriram, V. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 125.
- ⁶⁷ *Grihalakshmi*. March, 1949. *Op.cit.*, 19.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 15-16.
- ⁶⁹ Sriram, V. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 26-27.
- ⁷⁰ Muthupalani was a courtesan in the court of Marathas of Thanjavur. She wrote an erotic text which was named as *Radhika Santawanam*. Charles Philip Brown, an eminent English-Telugu scholar found the manuscript and printed in 1887 C.E. under the supervision of his associate Paidipati Venkatanarasu. The erotic text was edited, some portions were deleted and later it was published by Paidipati Venkatanarasu. But the scholar like Nagarathnam understood the lyrical quality and decided to publish the entire work with the prologue.

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- ⁷¹ The arguments were rendered from the translation of Sandhya Mulchandani's *The Appeasement of Radhika: Radhika Santawanam* (Mulchandani, Sandhya. Trans. 2011: xix.)
- ⁷² *Radhika Santawanam* was an erotic poem. The 584 verses poem was divided into four sections.
- ⁷³ Mulchandani, Sandhya. Trans. 2011. *Op.cit.*, xix.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, xx.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, xx-xxi.
- ⁷⁶ *Tamilnadu Archives*. GO. 4079. Law Department. December 20, 1927.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁰ Arudra. "The Transfiguration of a Traditional Dance". *Sruti*. Issue. 27/28. (December, 1986 - January, 1987): 19.
- ⁸¹ Sriram, V. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 124.
- ⁸² Sankaran, T. "Bangalore Nagaratnammal: A Devadasi True." *Sruti*. Issue. 4. (January-February, 1984): 14.
- ⁸³ Jackson, William J. 1994. *Op.cit.*, 149.
- ⁸⁴ *Grihalakshmi*. March, 1949. *Op.cit.*, 15-16.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁶ Jackson, William J. 1994. *Op.cit.*, 150.
- ⁸⁷ *Chinna Katchi* and *Periya Katchi* were the two section of the people who fought for the rights over the property of the memorial.
- ⁸⁸ Sriram, V. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 143-146.
- ⁸⁹ Jackson, William J. 1994. *Op.cit.*, 145.
- ⁹⁰ *Ashtothram* is a form of worship which usually offered to any particular deity with a recital of 108 names.
- ⁹¹ Sriram, V. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 95-113.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, 165.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, 168.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 166-167.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.
- ⁹⁶ The statement was reported in *The Hindu* and it was quoted in Jackson, William J. 1994. *Op.cit.*, 149.
- ⁹⁷ Sriram, V. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 184.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.
- ⁹⁹ Sundaram, B.M. 2003. *Op.cit.*, 42, 103.
- ¹⁰⁰ Knight Jr, Douglas M. *Balasaraswathi: Her Art and Life*. Chennai: Tranquebar Press, 2010.
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- ¹⁰² Knight Jr, Douglas M. 2010. *Op.cit.*, 29.
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- ¹⁰⁴ Ramanarayanan, Gowri. "Rukmini Devi: A Quest for Beauty." Part. 1. *Sruti*, Issue. 8. (June, 1984): 17-29.
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- ¹⁰⁶ Knight Jr, Douglas M. 2010. *Op.cit.*, 45.

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- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.
- ¹⁰⁹ Krishnamurthy, R. August 20, 1933. *Ananda Vikatan*.
- ¹¹⁰ Knight Jr, Douglas M. 2010. *Op.cit.*, 58.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*, 77.
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- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.
- ¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.
- ¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 107-113.
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- ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.
- ¹²⁵ The statement was quoted in the work of Douglas M. Knight Jr. (*Ibid.*, 118.)
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- ¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 152-153.
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 183-184.
- ¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 138-139.
- ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.
- ¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 129.
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- ¹³⁸ Balasaraswati, T. November, 1988. *Op.cit.*, 37.
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- ¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 8-13.
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- ¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴⁵ The statement was quoted in the work of Douglas M. Knight Jr. (Knight Jr, Douglas M. 2010. *Op.cit.*, 131.)
- ¹⁴⁶ Balasaraswati, T. April-September, 1984. *Op.cit.*, 10-11.
- ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ¹⁴⁹ The emphasis is stressed by the author. *Ibid.*, 13.
- ¹⁵⁰ *The Statesman*. 28/03/1955.
- ¹⁵¹ Guhan, S. 1991. *Op.cit.*, 7.
- ¹⁵² The statement was quoted in the work of Douglas M. Knight Jr. (Knight Jr, Douglas M. 2010. *Op.cit.*, 154.)
- ¹⁵³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵⁵ Guhan, S. 1991. *Op.cit.*, 14.
- ¹⁵⁶ Knight Jr, Douglas M. 2010. *Op.cit.*, 141.
- ¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.
- ¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.
- ¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.
- ¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.
- ¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 161-162.
- ¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 178.
- ¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 187-189.
- ¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 186.
- ¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 190-198.
- ¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.
- ¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 201-203.
- ¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.
- ¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.
- ¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 235.
- ¹⁷¹ Ray, Satyajit. April-September, 1984). *Op.cit.*, 66.
- ¹⁷² *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷³ George, T.J.S. 2007 (Rpt. 2010). *Op.cit.*, 92.
- ¹⁷⁴ *Sruti*. Issue 144. (September, 1996): 29.
- ¹⁷⁵ The statement was referred in George, T.J.S. 2007 (Rpt. 2010). *Op.cit.*, 73.
- ¹⁷⁶ Jeevasunadari, B. 2007. *Op.cit.*, 34.
- ¹⁷⁷ George, T.J.S. 2007 (Rpt. 2010). *Op.cit.*, 69.
- ¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.
- ¹⁷⁹ M.S. Subbulakshmi's interview by Vaasanthi. *India Today* (Tamil). September, 1996.
- ¹⁸⁰ *Mahamaham* was the South Indian religious festival which is equal to the famous festival of North India, *Kumbamela*. *Mahamaham* festival was held once in every twelve years in Kumbakonam in modern Tamilnadu.
- ¹⁸¹ George, T.J.S. 2007 (Rpt. 2010). *Op.cit.*, 94-97.

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- ¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 98.
- ¹⁸³ Krishnamurthy, R. “*Sakunthalavin Ponvizha Andu* (The Golden Jubilee Year of Sakuntala)” (in Tamil). *Kalki*. (February 16, 1942).
- ¹⁸⁴ George, T.J.S. 2007 (Rpt. 2010). *Op.cit.*, 106.
- ¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.
- ¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.
- ¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.
- ¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.
- ¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.
- ¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.
- ¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 129-132.
- ¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 101.
- ¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 102.
- ¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.
- ¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.
- ¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.
- ¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 173-174.
- ¹⁹⁸ The statement was quoted in T.J.S. George. (*Ibid.*, 176.)
- ¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 176.
- ²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.
- ²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 211.
- ²⁰² *Ibid.*, 170.
- ²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 186.
- ²⁰⁴ The statement was quoted in T.J.S. George. (*Ibid.*, 186.)
- ²⁰⁵ Gangadhar, V. M.S. *Subbulakshmi: The Voice Divine*. New Delhi: Rupa and Co, 2002.
- ²⁰⁶ *Kundoosi*. January, 1948.
- ²⁰⁷ George, T.J.S. 2007 (Rpt. 2010). *Op.cit.*, 195-196.
- ²⁰⁸ *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP) is a Hindu right wing organization which propagated the *Hindutva* ideology. The organization was formed in 1964 C.E.
- ²⁰⁹ The statement was quoted in T.J.S. George. (George, T.J.S. 2007 (Rpt. 2010). *Op.cit.*, 188.)
- ²¹⁰ The content was rendered from the official webpage of *Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation* <http://www.rmaf.org.ph/newrmaf/main/awardees/awardee/profile/228> accessed on March 20, 2014.
- ²¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ²¹² George, T.J.S. 2007 (Rpt. 2010). *Op.cit.*, 216.
- ²¹³ *Ibid.*, 217.
- ²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 251.
- ²¹⁵ The content was rendered from the official webpage of *Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation* <http://www.rmaf.org.ph/newrmaf/main/awardees/awardee/profile/228> accessed on March 20, 2014.
- ²¹⁶ George, T.J.S. 2007 (Rpt. 2010). *Op.cit.*, 150-152.

²¹⁷ The content was rendered from the official webpage of *Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation* <http://www.rmaf.org.ph/newrmaf/main/awardees/awardee/profile/228> accessed on March 20, 2014.

²¹⁸ George, T.J.S. 2007 (Rpt. 2010). *Op.cit.*, 245.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 246.

²²⁰ M.S. Subbulakshmi's interview by Vaasanthi. *India Today* (Tamil). September, 1996.

²²¹ George, T.J.S. 2007 (Rpt. 2010). *Op.cit.*, 244.

²²² *Ibid.*, 218.

CHAPTER - VII

Conclusion

The present thesis, *The Evolution and Reformulation of the Devadasi System in Tamilakam- A Historical Study* focuses on the historical development of the devadasi system from the early medieval period to the early 20th century C.E. There are five objectives formulated to understand the historical transformation of the devadasi system. The first is to understand the concept and nature of devadasi institution, the second is to delineate the historical background of the devadasi system in Tamilakam and it further focuses on social, religious, political and economic conditions of the Tamilakam. The third is to study the life of devadasis in the historical context. The fourth objective is concerned with the historical transformation of the devadasi institution from sacred place to profane and the fifth is to find the role of reformist and revivalist in the process of abolition of the system.

Devadasi were women who were dedicated to a specific temple or sacred object. The custom was widely prevalent in South Asia, especially in India and Srilanka. Generally, the dedication happened in a brahmanical temple. The dedicated young girls came from the different caste. The dedication ceremony resembled the rituals of the Brahmin marriages. Within the devadasi system, caste played a significant role and it determined the inter and intra relations of devadasi system. An unequal hierarchy was existed among devadasis. The girls from the upper caste such as Brahmins were in a comfortable position and allowed to perform ritual services. On the other hand, the non-Brahmin girls did non-ritualistic services such as cleaning temple premises, sounding the bell, etc. Unlike other women in the patriarchal society, the dedicated girls were educated, owned property, sexually free and had certain other privileges such as holding their flags in the medieval period and the special funeral rites of the devadasi, which was not even confirmed to 'caste' men in the society.

The development of the system was not uniform in its nature. It varied according to the region and political climate of the particular historical period. The development of the system was always paralleled with the transformation of the society. The primitive

Sangam society did not need the massive temple institution; the shift from the pastoral to feudal society required a kind of ideology to control the vast land. The establishment of Pallava and Pandiya in the 5th century C.E. signaled the new monarchical kingship in South India, especially in Tamilakam. The institutionalization of the temple helped to construct their royalty and ideas over the society. The introduction of the constructed temples made a huge impact in the South Indian society. The religious institutions became a primary causative factor for the medieval pre-industrial and traditional agrarian South Indian society. The medieval temple represented as an intersection with the sacred realm that gives meaning to both kingship and the service of the devadasi.

The power structure of Tamilakam co-existed with religion, religious institutions and symbols. The religious institutions such as temple played a crucial role. The firm establishment of temple order in Tamil country strengthened the devadasi system. The temple had a huge bureaucracy at its command amongst which the temple girls, who were employed in the service of God and deserve a special mention. The Brahmin-Kshatriya combination helped to preserve the patriarchal order in the society. The system had its consistence growth from the Pallava period onwards. The imperial Cholas improved the condition of devadasi system by the means of donation and protection. The *bhakti* movement provided an ideological base for the existence of the system. The medieval records detailed the role of devadasi in the temple.

In the meantime, devadasi became an integral part of the temple institution. There was no ritual and festival complete without the performance of the temple girls. The medieval Tamil monarchs were liberal to patron the devadasi institution. Devadasi were commonly found in the most of the temples of the Chola period. Pandiyas also paid their attention towards the devadasi institution. In general, devadasis were honored with several titles such as *manikkam* (ruby) and *thalaikkoli* (an expert in the dance performance), etc. The medieval records detailed the engagement of devadasi in a family as a wife, mistress, etc. In a feudal society, courtesans and slaves were the symbols of the rich men. The medieval kings and nobles interested to associate them with devadasi as a symbol of their nobility.

The dedication of devadasi in the temple happened in voluntary and non-voluntary basis. The non-voluntary process of dedication occurred through various means such as presentation and purchase. The state, temple and village assembly owned the recruitment and appointment right of the temple servants. The presentation was carried into two categories. Some women were gifted as objects and the others were a voluntarily dedicated. The extensive devotion, poverty, superstition and prayer were the chief factors for the volunteer dedication. Usually, the donor might be from the royal household, military generals, local chiefs, wealthy merchants and prominent devadasi. The dedication occurred in the different section of the society.

There was a strict code of conducts drafted and maintained by the state, caste and religious institution. In the appointment of dancing girls, Rajarajan I drafted the rules for the temple services. Usually, devadasis would bath at dawn and adorn, then they would visit the temple and stand well in sight of the deity. Temples strictly conducted the regular ritual cycles in a day, week, month, season and year. Marco Polo, the 13th century C.E. traveler, mentioned that the king of Malabar region performed 104 prayers everyday morning and evening in honor of the deities. The functions of devadasi in the sacred realm were classified as ritualistic and non-ritualistic. The ritualistic services were considered as dancing, performing *tirualatti* or *karpura alattai* (a mixture of turmeric, lime and camphor) and *tiruchulam* (the sacred trident). The non-ritualistic works considered carrying lamp, maintaining perpetual lamp, bringing water for worship, fanning idol, husking paddy, cleaning rice and kitchen vessels, washing clothes, decorating surroundings, etc.

Devadasis were treated as temple property, and they primarily served Brahmins and other patrons in the society. Within the devadasi system, hierarchy was existed. The dedicated girls were punch marked as a sign of their lifelong servitude. The branded devadasis could not allow doing the outside services. The devadasis of the Siva temples were branded with the *sulam* (trident) or *rishabham* (bull) marks and the Vishnu temples with *sanku*, (shell) or *chakram* (discus) marks.

Towards the end of the early medieval period, especially when the Chola Empire declined, the institution of devadasi was questioned and began to degrade. The political instability of the later Pandiyas worsening the condition of devadasi women. Devadasi did not have any agency to communicate their problems and issues. The institution of devadasi in Tamilakam suffered a hardship of sixty eighty years from 1310 C.E.-1378 C.E. due to political convulsions. The interlude of non-Hindus and non-Tamils happened in the later phase of Tamilakam. It questioned the existence of devadasihood, and later it influenced the characteristic changes in it. The political intervention of the non-Hindus led a little setback in the system.

The emergence of Vijayanagar rule revived the Vedic order in the Tamil country. After the establishment of Vijayanagar Empire in the 14th century C.E., the Kannada and Telugu Nayakas emerged as prominent patrons of the temple institutions. The Vijayanagar rule in South India reformulated the devadasi system. Kumara Kampana, the chieftains of Vijayanagar emperor, restored the devadasi tradition and assured their safety. Vijayanagar rulers were conscious to promote a high degree of Sanskritization. They created the Vedicization-Sanskrit ‘cosmopolitan’ culture for pan Indian Vedic authentication. During this period, devadasi women started to perform a new kind of ritual service called *kumbarthi*.

The later medieval records such as travelogues, hagiographies and other literary records gave details of the devadasi’s involvement in physical relation in the profane places. The moral conduct of devadasi was continuously questioned by the later medieval text. The travelers such as Domingo Paes, Abraham Rogerius (1651 C.E.), Francois Valentyn (1726 C.E.) and Bartholomous Ziegenbalg (18th century C.E.) witnessed that the devadasi tradition during their visit to South Asia especially to the Indian subcontinent. Dutch pastor Francois Valentyn (1726 C.E.) was the first one who mentioned the word *devadasikal* (plural form of devadasi) in his book *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien* (Old and New East India). The Venetian jeweler Gasparo Balbi (1590 C.E.) used the derogatory term *puttane del pagoda* (temple whore). Abraham Rogerius, a Dutch Calvinist minister called them as ‘whore’ in his *De Open-Deure tot het Verborgten Heydendom* (1651 C.E.).

Francois Bernier mentioned that the Brahmin priests of the Jagannath temple ‘raped’ the young dancers after they were ‘married’ to the god.

The later medieval literatures reflected the condition of devadasis. The minor literary works such as *Virali Vitu Tutu* (messenger literature), ballad and *Thanippadal Thirattu* (compilation work) focused the issues of the devadasi. These later medieval literatures did not have any ambiguity between the temple women and prostitutes. They were well aware of the uniqueness of the devadasi women. Arunakirinathar and Kalamekam, the later medieval poets, discussed the exploitative nature of the devadasi women. They had personal relationships with devadasis. Their works praised, criticized and cursed the devadasi women. Kalamekam compared the prostitutes with monkey, betel leaf, coconut and palm tree. He mentioned that no one could escape from the clutches of devadasis. They always moved with the persons until they lose their materials. They did prank on others and their powerful hug could cheat every one.

The *Virali Vitu Tutu* (messenger poems) is one of the literary genres in Tamil literature, which extensively discussed about the relationship of devadasi and the composer. It was popular between 1600 C.E. and 1750 C.E. The genre is structured like a conversation between *virali* (female messenger) and the protagonist. The content dealt with the morality and misconduct of devadasi. The *tutu* literature such as *Deivachchilaiyar Virali Vitu Tutu*, *Muvaraiyan Virali Vitu Tutu*, *Sethupathi Virali Vitu Tutu*, *Nannavur Sangamechuvaram Svami Vedhanayaki Amman peril Virali Vitu Tutu* and *Kulappa Nayakkan Virali Vitu Tutu* extensively detailed the devadasi institution.

The scattered and fragmentary references of the temple women, court dancers, and other public women only coalesce in Thanjavur Maratha period, when these hitherto independent roles fully collapsed the identity of the devadasi. During the Maratha period, the dance of devadasis was called as *sadhir-attam* instead of *dasi-attam*. The Marathi word *sadar* meant durbar (court). The Marathas made many rules and restrictions to control the sexuality of the devadasi. The records of the years 1820 C.E., 1846 C.E. and 1847 C.E. mentioned those rules and restrictions under the titles of *The Duties of the Dancers and Nattuvanars* and *Dress and Jewels which were restricted to the Dancers*.

These rules were strictly imposed on devadasi and *nattuvanar*. It distinguished devadasi from the other women.

The colonial intervention and the nation building process changed the social relations of the Indian society. The period, 18th century C.E to early 20th century C.E. witnessed a rift between traditionalism and modernity. The dominant ideologies of the colonial state and brahmanical social order discriminated and excluded the natives. The caste order was strengthened and new land relations were established. The European renaissance and industrial revolution resulted in colonial power over India. In general, the devolution of royal cosmologies to lower levels of political organization in South India occurred in the 18th century C.E. Historically, the administration of temple was state managed. The traditional kingship depended on the religious institution to retain their power structure. The colonizers understood the irrelevance of the temple patronage to sustain their imperial power over the natives. Therefore, they withdrew their support from the temple. The withdrawal of patronage created a kind of vacuum. The Brahmin priests and other temple servants started to seek their new patrons.

The introduction of the *zamindari* and *ryotwari* systems resulted in the creation of the new political lobbies, who were known as ‘new elites’ in South Indian society. The traditional local chieftains were replaced by the new elites such as zamindars, *dubashis* etc. The temples and other religious institutions came under the power of the local elites such as little kings, zamindars, *dubashis*, wealthy Brahmins and merchants. The local landlords started to patronize it by virtue of their socio-economic power. The auspiciousness symbols of devadasi had become an important part of the ritual celebrations of non-royal elites.

The decline of temple economy led devadasi to lose temple patronage. Devadasi started to face the economic hardship and underwent difficult circumstances. It largely led them in engaging concubinage and prostitution to support their basic needs. Gradually, the activities of devadasi shifted from sacred to profane sphere. The sexual activities of devadasi were highlighted rather than their earlier ritual services. The most of the devadasis became an unskilled performer. Devadasi became the de facto concubines of

the new elites. The local elites funded and hosted professional performances of music and dance in the profane space. Usually, devadasis participated in most of the palace ceremonies such as coronation and festivals. However, in the changed historical context, devadasis were made to dance in the private parties other than the ritualistic services, which were regularly conducted in the temples and royal houses.

During the colonial period, the private dance performance was called as *nautch* or *nautch* parties. Therefore, the dance performance of devadasi was also identified with that popular term *nautch*. The dance performance of the traditional dancers was considered as high honor to the guests. The service of devadasi was demanded outside the temple and huge amount was remunerated. The *nautch* was performed on the occasions of marriage, feast, and other public occasions. They travelled to different places to perform, which was peculiar from the earlier custom of devadasi. Here, the service was rendered to petty kings, zamindars and *dubashis* rather than the deities of the temple. Generally, devadasis were contracted for many days to perform in profane, and the pleased patrons liberally donated the devadasis with valuables such as money, shawls, and other gold ornaments.

Throughout 19th century C.E., the *nautch* performance was provided to English officials and elites. After the settlement, British conceived India as their second home. From 1880 C.E. onwards Europeans in India, especially the higher officials such as Viceroys, Governors, Collectors, District Magistrates and other law enforcing echelons used to attend the *nautch* parties. The *nautch* performances were organized to honor the visit of the Prince of Wales (1875 C.E.) and his son Prince Albert Victor (1890 C.E.) to British India. However, the British were interested in attending the *nautch* parties, missionaries and few other colonial officials regularly voiced against the *nautch* performances. They perceived *nautch* and devadasi system were symbol of degradedness.

Most of the reformers of 19th century C.E. and early 20th century C.E. considered *nautch* as a social issue. Ramachandram in his monograph *The Devadasi* noted that these women of ill fame had ruined the country with their shameless trade. He further opined that the system was the creation ground for the devils. He warned people to call them as devadasi and that would insult God under the sacred name of religion. Thiru.Vi. Kalyanasundaram

mentioned that he could not accept the degraded tradition of devadasi, which was practiced in the name of 'Hindu' religion. Sarma claimed the misconduct of devadasi as a prostitutes. He stated that once devadasi were *rudrakanikai* whom practiced the strict moral conduct and well received by the devotees due to their asceticism. However, the loss of their asceticism led devotees to disrespect the community. Yande stated that the holiness of their life was primary, thus un-chastity and voluptuousness were reckoned as extreme sin. Further, he recommended that those who indulged in them were threatened with all sorts of terrible punishment in future existence.

The early reformers placed their arguments within the religious context. They tried to establish the devadasi custom was not an integral part of the 'Hindu' tradition. They glorified womanhood. Yande explained that the dancing women were not mentioned in the Hindu text. Sarma stated that there was no truth that *Vedas* and *Sastras* insisted the dedication. On the other hand, the tradition brought defame to the religion. Yande detailed that the custom was not at all sanctioned by our Hindu religion, which had been based on *Vedas*. Moreover, he explained that there were no records in Sanskrit and Prakrit legends, which existed regarding the idols, which were supposed to require the services of such dedicated prostitutes, and the custom was entirely against the genius of all religious cults that had their roots in Vedic teachings.

Usually, devadasi could not be compartmentalized within the inner sphere, which meant spiritual, because devadasis were vibrant, educated and possessed property, which was not common to other women. The reformers interested to bring devadasi women into the private domain of a 'home', through marriage practices. The nationalist flagged the concept of the 'Indian motherhood' and compared the nation with mother. They visualized the morality of a country soulfully depended on the character of the Indian women. The concepts such as purity, righteousness and discipleship played a key role in nation making.

There was a series of engagement on the issue of *nautch* performance of devadasi women. In Madras Presidency, the purity and the anti *nautch* movements found their chief advocates. The Purity Movement, the Indian National Social Conferences (1885

C.E.) and Madras Hindu Reform Associations (1892 C.E.) marked the significant beginning in the Indian social reform activities. It actively campaigned for the *anti-nautch* movements. It questioned the principles of the system and favored Indian nation would to compete in morals. According to them, the *nautch* was a form of impurity, which destroyed the glory of the nations. They perceived devadasis were the national weakness.

]The reformers believed that the engagement of the state and some individuals could prevent the social problems such as devadasi system. It mentioned that it was impossible to expect the custom to disappear of its own accord, for it would take a long time for education and enlightenment to reach the lowest strata of the society. The British were trying to implement various laws to ensure the moral progress in the Indian subcontinent. There were recurrent demand to the officials to shun the *nautch* parties, which were given by the rich Indians. Some of the English settlers and Indian elites criticized the participation of the Prince Albert Victor in the *nautch* performances. Ralph Johnson, the Bishop of Calcutta, condemned the prince participation, and mentioned it as immoral. William Miller (1838 C.E.-1922 C.E.), the founder of Madras Christian College, expressed his disappointment with the *nautch* parties. In 1893, he organized a meeting with the help of the Indian elites to discuss the issues, which related to the *nautch*.

The colonial intervention with the devadasi system in the Indian subcontinent made a great impact. The social and economic changes affected the life of the devadasis. The ‘sacredness’ of the devadasi was questioned and they were forced to search their identity. The colonial officials struggled to differentiate the public women of the West and the religious women of the East. The establishment of the colonial settlement and introduction of the colonial administration initiated the new economic policies of the British which were influenced the devadasi customs in a multiple way. In general, the colonizer was not able to distinguish between the devadasi and prostitutes. The most of the colonial officials compared the devadasi to prostitutes.

In the early 19th century C.E., an important task of the colonial government was that to document the 'native' religious practices. The colonizer made an effort to universalize the legal code in the Indian subcontinent. The colonial administration structured 'tradition' through the agency of the courts, serving to equalize structurally unequal people. The process of universalization benefited Brahmin community in the Indian society. The process authenticated the brahmanical textual tradition and its culture as universal. Their caste customs and religious practices became the law for all. There was a little tension raised between the traditional and modern legal systems. The colonizers preferred to implement the British mode of public law and Indian mode of private law.

The patriarchal Hindu law is constructed on the sexual activities of women. Kunal Parkar, a historian, noted the under the new patriarchy, marriage instantiated itself in law. Marriage was essentialized for the 'Hindu' women and it became the source for all legal status and rights. The sexual activity outside the marriage was constructed as sin, and designated as 'un-chastity', 'incontinence' or prostitution. The Hindu law conditioned women's property rights upon their chastity. The devadasi institution was different in the Hindu community. In addition, the Hindu law recognized the existence of dancing girls as a separate class and acknowledged their civil rights. The colonial judicial law established the rights of the temple women and recognized the devadasi institution. The Colonial High Courts observed that the dancing girls were a separate community and had no caste, or belonged to any caste, and that consequently they could adopt a girl from any caste or no caste.

In 19th century C.E., the British Government enacted Contagious Disease (CD) Acts of 1864 C.E., 1866 and 1869 C.E. in England to safeguard the health of the British soldiers from the venereal diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea. The British Government protected their soldiers' health through the control of the female body. According to the act, female prostitutes were instructed to undergo a regular checkups and treatment in health centers. Later, the act was extended to all the British colonialized courtiers. In 1868 C.E., the Indian Contagious Diseases Act (Act XIV of 1868) was enacted with similar provisions for the supervision, registration, and inspection of prostitute women in major Indian cities and seaports. The colonial government had to keep registers and issue

the licenses to prostitutes. The examining hospitals were infamously called Lock Hospitals. The process excluded the dancing girl community from its provisions. In many cases, devadasi were exempted to attend the Lock Hospital for examination and certificate due to their religious status. Ramachendrier noted that the colonial government somewhat recognized the status of devadasi by not classifying them with the common prostitutes who were actually brought under the act, and compelled to attend the Lock hospital for examination and certificate.

In the end of 19th century C.E., reformers lead the first phase of *anti-nautch* and anti-dedication campaign. Usually, the reformers were nationalist, and they believed in Brahmanical Doctrines. Their primary concern was on social purity and desired to construct a 'pure' nation. However, in early 20th century C.E., a section of reformers brought different arguments on the abolition of devadasi system, which centered on radical ideas. The second phase got its momentum with emergence of the Self-Respect Movement in South India. There was a significant difference between the groups of reformers, regarding the reasoning for the abolition of the system in the society. The radicals understood the exploitive religious nature of the system and criticized it. They envisaged that the degraded devadasi system could entertain the subordination, trafficking and sexual exploitation of women.

Among the reformers, Muthulakshmi Reddi was a prominent personality who tirelessly argued for devadasi abolition. Ideologically, she had a complex position. It was a mixture of two phases of the reformers. On one side, she concerned for the puritan Hindu religion, and on the other side, she argued for the abolition of the system due to the empowerment of womanhood. The Self-Respecters (people who believed in the Self-Respect Movement) supported the campaigns of Muthulakshmi by their rational arguments. The efforts of reformers were able to create awareness among the people. Following these development, in 1930 C.E. Madras Legislative Council (MLC) passed a resolution to prevent the dedication of devadasi.

In general, the radicals came from the Self-Respect Movement who chiefly advocated for universal brotherhood, anti-Brahmanical and anti-ritualistic society. The Self-Respect

Movement voiced for the marginalized sections of the society and questioned the hereditary monopoly of Brahmins in the caste society. The Movement questioned the existing caste structure and cultural hegemony of Brahmanism. It gave much priority to the self-respected life for the common people. Women liberation was one of the prominent aims of the Self-Respect Movement. It questioned the patriarchal system. It stated that in a patriarchal structure, women were treated as sexual object and property and the society treated women as a child bearing machine and equaled women with animal. The Movement spoke for devadasi women and provided a space for them. It encouraged devadasi women to articulate their arguments in the mainstream politics.

The Self-Respecters strongly believed that the abolition of the devadasi system was desirable and important. E.V. Ramasami considered the abolition of the *dasi* system and child marriages would lead the women empowerment. The rationalist considered devadasi system as a system of professional prostitution. E.V. Ramasami understood that the *pottu* ceremony was license for the prostitution in the name of God. The Self-Respecters were able to understand the differences between prostitution and devadasihood. *Kudi Arasu* used the Tamil term *vesi* to point prostitute women and *dasi* to denote devadasi women. The newspaper actively engaged in the process of eradicating evils in Hindu temples and prostitution in the name of religion.

The Self-Respecters stressed the importance of religious reforms in the society. The Self-Respect newspapers gave its special attention towards the issues of devadasi. Frequently devadasi and other activist in the Self-Respect Movement were written columns in the newspapers. *Kudi Arasu*, the rational daily, extensively provided columns for devadasi women. On June 17, 1928 C.E., Masilamanip Pillai wrote a column *Devadasikalukkor Vendukol: Namathu Nokkam*, which meant *An Appeal to Devadasi: Our Intention* in *Kudi Arasu*. Another column, *the Abolition of the Pottu Ceremony in the Hindu Temples in Madras Presidency* highlighted the problems in the *pottu* ceremony signify the acceptance of devadasi as a prostitute or concubine as their profession. The contents, *Naan Vilaimagala?* (Am I a prostitute?) in March 30, 1930 C.E. and *Swamikalum Devadiyalkalum* (Gods and prostitutes) in December 21, 1930 stated that all the social evils in the society were occurred in the name of religion.

Usually, devadasi and their artistic performance were inseparable. The livelihood of the devadasi was largely depended on their performing ability. However, in the end of 1920s, there was a new discourse raised around the lives of devadasi women. There was a strong protest against the devadasi system, and to restrict the performances of devadasi women. The Self-Respecters did not bothered about the aesthetic values of the dance performances of devadasi. In more than that, they visualized the exploitative and submissiveness nature of the female body thorough the performances. The Self-Respect Movement propagated the restriction for the performance of devadasi women. *Kudi Arasu* mentioned that the performance of devadasis, during the *puja* hours would stimulate the minds of the devotees. In 1928 C.E., Youth Conference of *Isai Vellalar* at Chidambaram passed resolution that the musical system of devadasi was degraded and recommend its reform.

The entire colonial discourse on the devadasi, renamed the dance tradition of devadasi as Bharatanatyam. The revivalist claimed that the art of devadasi was ‘sanitized’ and ‘revived’. The so-called respectable upper caste-well-read Brahmin men and women took up the task of revival of devadasi dance tradition. There was a huge debate on the renaming of devadasi’s dance. It is difficult to find an exact person who coined the word Bharatanatyam first. Rukmini Devi, V. Raghavan (musicologist) and E. Krishna Iyer were the leading personalities in the process. In 1932 C.E. Madras Music Conference of the Music Academy passed resolution to rename *sadhir* into Bharatanatyam. *The Centenary Issue* of Krishna Iyer mentioned that this gave a new lease of life under a new name with similar to how a girl was given in marriage.

The revivalist considered that the performance of devadasi would not satisfy the aesthetic taste of sophisticated society in which it should function. The revivalist undervalued the traditional techniques of devadasi dance. They considered the importance of the revival of the dance. Rukmini Devi was the prominent women in the process of the renaming Bharatanatyam. As Theosophist and Brahmin, she was interested to continue the age-old ‘Hindu’ practices especially, the dance tradition. Rukmini Devi considered that dance was an ancient culture and religion. She criticized that persons (devadasi) could do stunts, which remained in the chorus because it did not have any soul in it. Further, she

mentioned that art could be one of the greatest achievements of humanity. The dance transcends the physical body as a vehicle and lifted humanity into a world of higher emotion with joy and pure wisdom.

Rukmini Devi made many changes in the dance tradition, especially in music, background and presentation. She blended *sadhir attam* with the new and old forms. According to her, dance was an expression of physical body. The physical expression was both dangerous and magnificent instrument. The weakness of the physical body was its coarseness and vulgarity. She believed that the portrayal of *shringara* (erotic dance elements) was “ordinary and low”. She also felt that expressing *shringara* movements on the profane area would not suit her or her students. Therefore, Rukmini Devi and other Brahmin elites thought to differentiate the so-called vulgarity from sublime. She selected her repertoire carefully. Her choice was on the concept of *bhakti* (devotion) and she used songs, which were based on religious themes. She perceived this dynamic and called it the secularization of the devadasi dance.

The revivalist was trying to establish the importance of the dance in the ritual tradition of Hindu religion. They continuously placed the dance and music within the religious context. They stressed the importance of the spirituality in dance performance. The revivalist voiced for spirituality. Raghavan mentioned that the temples had rare ragas and forms of composition and it serve to art as well as to moral and spiritual regeneration of the people. Rukmini Devi stressed the importance of the religious spirit in the dance. She noted that the dance should be influenced by religion.

Many Indologists and nationalist historians claimed that Bharatanatyam was a direct descendant of the arts of the Tamil Sangam age. The elites Brahmin claimed that the dance forms were descended from the age-old Sanskrit tradition. Annie Besant stated that the dancing women of temple was established to exonerates the ancestors from any such evil motives and were worthy of their earnest attention. Sathyamurthi mentioned that the importance of the musical revival of India, especially South India. He insisted that the music has always played a larger role in helping the achievement of freedom to other

countries. The revivalist recommended that Indian National Congress should use the new spirit that emerged among Tamils on music and dance to Indian nationalism.

The Music Academy of Madras played a key role in the revival of devadasi dance. The relationship between the Music Academy and Bharatanatyam was inseparable. Usually, the members of the Music Academy were part of the cultural wing of the Indian National Congress who was projecting devadasi as performer of Bharatanatyam and identified themselves as the 'pro-art progressives'. E. Krishna Iyer, one of the Secretaries of the Music Academy, played a decisive role in the renaissance of *sadhir* dance into Bharatanatyam. He was interested to include *sadhir* programs in the Academy. The Music Academy's attention towards dance was at its peak in the period between 1930 C.E. and 1935 C.E. The Music Academy made an effort to revive the devadasi dance tradition. The Academy started to organize the dance performances of devadasi. The various resolutions of the Academy favored and encouraged the art of Bharatanatyam. It stated that Bharatanatyam was a great and ancient art, which was unexceptionable. It appealed to the public and art associations for necessary attention and the encouragement of Bharatanatyam.

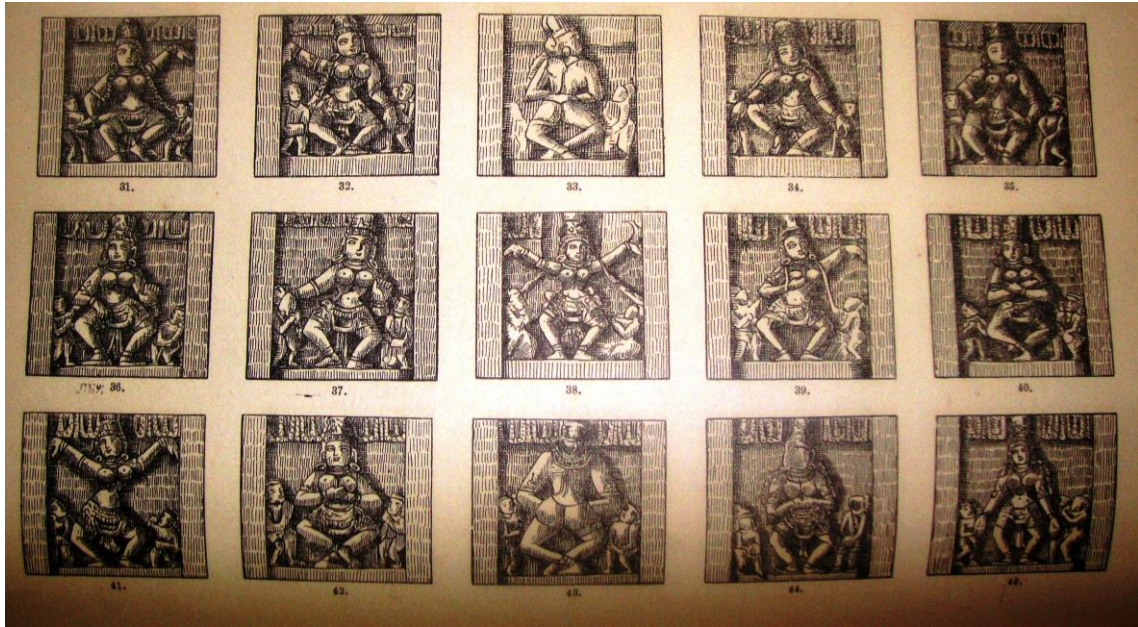
The executive functionaries of the Academy continued to encourage the art of dance under its new name of Bharatanatyam. The academy provided a space for the dance performances and it allowed dancers to perform their dance. In a decade between 1930 C.E. and 1940 C.E., significant numbers of devadasi performed in the Academy. The Academy helped to stage dances by outstanding devadasi performers. However, after 1935 C.E., a new factor emerged in the South Indian dance tradition. A group of Brahmin women who were associated with the Theosophical society started to learn the dance. These Brahmin dancers had infused their upper caste values into the dance. The Music Academy provided a platform for these 'new' dancers. The participation of devadasi in the dance performances at the Academy started to decline in numbers.

Following these developments, we also look into the life stories of devadasis who were actively engaged in the discourse on devadasi on different stages. The thesis focused the lives of Muvalur Ramamirtham, Bangalore Nagarathnam, Thanjavur Balasaraswati and

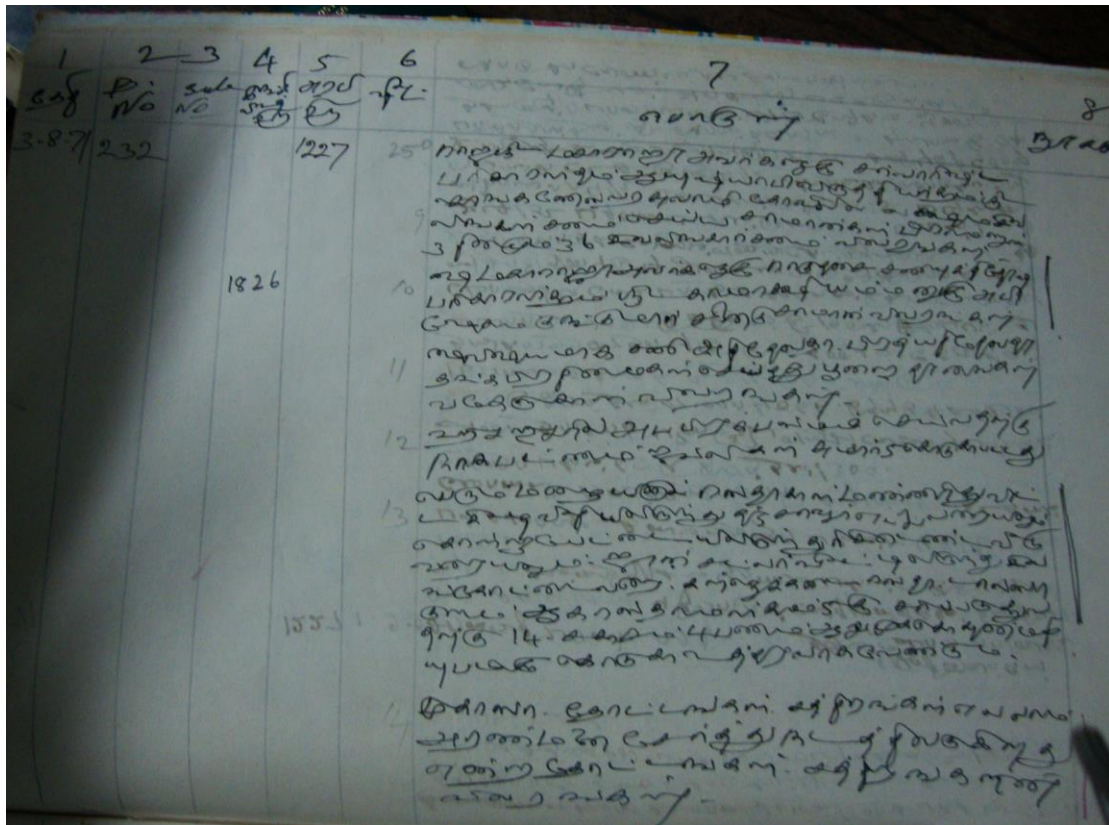
Madurai Shanmugavadivu Subbulakshmi. All the four women were from the devadasi community and they survived during the period, when the abolition of devadasi discourse was at its peak. The life of these women directly or indirectly reflected the chances, which raised on the abolition of the system in the 20th century C.E. Indian society. These women represented the different discourses on the devadasis. Bangalore Nagarathnam was from Mysore who voiced for the continuation of the devadasi system. Muvalur Ramamirtham was firmly against the devadasi custom and intensively worked for the abolition of the system. She became a social reformer and closely associated with the Self-Respect Movement. Balasaraswati came from the strong devadasi lineage of Vina Dhanam. She questioned the Sanskritization of devadasi dance tradition and represented the devadasi's dance to the modern world. On the other hand, M.S. Subbulakshmi, the musical legend from devadasi community signified the transition of the autonomous nature of devadasi womanhood to submissive woman of a modern society.

The entire arguments of devadasi discourse was able to establish the fact that the gradual transition of the devadasi system from the early medieval to the modern society. The political economy determined the condition of devadasis. The imperial Cholas understood the importance of the religion to sustain their power. They made liberal endowment to the temples. The sustained temple economy patronage the devadasis and thus they were economically resourceful. But later, the failure of the Empire collapsed the temple economy, which made the devadasis to meet the economic hardships. Meanwhile, the Vijayanagar kingdom revived the 'Hindu' religion and patron the temple institutions under the control of Kumara Kampana. However, devadasis could not regain their earlier status. The later medieval sources highlighted the problems in the devadasi system. The intervention of the colonial power introduced new economic patterns such as *zamindari* and *ryotwari* and it influenced new kinds of social structure. The nation building process of the 19th century C.E. was largely constructed on female sexuality that brought concepts such as 'social purity', 'good women', and 'motherhood'. This further weakened the social acceptance of the devadasi women. In the early 20th century C.E., devadasi lost both their social and economic bases and eventually the devadasi institution faded away in Tamilakam.

APPENDIXES



Appendix 1: - Dancing images of East tower of Natarajar Temple at Chidambaram



Appendix 2: - The translation of the Modi scripts into Tamil language



Appendix 3: - The historical Tamilakam



Appendix 4: - Images of Paravai Nankai and Rajendran I in Thiyagarajar Temple, Tiruvarur



Appendix 5: - Shrine of Paravai Nankai and Rajendran I in Thiyagarajar Temple, Tiruvarur



Appendix 6: - Image of Manikka Nachchiyar in the North car street of Thiyagarajar Temple, Tiruvarur



Appendix 7: - Temple of Manikka Nachchiyar in the North car street of Thiagarajar Temple, Tiruvarur



DEVEDASCHIE,
OF INDIANER DANSEERESSE.

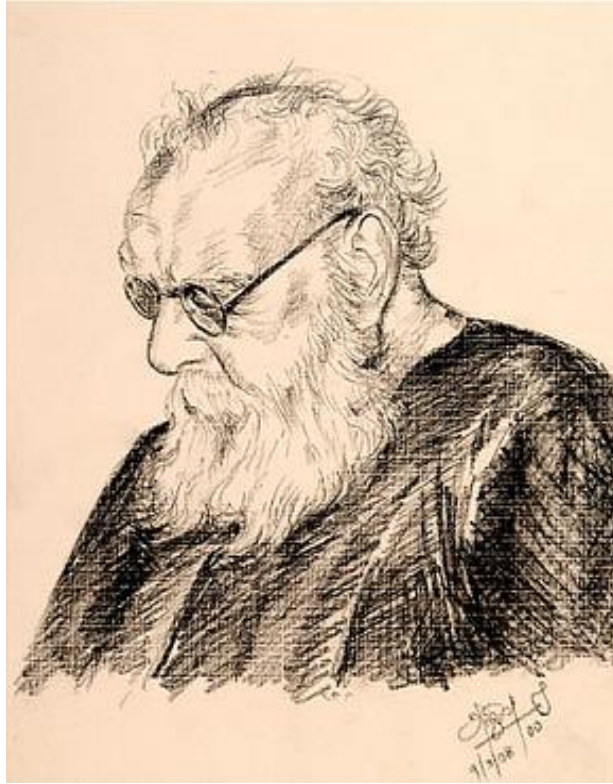
Appendix 8: - The 19th century C.E. portrayal of devadasi woman (Haafner, Jacob. *Reize in eenen Palanquim; of Lotgevallen en Merkwaardige Aanteekeningen op eene Reize langs de Kusten Orixia en Chroromandel* (in Dutch). Vol. I. Amsterdam: Johannes Allart, 1808: 219.)



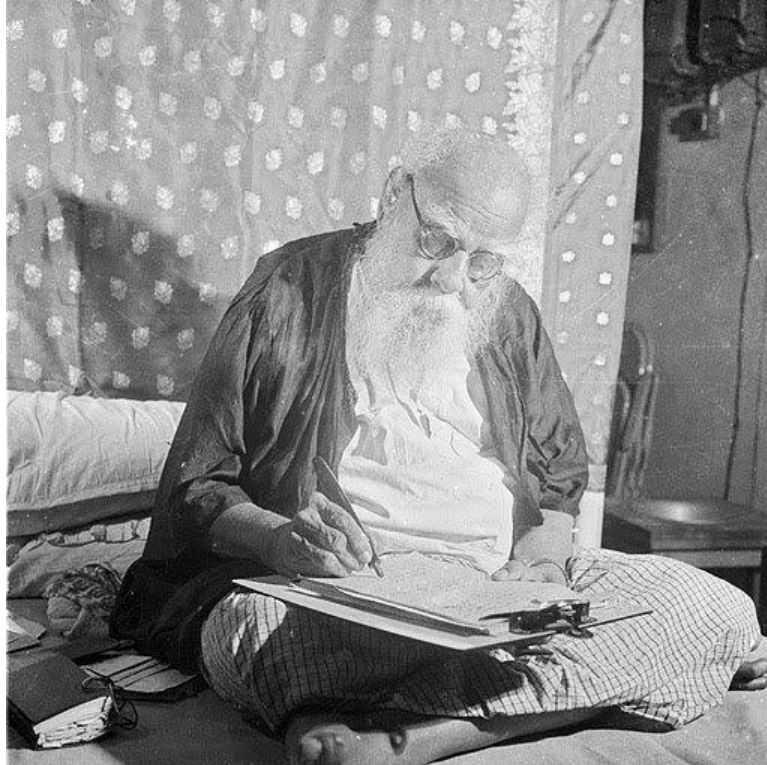
Appendix 9: - Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddi



Appendix 10: - Photograph of 20th century C.E. girls from the devadasi community
 (The photograph was collected by the researcher from P.R. Thilakam at Thanjavur on March 15, 2011.)



Appendix 11: - 'Thanthai Periyar' E.V. Ramasami



Appendix 12: - 'Thanthai Periyar' E.V. Ramasami



Appendix 13: - Rukmini Devi at her concert



Appendix 14: - Muvalur A. Ramamirtham



Appendix 15: - The memorial of Thiyagarajar, Tiruvaiyar



Appendix 16: - The image of Bangalore Nagarathnam in Thiyagarajar memorial, Tiruvaiyar



Appendix 17: - The family of Balasaraswati



Appendix 18: - Young Balasaraswati



Appendix 19: - Balasaraswati during her performance



Appendix 20: - Balasaraswati with her daughter

(The image is from Pattabhi Raman, N and Anandhi Ramachandran. "T. Balasaraswati: The Whole World in Her Hands". Part. 1. *Sruti*. Issue. 4. (January-February, 1984): 19.)



Appendix 21: - M.S. Subbulakshmi playing Vina



Appendix 22: - M.S. Subbulakshmi at the shooting of the movie Sakunthalai



Appendix 23: - M.S. Subbulakshmi at the shooting of the movie Meera



Appendix 24: - M.S. Subbulakshmi honored by the India Post by issuing postage stamp on her



Appendix 25: - Google honored M.S. Subbulakshmi with its doodle service on her 97th birthday



Appendix 26: - M.S. Subbulakshmi with her husband T. Sadasivam in 1997

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Synopsis of the thesis entitled
**THE EVOLUTION AND REFORMULATION OF THE
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SYNOPSIS

The Evolution and Reformulation of Devadasi System in Tamilakam- A Historical Study

History writing seems to be very biased because it has given us a very male centric view of the past. The patriarchal understanding on the history writings have marginalized women and their historical experience. Writing Women's History is not just meant glorifying the historical personalities but it is an important intellectual engagement in the reconstruction of the gender sensidized historical past. In general, women's history traces the historical experiences of women. In India, women in history are placed within the "private" domain, but recorded history generally focuses the "public" domain. Further, the centrality of the Indian culture lays in the religious roots. The patriarchal values are established and monitored through religious ideas. Religious values are controled women to access the public sphere. Hence, Devadasi is a temple women who could share the public domain, which was not possible for other women in the society. The study of devadasi institution is relevant to get a balanced understanding of the past.

Devadasi is a dedicated women to any particular deity or symbol. In the past, the custom was widely spread in South Asia, especially in modern India and Srilanka. They were an integral part of the temple organization. In general, the dedication was happened in the brahmanical temples. The dedication ceremony resembled the rituals of the Brahmin marriages. The dedicated young girls were from different castes and performed ritualistic and non-ritualistic services. In general, caste played a significant role in the intra and inter relations of devadasi. Unlike the other women in the patriarchal society, the dedicated girls were educated, owned

property, sexually free and had certain other privileges such as holding their flags and the special funeral rites which was not even confirmed to 'caste' men in the society. The strong historical lineage of devadasi institution had underwent many changes due to various historical reasons. This thesis attempts to focus on the historical development and transition of the devadasi system from the early medieval to modern Tamilakam.

There are five objectives formulated to understand the historical transformation of the devadasi system. The first is to understand the concept and nature of devadasi institution, the second is to delineate the historical background of the devadasi system in Tamilakam and it further focuses on social, religious, political and economic conditions of the Tamilakam. The third is to study the life of devadasis in the historical context. The fourth objective is concerned with the historical transformation of the devadasi institution from sacred place to profane and the fifth is to find the role of reformist and revivalist in the process of abolition of the system.

This study uses qualitative methods, especially the methodologies of History and Gender Studies. The research carried out unstructured interviews with an expert and the last surviving devadasi to understand their experiences and opinions on devadasi institution. Further, the study focuses on the traditional Tamil region which is popularly known as Tamilakam. The region Tamilakam is included modern states of Tamilnadu, Kerala, and some parts of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters including the introduction and conclusion. They are as follows: 1) *Introduction*, 2) *Pre-Colonial Tamilakam: - The Historical Context*, 3) *Emergence and Growth of the Devadasi System: - Pre-Colonial Tamilakam*, 4) *The Devadasi*

System: - The Colonial Tamilakam, 5) The 20th century C.E. Debate on Devadasi System, 6) The Life Stories of Some Selected Devadasis of South India and 7) Conclusion.

The first chapter introduces the concept, meaning and features of the devadasi institution. It explains the root of the term 'devadasi' and different names of the institution due to various historical, cultural and geographical reasons. The chapter discusses the evolution of the devadasi institution from the pan Indian perspective and exclusively deals with the context of Tamil country. It engaged with the elementary process of the devadasi ceremonies such as *pottu kattuthal* (tying golden symbol), *gejja puja* (anklet ceremony), and puberty ceremony. The question of caste is always associated with the devadasi institution. The chapter tried to solve the puzzle with regard to the association of caste with the institution. It further provides the details about different names and categories in the institution. As like the introductory chapter, it also details the different sources and historiography of the study. Then it discusses about the methodologies of the study. The chapter concludes with the chapterization of the research.

The second chapter *Pre-Colonial Tamilakam: - The Historical Context* discusses the social formation and the historical reasoning for the establishment of the devadasi system in the Tamil country which is popularly called as 'Tamilakam'. The chapter explains the historical transformation of the Tamil society from ancient Sangam period to early medieval to medieval and then modern period. It exclusively discusses the kingship pattern in South India especially in Tamilakam. In general, the devadasi system was an integral part of the temple organization and the power structure of the Tamilakam was co-existed with religion, religious institution and symbols. Thus, the chapter has made an attempt to understand the

relationship among the kingship, religious institution and devadasi. Further, it analysis the impact of *bhakti* in the Tamil society, because the devotional movement could establish the concepts such as self-surrender, sacrifice, dedication, devotion and destiny.

The third chapter *Emergence and Growth of the Devadasi System: - Pre-Colonial Tamilakam* analyzes the growth, process of recruitment, services and remuneration of the devadasi institution in the medieval Tamilakam. The chapter extensively deals with the nature of services done by devadasi to the religious as well as other social institutions. The services of devadasi were classified as ritualistic and non-ritualistic performances. The ritualistic services included dancing, performing *tirualatti* or *karpura alattai* (a mixture of turmeric, lime and camphor) and *tiruchulam* (the sacred trident). The non-ritualistic works were carrying lamp, maintaining perpetual lamp, bringing water for worship, fanning idol, husking paddy, cleaning rice and kitchen vessels, washing clothes, decorating surroundings, and so on. The chapter further discusses the different forms of remuneration for the devadasi services such as house, land, food, tax exemption or remission, certain rights and etc. In general, devadasis had received the grants in a two or more combinations. The historical remains exhibits the existence of hierarchy within the devadasi institution. The nature of work of devadasi was determined by their hierarchal gradation. The dedicated women were punch marked as a sign of life long servitude. The punch mark was varied according to their association of the temple. The Vaishnava temple *dasis* were marked with *sanku* (shell) or *chakram* (discus) and Saiva temple *dasis* with *sulam* (trident) or *rishabham* (bull).

Apart from these services, devadasi were engaged with some charitable activities such as endowing their wealth in the construction and renovation of temple, pond and other public utilities. Devadasi was liberal to donate in kinds like people, land, money, and livestock and so on. The tradition received a setback during the later medieval period on account of the decline of the imperial Chola and later Pandiya. The interlude of non-Hindus and the non-Tamils further weakened the institution. With the establishment of the Vijayanagar Empire in the 14th century C.E., the Kannada and Telugu Nayakas emerged as prominent patrons of the temple institution. The emergence of the Vijayanagar rule in South India reformulated the system. Kumara Kampana, the chieftain of Vijayanagar emperor, restored the devadasi tradition and assured their safety. Kumara Kampana restored the worship and services which had been discontinued. These political changes influenced the characteristic changes in the system. The later medieval records such as travelogues, hagiographies and other literary sources highlighted the loose character and exploitative nature of devadasi women. These later medieval records criticized the auspiciousness of the devadasi women.

During the later medieval period, the foreign travelers such as Domingo Paes, Abraham Rogerius (1651 C.E.), Francois Valentyn (1726 C.E.), Bartholomous Ziegenbalg (18th century C.E.) and Jacob Haafner (19th century C.E.) recorded the devadasi tradition and its function. Some of the indigenous literature also reflected the conditions of devadasi in the later medieval period. The minor literary works of Tamil such as *Virali Vitu tutu* (messenger literature), ballad, *Thanippatar tirattu* (compilation work) and the works of Arunakirinathar and Kalamekam focused the problems of the devadasi system. Usually, these literatures were written mostly out of their personal experiences of the author. The literatures have not had

any ambiguity between the temple women and prostitutes. It was well aware of the unique features of the devadasi women.

The fourth chapter *The Devadasi System: - The Colonial Tamilakam* vividly discusses the transition of the devadasi system in the 18th and 19th century C.E. This period witnessed a rift between tradition and modernity. The political economy had determined the condition of the devadasi women. During the reign of Nayaka, the boundaries between courtesans and temple women had become indistinguishable. The period collapsed the homogenous identity of devadasihood. The 17th and 18th century C.E. historical evidences highlighted the slip up in the position of the devadasi from the earlier stage. During the Maratha period, the dance of devadasi was used to call as *sadhir-attam*. The ritualistic roles of devadasi was overshadowed the performing abilities. Their artistic qualities turn out to be popular. The Maratha court imposed a rigorous code of conduct for devadasi and enforced it with a severe punishment. The Marathas' made many rules and restrictions to control the sexuality of devadasi. The records of the years 1820 C.E., 1846 C.E. and 1847 C.E. have mentioned those rules and restrictions with the titles of *The Duties of the Dancers and Nattuvanars* and *Dress and Jewels which were restricted to the Dancers*. These rules were strictly imposed on devadasi and *nattuvanar*.

The chapter further continues to analyze the colonial intervention and the changes in the devadasi system in the course of the nation building process. The process of colonization had made a huge impact on the colonized countries. The medieval feudal structure provided support and patronage to the institution. During the 18th century C.E., political transformations and agrarian changes questioned the patterns of indigenous economy. The

colonial government introduced new land relationship in the Indian society such as introduction of the *zamindari* and *ryotwari* system. The changes questioned the traditional power centre and established a lobby which acted as a mediator between the colonial government and the people. The lobby was popularly called as ‘new elites’. In the meantime, devadasi started to perform in the private parties such as marriage, feast, and other public occasions. The public performance of devadasi was popularly known as *nautch*. The local elites, wealthy merchants and other eminent persons conducted the *nautch* parties. The reformers, missionaries and some of the conservatives believed that the *nautch* performance would seduce the young minds and so they questioned the *nautch* performance. During the 19th century C.E., “the sacred” identity of devadasis was lost and their *nautch* became the devadasi phenomena. Their artistic qualities became an iconic identity for them.

At the end of the 19th century C.E., the process of the nation building process played a key role in the construction of the Indian culture, especially on Indian womanhood. The colonial modernity was tried to preserve the tradition and pretended to be a bearer of patriarchal ideologies. The evolution of the national consciousness was more relevant in the transformation of the devadasi tradition. The historical consciousness was reshaped to construct their ‘superior’ culture. Women became a part of the reformist agenda. The women’s question became very relevant. The reformers critiqued the customs of *sati*, child marriage and widow remarriage. The characters such as coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense and sexual immorality were questioned and simultaneously the national consciousness developed the notions of womanly virtues as chastity, self-sacrifice, submission, devotion, kindness, patience and the labors of love. The entire arguments of the reformers were placed on the core of the revival of the Hindu tradition

otherwise super ego of their indigenous culture. They voiced for social purity rather than liberation and empowerment of people, particularly on the issues of women.

The reformers articulated a notion of 'true' womanhood and restricted women within the family. The female sexuality was controlled through the marriage institution. A section of reformers believed that the degradation of the society was mainly caused by devadasi women. Their arguments were more on safeguarding the purity of the Hindu religion and accused the devadasi as a cause for the institutional failure of the Hindu religion. In general, they shared the view of the fundamentalist principle of Hindu orthodoxy. Usually, reformers endorsed Hindu religion and acknowledged the ancient glory of the temple women. They considered that the devadasi custom would pollute the Hindu religious order. The reformers placed their arguments within the religious context. They tried to establish the fact that the devadasi custom was not an integral part of the Hindu tradition.

In the early 19th century C.E., an important task of the colonial government was to document the 'native' religious practices. In 1861 C.E., the Indian Penal Code was formulated. The colonizer made an effort to universalize the legal code in the Indian subcontinent. The colonial administration structured 'tradition' through the agency of the courts, serving to equalize structurally unequal people. The homogenization of Indian law had a problem in addressing the indigenous cultural and religious practices such as family law, inheritance, child marriage, property rights etc. These transformations directly or indirectly affected the life of devadasi. Meanwhile, the colonial engagement of devadasi institutions influenced the princely states in the Indian subcontinent. In the early 20th century C.E., the princely states of

Mysore, Pudukkottai and Travancore engaged in the abolition of the devadasi system in their respective states.

The fifth chapter *The 20th century C.E. Debate on Devadasi System* discusses the role of reformist and revivalist in the move of the abolition and restoration of the devadasi custom in the society. The two decades 1920's and 1930's were significant in the history of devadasi system. During 1920's the entire of devadasi system was abolished. Muthulakshmi, E.V. Ramasami and other Self-Respecters from the Self-Respect Movement argued, worked and campaigned for the abolition and propagated the irrelevance the custom in the name of 'sacredness' and 'divine duty'. The hard work of Muthulakshmi and Self-Respecters could create public opinion against the practices and passed the resolution of the devadasi dedication in the MLC in 1930 C.E. Following the historical event, the revivalists who were generally accepted Brahmanical ideas initiated the move of reviving the dance of devadasi. They renamed devadasi dance as Bharatanatyam. The Theosophical Society and Music Academy of Madras supported the initiatives of Rukmini Devi and E. Krishna Iyer. They made some of the changes in the traditional dance for the convenient. During 1930's, the dance of devadasi was staged in so called the secular and prestigious stages of Music Academy. In meantime, some Brahmin girls started to learn dance from the traditional *nattuvanars* and gradually occupied the stages of devadasi and questioned the cultural economy of the devadasi community.

The sixth chapter *The Life Stories of Some Selected Devadasis of South India* discussed the life of some selected devadasis such as Muvalur A. Ramamirtham, Bangalore Nagarathnam, Thanjavur Balasaraswati and Madurai Shanmugavadivu Subbulakshmi. There is a rationale

behind the selection of these women. All the four women were from the devadasi community and they belonged to the period, where the abolition of devadasi discourse was at its peak. The lives of these women directly or indirectly reflected the developments related to the abolition of the system in the 20th century C.E. Indian society. And also these women represented the different discourse of the devadasi issue. Bangalore Nagarathnam was from Mysore who voiced her opinion for the continuation of the devadasi system. Muvalur Ramamirtham was firmly against the devadasi custom and intensively worked hard for the abolition of the system. She became a social reformer and close associate of E.V. Ramasami of Self-Respect Movement. Balasaraswati came from the strong devadasi lineage of Vina Dhanam of colonial Madras. She questioned the Sanskritization of devadasi dance tradition and represented the devadasi's dance to the modern world. On the other hand, M.S. Subbulakshmi, the musical legend from devadasi community signified the transition of the autonomous nature of devadasi womanhood to submissive woman of a modern society. Though the life of Muvalur A. Ramamirtham, Bangalore Nagarathnam, Thanjavur Balasaraswati and Madurai Shanmugavadivu Subbulakshmi represented four different lives but they had similar characteristics and experiences. The similarity starts from their birth. All the four carried their matrilineal lineage and they carried their mother's name and ancestral town as initials.

The concluding chapter summarize the facts discussed in the thesis.

The entire arguments of devadasi discourse was able to establish the fact that the gradual transition of the devadasi system from the early medieval to the modern society. The political economy determined the condition of devadasis. The imperial Cholas understood the

importance of the religion to sustain their power. They made liberal endowment to the temples. The sustained temple economy patronage the devadasis and thus they were economically resourceful. But later, the failure of the Empire collapsed the temple economy, which made the devadasis to meet the economic hardships. Meanwhile, the Vijayanagar kingdom revived the 'Hindu' religion and patron the temple institutions under the control of Kumara Kampana. However, devadasis could not regain their earlier status. The later medieval sources highlighted the problems in the devadasi system. The intervention of the colonial power introduced new economic patterns such as *zamindari* and *ryotwari* and it influenced new kinds of social structure. The nation building process of the 19th century C.E. was largely constructed on female sexuality that brought concepts such as 'social purity', 'good women', and 'motherhood'. This further weakened the social acceptance of the devadasi women. In the early 20th century C.E., devadasi lost both their social and economic bases and eventually the devadasi institution faded away in Tamilakam.