



Unveiling the Lives of Devadasi's Children: A deep dive into William Dalrymple's *NINE LIVES*

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Abstract

This article examines the experiences of children born to Devadasi mothers, focusing on their unique perspective in understanding their lives of their mothers within the context of the story, "The Daughters of Yellamma" from the book *NINE LIVES*. William Dalrymple investigates lives of Nagamma and Alaka, the daughters of a Devadasi mother, Rani Bai. Dalrymple emphasizes the difficulties these girls face as they navigate the complexities of their identities, balancing their connection to the sacred with the societal marginalization they face. The article examines the children's lived realities, emotions, and perceptions, shedding light on the challenges they face within the Devadasi community and wider society. The research is framed within the Attachment theory which provides insights into the emotional bonds and dynamics between the children and their Devadasi mothers. It examines the intersectionality of their experiences, health issues and socio-economic factors, and the complex interplay of these identities. By understanding the children's perspective, the article aims to deepen our comprehension of the Devadasi system and its consequences.

Keywords: Devadasi, Societal marginalization, Attachment theory, Emotional bonds, Socio-economic factors.

Introduction

The Devadasi system, also known as the Jogini system, was a religious and cultural practice that originated in ancient India and was practiced for centuries in the southern states. Devadasi were women who dedicated their lives to serving God in Hindu temples. In Sanskrit, the term Devadasi means 'God's Servant'. Young girls were dedicated to temples as a religious offering to a deity, most of a local goddess such as Yellamma or

Mariamman. The young girls were believed to be married to the deity and were expected to serve the temple and its priests. In the article, "Gender Performance on the Reinvigoration via Food", the author Suganya et al. describes the optimistic role of women in facilitating the multicultural environment, the protagonist from both the novels exhibits food consumption and the offering of comfort food by women shape an optimistic multicultural environment. It paves a way to blend in culture and is made possible through the field of Gastronomy discussed in Richard. C Morais' *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (Suganya et al. 883). Devadasis were trained in art forms such as dance, music, and poetry, and their abilities were frequently displayed in temple rituals and religious ceremonies. The Devadasi system evolved significantly over time. Economic and societal factors led to the exploitation of Devadasis, with some being forced into prostitution. The practice evolved into a system in which girls from marginalized communities were dedicated to temples and effectively became temple prostitutes. The Devadasi system is now illegal in India, and dedicated temple prostitution is prohibited. However, the consequences of this practice continue to affect the descendants of former Devadasis, and efforts to provide them with education and employment opportunities are ongoing.

William Dalrymple is a British historian, journalist, and travel writer known for his works on South Asia and the Islamic world. He has authored several critically acclaimed books that delve into the rich history, culture, and contemporary issues of the regions he explores. Some of his notable works include *City of Djinns*, *White Mughals*, *NINE LIVES*, and *THE LAST MUGHAL*. Dalrymple's writings often explore historical connections between India and the western world. *NINE LIVES* by William Dalrymple is a non-fiction book that offers an illuminating glimpse into the diverse and vibrant religious traditions of contemporary India. He explores the lives of nine individuals from different religious backgrounds. Through their personal stories and experiences, he delves into the rich shades of faith, devotion, and spirituality that shape the lives of people in India. This book has received the 2010 Asia House Award for Asian Literature.

Glimpse of the Story

The story of the Devadasis, who worship the goddess Yellamma (the mother of Parashuram), is told in "The Daughters of Yellamma". It describes the horrible tradition of Devadasis being pushed into the flesh trade after committing daughters to gods. These Devadasis eventually pass away from sexually transmitted diseases. This tale centres on Rani Bai and Kaveri. When Rani Bai was six years old, she was committed to the god. She claims, "I had no feeling at the time except wondering, why they have done this" (Dalrymple 65). At the time, her family was in dire straits. Her father was left with no choice than to dedicate her. Rani's father was a frequent drunkard and he needed money badly. She was given up for cash. Her father sold Rani Bai for Rs.500. The individual who deflowered Rani Bai did not provide the whole amount of Rs.500 as he had promised. These Devadasis consider themselves to be Yellamma's daughters because they share the same fate as the Goddess. The Yellamma narrative exemplifies how women are oppressed and how her husband controls her. Yellamma, Jamadagni's wife, experienced the same fate as Devadasi. One day, when she was returning water to her husband, she noticed a "Gandharva" (Dalrymple 59) which means making of love. She yearned for

sexual love as her repressed passions came rushing out. She abruptly lost her yogic abilities, making it impossible for her to retrieve water for her husband. Jamadagni, her husband, cursed her for thinking about and wanting sex. She started to look ill and nasty. She is asked to leave her home. She never received forgiveness for the crime she never committed. Because their circumstances are no better than hers, Devadasi like Rani Bai and Kaveri believed that they are the daughters of the goddess Yellamma. Rani Bai dedicates her daughters to the temple despite the fact that she is unhappy with her life; as a result, they pass away from AIDS. At the conclusion of the story, Rain Bai has the same HIV infection as her daughters.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory focuses on the relationships and connections between people, particularly between parents and their children. It explains how people form emotional bonds and develop relationships. According to this theory, humans are born with a natural desire to form close connections with their caregivers when they are children. These early bonds can influence their relationships throughout the lives. The principles of attachment theory can be applied to understand the situation of Rani Bai's daughters who passed away due to AIDS. She says "One was a singer. She eloped when she was fourteen. She came back a year later, but no one would marry her. So, she became a Devadasi" (Dalrymple 64). "The other had a skin disease and had white patches on her thighs. Like her sister. She found it hard to get married, so I had to dedicate her too" (Dalrymple 64). If Rani Bai had given her daughters love and care instead of making them Devadasis, their lives would have been different. If they hadn't become Devadasis, they might not have contracted AIDS, and they might have lived longer. This highlights how parental decisions can shape their children's lives. A mother's care during challenging times can have a significant impact on her children's lives.

Marginalization

Marginalization also referred to as social exclusion, occurs when a certain group of people get denied access to areas of society. The Devadasi system is also been associated with various forms of marginalization. Their children often experience social stigma and discrimination due to their family background. This stigma can lead to exclusion, prejudice, and limited opportunities for these children. Many people have limited knowledge and understanding of the historical context and cultural significance of the Devadasi practice. This lack of awareness often leads to misconceptions and negative stereotypes about Devadasi's children. Devadasi's children are often born into families facing economic challenges and limited resources. This economic vulnerability can further marginalize them, as they may lack access to necessities.

Healthcare is yet another concern for Devadasi's children. They may face difficulties in accessing adequate healthcare services. "Rani didn't say so explicitly at the time, but I later learned that both her daughters had died of AIDS" (Dalrymple 65). In the case of Devadasi's children, one of the main causes of death is sexually

transmitted disease. This lack of healthcare can have detrimental effects on their physical and mental well-being.

Socio-economic factors

“Poverty, dependency, and feelings of shame are everyday aspects of economic dislocation and social isolation. Mowli (1992) studied on Jogini Girl Child Labour and found that the majority of Devadasis come from poor landless families” (Ayyappa and Melkeri 929). Many Dalit women are dedicated to the Goddess at a very young age because of poverty. One of the victims of such circumstances is Rani Bai herself. “I was only six when my father dedicated me. We were very poor and had many debts” (Dalrymple 61). Rani's father sold his daughter to a shepherd so that they could live a respectable and wealthy life to lessen his financial burden. Thus, Socioeconomic factors are also one of the major causes that affects the life of those children.

Emotional bonds

Devadasi may face challenges in fulfilling their parental roles due to their commitments to the temple or communities. This absence of parental involvement can result in a lack of emotional bonding between Devadasi mother and their children. The limited presence and support from parents can impact the emotional well-being of Devadasi's children. “Children born to such mothers bear the stigma of being ‘Devadasi's children’ and lack a father figure” (Shwetha and Manjula 155). “Once I tried to open my bank account with my son. We went to fill in the form, and the manager asked: ‘Father's name?’. After that, my son was angry. He said I should not have brought him into this world” (Dalrymple 36). Growing up without a father figure can lead to emotional and psychological issues such as feelings of abandonment, low self-esteem, and a sense of incompleteness. This trauma can further cause drifts between the mother and the children and affects the emotional bond between them. In some cases, children without a father figure may face additional social stigma, which leads to isolation and discrimination. On the other side, men and transgender also face emotional struggles. The article, “Communal Expectancy and the Authentic Self of Men and Transgenders - Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw and Birthday by Meredith Russo” the author Suganya et al. explains the emotional sufferings of men and transgender as,

Restricting one's emotions will lead to physical and psychological effects. Peer pressure and societal fear drags down the male victims from equity and impartial justice. Transgender individuals face significant discrimination and marginalization, including lack of legal recognition and access to appropriate healthcare, harassment and violence (Suganya et al. 882).

Conclusion

The Devadasi's children often grapple with a unique blend of pride, resilience, and adversity shaped by their mother's involvement in a system that combined religious devotion with exploitation. However, the challenges

they face are undeniable. The legacy of social exclusion, economic hardships, and limited opportunities remains a burden. The absence of a father figure, combined with societal biases, affects their emotional well-being and development.

In light of these complexities, it is crucial to recognize the resilience and strength of Devadasi's children and provide them with opportunities for education, employment, and social inclusion. Addressing the historical and cultural factors that perpetuate their marginalization is a step toward ensuring a bright future to these young individuals who deserve to be seen for their potential and not just the circumstances of their birth.

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