



Efforts made by Reformists and Revivalists to Abolish and Reform the Nautch Kanya System and Special light on Works of Dr. Muthulakshmi Ready

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Abstract

The Nautch Kanya system, or devadasi system, survived in Indian society from centuries ago with religious sanction of one particular class. At the initial stage it was emerged as religious performance of dancing girl of low caste who was later taken as wife of that particular deity and sacrificed her whole life for the religious cause. But this system spoiled the lives of innocent girls from *dalit* castes and helpless women. The wise persons wanted to abolish this system for the betterment of the women and young girls and to protect them from being dedicated in temples. This research paper deals with the subject of the efforts and different works done by the reformists and revivalists, including the most important work of Dr. Muthulakshmi Ready, who dedicated her life for the welfare of devadasis and also gave them the occupation they needed to survive.

Keywords: system, fortune, girls, abolish, efforts.

Introduction:

The Nautch Kanya System started in India during ancient times, but we also find some evidences from mythological periods in the tales in many sacred books, verses, and Vedas. In the beginning, the system was based on religious bindings and beliefs and some social beliefs were related about good fortune after adopting this profession. In this system, young girls were dedicated to the temple deity, who married them with all rituals on the names of enteral brides, then they became Nautch Kanya, sometimes called devadasis. But with the passage of time, this system became famous under the name "Devadasi System. They used to do all the important works of the temple, like lighting the temple with *divas* near the deity and other important places; bathing the deity; preparing food for the deity and feeding it; washing the floors; and entertaining the deity with their dance (nautch) and singing in front of the deity. They spent their whole lives in temples and used to serve them. But with the passage of time, the system filled with bad elements and became hell for girls and females. The reformists took it right time to reform the system, because otherwise day by day it was becoming an institute of prostitutes and it was taken that the devadasis are not pure women and are only sex workers.

Efforts made by the Revivalists and Reformists:

The modern era of India marked the downfall of the Devadasi system due to the destruction of Hindu temples by Turkish and Mughal invaders. Then India faced a tough time under the colonial era; the devadasi system also faced a time of vane, and devadasis were used as religious prostitutes. It was because they don't have any income sources. Devadasis's elitist and patronizing reputations have faded. The devadasi system lost its patronage, leading to the public disgrace of "nautch girls". An anti-nautch movement was spearheaded by the Hindu Social Reform Association, which succeeded in its mission. However, some of the reformers were also intent on banishing the centuries-old traditional Bharata Natyam, associating it with prostitution. The '*nautch Kanya*' movement suddenly faced resistance from the pro-nautch movement started by E. Krishna Iyer, a well-known lawyer and a lover of Bharat Natyam, who announced in the press conference about the complete silence of the anti-nautch movement. Which affected the lives of Devadasis in Tamil Nadu. The reason for this is that some revivalists thought that the devadasis were the only protectors and custodians of Sadir (a form of Indian dance), whose famous name today is Bharatanatyam, and they were the only performers of this sacred dance art in temples and stages. That's why they tried to reform it, not abolish the system.

Following the development of feminism in European nations, India was also impacted, and many reformers and revivalists worked to provide women with an easier life and a respected role in society. Additionally, they attempted to outlaw a number of absurd and pointless customs that Indian women had long been expected to adhere to. However, in the case of the Devadasi system, they believed that it should be revived rather than eliminated since they believed that Devadasis were the guardians of Hindu art and culture, particularly the Sadir traditional dance style. The dance that contemporary society now refers to as Bharatanatyam was formerly known as *Sadir Natyam*. The name "sadir" refers to the original purpose of Bharatanatyam, which was to dance in the royal courts. The Devadasis lagged behind the changes directed at them in an effort to defend their actions as justly religious and humanitarian.

India's Devadasi system is widespread, but it is particularly strong in the country's southern region, which is home to numerous historic temples. There have been several reform and revival movements, but regrettably, they have all been state-level movements rather than national ones like those begun by Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy in Tamil Nadu and Madras, Veresalingam Pantulu in Andhra Pradesh, and S. R. Venkateratnam Naidu.

Reforms began during the 1830s Madras Presidency. Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu started the Purity Movement to eliminate alcohol, promote purity in relationships, and end the Devadasi System. England and America also began the Purity Crusade. Feminist campaigns against infant marriage, lifelong widowhood, and widow remarriage by Stree Associations enhanced the Devadasi System. They helped women, especially Devadasis.

In Collector of Madras V. Mootoo Ramalinga, centuries-old customs and traditions trumped the law. Many Madras and Andhra Pradesh movements followed. Several young, educated Madras residents attended public conferences, rallies, and seminars to survey public opinion on Devadasis. They met with the Viceroy, Governor General of India, and Governor of Madras to begin anti-nautch efforts. From 1882 to 1892 in Madras and 1881 to 1890 in Andhra Pradesh, anti-narcotics efforts peaked. In 1892, well-educated Hindus protested the Devadasi System. Indian social reformers, journalists, and newspaper Lahore purity servants backed reformers' efforts to

abolish bad systems. After this backing and understanding of literate peoples, the anti-naught campaign rapidly became anti-dedication towards 1899.

In March 1914, Pudukottai Darbar sent a memorandum to the 30 members of the assembly regarding the Devadasi System in order to determine the political stance on the issue of its abolition. However, only 17 participants provided feedback. Eight members agreed unanimously to end this system; five members wanted to continue it with modifications and revivals; three members wanted to continue it as it had been in the past; and one member suggested consulting the Sastras (Hindu sacred texts) for guidance. Due to this, the Darbar determined that it was not yet time to suspend and abolish the system. The British Government finally outlawed the Devadasi System's dedication of females to temples in 1924, despite society's efforts to oppose it. On March 3, 1911, Butler, the Indian government's Home Secretary, sent out a letter seeking public opinion on the effectiveness of sections 372 and 373 IPC (sections 372 and 373 of the Indian Penal Code were amended to make prostitution unlawful) against the Devadasi System. Other states made a concerted effort to reach a difficult decision and pass legislation opposing this arrangement.

Theosophist Rukmini Arundale supported Sadir's reincarnation as Bharatnatyam. Annie Besant and the Theosophical elders trained her. She encouraged Sadir's Bharatnatyam. The Theosophical Society arranged and sponsored her as a Bharatnatyam champion. Colonel H.S. Oclott and Madam H.P. Blavatsky toured South India to restore devadasi and sadir art. It symbolized the sacred, virginal temple dancer. Thus devadasis were also taken as spiritual "yoga" performer before immorality.

British authorities were also worried about Indian women and other orthodox social issues. Raja Ram Mohan Rai became India's first Sati banner after watching her sister-in-law's suffering after her brother's death, when she was forcefully sent to funeral pyre of his brother by the family members because of *Sati* system. This was with William Bentick. Hindu laws prohibited *Sati* because William Bentick strongly opposed it. The British Government saw temple dancers. They concentrated on eliminating the institution and young girls' devotion. The Brits thought the Devadasi challenged the monogamous, chaste, virtue-filled Aryan lady. Devadasi were dubbed prostitutes and disrespected. Girl devotion was outlawed in India in 1925. Former sociopolitical thinker Periyar led the self-respect crusade against Devadasi.

Former Indian kings were weak and obedient to the British, despite not abolishing the nobility. They were ruled by Britain. They lost power and couldn't fund the Devadasis. Indian society harshly criticized Devadasis' appearance. Devadasis may never dance again if their beauty fades. Devadasis were helpless.

The Bombay Devadasi Protection Act of 1934 was passed by the British Government and covered Bombay. It declared the dedication of a woman an illegal act, regardless of whether it was made with her consent or not. The Karnataka Devadasis Act was adopted by the State Legislature in 1982 and was notified by the government through its Gazette in 1984. With the creation of the Devadasi Act, turning a girl into a temple prostitute was made illegal and punishable by up to 5 years imprisonment and a fine of 5000 rupees. The new Act also seeks to declare unlawful the very act of dedication, whether it is done with or without the consent of the dedicated woman.

Efforts made by Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy for the betterment of Devadasis:

Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy was the first woman doctor in colonial India. She loved women. She worked tirelessly to improve the lives of Indian women, especially Devadasis. Born in Podhukottai on August 30, 1886, she died

on July 22, 1968. Medical school made her a doctor. She worked tirelessly to help underprivileged pregnant women as a maternity hospital surgeon. On April 8, 1951, President Rajendra Prasad inaugurated her Cancer-Eradication Effort. Dr. Muthulakshmi was honored when Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru appointed her to a Cancer Research Institution.

The tremendous effort that Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy put into helping the devadasis in Tamil Nadu earned her the nickname "milestone" for her achievements in that state. She went across Tamil Nadu to a lot of different cities and towns and sought to educate people about the harmful practices, such as the Devadasi system and child marriage, that are still prevalent there. She never gave the unfavorable assessments and ideas that others had about her any credence since she was against the systems that were practiced by society, which were completely sanctioned by religious institutions.

After a great deal of time and effort, she finally concluded that there was no influence on the system; at that point, she made the decision to elevate the topic to the level of a state subject. At the beginning of the year 1929, she made an attempt to write out a legislative proposal. On February 2, 1929, she presented her proposal to the legislative body of the state. In 1929, Muthulakshmi Reddy introduced a measure to alter the Hindu Religious Endowment Act so that the devadasis would no longer be required to perform temple worship as part of their job responsibilities. She was prepared for the robust opposition from the religiously sensitive individuals, yet she persisted in making her never-ending efforts against the system. The Maharaja of Bobbili, who was the leader of the Party in the Madras Presidency, was present at a public gathering when a dance performance was given by devadasi ladies. Muthulakshmi Reddy voiced her dissatisfaction of this incident and offered some harsh criticism of it. She received support from the well-known journal Anandha Bodhini, which highlighted her opinions and efforts in its pages.

After a hard time, she got help from the Father of Tamil Nadu, Periyar. He was the first person to back her efforts and the draft in particular. He wrote a piece called "Devadasi Ozhippuchattam." By the end of 1930, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy had finally achieved his goal. The bill was passed, and a law against child marriage called the Sharadha bill was passed in Parliament in Delhi.

In 1930, she was in charge of a house called Avvai Illam, where she helped the dancing girls in Adyar, Chennai, make money. She taught the devadasis how to be nurses, village servers, caretakers, etc., in this house. She also taught them how to run a business. The house sometimes notices what devadasis are interested in. For example, if a devadasi was interested in education, the house would train them to be school teachers. Then she thought that education was the only way to improve the devadasis' understanding and rights. That's why she tried to educate the devadasis' children. She thought it would help get rid of the system, and she also tried to get the devadasis out of temple service. She thought that this way, devadasi wouldn't have to go into prostitutes. At that time, in 1929, the Madras Legislative Council passed a new law called the Hindu Religious Endowment Act. The Act said that dancing girls and devadasis didn't have to do any work for temples, and it also made sure that lands called "Inam land" were given to them so they could live better.

Muthulakshmi Reddy thought that punishing these young girls in the name of religion or because of religion was very shameful and unfair. She said that it was a big wrong and an abuse of human rights. She also said that it went against our morals and made our minds and bodies sick.

She worked harder to make the lives of young girls better, especially to keep them from becoming whores. For this reason, she goes to a lot of gatherings, like the one in 1927 in Madras. She went to the 40th Indian National Social Conference, where she talked a lot about the Government's silent part in getting rid of the system. She also says that the government didn't understand that the process of "dedicating" young girls was a direct way to turn them into whores in the name of pure religious practice. She also talks about how bad the girls' lives are. She soon became President of the Women's Indian Association. When that happened, a new bill The Special Marriage Bill of 1952, which was an updated version of the Special Marriage Act of 1872, was made ready for discussion. The government wants the views of wise people on this bill. Muthulakshmi Reddy also got the bill and invites. She shared her important thoughts and ideas about it. In 1952 and 1953, she was chosen by chief minister Rajagopachari to be a member of the legislative assembly. There, she had a lot of opportunities to do good things, which she did with a lot of dedication.

In present scenario when world is moving towards 22th century's all over ideal and progressive thoughts with technological empowerment, such orthodox ideologies are meaningless to follow, as it is curse and misbehaving with the rights of one class of society, only to provide comfort and entertainment to the other part of society, which should be abolished from the roots.

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