# Tradition of Devadasi in India and Abroad

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The antiquity of the Devadasi tradition mystifies its origin. But the inscriptional sources and the temple architectures, provide certain relevant and significant information regarding this holy tradition.

A Devadasi was popularly known as a devoted temple dancer. She use to perform her dances with a view to entertaining the Lords or Gods, but certainly not to the human beings. But because the people use to witness such dances, Devadasi became a sources of entertainment for the folk.

In the ancient times the Devadasis were divided into seven categories. They are known as Dutta, Hruta, Bikrita, Bhrutya, Bhakta, Alankara and Gopika or Rudraganika. Such categorisation reveal the origin and status of the Devadasis.

When a sacred man offered his daughter to a temple as a Devadasi, she is known as "duttadevadasi". But when a lady was kidnapped and subsequently employed in a temple, she is known as "hrutadevadasi". Sometimes when a lady was sold to the administrator or the priest of a temple, she is know as "bikrita devadasi. If a lady volunteers to work in a temple as a devadasi, she is know as "bhrutya devadasi". Some women who offered themsevles devotionally to serve the temple are known as "bhakta devadasi". When a woman after attaining a certain degree of competence, is offered to the temple with ornaments, she is known as "atankaradevadasi". The Devadasis who were getting remunerations for offering dance and music in the temple in a particular time became identified as "Gopika" or "Rudraganika". This class of the Devadasis were receiving fixed remunerations and some landed property for their personal use.

The Devadasi tradition was prevalent in the Hindu temples of Souther India. There was a custom amongest the Korea (Weaver) community of Chigalput district of Madras that they had to donate or offer their eldest daughter to a temple. These girls were called "Basava" in Teugu and "Murali" in Mahrastra. Some of them were actually led a sacred and celebrated life devoting themselves to God. Some others became the victims of the sexual lust of the priests and other temple officers, and sometimes even of the influential people of the community.

The Devadasi tradition was prevalent in Karnatak, Maharastra, Madras, Kerala, Goa and Andhra Pradesh. In the inscriptions of Southern India some kings, queens and royal families donated lands for the perpetuation of this holy tradition in a particular temple. There are some information available.

Devadasi tradition in the temple inscriptions of Korangunathan, Pipilikeswar and Sundereswar of Trichinapalli district. In 12th century, Chalukyaking Vikramaditya I established a holy temple in the name of Chandaleswar and collected some beautiful ladies from different countries and employed them as templedancers or Devadasis.

This tradition was also prevalent in some places in the Eastern India. Now in the Garohills of Assam there is a tribal community who have known as "Maharies". There are some similarities between the maharies of Puri and Garo hills.

In the holy temple of Lord Jagannatha at Puri, this dancing girl tradition was prevalent too. There is a dancing ritual in the temple of Lord Jagannatha at the time of the Lords retirement to sleep. For this purpose special sebakas were employed. They were known as Devadasis and their dance was known as devadasi dance or mahari dance.

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Descriptions on the rituals of dancing in different inscriptions of India were available. In the stone inscription of India were available. In the stone inscriptiion of Yogimara cave (3rd century B.C.), Brahameswar temple (1053 A.D.), Megheswar temple (1070 A.D.), Sovaneswar temple (1080 A.D.), Narendreswar Saiva temple (1083 A.D.), Mukhalingam temple (11th Century A.D.), Laxmi Nrusingha temple of Simanchalam (15th Century A.D.), Jagannath temple (16th century A.D.) there were some evidences of dancing rituals or the Devadasi traditions.

Even in the ancient Indian Culture the queens in the royal palace were adept in dance and music. The queens of Gangaudayaditya and the three queens of Hoiochillaballa I were experts in dancing. Sabaldevi, the queen of Somadeva of Kalachuri was also an expert in signing and dancing. During the reign of Raj Raj I of Chola four hundred dancing girls were appointed in the temple of Tanjore. Bhattadeva, the minister of Haribarman of East Bengal also appointed one hundred dancing girls in the temple of Ananta Val Basudev. In a Siva temple of Deopara of East Bengal many Devadasis were employed during the reign of Vijoya Sen. At the time of Chandellamadan Verman, Padmabati was appointed as the dancer-in-cheif in the Nilakantha temple of Kalanjar.

The raindance of Rajabansi of Kuchvihar bear resemblance to the Devadasi dance. They called this dance as nude-dance. Some women were dancing nude infront of their holy deity in a forest.

In Kalhan's Rajatarangini there are some descriptions about the dancing girls, who were attached to the temples in Kashmir from ancient time. In Kalhan's own time the dancing women of the temples appear to have been keenly interested in the politics. In this book he gave some information that there were some instances of dancing girls of the temples who became consorts of kinee.

In the Meghaduta of Kalidas, Mruchhakatika of Sudraka, Kuttinimata of Damodara Bhatta, Samayamatruka and Srungarmanjari of Kshemenda, Ramcharita of Sandhyakara Nandi in Saduktikarnamruta there were some information about the dancing girls.

Not only in India but also in some of the Western countries, such type of ritual dances were in vogue. From the Ankor Borei inscription of Kambodia or ancient Kambuja, it is found that seven dancing girls, eleven singers and four violinists were appointed in the temple. the time of this inscription is 533 Sakabda i.e. 611 A.D. Countries like Egypt, Greece, Asiriya, Phinisia and Babylone etc. this type of dance was also found. In Arsmenia there was a tradition or principle that the nobles employed their unmarried daughters for the service of Goddess Anaitis. In Babylone not a single girl before her marriage could be spared from this type of duty. This was a binding obligation at that time. But the custom of dancing after marriage was not an obligation. In the exodus of Bible there are also some references to such dances. There was an another information regarding Devadasi tradition of Babylone. Ishtar was the famous deity of Babylone. Devadasis were appointed as the friend Ishtar. A stange custom was prevalent in Babylone in which the matured girls were asked to sit in the temple of Ishtarn who ever would drop a silver coin to any girl of the queue, she used to became his property and the person establishes his relationship with her. This practice was not at all appreciated by many as it laid open the sexual escapades. They treated it a kind of exploitation. But at the sametome the historians Herodotus recorded that the money earned through such practice by the girls was considered to be holy in Babylone are Cyprus. The Hebrew qadeshah belongedd to this category. Arthasastra of Kautilya informed that the royal treasury accepted such money as the property of the Kingdom.

Marcopolo also described that in his time parents were dedicating their daughters to the Gods. They (parents) kept their daughters with them and took them to the temples for dancing services on important festive occasions. This ritual was repeated till the day of their marriage.

This Devadasi tradition prevailed in Missore, the most ancient civilised country of the world. The deity of this country was Aman. In 1400 B.C. Amus Hotep Thibes III of Missore was constructed a beautiful temple and established the drity. He had conquered many countries and collected funds. To accredit his trimphal march he had constructed temples, donated funds for the rites and rituals of the temple and engaged Devadasis. There was a document known as Great Harris Papyrus in which there was description that Ramesis III donated 84,486 servants and Devadasis etc and many landed property to the temple of Aman. Some historians are of the opinion that this was the most primitive record of Devadasi tradition of the world.

In the history of Greece there are some information of Devadasi. The Devadasis were appointed in the temple of Apolo, the Sun god. They were exibiting dance in the temple and it was enjoyed by the temple priests, kings and poweful persons etc.

But in Carthege town situatged on the Northern Coast of Africa, there was a traditional religious belief which was known as "Punie". This religiouns imposed the human sacrifice and child sucrifice. Tanith was the famous deity of Carthege. In this temple a record was available which indicated that ladies were also purchased along with the animals for the purpose of the temple. some historians interpreted it as an evidence of dancing girl tradition. But in Phinicia in the Northern Coasts of Africa, there were some instances about the tradition of temple dancer of Devadasis.

The traditions of dancing girls could be located in Rome. Historical evidcences of the appointment of dancing girls or Devadasis in the temple of Juno, Venus and Jews at Rome were also recorded.

In the Inca civilisation of South America, there were some instances about the dancing girl tradition. The king of Inca identtified himself as the son of the sun. In this state suntemples were managed by the priests. The priests were selecting tiny and pretty girls and took them to Cuzco, an educational institution and educated them. When these girls got maturity, they had to live as the kept of the king or they had to stay at the temple as the virgins of the Sun.

From these above information we came to known that in India and abroad some girls were engaged in the service of the Gods and Goddess as dancing girls. But analysing the history of religious tradition it is found that some matured girls were appointed or employed as the temple dancers or Devadasis for the entertainmnt of the Gods. It was a sacred service. From these girls those who were not maintaining their sacred life, they wedre constrained to accept prostitution. For this not only the Devadasis were responsible, but also the priests who were creating manupulation in the religion also were also responsible.

Consequently this tradition of converting women particularly virgins into Devadasi was responsible for spreading prostitution in ancient Near East, (Mesopotamia, Syria, Canaan, Anallia, Cyprus, Greece). The Goddesses concerned wee Ishtar, Astrate, Ma, Anaitis and Aphrodite etc.

This sacred Devadasi tradition was responsible for the establishment of prostitution as an independent service. So in the temples temple daneers or Devadasis, in the Courts the Court dancers, and city dancers in cities were seen. In the Countries like Greece, the city dancer ws given the highest privilages. These city dancers were known as "Hataera". Many intellectuals and educated persons used to visit their houses. They not only discussed with the dancers but also learnt their opinions, proposals and suggestions on various issues. Like Greece, the dancers geishasin Japan had a social reputation. These geishas were very beautiful, educated as well as

fond of dance and music. They could attract the public by their art performances. But in the later period they didnot maintain their sacred life and joined in the profession of prostitution.

The tradition of Devadasi was very famous not only in India but also in the countries beyond India. But due to the illegal, irrelitions attitudes of some priests, nobles and powerful persons, this scared tradition became extreemly poluted. Becase of the degeneration of the sacred tradition, the reformers were compelled to abolish ritualistic practice of Devadasis.

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