

**CHALLENGING THE DEVADASI SYSTEM FROM A FRAMEWORK OF
INTERSECTIONALITY**

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

The practice of marrying girls to deities or priests existed historically in many cultures across South Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. In India alone, this system is known by different names like Devadasi, Mathamma, Jogini, Basavis. Through this study, I represent the unheard voices of Devadasi women from South India and use HRD concepts and principles to synthesize the findings.

The field of HRD is not confined to the boundaries of an organization and can play a critical role in community development. This is the first step towards empowering the members of this system and it is hoped that the findings from this study will help inform the organizational practices of NGO's working with this populace. This study includes a unique set of participants whose experiences have not been captured and examined using intersectionality and Bourdieu, thus contributing to literature.

Data was collected through interviews with Devadasi women from South India, specifically Nizamabad, Mahabubnagar, and Tirupati. Five themes emerged from the data – dichotomy, identity, status, fear and locus of control. The theme 'status' refers to the participant's intersecting identities as women and as people from lower castes. The themes 'identity' and 'dichotomy' indicate cultural and economic capital respectively. It is the intersections of these forms of capital that create intersections in statuses, which collectively result in symbolic violence. This is evident from the last two themes, fear and locus of control, which were identified from the data.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all the women role models in my life who inspired me to go on this journey. I specifically would like to mention two of the women – my mom, Dr. Usha Rani. Anne and my committee chair, Dr. Jamie L. Callahan who have supported me each step of my way and without them this piece of work would not have been possible.

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NOMENCLATURE

Devadasi	<i>Deva</i> meaning God ; and <i>Dasi</i> meaning servant or one who serves. <i>Devadasi</i> means one who serves God or one who is a servant to God.
Mathamma; Jogini; Matha; Basavi	Different names and words used for <i>Devadasi</i> varying by region.
Pothuraju and Baindla	Men who are a part of the system are called Pothuraju. They play a significant role during the wedding ceremony of the Devadasi and in the annual festival conducted in the villages.
Caste	A system of segregation in the Indian subcontinent, based primarily on the occupation of an individual. It passes on in the family and transcending caste boundaries is not easy.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

After almost 60 years of independence in India, quality education, fair pay, and equal opportunity are some aspects of affirmative policy that need to be examined further in research and practice. Globalization in recent years produced lots of money for a privileged few, while it increased the gap between the affluent and poor (Symington, 2004). The colonial education system, where the eligibility for quality education was determined by an individual's ethnic, racial, and gender classifications, was one of the initial practices that perpetuated inequality (Jauch, 1999). New technologies, policies, and processes of globalization are (perhaps unconsciously) further fostering these inequalities and discrimination against caste and racial, gender and sexual minorities.

In spite of women's autonomy being an important predictor of the performance of programs and policies for international development, gender based discrimination is one of the burning issues that needs to be addressed commonly across many countries, and within various disciplines (Singh, 2010). Apart from gender discrimination, many factors like caste, sexual orientation, ancestry, socio-economic class, religion, and geographic location, play an important role in determining the social position of an individual (Symington, 2004). In spite of being one of the biggest democracies and having the longest history of Affirmative Action policies in place, India has many unfair practices that confront minorities due to a few oligarchies that have risen to power politically, socially, and financially.

The roots of Affirmative Action policies in India can be traced back to 1905 when they were first introduced by Vice- Roy Curzon in response to the practice of banning employment of Hindu Bengalis (Basu, 2006). These policies, known as *reservations* or *quotas*, were further amended to favor the individuals from the down trodden and discriminated castes in 1950 by the Constitution of India (Moses, 2010). Despite the *quotas*, gender and caste still continue to be the major barriers of development for many individuals and the society as a whole.

Emblematic of these two barriers, the Devadasi system is a practice unique to the Indian Sub-continent, which has been in existence for 2000 years (Black, 2007). *Deva* means God and *Dasi* means servant. Women are married to the Goddess of the temple and are not allowed to have a life outside the temple. This practice of marrying girls to deities or priests existed historically in many cultures across South Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. In India alone, this system is known by different names like Devadasi, Mathamma, Jogini, Basavi, and many more. For the current study all these will be referred to commonly as Devadasis, unless otherwise specifically noted.

While the origins of the system are not clearly known, it has been argued that this system is sustained to cater to the interests of men from upper castes (Black, 2007). It is believed that if the sexuality of the Goddess can be satisfied, she would in turn bless the village and its people. Male devotees or men from upper castes satisfy the sexuality of the Goddess by having sex with the Devadasi of the respective temple. This leads to sexual abuse of these women by priests and men from higher castes.

In spite of laws that exist against the Devadasi system, it is still practiced in many rural areas in India. Though the number of girls who are being recruited into this system is on the decline (APMSS, 2006), there are still tens of thousands of girls who are being dedicated to temples in the name of God, tradition, and religious superstitions. A vast majority of the women dedicated to the temple and branded as Devadasis now belong to lower castes (Black, 2007), thus bringing in caste-based discrimination along with gender discrimination.

Many non-governmental organizations (NGO's) and social activists have been working to eradicate this system and help empower women who have been part of this system. However, social taboo towards the Devadasi system, gender and caste hierarchies, and more importantly the lack of economic and social capital to support their families, has made it difficult for these families to part from this practice. As a result women who have been part of the system reluctantly tend to send their daughters back into the system (Black, 2007).

The current study is focused on women who are/were a part of this system. Through this study I aim to explore the underlying structural hierarchies through the voices of these women to shed light on the as yet unseen obstacles to escaping the system and to reflect on how these can be overcome. In this study, I use the framework of intersectionality and Bourdieu's theories of power and practice to capture and analyze the lived experiences of the women who are a part of the Devadasi system.

The field of HRD is not confined to the boundaries of an organization and can play a critical role in community development (McLean, 2006). Supporting this premise,

researchers like Callahan (2012) have argued that the field of HRD should change its boundaries and “loosen their definitions of what constitutes an ‘organization’ that is relevant for the study and practice of HRD in order to meet the changing environment of the future” (Callahan, 2013, p. 299). Through this study, I represent the unheard voices of people in the current populace and use HRD concepts and principles to synthesize the findings, which will in turn help create an informed and robust framework for the NGO’s working towards the betterment and empowerment of the Devadasi women.

According to McLean & McLean (2001), global HRD involves working with processes and activities that help develop expertise, satisfaction and productivity for professional and, personal gain along with the wellbeing of an organization, community, nation and ultimately humanity. McLean (2006) further defined NHRD as comprising of top level governmental and societal activities that are directly or indirectly related to human development in general. Referring to prostitutes in Taiwan and Thailand, Kuo, Yamnil, & McLean (2008) argue that the field of HRD should be committed to providing career development, organization development and training and development opportunities for women involved in the profession and thus create alternative livelihood options for these women. In spite of the difference in contexts between the Taiwan prostitutes and Devadasi women, HRD principles and tools would play an important role in alleviating the living conditions of the Devadasi women consequently aiding in social development.

BACKGROUND

The origins of the Devadasi system in the Indian subcontinent date back to 850 AD. According to Sriram (2007), Devadasis in the early periods were looked upon as a group of women well-versed in cultural arts like dance, music, and literature; however with the passage of time the word Devadasi became synonymous to prostitute. The tradition of marrying off girls to the temple or God is an ancient practice related to customs like *sacred prostitution* prevalent in countries like Rome, Egypt, Greece, and Mesopotamia (Qualls-Corbett, 1988). Depending on the type of rites and rituals they were responsible for, Devadasi women were divided into two major groups. The first group took care of cleaning the temple premises, doing dishes, decorating and working on flowers. The second group took care of the cultural part like dance and music in the temple. Caste was not a factor and women from different castes like *Brahman's*, and *Kshatriya's* were a part of this system as well (Sriram, 2007). Table 1 provides a list of main Hindu caste groups and their respective occupations in the order of decreasing hierarchical position.

No.	Caste Group	Occupation
1	Brahmins	Spiritual Leader/Priests and Teachers
2	Kshatriyas	Warriors and Nobility
3	Vaishyas	Merchants and Business People
4	Shudras – BC (Backward Castes)	Semi-Skilled and unskilled laborers
5	Harijans or Untouchables – Scheduled Caste (SC); Scheduled Tribes (ST) & Dalit	Menial and Dirty work - like cleaning feces etc.

Table 1: Summary of the major caste divisions in the Indian Hindu Society

However, today there are numerous sub-castes which have originated from the overarching four major categories. Devadasi women underwent rigorous training in the arts, such as music and dance, thus making them responsible for keeping the Indian traditions and cultural arts alive and going. Devadasi evolved as a pseudo-caste group different from and outside of the caste system in India (Belkin, 2008).

Since the Devadasi's are married to God, they were highly respected and can never be widowed (Kersenboom, & Saskia, 1987). Upon their passing, the last funeral rites were conducted at the temple as an act of respect towards the Devadasi women (Marglin, 1985). Devadasi women were highly educated and some of them had great prowess in literature, dance, and music even when women were forbidden any kind of formal education. They were considered auspicious women as they were married to the deity of the temple and many societal rules that applied to other women did not apply to them. For instance, Devadasis could participate in temple rituals and rites even during the time of their menstrual cycle (Soneji, 2004), engage in sexual activities with multiple partners and across different castes (Marglin, 1985), and be educated in literature and arts.

In return for their services to the temple, they held powerful positions in the temple administration and had a share in the temple property and lands. However, there were no restrictions or judgment in terms of their sexual relationships with the men in temple administration and priests (Sriram, 2007). The group of Devadasi women dedicated to dance and music were further divided into sub-groups. Some of the more beautiful, educated, and talented women were dedicated to serving kings, rich autocrats,

temple administration, and priests. The others danced and sang to entertain people during festivals and rituals. There was a clear distinction between these two sub-groups of women in terms of the services they were involved in, meaning women dedicated to the service of kings and temple administration never danced or sang to entertain common people and vice versa. However with deteriorating temple income and with increased invasions, the distinction between the two groups slowly started vanishing.

Having a male child in a patriarchal society like India has always been considered a blessing and a girl child is looked at as an encumbrance due to financial burden of marriage, dowry and further financial obligations. However, among the Devadasis where the property is passed on to daughters from their mothers, a girl child is considered as a blessing and is celebrated. Even at the beginning of the 20th century, girls belonging to poor Brahmin families were given away in adoption to Devadasi women and the girls were in turn dedicated to the temple.

During the rule of the Cholas (985-1013 AD), a temple for the God *Bruhadeeshwara* was built in *Tanjore*. The Chola king, who was a great patron of arts and literature, hired around 400 women well-versed in dance and music to take care of the rites and rituals in the temple. These women were allocated houses and rich agricultural temple lands to help them with their living expenses. This practice of dedicating talented women to the service of the temples slowly spread to temples in other areas in India. The livelihood for these women was taken care of efficiently in the reign of strong kings. But as the power and prosperity of the kingdoms declined, it directly affected the income and livelihood of Devadasi women who had to rely on the

favoritism – earned largely through sexual favors – of administrators and people in charge of the meager income generated. These sexual favors resulted in the women having children, who were further trained in cultural arts and were dedicated to the temple. This community slowly turned from a profession based group into a pseudo-caste group (Belkin, 2008).

In 1279 AD, the Chola kingdom was attacked and taken over by the Pandyas, and similar wars and battles were fought all over India for almost 100 years. For a period of time between 1318 – 1378 AD, the Hindu kingdoms were taken over by Muslim kings who were in turn overthrown by the kings of Vijayanagaram. King Krishnadevaraya ruled this kingdom from 1509-1529 AD. Being a great admirer of arts and a gifted artist himself, King Krishnadevaraya made sure that literature, religion, and different forms of arts flourished under his reign. This era once again marked the rise and prosperity of Devadasi women who were highly respected both by kings and common men. Given the rich agricultural lands and high income of temples in South India, many Devadasi women migrated to and settled in this area. They became well-versed in music and devotional songs in different local languages like Telugu, Kannada and Sanskrit, thus making them proficient in more than one language (Sriram, 2007).

By the 17th century AD, most of the large kingdoms were attacked and broken down into smaller kingdoms which in turn resulted in an increase of local kings. This further helped with the social & financial status of Devadasi women. However, the decline in Kingdoms, and destruction of Hindu temples by invaders, along with famine and drought, resulted in decreased patronization towards arts and culture which further

affected the livelihood of Devadasi women. In the 18th and 19th centuries, most of the Devadasi women were earning a livelihood through dancing and were not as involved in arts and literature as they were before. They danced in the temples while simultaneously offering prayer services to God. Older Devadasi women, who could not dance, sang at these prayer services while the younger Devadasi women danced (Sriram, 2007).

The way Devadasis were perceived further deteriorated with the advent of British rule in India. Dubois, a French writer who lived in British India wrote about Devadasis in his book about Hindu manners, customs, and ceremonies, which further reflects the westernized view towards Devadasi women. Dubois (1943) claimed that these women were courtesans attached to the temple who were commonly known as Devadasis but were looked down upon by others in the society and were sometimes even called prostitutes. As a part of their profession, he said, they were required to offer sexual favors (initially reserved only for Brahmins and temple priests) to whoever was interested, in return for money. Dubois indicated that the women were consecrated to perform holy services to God, which included dance and songs that were initially devotional in nature but slowly were filled with a lot of obscene gestures and lyrics based on romantic stories from different Gods' lives. Further, the Devadasis dressed well and took care of their beauty (Dubois, 1943). The narration by the French writer highlighted the sexual relationships and obscene dances more than it did the historical, religious, and cultural roots of the system.

Until the advent of British rule, Devadasis experienced both peaks and lows largely due to the financial status of the Kings and kingdoms that patronized these

women. However after the advent of the British rule, Devadasi women and their families experienced a steep decline owing to changes in legal and social conditions in the society. Once the British gained legal control of India, they declared the Devadasi system as prostitution which further led to the decline of this system and disrespect of women in this system (Srinivasan, 1986).

The act of sex during 17th and 18th centuries was looked at as pure and auspicious due to its direct connection with creating human life. Sexual relationships with a Devadasi were further valued as the men looked at it as having a deeper spiritual relationship with the God to whom the Devadasi has been married. However, with changes in societal values and outlook, the act of sex outside marriage was looked down upon and sex with multiple partners in exchange for money was looked at as prostitution. Slowly the Devadasis moved away from their duties at the temple, and today they take part in rituals and rites only during festivals once or twice a year. The major portion of their everyday living involves sexual favors for men in the village or town in return for money. A tradition and practice that started with a religious and cultural base, where women who were part of the system were highly respected and looked up to, slowly turned into a venue used to exploit women from low socio-economic backgrounds. If this practice had adapted to meet the changes in today's society, we might still be respecting and looking up to women with great talent in literature, arts and ancient Indian traditions.

Many barriers faced by Devadasi women are directly connected to the social structure of the Indian society. These problems can only be alleviated through practical

and robust interventions from the highest level of organization in the nation—the Indian government. Keeping pace with the ever-changing socio-economic scene in both the domestic and global context, the findings of this study highlight the responsibilities of the Indian government from the perspective of national human resource development (NHRD). According to Cho & McLean (2004), an excellent NHRD would strive towards achieving: increased opportunity and higher quality education for all resulting in lower illiteracy rates, decrease in socially undesirable occupations (drug dealing, prostitution, and illegal activities), and using education & training to help improve health situations. While this might not be the ultimate solution, the dream of NHRD to promote individual and organizational development in pursuit of safe, supportive and ethical living conditions (Cho & McLean, 2004), would be a first step towards positive development in the living & work conditions of Devadasi women in India

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is twofold. First, through this study I represent the voices and lived experiences of Devadasi women who still follow this practice in South India. This helps create awareness around the day to-day lives of the women who are currently a part of this system. Second, I critically examine the underlying structures of discrimination that help sustain this practice, using a framework of intersectionality and social capital. This study mainly focuses on gender minorities in India, who also are further discriminated due to their caste, thus revealing multiple identities of women who face different types of discrimination due to their converging identities. This is the first

step towards empowering the members of this system and it is hoped that the findings from this study will help inform the organizational practices of NGO's working with this populace. Choosing an under-explored context for the study further contributes to the HRD literature.

While Bourdieu's social capital was used as the background theory to help understand the obstacles faced by Devadasi women, intersectionality helps clarify the role of gender and caste identities. Members of this system lack economic, social and cultural capital, as most of it is controlled by men from upper castes. This makes it difficult for women to escape the system and survive in society due to lack of resources like education and financial support. All the women who are now dedicated to the temples are from lower castes and they were dedicated for reasons ranging from financial obligations, to the well-being of male siblings, to superstitious beliefs such as a successful harvest, safe labor, etc., (Black, 2007). Many families believe that sacrificing a girl child to the temple would bless them with a male child. Thus, apart from caste, gender plays an important role in offering female child to the temple.

This study gives an opportunity for HRD professionals to understand how organizational policies and programs impact the lives of employees who have converging identities. Being familiar with nuances that are culture specific will help HRD professionals to make meaningful distinctions between different groups of employees and make informed decisions about policies to ensure that all individuals fully enjoy their human rights. Well informed policies based on robust frameworks

would help employees deal with discrimination at work place better, thus increasing their job satisfaction and commitment towards the organization.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the current study, I used intersectionality and Bourdieu's concept of power and practice to explore and examine the lived experiences of Devadasi women.

Intersectionality. Intersectionality is a feminist theory which can be used as an analytical tool to study and understand the convergence of multiple identities with gender and to respond appropriately to alleviate the discrimination against oppressed classes (Crenshaw, 1991). The theory is based on the premise that individuals simultaneously belong to multiple communities (that have emerged from social and power structures in the society) and would experience oppression and privilege both at the same time. In a society dominated by patriarchal ideologies, Indian women have been struggling to create an identity for themselves apart from being known as a daughter, wife or mother (Razvi, & Roth, 2010). As a result of their multiple identities depending upon their caste, religion and socio-economic background, some women have experienced profound forms of discrimination and unfortunately are considered as outliers in most research (Symington, 2004).

Bourdieu's concept of power and practice. While intersectionality as a theoretical paradigm helps us better understand the impact that converging social identities have on women, Bourdieu's theory on power and practice helps us further explore Devadasi's experiences in terms of cultural, political, economic, and social

structures (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu largely examined the functioning and sustaining of social hierarchies. He argued that cultural and symbolic systems play an important role along with economic capital in defining and maintaining societal structures of hierarchy. Bourdieu (1980) argued that social struggle is not always due to economic factors and proposed a cultural conflict theory for which he defined two words *habitus* and *fields*.

The status of an individual in any field is determined in part by his/her *habitus* and unequal distribution of power or capital occurs through interactions between individuals from different status groups. *Symbolic violence* is used by people to maintain the dominant position over the less powerful status groups. Women from lower castes experience domination in two fields - gender and caste. Their habitus as members of these oppressed groups reinforces the existence of social structures that continue their oppression, such as restricted entry to places such as police stations, temples, or hospitals and the lack of basic amenities such as water, electricity, or postal service.

For the current study, gender and caste are the two autonomous fields. Lower economic capital and belonging to lower castes in the Indian Hindu caste hierarchy contribute to the disadvantaged position of Devadasi women in the two fields – gender and caste. The lack of capital creates habitus like superstitious, customs and stigma thus aiding in the continued sustenance and reproduction of behaviors that support the Devadasi system.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study highlights the lived experiences of a marginalized population in India while examining the power dynamics and distribution of resources that reproduce their oppression. I hope that the findings would further inform the practices and policies of NGOs to include Devadasi women from low socio-economic backgrounds. Following are the questions that were used to guide the study

1. What are the perceptions of Devadasi women on this system in which they are embedded?
2. How has the status of being a Devadasi impacted the lives of these women?
3. What are the unique experiences faced by Devadasi women due to societal structures/hierarchy?

METHODS

In-depth interviews developed using Seidman's protocol and guided by phenomenology were used to capture the essence of the lived experiences. The basic aim of a phenomenological study, according to Creswell (2006), "is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (p. 58). The main objective of this study is to capture and understand the Devadasi system as experienced by the women who are/ were part of this practice.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Many studies on gender discrimination and legal and developmental frameworks are based on traditional lenses and the assumption that discrimination is one-dimensional. Experiences of women belonging to more than one minority group are unique, and cannot be captured in their entirety by looking at discrimination using traditional lenses (Crenshaw, 1991). Taking into consideration different intersecting identities and the social context of the oppressed group is critical for the application of developmental and legal frameworks as well as the success of developmental projects. Findings from this study have valuable implications for domestic and international organizations and HRD professionals to make informed policy and procedural decisions that directly impact the everyday lives of citizens and workers.

Affirmative action policies in India have not been able to reach all the economically and socially disadvantaged communities, as policies were primarily concerned with less privileged, known as 'backward' castes defined uni-dimensionally and not taking multiple identities into consideration. Only individuals belonging to castes that are considered as backward are qualified to enjoy the *quotas* allotted by the affirmative action policies. As a ripple these *quotas* are increasing the rivalry between different castes, as individuals from higher castes feel that it is unfair to them as the *quotas* are not based on merit but are based on the caste of the individual (Basu, 2006).

In spite of the *quotas*, the seats allotted to backward castes and SC's (Scheduled Castes) remain unfilled in many universities and governmental organizations. Only 3% of the students that receive their degree from fields like Engineering and Medicine in

India are from SC and ST (Scheduled Tribes) (Sowell, 2004). The main reason behind this is the expense involved in schooling (books, tuitions, housing and boarding) and the funding provided by the government is not sufficient to cover all the expenses incurred. While some categories of backward castes are doing better than others due to their financial status, the governmental policies still need to be revised to reach the marginalized population suffering due to multiple identities (Basu, 2006).

In spite of legislations attempting to protect the basic human rights of discriminated minorities, the statistics on discriminatory practices and their effects on minorities are alarmingly high. The present study focuses on the experiences of one marginalized population through a lens of cultural conflict theory and intersectionality. These findings can be used as valuable information by policy makers and NGO's in their attempts to emancipate and empower this populace. Highlighting the experiences of Devadasi women, and representing their voices is the main objective of the study, in hope that these findings can be used to help create better living conditions for this populace.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature relevant to the current study is reviewed in this section. A conceptual framework for the current study is based on intersectionality grounded specifically in the Indian context of gender and caste and Bourdieu's theory on social and cultural capital. The first part of this section discusses caste system specific to the Indian context and the second part discusses gender, followed by caste and gender discrimination in India. Intersectionality and Bourdieu's theory specific to the current study are discussed in the last two parts of this section.

CASTE SYSTEM AND ITS ORIGINS

The caste-based discriminatory structure is unique to the Indian society where individuals are grouped into different castes depending on their family names, descent; it correlates to the skin color of the individual. In spite of many laws in the legislation against untouchability, it is still prevalent in India, where individuals especially from the *Dalit* clan are ostracized (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Indians living in urban areas are mostly categorized by their wealth, and though caste is not seen as a major obstacle to opportunities of advancement, many of the matrimonial advertisements specifically mention caste preferences for the spouse. In the rural areas, social status, access to education, and basic necessities are all based upon the caste of an individual (Baker, 2006).

According to the ancient texts, Indians follow three major themes. One of the themes is the adherence to hierarchical order. Everything in the Universe, animate and inanimate, according to Indians, is arranged in a strong hierarchical order with human beings being at the top of the hierarchy. Among human beings the order is based on castes; within castes the order is based on gender and age (Sinha & Kumar, 2004). The origin of caste system dates back 3000 years, where it was mentioned only once in *Purush Sukta*, a part in the famous *Rigveda*. However social reformers like B.R.Ambedkar and Max Muller have argued that caste system in the Vedas is an inclusion done for the interests of specific group of individuals (History of the Indian caste system, n.d).

According to Thind (2000), there was no caste system in India around 3200-2500BC. Women were as educated and learned as men and had the right to choose their mate. Remarriages for women were not a taboo in the society as they are now. Religious books like *Manusmriti*, *Vedas*, etc were later created to cater to the interests of men with power, as a result of which divergences based on gender, caste, class, and many more were perpetuated into the society. According to some of the verses in *Manusmriti*, it is justified to ill treat or sexually abuse women from lower castes. The status of women from higher castes was not any better and they faced discrimination in terms of freedom, right to education, objectification, and many more.

Caste system in India consists of four groups known as *varnas*, which are further divided into sub categories (Dumont, 1980). Individuals were initially grouped depending on their occupation, priests (*Brahmins*), warriors and kings (*Kshatriyas*),

businessmen (*Vaishey*), and manual labor (*Shudras*), listed in their position in the hierarchy (Gupta. 2006). These categories have been further divided into numerous sub-categories, and were strictly codified into the society, to cater the selfish interest and power politics of a few (Baker, 2006).

GENDER

Concepts like race, gender etc., refer to different groups and conceptions in different cultures, but are often used with little reference to the context under discussion leading to misconceptions and confusion (Thurnau, 2008). Gender has long been defined by many feminists as a concept evolved around reproductive differences of individuals that shape's societal relationships, identities and meanings (Connell, 1989). Recent studies on gender have further analyzed this concept in terms of sex-gender distinction, which assumes that something real exists based on which cultural meanings and social relationships are developed.

This interpretation of gender received many critiques from post structural feminists who argued that the concepts of sex and sexuality are in themselves constructed on cultural values and beliefs (Butler, 1990). Lorber (1994) further distinguished sex, sexuality and gender by explicitly defining them: (1) sex – biological or genetic characteristics, (2) sexuality – sexual interests or orientation, and (3) gender – identity and social status, thus emphasizing that all the three concepts are culturally and socially constructed. Hence gender is an organizing principle or a social concept which

goes far beyond just the reproductive differences, and is a concept that is constantly evolving depending on our everyday lives and the roles we play (Torri, 2009).

Hagemann- White (2001) defines gender as a relationship between different people, institutions and categories. Relational theory is used by many researchers to understand the interactions between men and women and how gender shapes and is shaped by social structures and practices. Gender is multi-dimensional in nature encompassing in itself various relations – power, economic, social, affective and symbolic – at different levels like society –wide, institutional, intrapersonal and interpersonal (Connell, 2009; Lorber, 1994). Change or movement in any one of these relations or levels causes a ripple effect in other dimensions as well (Connell, 2011).

Gender, as a fundamental principle underlying societal behaviors affects major areas of life like work, family, sexuality which are organized on gender principles and the interests of power, hierarchy, and privilege (Torri, 2009). The classification based on the concept of gender in societies is more than often manifested in forms like gender specific symbols, images, allocation of resources, and autonomy based on gender. Thus, to gain a holistic understanding of gender, one needs to know the context in terms of structure and meaning relevant to the society or culture under study.

GENDER AND CASTE DISCRIMINATION IN INDIA

On December 2nd, 2011, the state of Uttarpradesh, India woke up to the shocking news of a *Dalit* boy being strangled to death because he shared his first name with a

person from a higher caste (BBC, 2011). According to the news article a 14 year old *Dalit* boy named Neeraj was strangled to death as his father would not change his name in spite of continuous threats from Mr. Chaudhary who is from a higher caste. Though the caste system has been abolished in India after the country's independence in 1947, prejudice still exists and has a profound impact on individuals from lower castes like *Dalit* Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) (Pandey, 2011).

India from an ecological perspective is a continent with over one billion people, 1600 languages and dialects (out of which 16 of them are recognized), thousands of castes and tribes, many major religions (Hinduism is the dominant one) and ethnic groups of the world, extreme poverty, varied geographic and climatic conditions, low human development index, the largest democracy in which members from minority religions are elevated to highest positions, and so on. It is rated by the World Bank as the fourth biggest economy on its PPP index, and has a higher gross national income than Germany, Canada and Russia (Sinha & Kumar, 2004).

Discrimination in the name of caste is widely prevalent in the Indian society. In spite of 200 million people belonging to the *Dalit* communities, they are still treated as untouchables and discriminated against. In a recent report on untouchability conducted in 565 villages in 11 States in India, public health workers were not willing to enter the houses of the *Dalits* in 33% of the villages. It has also been reported that

- In 37.8% of the government schools, *Dalit* children had to sit separately while eating.

- 27.8% of the villages had police stations where *Dalits* were restricted entry.
- 23.5 % of the villages do not deliver mail to a *Dalit's* home.
- In 48.4% of the villages *Dalits* did not have any access to drinking water. (Razvi, & Roth, 2010).

Further looking at the negative aspects of the Indian economy, more than one third of the Indian population is living under the poverty line, with 80% of them surviving on less than \$2 (Re.100) per day (Razvi & Roth, 2010). India's economy does not favor women from low – income groups who are forced to take up unregulated informal work. Even in the formal sector there is a huge gap between the percentage of employed males and females (Razvi, & Roth, 2010). To add to an already dismal situation, there is lot of gender discrimination in organizations in India where promotion and retention prospects for women are not so good as compared to their male counterparts (Rajadhyaksha, 2002).

Caste and gender being the major forms of discrimination in the Indian society make life even more difficult for individuals who belong to both the minority groups. The conditions for existence become even worse in the rural areas where the literacy levels are lower than 55% for individuals coming from lower-castes (Pandey, 2011). Statistics have revealed that there has been an increase in the violence rate in the recent towards lower-caste individuals from people from higher castes. On average three *Dalit* women are raped per day by individuals from higher-caste, and this is done primarily to reinforce their power and hierarchical position in the society (Orchard, 2004). Even

shocking reports by the Human Rights Commission have revealed that rape is a custom in many villages, where girls from lower-castes are forced to sleep with the village head man who invariably is from a higher- caste.

Girls from lower-caste families that are not economically sound are the major targets of land owners. Many of the land disputes and debts are resolved by the action of sex or rape (Orchard, 2007). The girl from a family belonging to low socio-economic background is more often than not is forced to have sex with the creditor in return for debt settlement or resolution. According to Sahoo (1997), women from lower-castes are forced to sleep with the village head man on the first night of their marriage in some parts of Bihar. The irony of the situations being that women from *Dalit* and *Harijan* clan are ostracized as untouchables, but when it comes to sexual pleasure untouchability is not a restraint. This in turn is resulting in the increase of child marriages, as a girl once raped is rendered unmarriageable (Torri, 2009).

Women from upper-castes who live in the same villages and economic conditions do not face as much sexual assault as women from lower-castes do. Also male counterparts from the same caste enjoy better life and safer living conditions when compared to the females. The conditions become intolerable when an individual simultaneously belongs to both the minority groups (Orchard, 2007). Government and social workers have looked at issues of caste discrimination and gender discrimination, but have not been able to efficiently deal with the intersections of both the identities.

Women from higher-castes have different battles to fight, which are unique to them because of the status attained by being born into a higher-caste. There is a strong

opposition to reservations (or quotas) given by the government intended for the upliftment of women. The opposition to the bill, which reserves one third of the positions in universities, and governmental organizations for women is not solely due to the patriarchal orientation of the society. Indian ruling class which was once dominated by individuals from higher-castes has undergone drastic changes and currently represents the population of India encapsulating individuals from different classes, castes, religion and educational backgrounds. The fear of upper-caste women replacing lower-caste men is the reason behind the strong opposition the bill is currently facing (Menon, 2009).

Studies have shown that better social status in terms of caste hierarchy comes at the expense of loss of mobility, reduced freedom of decision making, risk of domestic abuse after marriage, and many more restrictions in terms of dressing, education, and the like (Malhotra et al., 2002). Many women in South East Asia who belong to higher-castes face oppression in many aspects of life and many times do not come out in public due to the fear of losing face. Ironically, women more educated or well-paid than their spouse are at a higher risk of domestic violence, as the spouse would see a better social status of his wife as a threat to his dominance (Yick, 2001).

Indian society known for its patriarchal orientation is one of the prime reasons for widespread violence against women (irrespective of their social status), which manifests itself in low literacy rates, high female mortality rates, deaths resulting from domestic abuse, high female malnutrition, and more (Heise, 1989). Long rooted social customs like dowry, *devadasi*, and *purdah* (practice among some Muslim and Hindu

societies where women need to dress in all-enveloping clothes to stay away from the sight of strangers) make violence against women more prevalent. While some of the customs affect women specifically from the lower-castes, others affect women in general irrespective of their position with regard to caste, social, and economic status. Being brought up in a patriarchal society, many men perceive controlling women as a birth right, which is the main reason for violence against women apart from the social customs which have been put in place by men (Heise, 1989).

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is a feminist theory, which can be used as an analytical tool to study and understand the convergence of multiple identities with gender and to respond appropriately to alleviate the discrimination against oppressed classes (Symington, 2004). The theory is based on the premise that individuals simultaneously belong to multiple communities (that have emerged from social and power structures in the society) and would experience oppression and privilege both at the same time (Crenshaw, 1991).

Multiple identities tend to push women to extreme fringes and make them more vulnerable to discrimination in terms of access to such things as basic human rights, opportunities, and resources. Researchers like Holvino (2010), further argue that studies situated around social positions of women should acknowledge and take into consideration the intersections of gender with other social identities. Intersectionality as a theoretical paradigm helps us gain a better understanding, by voicing the opinions of

the victims themselves, as opposed to dominant self-interest groups. Intersectionality as a theoretical framework has been used for more than a decade and is different from diversity management in its research focus, intended outcomes, and methodology of implementation. Its main focus is to advocate for the basic rights of minorities like women, disabled, people of color, LGBT's, and indigenous individuals (Symington, 2004).

Social interactions and perceptions more often than not translate to organizational structures and practices. Context plays an important role in the way intersections are perceived and understood (Corlett, & Mavin, 2014). According to constructionism meaning is created through social and cognitive interactions (Ackerman, 2001). Existing societal structures and culture directly influence the gendered relations and interactions between individuals situated in a particular context thus sustaining behaviors and perceptions both in personal and professional life. Gender is a historical process which can never be separated from other social identities like class and caste. These intersecting social identities have developed processes “through concrete practices that are never independent of each other but always organizationally and historically specific.” (Holvino, 2010, p. 257).

Most developmental frameworks are focused on gender relations and fail to recognize that women are a heterogeneous group and the extent of impact is different for women in different groups. Problems of women, who are at the margins facing the maximum oppression most of the times, tend to go unnoticed. Legal frameworks understand gender and caste discriminations as two distinct concepts and fail to realize

that they intersect, as a result of which victims in many cases of discrimination as discussed in the previous sections do not get the justice they rightfully deserve (Symington, 2004). It is very unfortunate that one of the biggest democracies in the world is not able to ensure that all its citizens have reasonable access to their basic human rights.

Frameworks based on tools like intersectionality help expose complexities involved in multiple identities and address women's issues analyzing them specifically with relevance to structure and context (Crenshaw, 1991). Design and implementation stages of frameworks like this should be advanced with caution and care should be taken to encapsulate social, political, economic and cultural situations to ensure results from the grass roots level. An effective framework would help develop rich analyses regarding the various factors involved in creating a situation, thus challenging the dominant beliefs of the society in terms of hierarchy, patriarchy, power politics and colonialism (Symington, 2004).

Employing intersectionality as a framework involves two major stages. The first stage involves focusing and defining the points of intersection, dynamic patterns, and complex structures that define the access to resources of the focus group. The second stage involves considering the voice and opinions of the victims themselves which is a bottom –up approach. As opposed to analyzing issues at the surface level using middle range theories, individuals from the dominated groups must be contacted to get a better idea of the impact of multiple identities, existing policies, and societal structures on their lives (Symington, 2004).

BOURDIEU'S CONCEPT OF POWER AND PRACTICE

While intersectionality as a theoretical paradigm helps us better understand the impact that converging social identities have on women, Bourdieu's theory on power and practice helps us further explore the concepts in terms of cultural, political, economic, and social structures (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu largely examined the functioning and sustaining of social hierarchies. He argued that cultural and symbolic systems play an important role along with economic capital in defining and maintaining societal structures of hierarchy. Bourdieu (1980) argued that social struggle is not always due to economic factors and proposed a cultural conflict theory for which he defined two concepts: *habitus* and *fields*.

Embodiment of self within a context is *habitus* and *fields* are the autonomous social spaces that exist in the social world (Bourdieu, 1990). *Fields* are relatively objective and hierarchical in nature, while *habitus* is subjective and can be conditioned through social interactions and structures, i.e., the *fields* (Bourdieu, 1990). Social actors struggle and compete to occupy the dominant positions in the fields, thus controlling the vital resources resulting in unequal distributions of power, economic, social, and cultural capital. Individuals in these dominant structures then create categories, perceptions, and symbols to maintain their dominance over the dominated groups. The power relations are manifested as legitimate values and ideologies thus conditioning the individuals in the dominated group to take social order as natural and just (Bourdieu, & Wacquant, 1992), thereby resulting in *symbolic violence*.

Habitus, thus is not a mere system of belief; rather it is a social construction that

affects an individual's perception of self in terms of habits, living conditions, decisions, display of emotions, etc. (Reay, 2004). These social constructions are deeply rooted in the society to an extent that they are considered *natural* and often go unquestioned. For example the habitus of a woman living in a patriarchal society would be household chores, parenting responsibilities, limited opportunities for education, lesser pay compared to her male colleagues and the like depending on the context.

Habitus in most cases is passed on to younger generations through exposure, education, familial ties, and socialization. The social structures (fields) are in turn reshaped based on the behavior and perceptions of individuals which form the habitus (Topper, 2001). According to Menchik (2004) society consists of many fields with new fields emerging continuously owing to the changes in the habitus of the social actors. Women from lower castes living in a male dominated society face oppression within two fields i.e., gender and caste. Their experiences of oppression (limited access to education, denial of basic human rights, sexual abuse) and their habitus further reinforce the existing social hierarchies making them seem *natural*.

Capital according to Bourdieu (1986) is amassed labor in material form. Social, economic, and cultural capitals are the three basic forms of capital. The control and distribution of capital is influenced by the structure of the fields in a society. Individuals belonging to a dominant group yearn to reproduce themselves and maintain dominance by controlling capital. This results in unequal distribution of resources (wealth, education, socialization) which in turn, strengthens the hierarchical structures (Hauberer, 2006).

Economic capital can be in the form of property and is the easiest form of capital that can be converted to money (Bourdieu, 1986). Individuals from lower castes have low economic capital resulting in lower educational qualifications and hence are either working as agricultural laborers or are employed in low paying menial jobs. Cultural capital can be incorporated in forms like individual characteristics, knowledge and the like. It can be objectified by using representations like books, ancient texts, paintings etc., and institutionalized by certificates and diplomas (Hauberer, 2006). Incorporated culture becomes an inherent part of a person and thus is a part of his/her habitus which in turn, affects the fields in which individuals operate.

Social capital operates through networking, interactions and relationships between people inside groups and between groups. It is further reinforced through symbolic exchanges which strengthen the existing structures of hierarchy. The symbolic exchanges are not always physical or visible in nature but reinforce themselves through unrecognized and invisible forms like customs and traditions (Bourdieu, 1990). Female infanticide, restricted freedom before and after marriage compared to male counterparts, gender roles etc., would be some of the symbolic exchanges a women in a patriarchal society faces thus reinforcing and masking male domination as being *natural* and *common*.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The main aim of the current study was to give voice to individuals from marginalized populations who are frequently excluded from study due to their intersecting identities of gender, caste, class, race, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The current study uses phenomenology for conducting research because, in phenomenological studies, the lived experiences of people involved in the system (Devadasi) under study are the focus of the research (Greene, 1997).

The remainder of this chapter is divided into three major parts: 1) Methodological framework, 2) Researcher's background and positionality, 3) Assumptions, 4) Research design, 5) Sampling and participants, and 6) Data collection. The first part gives a detailed explanation regarding the research method selected for this study and talks further about the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the study. The researcher's background and positionality explain the biases I bring in to the study as a researcher due to my past experiences and interaction with the culture. The research design section explains how the methodology selected for the study is used to help guide the actual research process. The last two sections talk in detail about participant selection and sampling, data collection techniques used, and data analysis.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In qualitative research, an in-depth analysis is done in order to understand the underpinnings and functioning of a particular context (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002) and, in this particular study, I explored the phenomenon of the contemporary Devadasi system. According to Merriam (1998), the underpinning of a qualitative study is that the interactions between individuals and the social world construct reality. Given the number of participants, there was possibility of multiple viewpoints and realities, further warranting a qualitative research methodology. According to Crotty (2003), multiple realities would emerge during a qualitative study which would help understand any particular phenomenon.

Examining my research closely, it is evident that a quantitative method or a survey would not account for the intersection between gender and caste which forms the premise of the current research study. *Dalit* women are often times excluded from studies as outliers and are not even accounted for in developmental projects (Symington, 2004). While qualitative study is not value-free (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), a quantitative approach would not represent the voices of my participants adequately. Thus a qualitative approach is more suitable for a study like this as opposed to a quantitative methodology.

There are several approaches available for researchers in qualitative inquiry including ethnography (Merriam 2009; Patton, 1990), basic qualitative research (Merriam, 2009), narrative analysis (Merriam 2002), case study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), phenomenology (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990;

Merriam 2002), critical ethnography (Thomas, 1993; Brown & Dobrin, 2004; Patton, 2002), and grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam 2002; Merriam 2009). Since the main focus of the study is to highlight the lived experiences of women in the Devadasi system prevalent in South India (Andhra Pradesh), the method of the current study is guided by the principles of hermeneutical phenomenology.

Phenomenology. Phenomenology as a methodology was developed by Husserl (1859-1938), after the end of World War I (Groenewald, 2004). According to Welman & Kruger (1999), in phenomenological studies “the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved” (p. 189). Hermeneutical phenomenology is interpretive in nature and focuses on the meaning of the lived experiences of people and the effects of these experiences on the development of the individuals at different levels (Lavery, 2003).

Researchers using this methodology usually argue that there is no objective truth and reality is constructed through lived experiences and explained as phenomenon (Eagleton, 1983). Lester (1999) stated that phenomenology illuminates a phenomenon through experiences and perceptions of individuals involved in the situation. Reflecting on lived experiences and delving deeper into them helps expose taken-for granted assumptions. Critically examining these assumptions would help understand the existent structures and their underlying assumptions. Semi-structured interviews conducted as a part of qualitative approach help explore the lived experiences of the participants in depth (Merriam, 2009).

The existence of hierarchical structures needs to be made visible and questioned for sustainable change to occur. Praxis, according to Greenwood & Levin (2005), is the application of theory to practice and translation of ideas into action. Through interaction with people about their challenges, hermeneutical phenomenology helps understand praxis at the grass root level (Lester, 1999). The current study aims at creating awareness among NGOs and *Dalit* women on how culture and social constructions influence their everyday lives and how the research findings can help emancipate and create better living conditions for the populace.

According to Husserl (1970), describing without bias the experiences of people is the main aim of pure phenomenology. But, according to hermeneutical phenomenology, a researcher cannot be completely bias-free or detached from his/her own opinions and perspectives. Thus, many researchers proposed that a researcher should not pretend to be bias free, but rather be aware of his/her biases and present them to the reader (Hammersley, 2000; Plummer, 1983). Thus, in the next section, I offer my own background and positionality as a frame for how I have approached the present study.

RESEARCHER'S BACKGROUND AND POSITIONALITY

I grew up in an upper middle class family, from a caste socially placed higher in the hierarchical structure in the society. Both my parents are doctors and value independence, education, and equality. I grew up in a patriarchal society with high power distance, which emphasizes collectivistic values over individualistic values. The Devadasi system, from my perspective, is discrimination against women because of their

gender, caste, and class. In my opinion, this is a system that is being sustained to cater to the interests of a privileged few at the cost of individuals from lower socio economic backgrounds. It is this value orientation that drove my interest in the topic, and drives my interpretation of the data.

My first encounter with caste was during my freshman year at college in India. My undergraduate school was located in a rural part of Andhra Pradesh, India. It did not take me long to realize that most of the associations and friendships were based on social status, predominantly caste. Most of my schooling – prior to my undergraduate – was in a metropolitan city, where caste was not so evident on the surface level. I had no answer to the question *what is your caste?* , which led my friends to believe that I belonged to a caste socially placed lower, and they initially started alienating me. A person's physical attributes and family names are sometimes used to speculate upon a person's social status and caste. It was only a week later, when my friends realized that I likely belonged to the same caste as them, that they started letting me into their inner circle. While this was the first and last time I faced discrimination based on my caste, I have not been so lucky in terms of gender discrimination.

As my awareness of the caste system increased, I started being more perceptive towards the existence and practice of caste in the Indian society. It was interesting to see the interactions between class and caste in the contemporary society. A system which started with four distinct castes grew into a more complex system with a number of sub-castes. In spite of the large number of castes present in the society there was clear distinction between the ones that belong to higher, middle and lower castes. Within each

of the three categories – higher, middle and lower - members belonging to different castes constantly struggle to place themselves on the top. Political power, class, and financial capital play an important role in deciding the position of a caste within a category.

With changes in the modern society, caste has become more fluid within each category and this fluidity more often than not seems to be influenced by above mentioned external factors like financial capital, power and class. However, there are still rigid and visible boundaries between the three categories. For instance marriages and family alliances between different castes within the higher or middle or lower caste category have become more common especially when class, power and money are involved. However, inter-caste marriages are still a taboo especially if it is between families belonging to different categories – higher, lower and middle.

I faced gender discrimination in various contexts both professionally and personally. My undergraduate class – in Mechanical Engineering – consisted of 95 boys and only 5 girls, including me. Active participation of girls in activities was looked down upon, thus limiting our freedom and flexibility. After I earned my master's degree in the US, I returned to India and started looking for jobs in the field of Mechanical Engineering. However, it did not take long for me to realize that my opportunities were limited due to many factors and one of which happened to be gender.

According to Malhotra et, al. (2002), status in terms of caste hierarchy comes at the expense of mobility, decision making freedom, higher societal expectations and such. Many South East Asian women belonging to higher caste face discrimination in

many aspects of life, but more often than not do not discuss it publicly due to the fear of social taboo. Women with education and a successful career face a higher risk of domestic abuse, owing to the insecurities of the spouse (Yick, 2001). As I was married into a family with conservative values, it was not easy for me, and my marriage ended in a divorce. However, being a divorcee in a society where it is looked down upon was not easy, more so due to my gender and higher social status based on caste hierarchy.

Thus, as an Indian woman, I shared with the participants of my study a similar cultural background, linguistics, and behaviors that are distinct to Indian women. I also shared with them experiences that women in many cultures have known. Given the cultural similarities present between the researcher and participants, unspoken bonds are formed naturally and without any need for major intervention.

ASSUMPTIONS

Personal experiences shape our perceptions which in turn influence the way we make sense of our surroundings and theories we relate to or select. Theory guiding any research influences the data collection, analysis, interpretation and presentation.

Following are some of the assumptions underlying this research

1. A research study guided by the critical paradigm would help identify the hidden and invisible norms in the society that shape culture and the way hierarchies are formed.

2. Identification of the underlying reason for oppression can help design developmental projects and frameworks that would emancipate and empower individuals from the oppressed group.
3. Even though the findings in this study are specific to this context, the findings would be helpful in informing organizations and governments regarding the design considerations of developmental projects.
4. As the researcher is the instrument for data collection in this study, the reliability of the findings depend largely on the ethical and moral principles of the researcher.

RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Denzin & Lincoln (2000), the paradigmatic view of qualitative researchers is based on the way their research is grounded in relation to the world. A research design helps establish connection between theoretical paradigms, research questions and data collection techniques. It is very important to align the research design with the paradigmatic view of the researcher. With this in mind, I have chosen qualitative research methods to help provide a thick description of the participant's lived experiences (Abusabha & Woefel, 2003).

The current research design is used to help answer the following research questions

1. What are the perceptions of Devadasi women on this system in which they are embedded?

2. How has the status of being a Devadasi impacted the lives of these women?
3. What are the unique experiences faced by Devadasi women due to societal structures/hierarchy?

Participant selection, sampling, data collection and analysis, and interpretation of the findings were guided by the methodological underpinnings of hermeneutical phenomenology. Data collection was done using face to face interviews for the purpose of the current research. The remainder of this section discusses 1) sampling and participants, 2) data collection, and 3) data analysis in the same order as listed.

SAMPLING AND PARTICIPANTS

Several factors like study location, resource availability, evolving data collection and analysis, and information exchange between the participants and researcher can help determine participant selection criteria and count (Merriam, 2009). Taking into consideration participants required for this research, criterion sampling was used (Patton, 1989). Given the purpose of this study, the initial criterion used for participant selection are as below

1. Must identify themselves as *Dalit* women and part of the Devadasi system.
2. Must belong to low socio-economic background.
3. The final inclusion criteria required participants to living in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India and be able to speak and understand Telugu fluently.

Belonging to a lower caste in the hierarchical caste system and being a woman is important for this study because I am looking at the intersections of caste and gender.

Contexts in this case are very important as women from higher castes have different battles to fight and their agenda is completely different (Menon, 2009). Similarly lower socio-economic background implies lower economic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1980), which, in turn, affects access to basic resources like water, food, postal services, education, and the like (Razvi & Roth, 2010).

During the first three weeks of data collection, I visited temples in Hyderabad (capital city of the state Andhra Pradesh, India) known for practicing the Devadasi system or having Devadasi women in the temple. However, I contacted these women by myself without a reference and they were not willing to talk to me for a myriad of reasons. While one woman was terrified to talk to me, another was just not willing to talk without any financial or material benefits. I tried contacting temple authorities to vouch on my behalf and see if one of the former women would be okay with talking to me, but unfortunately the temple authorities kept stonewalling me for several months. Finally, I had to give up on the participants I identified at the temples and look for other sources of information.

Participants were identified using internet, media, and my social network. In order to identify additional participants, snowballing technique was used. This technique works like a referral system where participants refer the researcher to other potential participants who possess similar characteristics (Merriam, 2009). I contacted a family member involved in social service in India who connected me with a non-governmental organization (NGO) working with the Devadasi community. Using similar personal connections and the internet, I connected to more NGO's which provided me with names

and contacts of potential participants for the study. The initial meeting with participants was through phone calls, where I could provide them with the names of people who referred me to them.

Given my locale and language criteria, I interviewed participants from three areas in the state of Andhra Pradesh – Nizamabad, Mahabubnagar & Tirupati. In Mahabubnagar and Tirupati, I reached out to participants through local NGOs which were not involved specifically with Devadasi women. In Nizamabad, I reached out to the participants through a family member running an educational institution in the area.

According to Merriam (2009), deciding on the sample size is very difficult as there is no set figure. Lincoln & Guba (1985) mentioned that sample size can be identified when the data being collected becomes repetitive and redundant. The original sample size for this study was between 5 to 10 participants, recognizing that there may be a possibility of change in this number depending on many factors like participant availability, data being collected, location of the study, and availability of resources like time and money (Merriam, 2009).

The initial research design was set up as individual interviews. However, it was evident during my initial contact with potential participants for the study that Devadasi women were more comfortable talking in groups rather than one-on-one. One of the participants shared that they have never been contacted before by an Indian researcher and all their prior interviews were for news, documentaries by foreign nationals or while pleading for financial help. This might be one of the reasons the participants preferred focus groups over individual interviews. The number of people per focus group

interview ranged from a minimum of ten to a maximum of 50 participants. The questions were written in English and the verbal communication was done in the Indian language - Telugu.

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is a collective process that involves participant identification, gaining access and permission from participants, and then the actual data collection. Since the current research is being conducted on human subjects, prior to data collection, approval was obtained from Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas A&M University (Appendix A). According to Bogdan & Biklen (2007), a researcher is responsible for promoting ethical practices and safe environments while interacting with human subjects. In order to create a risk minimized environment, I communicated all the plausible risks involved in the study and participants were not obligated to share information or be part of the study against their will. As all my participants were (relatively) uneducated or could not understand English, the consent form (Appendix B) was conveyed to them in my mother tongue (Telugu) verbally. The details in the consent form were explained verbatim to the participants ahead of time and any questions or concerns were addressed by me during the initial contact. I gave participants my contact number and they could contact me whenever they had any concern or wanted to talk. Most of them were reluctant to sign or place a thumb print on the form since they could not read or understand the script, so all the conversations regarding the consent were recorded on the participants' approval. No deception or coercion was used in the

recruitment process and participants were free to make their own decision without any repercussions.

For this research, semi-structured, open ended interviews were the primary data collection technique used, which allowed me to participate in a conversation with members of the Devadasi community. Rubin & Rubin (1995) argued that interviews are the best methods in fieldwork research because they go beyond survey instruments which seek to find one objective truth. According to Seidman (1998), understanding others' experiences and perceptions regarding the experiences should be the main focus of in-depth interviews.

According to Spradley (1979), rapport and information collection are two complementary processes involved in interviewing. Once the participants were identified, I made an initial contact with them – some in person and some through phone – in order develop a rapport between me, as researcher, and the researched. This initial rapport helped create a sense of relationship and trust, thus enabling both the participants and the researcher to make meaning of each other's viewpoints.

The semi-structured interviews (Appendix C) lay emphasis on the life histories – family history, early encounters and past experiences – of individuals; current experiences in relation to their living conditions, place of residence, customs, traditions, and responsibilities; and finally capture the perceptions and meanings of the experiences of Devadasi women. Reflection by participants on their past and current experiences, specifically situated in the background of the current context, helps critically examine the different factors involved in creating the situation (Seidman, 1998). Also the

dialogue with the interviewee provided me with an opportunity to experience the situation from my own perspective. All the interviews were semi-structured with follow-up and probe questions. Johnson (2002) advocates for non-standard semi-structured interviews over structured and protocol guided interviews in order to enable a smooth and uninterrupted flow of information from the participants.

Owing to the sensitive nature of the study, all the interviews were confidential and only agreed upon pseudonyms are used to refer to the interviewees. Any information which would jeopardize the identity of the participants is not included in the final report. The major concern prior to the interviews was the language they were to be conducted in. Due to the type of populace under study, fluency in English is not expected; hence the interviews were conducted in the native language of the participants, which is Telugu (an Indian language). As my mother tongue is Telugu, there was minimal concern with regard to translation.

In spite of the commonalities – gender, nationality and mother tongue - I share with the participants, an insider's status with Devadasi women is not guaranteed due to plausible barriers such as class – social, financial, and cultural. According to Few, Stephens, and Arnett (2003), personal preparations like body language, dressing, and language in terms of local slang are as important as technical details of the data collection process. Cultural competence in terms of understanding the experiences of Devadasi women, adapting to and respecting the values and expectations of the populace is important to engage in a candid conversation with the informants (Pinderhughes, 1989).

Relying completely on interview notes may result in loss of important information. Hence, interview notes along with digital audio recordings were used during the interviews to make sure the information/data presented during the interviews was not lost, especially given the number of participants in each interview (Powney, & Watts, 1987). Prior to recording, I explained to participants the reason for the recorder and obtained their consent. Participants were informed prior to the interview that they could choose not to be recorded at any time during the interview process and then note taking would be used as the primary technique. The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes for this research. All the interviews were conducted at locations chosen by participants and in or near their hometowns. Two interviews were conducted at participants' houses; one was conducted in an adjacent village upon the request of participants due to safety concerns expressed by them; while the remaining two were conducted at NGO's located in the area.

The interviews were transcribed in Telugu (native language) within a couple of days after the interview. As the primary interviewer, I decided to be the primary transcriber, so I could capture the stories effectively and also stay in contact with the collected data. The interviews were later translated after verification by the participants. This is *member checking* and was done to increase the *credibility* of the research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Using this technique the researcher makes sure that the transcribed data accurately captures what the participant tried to convey.

Participants were the key contributors to data collection efforts and as a token of appreciation for their time, and willingness to share their experiences, all the participants

were reimbursed for any travel and food expenses they had to incur for the interview. Food and drinks, depending on the time of the day, were provided as well.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis, according to Denzin & Lincoln (2005), brings structure, order, and meaning to the raw data. Interview transcripts and interview notes form the raw data for this study. Data collection and analysis must happen simultaneously to ensure better efficiency (Merriam, 2009), thus data analysis started with the first interview. Data analysis according to Corbin & Strauss (2008) involves “taking data apart, conceptualizing it, and developing those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions in order to determine what parts tell us about the whole” (p.64).

A six-step method was used to analyze the data and following are the steps listed in the order used: 1) preparing and organizing the data collected; 2) read through all the transcribed interviews to understand the overall meaning of the data; 3) coding the data and identifying probable categories; 4) organizing data into meaningful categories and themes that can be used to describe the research settings and context; 5) organize and present the data into a meaningful report; and 6) further interpret the data for a larger meaning.

In step 1, I transcribed the audio-taped interviews verbatim in Telugu (native language of the researcher and participants). Also, notes taken during the interview process were included along with the transcriptions. The audio-recordings were transcribed as soon as possible after the interview to minimize the loss of any important

data. As the primary researcher, I translated all the recordings and read random parts of the transcriptions back to the participants to ensure accurateness in the translation. The transcribed interviews (in Telugu) were later translated to English and organized along with interview notes for further analysis.

In step 2, I read over the translated interviews and interview notes entirely. During this step, I reached out to two colleagues who were proficient in both the languages – Telugu and English – to help cross check the translations. In order to protect the identity of participants, I removed all identifiers from the data before handing it over for cross-checking. Since translating the interviews in their entirety was not practical, both the colleagues cross-checked translations intermittently and in large chunks to make sure the meaning was not lost in translation. Reading through the translated data helped draw impressions and meaning from raw data while giving a generic sense of participants' personal narratives and contexts. Concepts and expressions emphasizing the background of participants were identified during this step.

Researchers use coding to make sense of the collected data (Creswell, 2005). In step 3, I used line-by-line open coding was done to unitize the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It was during this step that the data was transformed into meaningful themes and words. Data was coded by hand. Open coding encompasses unitizing the data using the criteria for recognizing units of data as mentioned by Lincoln & Guba (1985).

In step 4, I grouped the coded data to identify similar phrases or words in an attempt to categorize them into various themes or segments of data. In the first round of data segmentation, I created impermanent categories, and in the second round these

categories were compared to one another to re-examine the connection between them and to look for any new emerging categories. In order to identify themes, the generated categories were scanned for patterns and constancies (Creswell, 1998). In the third round of analysis, I examined the themes more closely to identify relevant connections between them and any sub-themes. According to VanManen (1990), “not all themes or meaning that we may encounter are unique to the phenomenon or experiences” (p.106). Thus, while themes relevant to the study were further analyzed, irrelevant themes were not included in the analysis.

In steps 5 and 6, I organized the analyzed data capturing the major insights from the research into a meaningful report (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For the current study, the report is submitted in the form of five chapters. The first three chapters discuss the background and importance of the study, the theoretical framework used for guiding the research and methods employed to collect and analyze the data identifying themes and subthemes in the study. The last two chapters discuss the findings from the study answering the research questions while making connections with literature. Based on the findings and research context, relevant implications for research, practice and policy are made along with recommendations for future research.

Trustworthiness. It is important that the research methodology meets the criterion for trustworthiness, which can be measured using various tools like – dependability (replication of research), confirmability (research can be verified), transferability (research is applicable in other situations), and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Creswell & Miller (2000), I used various tools like

“triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, disconfirming evidence, researcher reflexivity, collaboration, the audit trail, and thick, rich description” (p. 126 -129), can be used to check the validity of the research.

Dependability and Confirmability. These two concepts are often used interchangeably, but Lincoln & Guba(1985), mentioned that they are two different terms and need to be used as such. Dependability places the responsibility to account for changes in the study context on the researcher. Given the change in interview design, I explained how all the changes affected the research process. The degree to which the findings of the study can be corroborated is called confirmability. This was done by having one of my peer researcher or colleague to access the research and play the devil’s advocate.

Transferability. This concept deals with the degree to which a study can be duplicated for comparisons with similar studies (Schwandt, 2007). According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), using thick descriptions to describe the lived experiences of the participants can help increase transferability of a research. The current study helps capture the unique experiences of discrimination faced by individuals due to their intersecting identities.

Credibility. Credibility depends a lot in the hands of the researcher because, in qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument guiding the study (Patton, 1990). Methods like examining the research paradigm, assessing the methods employed for the study, and questioning the biases of were employed to verify the credibility of the study. As discussed earlier in this chapter, maintaining a reflexive journal, member checking,

triangulation are some of the methods employed to maintain the credibility of the current study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from data gathered for the purpose of analyzing and evaluating the perceptions and experiences encountered by the Devadasi women in South India. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Devadasi women from South India, specifically Tirupati, Nizamabad and Mahabubnagar, were interviewed for the current study. The data was collected through three one-on-one interviews and three focus groups. The first part of this chapter begins with a brief introduction of the participants and narrates their life stories, highlighting the participant's lived experiences. In the second part of chapter 4, the themes identified in the data are discussed in more detail.

Thematic analysis was used to identify the themes in the data. Using thematic data analysis for qualitative study helps researchers identify patterns and themes resulting in rich data analysis (Joffe and Yardley, 2004). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis helps capture and organize raw data into meaningful themes. Thematic analysis includes the following steps - becoming thoroughly familiar with the data at hand, identifying common themes among participants, constant comparison and review of the themes, defining and naming the themes, and finally producing a report. Thematic analysis conducted following the steps listed above results in a rigorous data analysis by ensuring systematic identification and cross-verification of themes which in turn results in conclusions based on actual data collected while minimizing the effect of assumptions and researchers' positionality (Clarke and Kitzinger, 2004).

Participant ¹	Probable Age ²	City	Education
Rani	55-60	Nizamabad	Uneducated
Veena	65-70	Nizamabad	Uneducated
Rita	40	Mahabubnagar	6 th Grade, but has travelled abroad and has a lot of exposure

Table 2: Participant Characteristics – Individual Interviews

¹Pseudonym assigned to the participant

²The birth dates were unknown, and hence participants guessed their age

Participant ¹	Age Range ²	City	Number of Participants
Focus Group Nizamabad (NFG)	45-65	Nizamabad	30 women and 10 men
Focus Group Mahabubnagar (MFG)	45-70	Mahabubnagar	10 women
Focus Group Tirupati (TFG)	35-50	Tirupati	7 women

Table 3: Participant Characteristics – Focus Groups

¹Pseudonym assigned to the focus group

²Approximate age range of the participants present at the focus group

PARTICIPANT STORIES

In this section I present the life stories, opinions, and experiences shared by the participants as they relate to the Devadasi system. While life stories present a brief biography of the respondents, opinions represent the voice and feelings of the participants towards the system, and experiences are the narration of different events faced by the participants as a result of their association with the Devadasi system.

As presented in the table, two of the three participants who participated in the individual interviews are uneducated. The third (Rita) completed 6th grade and is currently enrolled in online part-time schooling working toward a college degree. Rita has a lot of exposure and has been working for a long time to help other women come out of the system and to stop new female children from being initiated into the system. In the Mahabubnagar focus group (MFG), all ten women were illiterate, while all seven in TFG have at least a 5th grade education. In NFG all 30 women are illiterate while only two men were illiterate; the other 8 men have college degrees.

When compared across regions, women from Tirupati looked more sophisticated, well-dressed, and educated. Women from all three areas come from families below poverty line and belong to lower castes like Dalits, SC, ST and other Backward castes (BC). If financial wellness can be inferred from physical appearance, clothing, and mannerisms, the women from Tirupati seemed to be doing a little better financially when compared to their counterparts in Nizamabad and Mahabubnagar. It can also be due to the locations themselves, as Nizamabad and Mahabubnagar are less developed and poor compared to Tirupati in general. Tirupati is home to one of the most famous and richest temples in India, making it a tourist spot and hence resulting in more development compared to the other two areas.

Since the present study is situated heavily in the Indian culture, it is important to understand some culturally unique factors that are not common knowledge. The Devadasi system relies on the concept of marriage to God. Most of the Devadasis are married to local Goddesses (female) and not to a male God. Only a few of them

mentioned being married to a male God. Even those who mentioned being married to a male God, shared that the actual wedding ceremony was conducted at the temple of a female Goddess. Throughout the interviews, participants talked about three Goddesses – Pochamma, Ellamma, and Muthyalamma. They further shared that these Goddesses differ from area to area and are referred to using different names in different areas. Another interesting observation I made was that the participants did not differentiate between the genders of the God. During the interviews they referred to Goddess or God using the word “God”.

Since the wedding ceremony is an integral part of the Devadasi system, an insight into the actual ceremony and some rituals is important. In an Indian wedding, the groom ties a necklace made of gold and black beads around the bride’s neck. This gesture signifies marriage, and the groom and bride are referred to as husband and wife after the necklace is tied (hence, the term, ‘tying the knot’). Depending on the financial status of the family, people either use a necklace made of gold or a ceremonial thread that has been dipped in turmeric. There are many other rituals that are conducted during the wedding ceremony, but this marks the actual completion of the wedding for the Devadasi community. Henceforth, while describing a Devadasi wedding, I will refer it to as “tying the knot”. The necklace is referred to as *Thalibottu* (*Thali* in short) or *Mangalasutram*, in the local language – Telugu.

The man who plays the part of the groom during the wedding ceremony initiating a Devadasi is called *Pothuraju* or *Baindla*. In some places, the participants indicated that it is the priest himself who ties the knot. In other cases, a senior Devadasi woman from

the community ties the knot. Participants from Tirupati mentioned that when a senior Devadasi woman ties the knot, she puts a necklace made of sea shells on the new Devadasi instead of the necklace with black beads. Participants mentioned that the ceremonies vary by location and the group conducting the ceremony. They feel that it is just a symbolic gesture done to initiate a girl into the system.

As mentioned previously, I conducted three individual and three focus group interviews. However, during the individual interviews, the participants talked about the whole Devadasi community in the area while discussing the problems that are not unique to them. This is evident from some of the direct quotes from individual interviews presented in the next section.

The next part of this chapter is used to present the stories of the three individuals and the focus groups. I start with the stories of the three individuals and then talk about the focus groups. Though the focus groups had more than one person, all the participants agreed the essence of all their stories is similar and they all have faced similar situations in their lives.

RANI'S STORY

I met Rani in a small village located in the outskirts of Nizamabad and I met her through a family friend who lives in the area. He knew people from the Devadasi community and introduced me to all the participants I interviewed in the Nizamabad area. We walked into a small hut where Rani lived and, after I explained the reason I was there, we sat in a room in her house and started talking.

Initiation into the Devadasi System. Rani was five years old when her parents dedicated her to the temple in the name of God because they had vowed to dedicate the first born female child in the family. While Rani does not know the exact reason her parents made this vow, she mentioned that she had no say in the decision that was made and by the time she was old enough to realize the depths of the system she was too deep into it to come out. While Rani does not know the exact origin of the belief system, she shared the story that was passed down to her from her ancestors.

During the time of Rani's grandfathers and great grandfathers, there was a high infant mortality rate. Lack of awareness of medical field paired with poor medical facilities further contributed to high infant mortality. People in the village prayed to the Goddesses – Ellamma, Muthyalamma and Pochamma - and vowed to dedicate their daughters to her if She protected their children from dying and restored health. Some of the children did survive and people attributed this to be a miracle and a gift from the Goddess as She who was pleased with their offerings. So they maintained this practice in belief that the Goddess would safeguard their families and village. In this particular area the system is referred to as the Jogini system.

Rani, just like any other Devadasi in the area, lived with her parents till she reached puberty. After she reached puberty she was formally initiated into the system through a wedding ceremony. Rani described the ceremony as

.....they put up a small wedding canopy (*mandapam/pandiri – 4 pillared canopy*) and *Pothuraju* “tied the knot” which signifies marriage. The man called *Pothuraju* is like a husband for the wedding ceremony. Everyone

in the village here has only one *Pothuraju* irrespective of the number of Devadasis per village. Even if these women die, it is believed that it is good for their soul only if *Pothuraju* is present at their funeral. *Pothuraju* however has his own family outside the system.

Responsibilities as a Devadasi. Women dedicated to the system are also referred to as *Devasthulu* in the colloquial dialect and it translates to property of God or Goddess. As Devadasis, Rani, and other women in the area are expected to go begging in the village twice a week. People who believed in the system and respected these women offered them food and money in alms. It is a popular belief that by giving alms to God's people, all their sins would be washed away by God. It is ironic that, though Rani was dedicated to the temple in the name of God, she actually was not involved in much of the temple activities, like every day cleaning, prayers and decision making. Her only involvement was during festivals when these women were invited to dance.

Rani also discussed dancing at weddings that take place in their village and villages around. People believe that is an auspicious omen for the new couple if Devadasi women danced at the wedding ceremony. However, as most women in the Devadasi system belong to lower castes like SC, ST and BC, they are not allowed into the houses of people from higher castes who are hosting the weddings.

Sexual Relationships. Rani has five children and a couple granddaughters as well. When asked about her children's father and her sexual relationships, Rani was not really comfortable sharing it and said that she never had multiple partners and that she

was always with only one partner. Social workers and government officials who met Rani previously had promised to help her financially on the condition that she would no longer be involved in sexual relationships with men in the village. So, based on her previous experience, where she was rewarded for not having sexual relations, she initially denied having multiple partners and asked me for financial assistance as she did not earn any money by exchanging sexual favors.

.....If our sons take care of us we live happily; if not we just suffer through poverty but never earn money through sexual relationships. It would be great if you can help us a little bit financially. A social worker promised to take care of us if we stopped everything but he never helped us. We are vexed following up and meeting people who promise us money and never even give us a penny.

But after a little more questioning, and while sharing the problems she and other women faced as Devadasis, Rani shared

.....We feel proud to be known as God's people, but our children and society look down upon us and we feel embarrassed. They look at us like women who had children without a husband. If there was only one man, then it would have been a husband-wife relationship. But when we have sexual relationships with so many others, no one knows who our husband/partner is. While the one dedicated or regular partner is alive, he takes care of us financially, but once he passes away our (Devadasis she knew) issues start.

Problems Faced

Financial Problems. Rani, talking about her financial problems, shared that her first patron actually married her and he took care of her financially. Unfortunately after he passed away, she no longer had financial stability. She currently has another patron who supports her financially, but he is not married to her and he has a wife and children. Rani mentioned that the Government gives them a nominal amount of money (Rs. 200 or \$3.33) every month as pension, but complains that she was promised a permanent house and agricultural lands along with the monthly pension but never received the house or land.

Rani also talked about two social workers who helped the Devadasis in her area on the condition that the women stopped earning a livelihood through begging, dancing and exchanging sexual favors. Both social workers promised a reliable future for their children and in return they asked Rani and other women in the system to stop dedicating their daughters to the temple. One of the social workers made sure that the grown up children were trained in some sort of job related skills, while she provided school supplies to the younger children attending school. However, after the social worker passed away, no one else continued the good work and all the progress stalled and Rani complains that no one takes care of them now.

Rani shared an experience she had with the social worker, and talked about how great person she was because she let Rani and other Devadasi women sit in her house and ride in her car.

..... She is a very nice person and she even invited us to her house. Whenever we went there, she would first make sure we had something to eat before anything. She also let us stay at her house for almost 2 days. Since our children were there and we wanted to visit them, she made sure we were comfortable when we were there and she also let us go around in her car.

Rani and some of her friends set up a spice producing business and this has been a form of livelihood for them. In spite of the income they have from the spice business and the monthly pension, Rani still complains that no government officials or social workers care for them anymore and do not help them financially.

Stigma. Rani mentioned that her children want to have nothing to do with her due to her association with the Devadasi system and also do not take care of her. She is happy that all her children have moved to Hyderabad (a metropolitan city) for education and jobs but is sad that she does not get to see them or interact with them as frequently as she would like. They do come and visit her occasionally, but she believes they are embarrassed by her.

Rani talked about how being a part of the system was respected and never looked down upon during her generation, and her parents were actually proud that their daughter was dedicated to the temple. But once her children started asking questions and the awareness increased it felt more like a taboo. She says that more often than not she is embarrassed to share her life story with any of her children or her grandchildren. She thinks that she had a miserable life because of a decision her parents made and she

would never wish this upon anyone. She shared that she feels depressed, lonely, and sometimes even questions her existence.

At the conclusion of the interview I asked her to talk a little bit about the change she wants to see for this system and for herself in the future, when she shared

..... We do not like being referred to as *Jogini*. We were dedicated in the name of God and instead of calling *people of God*, they refer to us as *Jogini*. They treat us like we are useless and of no value. *Jogini* actually means *sister*, but they do not treat us or respect us like that at all. They now use the word *Jogini* as a way to insult us and we do not like being called that or treated that way. If you can please do help our children, grandchildren and us. Some of our children do not have a livelihood. They are not educated, so they do not have jobs. We are doing our best to educate our grandchildren.

VEENA'S STORY

I met Veena at her house just like Rani. Veena is not married and lived with her parents. After the death of her parents, she started living with her brother's family. She said she does not know her birth date and she guessed her age for us.

Initiation into the Devadasi System. She shared her story saying she was dedicated to the temple when she was a child. She thinks she was dedicated to the temple due to two reasons. The first reason she mentioned was her father's health. Her dad got chicken pox and was dying due to lack of proper treatment. So Veena's paternal

grandmother and elders in the family vowed to the God in their temple that if Veena's dad would survive the chicken pox, they would dedicate his first born daughter to the temple. Veena's life as a Devadasi was decided for her even before she was born. Veena has three siblings - two younger brothers and one younger sister. She lives with one of her brothers now.

Veena also mentioned that her aunt was a part of the system and her family also wanted to dedicate someone else to the temple on her behalf. She thinks that her father's health and family custom are both the reasons that led to her being dedicated to the temple by her family.

..... Apparently my dad's sister was a part of this system as well, but she died. They made me a part of this system on her behalf and I decided not to dedicate anyone else from my family into the system after me. My aunt's daughter and mom were Joginis as well, but they all died.

Veena's description of the wedding ceremony was similar to what Rani shared. There was a wedding canopy and Pothuraju was present to "tie the knot" signifying marriage.

Responsibilities as a Devadasi. Begging was an integral part of Veena's life as a Devadasi. She also worked as a manual laborer on others' agricultural lands for additional income. Veena was also involved in some rituals at the temple called *Posham*, where she danced and sang along with other Devadasis. Once Veena's brothers grew more aware of the system, they did not want her to

dance or beg in the village anymore. She now lives with her brothers who have promised to take care of her.

Sexual Relationships. Veena mentioned that there were 11 other Devadasi women along with her in the village and that no one mistreated them. Veena mentioned that she has no children and that she decided to remain celibate. Having sexual relationships with multiple men is looked down upon and is considered a taboo. In all my interviews, the participants initially denied any kind of sexual involvement with multiple partners. However, as the interview progressed and the trust level increased, they shared their sexual involvement with multiple partners, but Veena stood firm on her word throughout the interview in terms of her sexual relationships. She is the only participant who said that she remained celibate and had no sexual partners. However, she did mention that there were other Devadasis in her village who had sexual relationships, but she did not.

She mentioned that as a Devadasi one is married to God and should not have sexual relationships with anyone else, though she acknowledges that many other Devadasi women do have sexual relationships and children. Sharing her viewpoint about the system Veena says

.....We decided to end it and not practice it anymore. We were dedicated to the temple when we were children, and we were not old enough or mature enough to have an opinion. We were not that aware of what it was at all till we got ourselves completely into it. Now it does not matter whether we like it or not. They would not get us married as we

were married to God, so we stayed back at home with our parents, brothers and their families. Nobody should lead a lonely life in the name of God. We need to feed ourselves on manual labor, we need to go begging for alms and this just ruins the respect. I have no hard or soft feelings towards the system.

Problems Faced by Devadasi Women

Loneliness. Veena continued to share some of the hardships that she had to face as a Devadasi. A major problem she discussed was that Devadasi women needed to support themselves financially either by begging or by working in the agricultural fields. A married woman has her husband to depend on for providing financially for the family, but a Devadasi has to depend on herself. Veena however mentioned that she got lucky because her brothers help her out and provide for her financially. Staying at home as housewives and taking care of household chores is seen as a norm and the most respectable life for women especially in rural parts. While some women still worked they enjoyed having the luxury of a two people income family. This perception seems to be the basis of Veena's concern about having to earn their own living as Devadasi women.

Veena, however did not talk much about financial hardships she had to face as a Devadasi. When compared to other Devadasi women, Veena had the financial capital as her brothers are taking care of her needs and she does not need to work to support

herself. Thus begging, dancing or singing at the rituals were not her primary form of livelihood.

RITA'S STORY

I met Rita through an NGO in Mahabubnagar and had a chance to interact with her before the interview. She came across as a person with a lot of courage and self-confidence. Rita told me that she had always been a difficult child for her parents and was constantly questioning everything around her. While her association with NGOs and other social workers helped improve her leadership skills, she thinks that it is all the troubles she witnessed growing up that instilled in her, the strength to stand up against a whole system. She is currently training several other Devadasi women to take up leadership roles after her.

Initiation into the Devadasi System. She is 40 years old and was dedicated to the temple when she was a child just like others. Rita was in 6th grade when her family decided to dedicate her to the temple. Her family made the decision as a custom they believed in. It disturbed Rita that her family dedicated her to the temple in spite of the plight of other Devadasi women in the village. Two of the older Devadasis had mental breakdowns due to the physical abuse they experienced. One of the Devadasis lived in Rita's house as she was a relative of the family. Rita was surprised, frightened, and angry at her family's decision but she could not stand up to them as she was really young and dependent on her family.

While Rita was not completely aware of what it meant to be a part of the system, she did get some information from other Devadasis in the village. Rita was not new to the system as two of her cousins were already part of the system. While Rita could not stand up against the system she chose the way her marriage ceremony is conducted and who would ‘tie the knot’ during her marriage. Rita mentioned that in her village, as a part of the wedding ceremony, the girl being initiated into the system has to wear a *saree* made of Neem leaves and go around a holy tree or the temple, three times. Rita did not want to go through the elaborate procedure and did not want *Pothuraju* “tying the knot”, so she chose the way her initiation ceremony was conducted. She did not wear a saree made of neem leaves at her wedding and instead of the *Pothuraju*, it was her uncle who “tied the knot.”

..... And when I said I did not want that kind of wedding, they offered to marry me off into the system in the easiest way, through marriage to my uncle. The decision was already taken. I could only choose the path into it. So the wedding ceremony happened and I became a Devadasi.

Rita went ahead explaining the Devadasi system in general and how it affects the women’s lives due to different reasons but in similar ways. She started with sharing the different reasons why a girl child is dedicated to the temple. If a family is having difficulty marrying off a girl, her parents want to absolve themselves of the female child’s responsibility while being able to show her some kind of livelihood for her future. So they dedicate the girl child to the temple, hoping she would have some form of livelihood through begging and would have children of her own with someone who

can support her when she herself is old. The other reason Rita mentioned is that when a family does not have a male child, they dedicate their female child as she would stay with her parents along with her children throughout her life and take care of her parents until their death. Summing it up, Rita indicated that absence of a heir, tradition, and poverty are the top three reasons families dedicate their female child to the temple.

Rita said that in the past girls were married and initiated into the system at a very young age of 7 – 9 years, but now they wait until the girl has reached puberty. A typical wedding ceremony costs around Rs. 50,000 (\$826.24), and when families cannot afford the expenses, they borrow the money to conduct the ceremony. The *Pothuraju*, or male participants in the wedding ceremony, in Mahabubnagar are called *Baindla*. Rita explained that the person “tying the knot” does not always have to be a *Pothuraju* or *Baindla*. Sometimes it is done by a priest, or another Devadasi women or a male cousin of the Devadasi.

Responsibilities as a Devadasi. After the marriage ceremony, the girl is taught the rituals and responsibilities that she needs to live by for the rest of her life. As a Devadasi woman, she is expected to go begging every Friday and Tuesday. Whenever, a person in the village passes away, the Devadasi needs to be present at the funeral and she fasts the whole day. It is believed that the soul of a dead person would be at peace and in a better place. Though she is not explicitly told about the sexual relations, it is expected of a Devadasi to have sexual relations with men in the village.

Rita talked about an annual festival that happens to celebrate good harvest in the village. She mentioned that a Devadasi needs to carry a holy pot, in which rice is cooked, all around the village before taking it to the temple. This marks the beginning of the festival. She says that though she can describe the rituals at the festival, one can only understand the significance of the festival, by watching it in person. In her own words she described the festival

..... It's the usual things. Praying for our safety, offering *kumkum* (sacred red powder) and turmeric powder, serving the rice we cooked, promising to do it again if we are bestowed with a good harvest and, promising hens and goats as offerings, promising special prayers each time there's a wedding in the village and stuff like that.

According to Rita, though the three systems - Jogini, Mathamma, Devadasi - all fall under the same umbrella, there are slight variations in practices. A Devadasi is expected to live all her life in the temple, while in the Jogini or Mathamma system the woman can stay at her parent's house. Similarly the dances and rituals at the temple are different depending on the location. The rituals after the death of a Devadasi are different in Nizamabad and Mahabubnagar.

..... In Nizamabad, they dance upon somebody's death, in the presence of the corpse. In Mahabubnagar, the corpse is wedded once again. Let's say I'm a Jogini (Devadasi), and I die. Then a ceremony for my marriage is performed once again exactly the way it was done during my initiation. But this time the ceremony is done with my corpse. Just the way it was

done before, with new clothes for the bride (corpse) and the bridesmaid and all members of the ceremony. That's justice to her duty, and like a form of remuneration for so many years of service, and for sleeping with so many people. That is when she is truly united with the Goddess. That is the belief and the reason behind marrying her off again after death. It's all a superstition.

Sexual Relationships. Rita mentioned that with the help of a pimp she went to Bombay (also known as Mumbai). She thought that if she was going to be abused sexually as a Devadasi, she would rather have it in her terms, which is not possible in the village. This was the reason she left to Bombay, but after she went there she realized that she could not cope with many customs that hang over prostitutes in Bombay. She came back to the village and started standing up against some of the practices of Devadasi system.

Around the same time, the government, in an attempt to curb the Devadasi system, offered to provide housing to all the Devadasis in Rita's area who could prove that they were in fact a part of the system. All the Devadasi women in Rita's area had to wait in a line for their turn to explain their life, and their experiences in an attempt to prove that they are a part of the system. Sharing their experiences and stories was the only way as there was no physical or documented evidence supporting their dedication to the temple. Rita recalled the painful experience of having to relive all the horrors she had experienced in order to qualify for the benefits as

..... There would always be a line and I was scared. So scared, that sometimes I would consider having no benefits rather than having to repeat all that I went through to them.

Talking about the current plight of Devadasis and the troubles they face, Rita shared that Devadasis get taunted by people almost every day, saying they are a Devadasi and that they sleep around with strangers. She added that people outside the system think that Devadasi women earn a lot of money through sexual favors, but she does not agree with that. All a Devadasi ever gets from a sexual relationship are children and, at best, a couple hundred rupees, which is not a lot in the current inflated market. She talked about her own experience saying, she never received anything substantial from a sexual relationship and neither did she hear of any other Devadasi women receiving anything. If the claims of earning a lot of money through prostitution are true for a Devadasi, Rita feels that there would be no poverty, homelessness or hunger deaths in their community.

Problems Faced by Devadasi Women. Rita feels that no one ever questioned this system at its origins 2000 years back when it was made to look all good and desirable. She says that if anyone would have questioned the system then, it would not have ruined the lives of so many women now. She describes the current plight of Devadasis saying

..... People can see the Devadasis everywhere. In temples, on pavements, under trees, mostly destitute. And we are supposed to be goddesses. Who can call us goddesses? Do we look/live like one? A

goddess needs to be fed till she dies, not die of hunger. Who would call a Devadasi a goddess, or the wife of God? You've seen Nizamabad, haven't you? There's not much difference between them and us. People do not have the courage to move out of the system and feel helpless. They either resort to begging or die of hunger. And people, in spite of all this, get more girls into the system. We fight so many people, and yet this is the result.

Rita lamented having to struggle to be able to qualify for a loan, as Devadasi women cannot show proof of income, property or anything to be issued the loan against. She says that government should have different requirements to sanction a loan for Devadasi women, as they cannot afford to even apply for a loan with the current requirements. Rita recalled an instance where they did actually make the money enough to set up a spice mill at home that would help make and sell spice. But the henchmen of the village head came and destroyed it and the group of Devadasi women who set up the mill had to incur huge financial losses.

Rita further added that to top all of this there are still cases of untouchability where the Devadasi women are not allowed into some temples or into the wedding houses where they are invited to dance and bless the couple. AIDS, Rita says, is another big problem among women in this community due to unsafe sex.

Rita, though a Devadasi, decided to garner her courage and stand against the system. She worked closely with the NGO's helping Devadasi women and got a lot of exposure. She garnered the courage in herself to stand up against the system and is in the

process of training other women to stand up as well. So most of her interview revolved around problems of the system in general, and what changes would help curb the system in the long term.

Rita complained about how most of the government interventions and policies do not help curb the problem but are only aimed at addressing the symptoms. Government passed a rule in the name of *Jogini Act*, according to which the wedding ceremony initiating a Devadasi into the system is illegal and if caught or someone complains, the Devadasi, her family and the *Pothuraju*, *Baindla* or the lady priest involved in the ceremony would be arrested. Rita argues that arresting these poor people who are in the lowest ladder of the food chain would not help solve the problem. She feels that the Act needs to be made more robust to curb the systems and structure enabling the Devadasi system. Similarly she shared her dissatisfaction over a scheme named *Jeevan Jyothi* which provides money to Devadasis; Rita argued that they should rather be taught skills to help with a permanent form of livelihood than mere financial assistance.

..... Earlier, the *Joginis* received money individually and it was used for personal, immediate gains like weddings and stuff. The money didn't serve its intended purpose but the *Jogini's* didn't have a choice too because that was probably their only shot at getting their children married. If the 10,000 rupees from the '*Jeevan Jyothi*' scheme were not spent, the daughter would never be married. Can she raise so much money by begging on Tuesdays and Saturdays? One of the *Joginis* spent

it on getting a small hut for herself, something she could call her own.

She just put a couple of asbestos sheets on old walls.

Rita feels strongly about the practices and beliefs of the system. She argues that women are brainwashed since their childhood. So they are really frightened to stand up against the system as they are frightened that God or Goddess would punish them and also do not have the confidence or courage to stand up against the oligarchs in the village. For many of the Devadasi women, this system is their only form of livelihood and this is one of the biggest reasons stopping them from coming out of the system.

FOCUS GROUP NIZAMABAD (NFG)

I went to a small village in Nizamabad, where only the Devadasi and Pothuraju families lived in a small section of the village. The whole community sat down to talk and they wanted all their opinions heard rather than a couple individual interviews.

There were around 30 women and 10 men in the group. We sat under a tree in the village in front of a small temple and after the formal introductions, we started talking about the Devadasi system.

Though there were so many Devadasi women present, they mentioned that all their stories are very similar to one another. They wanted all their voices to be represented as one and in case of an intervention or financial help, no one wanted to be left out. This may have been one of the reasons they preferred focus group interviews over individual interviews.

Initiation into the Devadasi System. The women were dedicated to the temple by their parents and grandparents when they were children and are not completely aware of the system. A couple of them shared reasons such as health of a family member, customs, and poverty. For instance one of them discussed that when she was born, her mother did not have breast milk to feed her children. Since her mother and those she knew were not educated or aware of other options available for feeding an infant, they vowed to dedicate the girl child to the temple if the Goddess blessed the mother with breast milk to feed her children.

Giving a little context into the system, participants said that people in the village celebrate a small festival, sacrifice a goat to the God/Goddess, and vow to dedicate their first born female child to the temple if they are blessed with prosperity and good fortune. A part of the vow is that the female child dedicated to the temple would not marry anyone else. Every time something good happened, it further reinforced this belief in people. Once the daughter reached puberty, they celebrate a marriage ceremony signifying the initiation of the female child into the system. The participants of NFG shared a metaphorical example

.....I will give you a small comparison. When a cow is sick and people think that it may die, they dedicate it to Lord Rama or Hanuma. They pray to God asking Him to save the cow and in return they vow to dedicate the cow to the temple. People believe that this would heal the cow, and they also get the cow treated for the illness. If the cow survives, from then the cow is left to the temple. How it applies to ladies in this

system is that, if they get sick when they are children, and when parents think that the child may not survive, they offer her to the God saying, “we will leave this child on your name, she doesn’t need to get married, and she will be like you, like a Jogini”.

Once the dedicated girl child reaches puberty, she is initiated into the system through a wedding ceremony. *Pothuraju*, ties the ceremonial thread to the Devadasi as a part of the ceremony thus signifying her marriage with the Goddess. All the women were too young to understand what was going on and some of them shared that they innocently enjoyed all the attention they received during the wedding ceremony. As these women are married to God, they are never widowed and considered auspicious (*Muthaiduvu*) all their lives.

The participants explained that many of them were dedicated even before they were born and some right after they were born, especially if they were born weak or unhealthy. They mentioned that there is another reason girl children, especially in the present are being dedicated to the temple. Since people in the village believe that dedicating girl child to the temple ensures prosperity to the village, some of the people with power and money in the village force families in the community to dedicate their girl children to the temple. They do not want to stop the system as it does not affect them directly and they also want to have someone dedicated to serve their pleasure. Participants expressed concern that if they stood up against the people in power in the village, those powerful individuals have the ability to make the participant’s lives miserable by asking them leave the village or hurting their means of livelihood.

Responsibilities as a Devadasi. Devadasi women, from the group went begging to every house in the village, and some of the villagers gave the Devadasis money or uncooked rice or other stuff to eat. Devadasis are invited to dance at weddings and also when someone in the village dies. During the annual festivals, Devadasis play a major role, where they dance and sing during some of the rituals in the festival. Dances that Devadasis are expected to be a part of after sunset are on the vulgar side and villagers watching the dance throw money at the dancing women. Participants mentioned that the money they earn from being a part of all the above activities is their means of living.

During the annual festival, some of the Devadasi women go into a trance-like state and people believe that when this happens it is God possessing the person's body and communicating through the person. Many others from adjacent villages attend the festival to witness this and listen to God speaking through a person. However, the women at the NFG, acknowledged that this is only a psychological thing and God actually does not take over the person's body. They mentioned that this is done to keep attracting people to the festival and to keep the belief going. They also shared that this is an expectation that comes along with being a Devadasi.

Women in NFG mentioned that, as a Devadasi, having sexual relationships with men in the village is expected. In most of the cases, Devadasi women lose their virginity to the village head, or the priest or a person in power in the village. It is expected of a Devadasi to satisfy her male patrons in the village and is more often than not treated as a property of the village.

Sexual Relationships. When asked about the principle of staying celibate and not marrying anyone, the women in the focus group started laughing and shared that having sexual relationships is compulsory as a Devadasi. They shared that it started on the first day of their wedding. Since they are not married to one particular person, according to the custom anyone from the village can have sexual relationships with Devadasi women. NFG women mention that though they do believe in God, one of the reasons this system is being sustained through force is because the men in the village can have someone for their pleasure.

Women mentioned having multiple partners, but sometimes if there is a regular patron willing to support them financially, they stick to that person. Most often than not the patron is someone who is married and has another family. However, Devadasi women feel that even life as a mistress or live-in relationship with one person is far better than having to sleep with a new person every night. While having a patron helps a lot, it sometimes contributes to the problem. If the patron decides to leave or dies, the Devadasi woman is back to where she has started. However the women mentioned being thankful for the life they currently have as they have seen other women go through a lot worse.

.....There are women who stooped down to lower levels and lived a very disrespectful life. They have lost a lot, suffered and died. But we have children and grandchildren for which we need to be thankful and happy. At least in some aspects of life we have been happy. But we do not have

even a small piece of property to show or pass on to their sons and daughters.

Problems faced by Devadasi Women. The women in NFG shared a lot of problems that they face in their everyday lives. I categorized them into three broader categories of financial problems, stigma attached to the system, and social structures and power. I present each of the problem categories the group discussed in the order listed.

Financial Problems. Participants of NFG explained that they face a lot of financial problems which is one of the biggest drivers to them staying in the system. They rely on the system for their livelihood and they need money not just to survive but to be able to educate their children and get them married. They mentioned that begging, dancing at different events and the annual festival is the biggest chunk of their earnings, while manual labor on agricultural fields provides them with supplemental income. They feel that since the place they are staying is a small village even the money they earn through begging and dancing is not as much as it would have been in a city or a town.

.... This is not a city to be able to make money or earn if you are left in the name of God. We cannot earn anything. Everybody in this village is poor, and there is no way we can earn much. This is a backward area and there aren't any big temples here. If *Joginis* go begging here, we do not get much because people living in the area are poor as well.

The women seemed to be more concerned about the future of their children than they were concerned about their own lives. They did do their best in educating their

children, but their children are haunted by the problem of unemployment. Without a job, it makes it even more difficult for them to get their children married.

The women mentioned that there was a social worker who worked for them and promised to educate their children and provide for them if the Devadasis promised to stop practicing the system. The Devadasis did trust in her and they stayed away from the system. The social worker did educate their children and trained some of them in job skills, but after she died no one from her NGO, stood up to continue her good work. This made it even worse for the women as they did not want to go back to the system and they lost their financial support as well.

Some of the women mentioned that they work in a tobacco factory near their village. Their work in the factory pays them Rs.200 (\$3.24) per day and most of it is used up to make the ends meet. They use the meager amount they save for the education, and marriage expenses of their children. The financial help they received once from government and the small loans they have acquired were used up as dowry or wedding expenses. They could not afford to take a chance and invest the money as it would not guarantee any return and if they incur losses, their children would still be unmarried. Adding health care issues to this already dire situation makes it even worse for the women.

.....Two sticks are always stronger than one. It is like we are dead, though we are alive. That is how much it hurts us and how much we go through. Today we are sharing all of it with you. Even if it is a blind or handicapped person, if the husband/ or male partner is alive it is a lot

supportive. If the wife is sick, he will at least be able to bring her some food and vice-versa. But if you are alone and sick, and your children do not stay with you, there is nobody to take care. Who would spend such time or money to take care of us? That is how it is.

Stigma. In addition to the financial hardships faced by Devadasis, they also face a lot of problems due to the stigma and taboo attached to the system. While they are expected to have multiple sexual partners, this is still looked down upon.

.....If anyone disrespects a woman or lady in the village, her husband or the man she is courting would stand up for her. But as women in this system we do not have anyone who would stand up for us whenever someone passes a snide remark or troubles us. This further adds to the disrespectful treatment we receive.

NFG women mentioned that many villagers pass derogatory comments and since they are not physically stronger than men to fight with them, they just walk away quietly, though it hurts them a lot. They mentioned that even the word “*Jogini* (Devadasi)” is used in a derogatory sense to insult these women.

Dancing, begging and multiple sexual partners before having children, was painful, but the women said that they could still live with it. They said that they have accepted their fate and just moved on with life. But as their children grew up and became more aware of the system, it made it even more difficult for the women to continue. They felt embarrassed and ashamed to face their children or talk to them about what they do.

.....Being born to a Devadasi, all our children are born with the stigma. Even though they are educated, we have a hard time getting them married. Even if they find someone they like, no family wants to have anything to do with a Devadasi family. If it is a son, no one wants their daughter married into a Devadasi family and if it is a daughter, no one wants to welcome a Devadasi's daughter into their family. They feel that Devadasi is a tag they lived all their lives with and they do not want their children facing similar problems due to this identity. Though we want to change and are coming out of it, this is a mark or identity that is stuck with us, since we were children. It is a tag people attach to us and do not let go, no matter what. The ones who are already a part of this system need to drown. Once all of us die, we hope that the tags, taboo and the system will drown with us.

Social Structures and Power. The third problem NFG women discussed is the pressure they face from powerful people in the village. This is a tradition that has been in place for thousands of years and the village elders do not want to stop it now. While the Devadasi women do believe in God, they do not think God would punish or bless the village based on whether there are female children being dedicated to the temple. However these women do not think they have the authority or power to stand up against these powerful men and survive in the village. As they cannot move to a city or town to find their own livelihood, they feel that they are stuck in the village. In order to survive

in the village, these women succumb to the pressure from the village elders and keep the system alive.

The women shared an example of an incident that happened in the village which further reinforced the power of the village oligarchs.

.....There was a bull here which was 12 years old. It was really strong and was attacking everyone who came close to it or tried to tie the bull down. 500 people could not tackle it and it killed a couple of them. The village head men and elders brought strong people from outside who were finally able to tackle the bull and sacrifice it. This incident itself shows how strong the village elders can be.

The women mentioned that while some of the powerful men in the village still live in the village, most of them have migrated to metropolitan cities, but come back to the village during the time of the festival. They spend almost 3 to 4 lakhs (\$4868 to \$6490) on this festival. Devadasi women are compensated well for taking part in the festival in terms of money, new clothes, and food.

FOCUS GROUP MAHABUBNAGAR (MFG)

I met the group of women from Mahabubnagar through Rita. She is from the same village as them and now is currently leading them to stand up against the system. Since the women have been actively standing up against the system, the village elders have threatened to hurt them physically if they continue their movement. The women were frightened that the village henchmen would hurt us if we met together in the

village. So we met in another village, adjacent to theirs. Rita joined the interview late, but she was present for the second half of the interview.

Initiation into the Devadasi System. The women in MFG shared different reasons for being initiated into the Devadasi system. One woman shared that her parents died when she and her sister were small children. There was nobody to take care of them and their grandmother was their only guardian. Since their grandmother could not take care of them, the woman's uncles and other relatives in the family decided to dedicate both the daughters to the temple.

.....They thought that if we were *Joginis*, we could live at some temple and care for ourselves and our grandmother too. So we were married off at the temple when we were around 6-7 years old.

Another woman mentioned that some girls are dedicated to the temple when the family does not have any male children. Traditionally the female child is married and sent away to live with her in-laws, while the male child stays with his parents and takes care of them when they are old. In the absence of a male child, the parents dedicate their female child to the temple, so that she can stay with them and take care of them when they are old. But if she is married to another person, she might not be able to provide for her parents or take care of them due to constraints from her husband and in-laws. One of the women shared that she was 5 years old when her parents dedicated her to the temple and lack of a male child was the reason her parents made her a Devadasi.

Continuing the family tree is one of the reasons mentioned by women in MFG. When a girl is married off into another family, she takes on the family name of her

husband and that is passed on to their children as well. People take pride in their family name and want it to be passed down from one generation to the next. When a girl is made a Devadasi, she keeps her parent's family name which is passed on to her children. So, when a family does not have a male offspring they dedicate their female child to the temple in a hope to pass on their family name to the next generation. Though anyone can become a Devadasi, the women mentioned that all of the Devadasis in their village are from lower castes like Dalit, SC, ST and BC.

Describing the wedding ceremony, the women mentioned that a saree made of Neem leaves is made specifically for the Devadasi. The girl being initiated drapes the saree and is required to perform certain rituals during the wedding ceremony. The women indicated that there are two customs *Puttam Kattadam* and *Tharam Ekkadam*. In *Puttam Kattam*, the girl who is to become a Devadasi needs to walk around the idol of the God naked. In *Tharam Ekkadam*, every Devadasi needs to find her replacement before she dies. According to the participants these practices have decreased by 50% now when compared to the time they were children.

Some women in the interview said that they are called *Baswinis*. They are bound by the same rituals and responsibilities as Devadasis, but the only difference is that they are married off to male Gods as opposed to female Goddesses. They mentioned that this is the only difference between the two systems and they follow the same life style as the Devadasis.

Responsibilities as a Devadasi. As a Devadasi, a woman needs to fulfill her responsibilities by taking part in different activities. The women explained that they need

to participate in all the activities in order to obtain salvation. The women need to go begging for alms in the village every Tuesday and Friday. They also need to fast all day when anyone in the village passes away. Devadasis also play an important role at all the weddings in the village.

..... We play a vital role in all the weddings in the village. We need to visit the wedding with all our equipment, like sketches, pots and other stuff. The weddings, in any caste, cannot take place without our visit. The bride and the groom then walk around the pots and the sketch.

The women also play a critical role in the fairs. There are around 100 fairs that take place in and around the village. New Devadasis are also initiated into the in these fairs. During these fairs many people from nearby villages visit the temple and seek blessings from God/Goddess in the temple and the Devadasis. Devadasis during the fair go into a trance-like state and people believe that this state is an indication of God possessing the bodies of the Devadasi women. In the trance-like state, many people touch the feet of the Devadasi women and seek their blessing.

Sexual Responsibilities. The women mentioned that as Devadasis they are expected to have sexual relationships with men in the village. They mentioned that due to multiple sexual relationships, most of them have more than 3 to 4 children and suffer from sexually transmitted diseases. One of the women mentioned that she chose to have a tubal ligation, so she can be sterile. However, she attributes her back pain to the operation and does not trust the doctors performing the procedures. She mentioned that after her experience, no other Devadasi women ever got herself operated.

The women in the MFG mentioned that they do not mind having sexual relationships with a male partner even if they are not married, but they do not like having sexual relationships with strangers and multiple partners. They shared that most of the men who sleep with them do not pay them anything and treat them disrespectfully. Some of them do pay them and some buy them some food and alcoholic drinks.

.....Many a time we are asked to be happy with the fact that they at least gave us children. “Your parents made you a *Jogini* because they had no choice. I at least gave you the children, be happy”, another tells us.

Problems Faced by Devadasi Women. The women in NFG shared many problems they face in their everyday life. I could categorize them into financial problems, stigma, and societal structure and power. Each of the categories is discussed in the rest of the section.

Financial Problems. The women mentioned that they face a lot of financial problems. Their only means of livelihood is from the system, which makes it difficult for them to fight the system. The women mentioned that they have spent all they earned in educating their children and in feeding a family of as many as five children. They are sad that none of their children want to take care of them now and sometimes their children abuse them. One of the women in the MFG shared an experience of her friend in the group.

..... She has 5 children, two of them sons and they left her after they got married. One of the sons even assaulted her just before we came here and she was out there crying. We had to console her and bring her here.

The women further shared that giving birth to children and making sure they stay healthy costs them a lot more than they can afford. They mentioned that from the time of conception, until the baby is born it costs them approximately Rs.50, 000 (\$830.43). The women shared that they must take out a loan just to make ends meet and cannot pay back the loan.

Stigma. Apart from financial problems, the women mentioned that they face a lot of problems due to the social stigma attached to the Devadasi system. The participants shared that everyone in the village wants to take advantage of a Devadasi, especially because she does not have anyone to stand up for her.

..... Even if a married woman were to sleep around with a 100 people, she could probably get away with it. But if a *Jogini* has even one partner, she's branded as a prostitute. There probably was some respect a few decades ago but we are nothing but prostitutes these days.

Social Structures and Power. Lastly the women shared about how societal structures and power affect their lives. The first experience they shared was when we met in a village away from their own village. As the women and some NGOs are fighting against the system, most of the initiations are being done secretly. So one of the Devadasi women who found out about an initiation, informed Rita about it and Rita brought in NGOs , media and cops to help stop the initiation. While they successfully stopped the initiation, the village elders physically hurt the woman who informed Rita and the woman has not gone back to the village after that.

..... She was suspected of informing on them, and she was boycotted completely. They accused her of being responsible for not letting the weddings happen, abused her and even attacked her. They are the reason why the practice is mostly invisible.

Another incident they shared is that recently they managed to save some money and loaned the remaining to set up a spice powder mill, so they do not have to rely on the system for livelihood. They spent Rs. 10, 000 (\$166.09), finished construction and were ready to start installing and using the mill. The henchmen came and destroyed the whole mill.

..... Recently we tried to start a Chilli powder mill and we were assaulted. We were stripped of our sarees and all the construction was destroyed.

FOCUS GROUP TIRUPATI (TFG)

I met seven Devadasi women in Tirupati through an NGO working on child labor issues in the same area. The women preferred to meet me at the NGO where I conducted the interview.

Initiation into the Devadasi System. The women in TFG mentioned that they were all dedicated to the temple when they were around 2-3 years old. They mentioned that their parents dedicated them to the temple for different reasons. Mostly they said that dedicating the girl child was custom that has been in practice for a long time and their parents wanted to keep the practice alive. One of them mentioned that she was

seriously ill when she was one year old and she recovered after her parents vowed to dedicate her to the temple. The participants mentioned that their ancestors believed in God more than they believed in going to doctors for medical help. Sometimes parents could not afford the cost of health care and preferred leaving the burden on God.

..... Our parents did this because it is a custom and a deeply rooted tradition in our caste. Some do it due to superstitions and beliefs. People from higher caste, make sure that there is at least one *Mathamma* per village. They brainwash people from lower caste in the name of God, customs & traditions and get us to dedicate our daughters to the temple. There is also an incident where the girl child was diagnosed with a heart problem. Since she is a female child, parents did not want to spend a lot on the child's treatment and conveniently dedicated her in the name of God. They did the same thing with a deaf & dumb girl as well. But they do not do the same thing with a male child.

Responsibilities of a Devadasi. The participants shared that, as a Devadasi, they need to be present at the annual festival known as *Koluvu*. The festival is conducted for 6 months at a stretch and covers 10-5 villages surrounding their own village. The Devadasi women dance during these festivals. They mentioned that during the day everyone at the festival respects them and touches their feet for blessings, but once the sun sets, the women are forced to perform vulgar dances and have sex.

..... During the ritual in the morning, all the villagers touch our feet and get our blessings irrespective of the caste, village and area. They believe

that a *Mathamma* cleans them and their houses from sins. But once the sunsets, everyman eyes us with an intention of sleeping with us.

The women mentioned that they dance at the festivals due to the force from the villagers and the fear of God. Since they are dedicated in the name of God, they believe that they have to live by all the principles. One of the women shared her experience saying that her health deteriorated and her live-in partner met with an accident after she stopped dancing at the festivals. But once she went back to dancing and performing all the responsibilities as a Devadasi, her life resumed normalcy.

Most of the women in the TFG have live-in relationships with men who are married and have another family. The women mentioned that this is the closest they can come to having a family, as they are not allowed to be married. They shared that if they were to get married, the husband would die as it is against the principles of being a Devadasi.

..... He is not exactly my husband. We used to live together. He asked me not to go and just live together with him. I did that and then had many issues, but when I went back to dancing at the temple, everything became normal.

Sexual Relationships. The women mentioned that as a Devadasi, they are treated as the property of the village and every man in the village wants to have sex with them. However, the women also shared that the amount of money they earn by going to the festivals and for sexual favors helps them make ends meet and educate their children.

They also added that they do not mind having sexual relationships with men outside marriage, if the person is willing to take care of them in the long-term.

..... We do not mind having a relationship with a man without marriage, if he takes care of us properly. But they only care until we sleep with them and when they feel like it. After that we are left to our fate and every man in the village feels like they have a right on us. They treat us like an animal sacrificed to God.

They mentioned that once a girl is a Devadasi, it is expected of her to have physical relationships with men in the village. The participants mentioned that in their village the village head puts a necklace made of black beads on the girl being initiated into the system and the girl has to sleep with him. After that whenever she is at a ritual whoever (except her brother and father) puts the black bead necklace around her neck can have sex with her.

..... The worst part of it is that she (the *Mathamma*) needs to live with the person till he wants to and when he no more wants to live with her she is left for herself. She does not have a say in this. Recently a 65 year old man tied the necklace to a 14 year old girl. She has no choice but to live with the person as long as he is alive, or until he no longer wants to live with her. We had to fight a lot to stop her from living with that old man. Even the policemen do not help us in this aspect. They just supported the old man saying that the lady is a *Mathamma* and that she needs to adhere to the customs.

Problems faced by Devadasi Women. Women in TFG also shared a lot of problems that they face in their everyday lives. I categorized them into financial problems, social stigma, and societal structures and power.

Financial Problems. The women mentioned that they face a lot of problems financially and that is one of the biggest reasons they are not able to come out of the system. The money they earn from manual labor is nominal and cannot help ends meet. But the money they earn from dancing at the rituals and exchanging sexual favors helps them with all basic expenditure and for the education of their children.

The women described that even for a janitorial job the employers are looking for a minimal level of education. Additionally, the employers also expect bribes, which the women cannot afford. Moving to a town or city comes with additional costs of housing which would not help financially. The women mentioned that they would have the option of staying away from the system only when they can have a steady income from a different source.

..... When people from higher castes have a serious problem in hand they do come to the temple and dedicate their daughters to the God, praying for relief from the problem. Dalits (Lower caste) do the same as well. But, girls from higher caste have the financial and social capital. So the girls from higher castes dedicated to the temple are only named after the Goddess, come to the temple once a year to offer their prayers and lead a normal life. However it does not happen the same way for women from

Dalit castes because they do not have any financial or social background and can be easily exploited by the villagers.

Stigma. The second category of problems the women shared was social stigma. They mentioned that they face a lot of problems due to the stigma surrounding a Devadasi. The women shared that people in the village do not refer to them with their real names. Instead, they are all referred to as “Devadasis.” They mentioned that their children are referred to as “Devadasi’s sons and daughters” as well.

..... The other problem is people do not call us by our names. We are just called *Mathammas*. Most of them don’t even know our names, making it even difficult for us to come out of the system. They refer to our children in the same way as well. We do not want this to become our or our children’s identity.

The women mentioned that no one in the village wants to be associated with the Devadasis as they felt that it would tarnish them as well. This makes it difficult for them to find jobs at organizations or in houses as maids. They shared that they wanted to apply for group loans which would help them set up a small business, but they could not find enough number of people to be qualified for the group loan. No one in the village wanted to have Devadasis in their group as they did want to be associated with the Devadasi system.

Social Structures and Power. The third category of problems the women shared is related to societal structures and power. They indicated that there is a lot of pressure from the villagers, especially from higher caste men, to make sure there is at least one

Devadasi per temple. They further shared that a Devadasi is forced to have sexual relationships with men in the village and she is forced to leave the village if she does not succumb.

There was a lady, a *Mathamma*, who did not have any place to live. So she started living under the tree in front of the temple with her 3 children. There were so many men in the village who offered to help her if she agreed to sleep with them. When she refused, they asked her to leave the village and said she cannot stay in the village if she doesn't exchange sexual favors, as that is a custom of a *Mathamma*. One night she was forced to have sex with one of the villagers. They did not care that her children were present either.

THEMES

Many themes have emerged from the analysis of the data. The emergent themes help relay a better understanding of the nuances in the life of a Devadasi. These themes also help highlight the root problem behind the continuation of the system. Data illustrates the challenges faced by Devadasi women and the external and internal struggles they go through to fight and come out of the system.

The themes that were identified in the data are illustrated below in table 3 and are discussed in detail in this section. The theme *Dichotomy* explains the conflict Devadasi women go through. While they want to stay away from the system, it is their only means of livelihood. Theme *Identity* illustrates the extent to which the status of Devadasi is

turned into an identity. These women are referred to as Devadasis and not with their real names. The theme *Status* talks about how being a Devadasi gives a kind of an elevated status to these women when compared to their status socially as they are women (gender) belonging to the lowest caste communities, sometimes even treated as untouchables. *Fear* alludes to the fear of losing what they have and the fear of unknown that the Devadasi women face in their everyday lives. The final theme *Locus of Control* talks about the feeling of helplessness Devadasi women face and as a result look for help and direction from someone outside.

Theme	Core
Dichotomy	Most of the women in the Devadasi system are illiterate and their only livelihood comes from being a part of the system. So though they do not want to be a part of it, they do not see a way out.
Identity	These women are referred to as Devadasi, Jogini or Mathamma and not by their real names.
Status	Devadasi women belong to lower castes and being a woman puts them at double disadvantage in terms of social and cultural status in the society.
Fear	Devadasi women face a constant fear of unknown, fear people in village with more power along with fear of losing what they have.
Locus of Control	Having never made a decision for themselves, Devadasi women live with a feeling of helplessness and are constantly looking to someone else for help.

Table 4: Summary of Themes

Dichotomy. Many of the Devadasi women come from financially and socially downtrodden families. For some of them financial need is a reason they are dedicated to

the temple. Once dedicated to the temple, this becomes their only form of livelihood. Devadasi women mentioned that though they want to come out of the system, financial dependency on the system makes it difficult for them to make the decision to move away from the system and the place they live. This is an inner conflict that Devadasi women mentioned to go through every day in their lives as they cannot afford moving away from the system financially and socially, but in an ideal world where they did not have to worry about the finances, they would be more than happy to walk away. As noted earlier, one of the participants from focus group at Mahabubnagar shared that both her parents died when she was around 6-7 years old. She and her sister did not have anyone to take care of them, and their grandmother and uncles made a decision to dedicate both the female children to the temple. They thought that by dedicating the girl children to the temple, they would stay at their house and take care of the grandmother when she was no longer able to take care of herself, both physically and financially.

Women from MFG mentioned that they worked as laborers in agricultural fields and in tobacco factories to earn Rs.100 (1.65\$) a day. Working in tobacco factories and as manual labor in agricultural fields affected their health and they cannot pay for health care. They mentioned being a part of some government schemes like “Food for Work”, which did not give them enough money for their ends to meet. Hence they turn to the system for their livelihood. Talking about the plight of their children who have been educated, they say that the unemployment rate is really high and most of their children have a hard time finding a job.

Women from the focus group at Tirupati shared the same concern. The mentioned being able to earn around Rs.20,000 (\$330.63) per week, when they go dancing or agree to the sexual favors. They mentioned that the money they earn from menial jobs outside does not even make the ends meet or pay for the schooling of their children. One of the women shared her experience when looking for a job saying

..... I reached out to a person who is in charge of government jobs. I asked him if he could refer me for a janitor job in one of the government institutions. He smirked at me saying I am dreaming big. That is how bad our situation is.

Participants from the Nizamabad focus group shared that they do not have enough money, qualifications or awareness to go out of the village and find a job. To add to that, the village head man has given them an ultimatum that they can live in the village only under the condition that they would be a part of the system. Feeling helpless and in need of a livelihood, they stay with the system though they want to stop it and come out of it. Money buys a roof over the head, food, education, and sometimes even a good marriage proposal for their daughters, which they can only afford if they have a steady form of livelihood.

Participants from Nizamabad shared their experience saying even educated children in their community have a hard time finding jobs and one of the reasons is because they belong to a lower caste.

..... When we talk about our problems, they are not taken seriously and are brushed away saying we belong to lower caste – SC (Scheduled

Castes) and there are all these affirmative action policies to help us get jobs and education. But none of them help us. We attend public schools which are not maintained properly and whatever we learn there is from our own knowledge and hardwork. To get a job or get into college (even using the quota put aside for us) we need to pay a lot of bribes and stuff.

Women from Tirupati focus group shared that if given an opportunity of better or at least equal income, they would come out of the system.

..... We are ready to come out of the system. We just hate it. But this is our only livelihood. If we can find another form of livelihood that is consistent, we would be more than happy to let go and move out of this.

Identity. This was a common theme observed across all the six interviews. All the women in the system are referred to as Devadasi, Jogini or Mathamma depending on the location. They are not referred to with their names. The identity of being a Devadasi has become a part of who they are and it has become their name irrespective of whether they like it or not.

Women from Tirupati mentioned that people do not call them by their real names, and they have been called *Mathamma* since childhood (this is the name of the system in Tirupati). One of the women at the focus group shared an incident where she had difficulty getting her son into a school as he was looked down upon since his mother is a Devadasi.

..... The other problem is people do not call us by our names. We are just called *Mathammas*. Most of them don't even know our names,

making it even difficult for us to come out of the system. They refer to our children in the same way as well. They call them *Mathamma's* son or daughter, and that is how they recognize them. We do not want this to become our or our children's identity.

Women in all the interviews mentioned that they are doing all they can to make sure that their children are not forced into the system. However, there are other families who are still dedicating their children to the temple, though they have witnessed all the problems the current Devadasis have gone through. While these women cannot control that, they want to make sure that their own children are not identified with the system and that their children can lead a life free of stigma and taboo, which in itself seems to be a big dream for them.

Women from Tirupati also shared an experience where their identity as a Devadasi is costing them their chance at getting a group loan to be able to set up a steady business. A government bank started a scheme where it was sanctioning mini-loans for a group of women who want to set up a small business as their form of livelihood. However, the requirement was that there must be a minimum of 10 women in the group and that all 10 women need to be living in a particular zone. Unfortunately all the Devadasis could not make one group as they all did not live in the same zone and those who did were less than 10. No other group in the village was willing to take them in due to their identity as a Devadasi and no one wanted to have anything to do with the women.

..... Nobody's wants to be seen with us or identified with us, as being a *Mathamma* is a stigma in the village. There is a Dalit woman (who is not a *Mathamma*). She was diagnosed HIV^{+ve} and since that is a stigma as well, nobody was willing to have her in their group for the financing. So we offered her to be a part of our group. But the stigma against us is so strong that in spite of that she faced, she did not want to be identified with us. No matter how respectfully we live, people just brand us to be prostitutes, assume that we have a lot of sexual relations and do not respect us. Even other women in the community don't treat us well, leave alone men in the community.

Participants from Nizamabad shared similar experiences where they have difficulty finding daughters-in law and sons-in-law for marriages as no one wants to have ties with a Devadasi family. They shared that in spite of the education, their children still are being identified as a part of the system and are having difficulty moving away from the taboo. As "Devadasi" has been a tag that they have been tied to since their childhood, they do not think it is going to leave them till their death. However, they wish that this identity would not haunt their children.

..... Daughters of *Joginis* have similar problems. No one wants to bring in a girl who is from a *Jogini's* family or whose mother is a Jogini. There are many instances where the in-laws and the groom like the girl but are reluctant for the marriage just because the girl's mom is a Jogini. Not knowing who the father is, makes it more difficult.

Status. 90% of the Devadasi women belong to castes which are placed in the lowest rungs of the social ladder in India. They come from different lower castes like Dalit, SC, ST and BC. People from these castes, irrespective of their association with the Devadasi system, still face a lot of discrimination based on their castes. In some villages people from these castes are still (to this day) treated as untouchables. Rita shared an example where she was discriminated because of her caste while talking about her distaste towards untouchability.

.....It has always been there, especially in the rural areas. Thankfully we at least breathe the same air and drink the same water, use the same infrastructure. I wonder how it would've been if one could even separate and allocate air but we are probably lucky we derive them all from nature. Untouchability is everywhere. When I started doing this, we weren't even allowed to meet in public places. And one time, another *Jogini* and I went to worship and offer a coconut at a temple and the whole temple was destroyed because we entered it. We enter only the local temples that we are dedicated to like the *Ellamma, Pochamma and Muthyalamma* temple which is for the *Dalits*. Other temples like that of Lord *Hanuma*, and other Gods are off limits.

However, Devadasi women during the time of the annual festival are treated like Goddesses, where everyone touches their feet to get their blessing and most of the ritual revolves around them. All these women have seen discrimination and taunts due to their caste and gender. In spite of all the discrimination they face as a Devadasi this is a status

that provides them with a better position in the society compared to their status due to caste and gender. People respect them during festivals, their presence is considered auspicious at weddings and deaths and even after their own death their corpse is treated with utmost respect. This makes it difficult for these women to let go of this status and move on especially as it is internalized as an identity and provides them with a status that they otherwise would not have.

During the focus group at Mahabubnagar one of the participants shared a story where one of the women wears a lock on her face by making holes to the cheeks. They claimed that it is the miracle of the Goddess that not even a drop of blood is spilled when making holes on the cheeks and that the wound heals and scars go away even when these holes are drilled every year. They claimed that they have no idea how they are able to do it and it is all God's miracle. I knew that they were not telling me the whole truth and no matter how much I pushed for the truth they would tell me.

I met the focus group in Mahabubnagar through Rita, as she is their leader and is fighting against the system for them. She joined the focus group interview an hour later and when the same issue came up again she looked at the women in the group and assured them that it is okay to tell the truth and that is what they should be doing. So they shared the actual trick behind the lock

..... It's a clip system Mrudula. I could put it even to your mouth. But who knows this? You do and I do but for everybody else, it's a miracle. And who even keeps their eyes open? It's only these gimmicks that cause the people to believe that we're possessed by the goddess. People actually

pray to us in person. A lot of people show up only to see the lock on the Jogini's mouth who is supposed to be the goddess. Even the biggest of the officers gets on the ground to offer prayers to these women. If the secret is out, I'm just another woman.

Women from the Tirupati focus group shared a similar story, where many people during the rituals believe that the Goddess actually possess the body of the Devadasi. This is the time when the Devadasi goes into a trance, starts giving instructions and directions to people as the word of God and dances to the beat of devotional music. They slowly shared that it is just a psychological thing and most of the times a Devadasi women in trance is just a show to gravitate people towards God. They went ahead and shared how a Devadasi gets treated with respect and like a Goddess at the time of the festival in the day and how at night she is again looked at as only a sexual being.

.....During the ritual in the morning, all the villagers touch their feet and get their blessings irrespective of the caste, village and area. They believe that a Mathamma cleans their houses and them from their sins. But once the sunsets, everyman eyes the Mathamma with an intention of sleeping with her.

Fear. Devadasi women are frightened and worried at the thought of coming out of the system in spite of all the problems they face by being in the system. Their fear stems from different factors like religious conviction, village henchmen, fear of losing their livelihood, identity, and status. While the fear of losing identity and status is

evident from the previous themes, in this theme I looked deeper into the fear of God and the village henchmen.

Women from the Tirupati focus group talked about their dislike towards the system and how much their lives were ruined for being a part of the system. They said that they would not dedicate their daughters to the system, though they cannot stop other families from dedicating their daughters. So my obvious question as an outsider was to ask them why they are still with the system and why they have not moved out. They shared two major reasons out of which one is livelihood, which was discussed earlier. The other reason they mentioned is that God would punish them if they walked away from the system as they were already dedicated. One of the women went ahead and shared her experience when she tried to come out of the system

..... My health got spoiled for a long time and this is because I did not do what I ought to do. Because of not being a perfect Mathamma, I almost had to beg. When I went back to doing it all right, I could earn some money and I could survive. Even my husband got ill. He is not exactly my husband. We used to live together. Now he is fine. He asked me not to go and just live together with him. I did that and then had many issues, but when I went back to dancing at the temple, everything became normal.

All the other women in the focus group agreed to this and one of them shared her experience saying that she was almost dead for three days before she was taken to the temple when she was a toddler. After being dedicated to the temple, she miraculously

recovered. These women also believe that they are not supposed to marry anyone as they are Devadasis. They are okay with a live-in relationship, but do not dare to get married as they believe that the husband would die if he is married to them.

Women from Nizamabad and Mahabubnagar, shared their fear of the village head's henchmen and also the fear of leaving a village they were in all their lives and going to a town or city without a guaranteed job and steady income. They shared that if they left the system and village, which would put them in bad books of the village head and might burn bridges to their current form of livelihood. To top it off, if the job in the town or city does not pan out, they would have more difficulty coming back to their old livelihood.

Women from the Nizamabad focus group talked about their fear of unknown in more detail. They shared an experience where some of the government officials, media and social workers promised to provide them with a steady income and good livelihood if they exited the system. But unfortunately, after the Devadasi women decided to stay away from the system, the sources that promised to support them never panned out. This incident only helped reinforce their fear of losing what they have for something they do not know or have yet.

They also shared that unless they live by the system, they cannot live in the village as the oligarchs in the village would not let them.

.....Since this has been a tradition being followed in the village for thousands of years, people do not want to change it now. The head people of the village also believe that the village would be prosperous only if this

ritual is being done and the Goddess is being pleased. If someone comes and asks to stop the festival or ritual, it is not going to happen. It does not matter if it is a village or a metropolitan city, this ritual and this custom will be kept alive and not stopped. There are men in power (in the village), they just want someone to have pleasure with and demanded and forced these women to dedicate their children as well because these women are Joginis and there has to be someone to replace them. “Your children should live the same way you did, so make them Joginis as well” was what they argued. If I stop doing this, elders or powerful in the village will force my family to leave the town, saying they will find someone to replace us if we are not interested. They do not want us to stay in the village if we do not want to be a part of this system.

Women from Mahabubnagar focus group shared similar fears. Rita mentioned that most of the initiation marriages are conducted secretly as people want to keep it as much under the wraps as possible. We had to conduct the interview for the focus group in a different village as they were frightened that the village henchmen would attack us if they saw them talking to me about the system. During the focus group interview the women shared couple of instances where they are abused and attacked for trying to come out of the system and stop an initiation ceremony. One of the women passed on information to Rita or NGO’s working with them about a secret initiation ceremony that was taking place in the village. When the village head men found out that she passed on

the information, they chased her down and abused her. Sharing a similar incident they mentioned

..... There was this 50 year old man, who married a 18 year old girl and left her to sleep with the village and she has ended up bearing the children of complete strangers. And when we tried to get her out, he comes with a group of people to assault us. It's the surreptitious political support that let's these people get away. Not one leader can openly speak in favor of the system and so what they do is that they encourage people like Narsimlu to assault us and ensure them of protection later. It's all a part of the vote-bank politics.

Locus of Control. The last theme identified from the data is the Locus of Control. Devadasi women, since their childhood, do not have the decision making power even about their own lives. They do not get to choose the life they want to live, pick the person they want to have a relationship with, pick the father of their child or the way they earn a livelihood. All the choices and decisions have been made for them irrespective of their opinion leaving them with a feeling of helplessness and the need to depend on someone else for making decisions for them. This again is one of the similarities observed across all the interviews except in the interview with Rita.

Women from Mahabubnagar talked about all the financial troubles they face and when I asked them to talk about an appropriate solution for themselves or what they want the change to be, they simply said that they do not know and it is up to me to make that decision for them.

.....What can we do now Mrudula? We've lived through most of our lives like we do now and we are almost done. All we can offer is unskilled labor, that too, if we are healthy enough or just survive. You tell me Mrudula. What do you mean when you speak about change, what kinds of change do you see for us?

Participants with the Nizamabad focus group shared their good experience and regard for the social worker, who helped them financially and helped educate their children. However, they complain that after her death there was no one else to take care of them and they are left to fend for themselves. They took their plea for help a step further saying they would regard me as their God and be indebted to me all their lives, if I can show them and their children a steady form of livelihood.

..... Our children are educated and some of us are educated as well. We would be eternally grateful if you can help us or show a way to set up a business or get a job to support our livelihood. We do not know where you came from and what you can do, but we are ready to trust in you and follow you if you can help us out of this situation. You came from this far, give us a small hope and help us out. You will have place here and people here to welcome you whenever you come here. If you do not trust us and think that we are lying, and if you get evidence to support that, don't come back or even help us. We are not getting any kind of help whatsoever, people just use us and are discarding us, but not helping at all.

However, Rita had a different perspective to this and said, Devadasi women are stronger than they think they are and do not need any one's help in fighting for themselves. She says that people interfering creates more issues as most of them are in it for their own selfishness and do not actually care for the good of the Devadasi women. Some throw in some financial help in terms of money and expect everything to change and when it does not change, they blame the Devadasi women for being unwilling to change.

Her exposure to outside world, courage, and leadership skills give her the confidence required to stand up against the system and be able to make decisions for themselves. She argues that while we still need help from the government to fight against the structure, a Devadasi is strong enough to be able to take care of herself, but she does not realize it yet as she is brainwashed all her life to be weak and not to question any of the customs.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to present the voices and understand the lived experiences of Devadasi women from South India (Andhra Pradesh) using a framework of intersectionality and Bourdieu's capital theory. This study makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature as it examines the experiences of Devadasi women from different locations in Andhra Pradesh, using a theoretical framework that has not been explored before in the current context. All the participants shared their experiences within the Devadasi system and talked about their internal conflict between leading life as a Devadasi or living in even greater poverty and struggling to make ends meet. Except Veena, all the participants have children from their multiple sexual encounters and more often than not do not know the father of their children. Participants internalized their experiences as Devadasis and, in spite of their desire to come out of the system, they live in constant fear of repercussions. In addition to the fear of incurring the wrath of powerful men in the village, the Devadasi women also believed that God would punish them if they stop practicing the system or living by the principles set forth for them.

All the participants shared that they would not dedicate their daughters to the temple, but there are many other parents who still practice this system for various reasons like poverty, external pressure from powerful men in the village, and keeping the custom/tradition alive. Since the ban on the system in 1988, along with increased awareness of and movements against the Devadasi system, the participants revealed that the marriage ceremonies conducted to initiate girls into the system are being done

secretly. During her individual interview, Rita shared that the men in the village attacked and tried to physically hurt one of the Devadasi women who informed the NGOs and Rita about a secret initiation. A majority of the participants are illiterate and those who went to school only had a high school degree or less. Experiences like social stigma, financial need, sexual abuse, and fear were discussed by all the participants. However two themes that came up – feelings of helplessness and looking for financial help – were discussed by all participants except Rita, who had a different perspective. She thought that mere financial help would not help the Devadasi women in the long term and, consistent with Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic violence, the feeling of helplessness stems from all their experiences since childhood and the societal structures they grew up in (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In the next section I present a model depicting the relationship and interactions between the various themes that have emerged during data analysis.

Figure 1 represents graphically the process of creation of symbolic violence in the Devadasi community. The model is based on the data collected through interviews with Devadasi women from South India, specifically Nizamabad, Mahabubnagar, and Tirupati. As represented in the model, symbolic violence is created due to the intersections of capital and identity. As mentioned in chapter 4, five themes emerged from the data – dichotomy, identity, status, fear and locus of control. The theme 'status' refers to the participant's intersecting identities as women and as people from lower castes. All the participants are women and belong to lower castes like SC, ST, Dalit, and BC. The themes 'identity' and 'dichotomy' indicate cultural and economic capital

respectively. It is the intersections of these forms of capital that create intersections in statuses, which collectively result in symbolic violence.

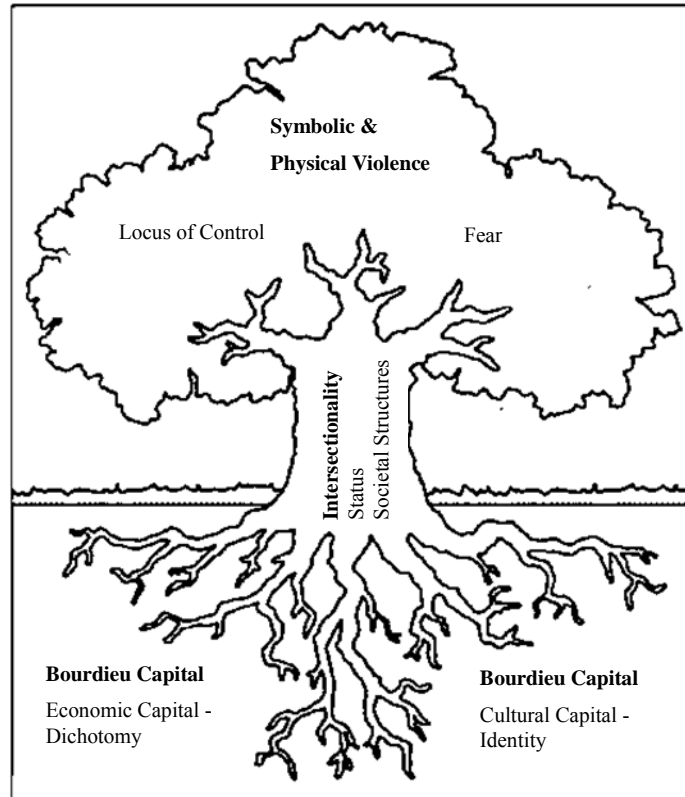


Figure 1: Creating Symbolic Violence Model

The roots of the tree are Bourdieu's capital. These are deeply embedded and hidden structures that support the rest of the system. The branches and trunk are intersectionality. These form the structures on which the leaves that are essential for the sustenance of the system grow. The symbolic and physical violence is represented by the leaves. We 'see' and 'feel' the leaves which are supported by the branches of intersectionality. Leaves also obscure the view of branches and trunk thus making the role played by intersectionality murky and invisible at the surface. The leaves are the manifestations of capital and intersectionality, but they are transient and enacted in

different ways. As long as the system maintains intact, the leaves will continue to return. The existent external factors and societal elements ‘feed’ the system, just like leaves draw the light that feeds the tree.

The symbolic violence enables the reproduction of the practice and sustains it. This is evident from the last two themes, fear and locus of control, which were identified from the data. According to Hlavin & Callahan (2013, p. 202), “the use of capital to maintain dominant positions within a given field results in symbolic violence toward those in less powerful positions.” The capital possessed by individuals in a field determines their position within the field (Topper, 2001). People in dominant positions use the capital to reproduce habitus and use power relations and oppression which result in symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977). The model presented here graphically depicts the role economic and cultural capital play in the current context to create symbolic violence which in turn sustains structures that reproduce habitus in the two fields – caste and gender, thus making it a vicious circle.

Fear and Locus of Control translate to symbolic violence which sustain the system and further contributes to lower capital and intersectionality. In chapter 4, I presented the findings from the data; and in chapter 5, I discussed the findings in more detail using intersectionality and Bourdieu’s capital theory.

CAPITAL

Devadasi women experience all forms of capital, but two forms of capital were most salient - economic capital and cultural capital. These two forms of capital together

create symbolic violence for these women. Bourdieu argues that every society is made of different fields and fields are “social positions structured internally in terms of power relations” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 141). The fields in the current context are gender and caste. Capital defines the position of the fields in the society and the power that members in each of the fields possess. Bourdieu presents that there are three forms of capital – economic, cultural, and social. The amount of economic resources – money, material resources - a person has defines the economic capital. Positions in groups and networks constitute social capital (Turner, 1991). Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu (1984), is inherited through family; it is also known as class which translates to habits, manners, taste etc. People in the various fields struggle to keep their positions and cultural capital plays an important role in legitimizing and reproducing those positions. Different forms of capital reinforce themselves in different ways as sources of power which, according to Bourdieu & Passeron (1979), is symbolic violence.

Economic Capital. All the participants come from economically downtrodden families. Most of them mentioned financial difficulty as being one of the reasons their parents dedicated them to the temple. For all the participants, the money they earned by being a part of the system is their only means of livelihood. Most of the participants were dedicated due to the self-interest of their parents who justify their actions by giving reasons of economic necessity (Rutnin, 1984). Participants shared that, when a daughter is sick, parents do not want to spend the little money they have on her treatment and they resort to God to save their daughter. In return they dedicate their daughter to the temple. However, participants from TFG shared that parents do not do the same in the case of a

male child. Parents look at the money spent on a male child as an investment as he stays with the parents and takes care of them in their old age. On the other hand, a girl child is looked at as an expense as she is married into another family after which she would have many constraints from her in-laws and husband. The dowry system further adds to the problem. A male child brings in dowry money while the parents have to pay dowry to get a girl child married irrespective of her educational qualifications (if any) and her beauty.

Lack of money to make ends meet and educate their children is one of the reasons cited by Devadasi women for going back to the system. Dancing at the festivals and exchanging sexual favors for money is the only means of livelihood for these women and this creates a conflict of choice between the system or poverty and suffering (Muecke, 1992). No one in the village wants to employ a Devadasi due to the stigma attached to the system, and hence the Devadasi women depend on the system for their livelihood. Some of them shared that they work in the agricultural fields and in tobacco factories but the money they earn is nominal and is not sufficient to make ends meet, especially given that they must support themselves *and* their children as the sole earner. Leaving the village to move to a town or city is not an option as the move would come with added living expenses and increased cost of living. In order to live in the village and earn money for their livelihood, the women resort to sexual relationships for money.

As a result of multiple sexual relationships, the women have children whose financial responsibility is on the women. The participants shared that after all that they have suffered, they do not want to do the same mistake as their parents and do not want

to dedicate their children to the temple. Since they do not have any property to pass on to their children, they spend all their earnings in educating their children so they can have a capital that the women did not possess. To a certain extent, different forms of capital can be converted into one another (Turner, 1991). However, lower economic capital can only be converted into academic capital (which is not sufficient to be successful in the current job market).

..... Since we are facing so many problems due to illiteracy, we are educating our kids. We cannot afford private school education, so we send our kids to public schools in spite of the lower educational standards.

Given the low educational qualifications of the children and increased competition in the job market, they have a hard time finding jobs. As discussed in Bourdieu & Passeron (1979), educational institutions are used by dominant and middle class individuals to reproduce capital by constantly creating higher and costlier academic qualifications, thus making lucrative educational qualifications unattainable to the lower castes.

According to Misra & Rao (2002), most of the women in the system belong to lower castes and poor socio-economic backgrounds, forcing them to depend on the rich landlords of the village for sustenance. Individuals with access to more capital use it to control their position in legitimizing beliefs and imposing meanings (Bourdieu, 1977), thus converting economic capital to cultural capital in the current context. In the current study, the landlords use devotion and sustenance (Misra & Rao, 2002), to create both

lower cultural capital for the Devadasi women and also contribute to the symbolic violence.

Cultural Capital. Cultural capital, according to Coleman (1990) is something that is passed on in the family and is crucial for the social development of an individual. The Devadasi women carry the tag as a *Devadasi* not merely as a system that they are a part of but as their actual name. All the participants across the three locations shared that they are not referred to by their actual names but are called *Jogini*, *Mathamma* or *Devadasi* depending on the area. This makes it particularly difficult for the women to detach themselves from the system. Unfortunately this is the identity that is being passed on to their children as well. The women lamented that their children are referred to as Devadasi's daughter or son and expressed their fears that their children might have to carry the tag as well.

Habitus is constructed socially and represents the beliefs and outlook of people in a social space (Lingard & Chrstie, 2003). Individuals in dominant fields use economic capital to create and legitimize meanings that help them preserve the dominant hierarchy of their field (Bourdieu, 1984). Eventually the dominated accept the behavior as normal and become accomplices to their own oppression (Hlavin & Callahan, 2013). In the current context, the belief that is a factor in sustaining the system is that the village would be prosperous and villagers blessed only if there is at least one Devadasi per temple. Village elders use this belief to necessitate the presence of the system and sustain it as a meaningful practice. The participants shared that some of the Devadasi women with female children are forced by village elders to dedicate the female child as

well. They argue that a Devadasi's child should be a Devadasi and it takes a lot of support, strength, and capital to stand up against the pressure. Participants from NFG shared that they have a practice called *Tharam Ekkadam* where the Devadasi is supposed to find her replacement before she ages or dies. Thus, the system is perpetuated and sustained through various methods, and using practices like *Tharam Ekkadam* is one of the examples.

According to Aiello & Thurlow (2006, p.159), "The cross-cultural communicative power of the visual renders images and other nonlinguistic representations key sites of intercultural and ideological exchange." Visual discourse is often used to negotiate, naturalize and consolidate cultural meanings, identities and narratives (Hall, 1997). The visceral perceptibility of visuals makes them easily recognizable and thus perpetuates shared meaning across fields in the society. The Devadasi women further shared that they are supposed to wear a necklace made of sea shells around their neck. Wearing the necklace is a visual representation that a woman belongs to the Devadasi system. Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu (1986) exists in three forms – embodied state (long-lasting dispositions of mind); objectified state (cultural goods); and institutionalized state. The necklace made of sea shells worn by Devadasis is an indication of this objectified cultural capital. The participants shared that they are embarrassed to wear the necklace around as people treat and look at them differently.

..... We are supposed to wear a necklace made of sea shells (guvvala danda). But we are so conscious about wearing it around, that we just

have one seashell attached to our chain and hide it in our clothes. Just like how we hide the necklace which defines this *Mathamma* (Devadasi) community, we try to hide our identities as well. When we go to a shop or to a market, everyone including women from other castes look at us differently. How much of it can we ignore? It hurts a lot.

The stigma and disrespect these women face from outsiders is countered by the camaraderie they receive from other Devadasi women in the community. This absence of a social support system outside the Devadasi community further pushes the women to be a part of the system and makes it difficult for them to exit it.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality was coined by Crenshaw, in reference to intersecting identities like gender, race, class, etc. (Crenshaw, 1994). This study specifically focuses on the intersections of gender and caste within the Indian context. Caste is a social institution that has existed in the Indian society for centuries (Jeffrey, 2001). Although it has declined as a religiously sanctioned system, caste still plays an important role in political identity and in creating social capital and symbolic violence. 95% of the women who are a part of the Devadasi system belong to lower castes like SC, ST, Dalit, and BC. People from these caste categories are also treated as untouchable in rural parts of India. For the purposes of this study, I will refer to the above mentioned four categories of caste as lower castes.

Men from lower castes face many problems as well, but the Devadasi system is unique to women who belong to lower castes. The participants mentioned that women from higher castes are dedicated to the temple as well, but they do not depend on the system for a form of livelihood. Also given their social status due to the caste they belong to, they are not forced to offer sexual favors.

..... Girls from higher castes dedicated to the temple are only named after the Goddess, come to the temple once a year to offer their prayers and lead a normal life. However it does not happen the same way for women from lower castes because we do not have any financial or social background and can be easily exploited by the villagers.

Thus, it is evident that to completely understand the structural system responsible for the sustenance of the Devadasi system, it is important to look at caste and gender as different but overlapping fields of dominance (Fuller, 1977). Before data collection, I was looking at different venues that would help me identify my research participants. I came across a group of women who taught a Devadasi form of dance on the internet. While I could not interview the women for the current study, I did have an opportunity to talk to one of them over phone. The woman shared her experience saying her grandmother was a Devadasi, but her family decided not to dedicate any more girls to the system and with the help of her uncle who was a successful businessman, her mother (after the death of her grandmother) relocated to a different state and led a life away from the Devadasi system. However, as the respondent grew up, she shared that she could sense an underlying discrimination and judgment towards her from her social

group. It was after this experience that she confronted her parents, who explained that her grandmother was a Devadasi and that was the reason for the differential treatment. However, the woman had the financial capital to be able to stay away from the system and instead use her association with the system in a positive way. This example further strengthens the argument that the intersection between the two fields – gender and caste- - and the intersection between the two capitals – financial and social-- both play an equally critical role in creating the experience of a Devadasi.

During the festivals and rituals, Devadasis are treated with utmost importance and respect. Everyone in the village irrespective of their caste, class and gender touch the feet of the Devadasis and seek their blessings. Devadasis are invited to weddings to perform some rituals and bless the couple, as it is perceived as a good omen for the future of the newlyweds. It is during these religious ceremonies that the women transcend the boundaries of gender and caste and enjoy an elevated status as a Devadasi (Belkin, 2008). However, this elevated status lasts only during these religious ceremonies and beyond the ceremonies these women face numerous problems due to their gender and caste status. Thus the identity as a Devadasi for these women is more than just a mere form of livelihood. It brings them the respect and acknowledgment (though short lived) which they otherwise do not have given the positions of their fields in the society. The yearning for this elevated status is another underlying reason for the sustenance of this system.

SYMBOLIC AND PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

According to Bourdieu (1990, p. 135), “symbolic capital is nothing more than economic or cultural capital which is acknowledged and recognized and which then tends to reinforce the power relations which constitute the structure of social space.” Two of the themes, locus of control and fear, which emerged from the data collected for the current study, indicate the conversion of power relations and habitual behaviors of Devadasi women into symbolic capital which plays an important role in sustaining the system. The lack of capital further reinforces the position of the fields in the society. While intersections of gender and caste create the unique experiences as a Devadasi, it is also the intersection of the financial and cultural capitals that create symbolic violence and sustain the system. It is important to understand the underlying social structures and power relations perpetuating the set of behaviors and actions from individuals in a field.

Symbolic violence discussed so far in the current context refers to “a kind of violence, oppression or coercion that is not physical, but is a gentle, invisible violence, unrecognized as such” (Bourdieu, 1990, p.127). However, the theme fear sheds light on physical violence faced by Devadasi women. Symbolic and physical violence are very closely related and according to Bourdieu (2000, p. 172), even simple force “has a symbolic dimension.”

Locus of Control. The Devadasi women were dedicated to the temple in the name of God when they were children and some even before they were born. All the participants mentioned not having a choice in the decision that was made for them by their parents. They accepted the current life as their fate and talked about themselves as

being powerless and helpless to change anything. They felt that the only thing they could control was the dedication of their children and they had decided to educate their children and help them stay away from the system. However, there are families in the community who still dedicate their daughters, making it difficult to curb the system as a whole.

Habitus influences how individuals make and perceive meaning, behave and create belief systems. The outlook and the meaning making process depend a lot on the experiences, history, social and mental structures of an individual (Topper, 2001). “These dispositions are both persistent and deeply embedded, serving as our common sense or seemingly natural responses and personalities,” (Hlavin & Callahan, 2013, p. 203). Some participants shared their helplessness by saying that the only way they can come out of the system is through the help of a powerful outsider. On the other hand some participants gave up hope and lamented that they were given a life which they do not like, but need to live by it till they die as it is their fate and it was decided for them based on the sins from their previous birth. These feelings of helplessness are reinforced by the experiences faced by these women and their perception of these experiences. TFG participants shared that, when they approached an official for a janitorial job in an educational institution, the official looked down upon them and reminded them that they are Devadasis and looking for a janitorial job is above them. Experiences like these leave the women feeling helpless and looking for someone to help them out.

The perception of these experiences plays an important role as well. While all the participants shared being hurt and helpless in experiences like above, Rita shared her

frustration and anger towards the people and societal structure that are the reasons behind experiences like these. It is the internalization and perception of these experiences that create behaviors which lead to continued reproduction of oppression from dominant fields.

The habitus and behavior is deeply rooted and embodied by an individual that the behavior is visible in spite of changes in external social conditions (Topper, 2001). Since their childhood, the women never had the decision making power. They were dedicated to the system as children and did not have a say in the decision. As Devadasis they could not be married and it was expected of them to have sexual relationships with multiple men in the village. The women did not have a say in who they wanted or did not want to have a physical relationship with. From their perspective, they were forced to be a part of the system as long as they wanted to have a form of livelihood and live in the village. It was evident in my interactions with the participants that they were constantly looking for someone from outside to help them financially and to take care of them and the future of their children. They talked about a social worker who helped them and their children in the past, but after her death no one from the social worker's team took responsibility to help them. They felt powerless and are looking for someone to help them and direct them. In spite of the initial help and opportunity to change, the Devadasi women resorted back to the feeling of helplessness as soon as the social worker passed away. One of the participants from NFG shared

.....We do not know where you came from and what you can do, but we are ready to trust in you and follow you if you can help us out of this situation.

Fear. Another theme that emerged from the data analysis is fear. The Devadasi women expressed fear of God and fear of abuse from the village elders as the reasons behind their helplessness to come out of the system. As discussed earlier, Bourdieu developed the concept of *habitus* to define this phenomenon. He argued that habitus generates regular practices, perceptions, and behaviors from people in the field making them accomplices to their own position in the social structure (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). For instance, the women were brainwashed since they were children that, once they are dedicated to the temple, they were required to live by the principles of the system. One of the women from TFG shared that she did try coming out of the system and, as a result, faced a lot of problems. So she returned to the system and all her problems appeared to be solved. Other participants shared similar experiences where they associated bad experiences to punishment from God for not living by the principles of the system or trying to come out of it. Participants from NFG and TFG shared that as Devadasis they are forbidden from marrying anyone else and they shared a couple experiences where the husband of a Devadasi woman had died. They attributed the unfortunate event as a punishment from God for breaking the rules of the system.

Sexual relationships and live-in relationships are acceptable in the system and are expected from a Devadasi. Participants shared that the act of sex or procreation was considered sacred as it helps sustain the human life. The belief that sex is an auspicious activity conducted for sustenance of human life is the foundation for the origin of this principle in the system (Marglin, 1985). Since the act of sex is considered impure and auspicious at the same time and only a Devadasi is free from impurity (due to her

association with God), it is her responsibility to procreate with multiple men irrespective of their caste and class (Young, 2004).

While Bourdieu (2000) presents symbolic violence as gentle and invisible force, he further argues that physical violence also contributes to symbolic violence. Physical violence asserts symbolic authority, through physical use of power by individuals from the dominant class. The interactions between the dominant (village elders) and dominated class (Devadasi women) are based on exercise of physical force or power to reinforce the habitus and dispositions (Kannabiran & Kannabiran, 1991). The Devadasi women shared their fear of village elders during the interviews. The participants of NFG and TFG, shared that they are not allowed to live in the village if they do not practice the system and live by the principles set forth. As noted in Chapter 4, participants from NFG shared an incident where the village elders manifested their power by taming a wild bull using professional henchmen; and participants from MFG shared similar experiences where the henchmen of the village elders destroyed a spice mill and threatened to hurt a woman who informed Rita and other officials about a secret initiation. Incidents like these are a common occurrence village elders resort to humiliation and abuse of the women to manifest their power (BBC, 2014).

CAPITAL, INTERSECTIONALITY AND SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

From the discussions and the data collected it is evident that capital creates symbolic violence, which further creates structures that sustain the intersections of the fields. The current phenomenon can be described as a vicious circle as symbolic

violence is both an outcome of the intersecting fields and capital as well as antecedent to the structures that create and sustain the position of the fields in the Indian societal structure. Gender and caste, when examined in a capital free social space are simple objective fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The fields are autonomous and play different roles in the societal structure. However, it is the capital that people in these fields possess which places them in the top, middle or bottom in the hierarchy of power. Lack of capital creates experiences of symbolic violence which in turn, reproduce the structures that further solidify the position of the fields in the social structure. The intersection of the two disadvantaged fields creates double disadvantage affecting the capital possessed by individuals in the field. Lower capital relates back to experiences of symbolic violence, thus completing the vicious circle which constantly reproduces the effects in spite of changes in the conditions that originated the vicious circle.

Intersectionality theory posits that intersecting social identities play an important role in shaping the experiences of individuals and these intersections taken into consideration in order to completely understand and analyze these unique experiences (Collins, 2000; Shields, 2008). However, in the current study, apart from the intersecting social identities of caste and gender, it is also the intersection of economic and cultural capital that creates the unique experiences of a Devadasi woman. Higher economic capital with lower cultural capital would result in different experiences as discussed earlier in this chapter. Economic capital would ensure low or no dependency on the system for livelihood and it would give the women freedom of mobility in terms of location and additionally help them afford better education for their children. Women

from higher castes with lower economic capital have the cultural and social capital giving them the freedom from sexual objectification and disrespect from village elders. Hence the experiences of Devadasi women in this context are unique and intertwined simultaneously with the intersections of capital and social identity.

Experiences unique to the Devadasi women are manifested as symbolic violence which in turn results in reproduction and habitus, thus supporting the fields of oppression and resulting in continued practice of the Devadasi system. The intersection of two forms of capital and two social identities plays an important role in shaping the perceptions of these women. Subsequently, the findings from the study provide critical and new insights to be considered while developing anti-discrimination policies or designing interventions targeted specifically for the members of this community. Additionally these findings uncover possibilities for new lines and approaches to research which would help deepen our understanding of this topic.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This phenomenological study provides a detailed understanding of the lived experiences of Devadasi women. Examining the experiences using a theoretical framework of intersectionality and Bourdieu's capital theory further help understand and uncover the underlying structural factors perpetuating the system. These findings highlight several implications for practice that can be useful for informing policy decisions as well as helping NGOs and independent social workers develop interventions targeted at the root of the problem rather than at the symptoms.

West (2000), argues that the living conditions and lives of women prostitutes can only be improved with radical transformation addressing the root causes of the problem like economic and social inequities generated by capital. Hence HRD professionals must proceed with utmost caution while designing and implementing interventions by taking into consideration all the implications. Interventions should be targeted at providing alternative livelihood options and moving toward making the current Devadasi system a history rather than attempting to normalize the practice or provide best practices within the system (Storberg-Walker, et.al., 2010).

No.	Category of Implication	Action Recommended
1	Policy & Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislative Initiatives • Affirmative Action policies • Government funded schemes
2	Career Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job Based Skills Training • Schooling and opportunities for higher education • Small Business loans and ideas
3	Leadership Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness/ Educational workshops & campaigns • Self-Help groups

Table 5: Summary of implications for practice

Table 5 above lists several categories of implications along with suggested actions. The remainder of the section discusses the actions and implications in more detail. The implications can be represented in three major categories. The first category addresses the policy and procedural implications for the ruling bodies. The second and

third categories discuss practice implications, specifically career development and leadership development.

With changing definitions and expanding the boundaries of spaces in HRD to include social movements (Callahan, 2013), community and societal development should be considered critical arenas for HRD practice and research. Given the scarcity of studies specifically around women involved in sex work, in the fields of HRD and NHRD, the current study is an attempt to bridge the gap while calling for more research and practice to help alleviate the living conditions of these women (Kuo, Yamnill, & McLean, 2008). The findings from this study provide invaluable information that would help inform the policy, procedural and legislative decisions made by the government, which is the main objective of NHRD (Cho & McLean, 2004).

Legislative Initiatives. The Devadasi Act formulated in the 1980's declared the act of dedicating a female child to the temple as unlawful. However, the practice still exists and female children are still being dedicated to the temple (Chawla, 2002). Rita and participants from TFG lament that this Act was made by officials who do not have a complete understanding of the system. The Act punishes the parents of the girl and the girl being initiated into the system as opposed to the village elders and the people in power who support the village elders. Rita talked extensively about the negative effects of this Act.

..... The government that enacted these laws did not really get the situation and hence it's we who get arrested. The government machinery in that area should be held responsible. The MRO, the village head and

the police are the people who should be arrested. That's what the law should state. But if the law is so framed that we are the ones arrested, it's like giving a free hand to the government machinery to let things remain as they are. Going by the current situation, it looks like the law wants this practice to carry on. A lot of people benefit from this practice

Similar concerns were expressed by participants from TFG. The current Act punishes people directly involved with the initiation ceremony, but does not take into account the underlying societal powers and structures enabling the dedication. Hence officials involved in making legislative rules like these must consider the factors like capital, symbolic violence, and power structures thus attacking the problem at its roots, rather than addressing the symptoms.

Affirmative Action Policies. According to Basu (2006), the affirmative action policies look at discrimination and disadvantage as uni-dimensional concepts and hence do not reach a large sector of underprivileged population in India. Most education institutions in India follow the *quota* system where a percentage of the admissions are reserved to people from lower castes. However, only a very small percentage of these allocated seats are filled by individuals from these lower castes (Sowell, 2004). Due to the lack of financial capital and opportunities, individuals from lower castes often cannot make it to a college degree. However, the affirmative action policies do not take these factors into consideration.

Additionally, the policies are either based on gender or caste but do not take pseudo-caste groups into consideration. Devadasis and hijras (transgendered

individuals), according to Belkin (2008) are within and at the same time transcend the societal caste structures in the Indian society. Caste associations help create networks and result in social capital. However, once identified as a Devadasi, no one in the village wants to be associated with these women due to the stigma surrounding the system. The lack of social and cultural capital affects the educational opportunities of members from the Devadasi community, thus affecting their ability to take advantage of the affirmative action policies. Participants from NFG shared that

..... When we go to the Collector's office and try to explain our problems, they do not even care about us or take us seriously. They think that we are constantly whining in spite of the *quotas* provided to us.

Government Funded Schemes. Participants shared that there are schemes such as Food for Work and Afternoon Meals to help provide a different form of livelihood and educational opportunities for individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds. While these schemes do help address the root of the problem, improper execution and corrupted systems obstruct the schemes from reaching their potential of impact.

..... We are only paid between Rs. 30 (\$0.49) to Rs. 50 (\$0.82), a day. One of my brothers went to find work with a tractor and lost his legs when he fell off. 'Food for work' doesn't work because the government does not pay up on time. The contractors keep telling us that they cannot pay out of their pocket and wait for weeks before the government gives them the money.

These policy and legislative changes, if implemented properly, would help create the support necessary to negate the effects of power and hierarchical structures on this community. However, these legislative changes need to be supported by career development and leadership development interventions to ensure success.

Job-based skills training. Dalavi & Badiger (2012) conducted a statistical case study on Devadasi women in Dharwad, Karnataka, India. She looked specifically at the co-relation between the personal characteristics of Devadasis and their awareness of income generating activities. Her study presented a list of income generating training activities the Devadasis in Karnataka have been involved in. In my interviews with Devadasi women in Andhra Pradesh, less than 5% of the participants were aware of income generating training initiatives and activities. Most of the job-skills based training the participants talked about was for their children whose educational qualifications do not match the requirements of the job market.

Government institutions, NGOs, and social workers should develop structured training initiatives aimed at training the women in income generating activities like candle making, stitch work, incense stick preparation and more depending on the location and availability of resources. Based on studies conducted to look at the impact of similar trainings on the financial capital of women in rural India, Masali (2002) and Patil (2002) concluded that there has been considerable alleviation in the poverty levels of the target groups. Similar programs can be replicated with the current populace, thus providing them with an alternative form of livelihood. Given the constraints with

mobility and travel expenses, providing non-formal training opportunities in the same village would further help improve participation.

Leach (1996) argues that the training initiatives need to be well planned and should take an integrated approach to training. Mere training and education in different skills would not help provide substantial income for these women. Training initiatives need to be planned properly and training provided should be based on the current market requirements and skills that would translate into substantial and steady income. Training in personal and social developmental skills is as important as training in technical skills. Organizations like Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) provide a wholesome approach to training initiatives while also supporting and empowering women by providing them necessary credit for small business initiatives (Datta, 2003).

Many participants said that their children were educated, but were unable to find the right employment opportunity. One of the participants from NFG shared that her daughter is in the process of a nurse training and once it is completed she would start looking for a job. Organizations working with the Devadasi communities must identify institutions that train individuals with a high school degree and above in job-related skills. Creating an opportunity for the children from this community to attend institutions like these, which would later help them with placement opportunities, would help provide steady income for children from this community.

Schooling and opportunities for higher education. All the participants mentioned struggling to convert their economic capital to education for their children. Many of them mentioned being able to send their children to public schools. Initiatives

and programs to make sure these children stay and continue their education are important. Providing them with school supplies, career counseling outside school, and field trips to engineering and medical schools outside their village, are some of the initiatives that can help motivate children and help them stay in school. This would in turn help improve their employability factor thus giving them an opportunity to stay away from the system.

However, most of the women I interviewed did not have more than high school education. Some of them mentioned this being an obstacle for them in obtaining janitorial jobs in government offices and in educational institutions. Initiatives like night or weekly schools, and providing resources to help women obtain high school degrees through vocational education opportunities would immensely help the women by improving their employability factor. This would also help instill confidence in themselves and provide them the necessary financial independence from the system.

Small Business Loans and Ideas. Participants from MFG talked about applying for loans and setting up a spice mill to help create an alternative form of livelihood outside the Devadasi system. However, the village elders destroyed the mill and the women had to incur heavy losses. On the other hand women from TFG shared that they could not get loans to set up small businesses which would help them financially. Multiple initiatives can help provide better opportunities. NGOs can work with banks to provide loans to Devadasi women using lenient requirements. Women groups like *Mahila Mandals* and SEWA help provide credit to women from low socio-economic

background helping them set up income generating businesses and providing them with necessary support through training and market based research (Datta, 2003).

..... 18 of us Joginis applied for loans and not one was chosen. Who'll come forward to secure the bank guarantees for us? How and why would someone trust us? We told the same to the District Collector and he told us that all our 18 caste/income certificates are useless, and that we wasted a lot of our time chasing useless officers. Unless we have a separate fund marked for us, things might not really change.

Moser (1991) argued that income generating projects for women have not been completely successful as they are mostly aimed at increasing the productivity and help women generate income only as supplemental to man's income. Hence, these projects need to be designed with an objective of providing a main source of income along with aiding to improve the social status. Only then can the projects play a critical role in creating the financial capital necessary to break the vicious circle of symbolic violence. Income generating projects like paper recycling, vending housewares (Rose, 1992), and production of cleaning products (Dalavi & Badigar, 2012), are some of the examples of income generating projects that can help create substantial income for these women while empowering them to tackle their problems without having to look for financial help.

Government led initiatives like The Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) provide loans and self-employment opportunities for women from lower socio-economic backgrounds. They provide financial help to women in

groups of 10-15 to set up income generating businesses (Nanavaty, 1994). The number of people required to qualify for the loan makes it difficult for Devadasi women to apply for loans like these. Thus government led initiatives like DWCRA and others should take into consideration pseudo-castes groups and communities with intersecting identities.

While all the initiatives discussed above would help address the problem of financial capital, and help empower women by creating confidence in themselves, leadership development initiatives are necessary to help provide the moral support and to give the women needed strength and courage to find their voice and stand up against the social structures.

Awareness/ Educational workshops & campaigns. As a part of the leadership initiatives, NGOs and social workers must conduct numerous educational and awareness campaigns. The campaigns and workshops should aim at bringing the Devadasi community together while providing them with necessary information to help them further. Access to information helps challenge the superstitions and beliefs held by Devadasi women and would further aid in helping them come out of the system (Nikolova, 2009). Information provided can range from various government initiatives available for these women to education on safe sex and sexually transmitted diseases. Campaigns and workshops like these would help provide an arena for the women to share their experiences, create in them a sense of camaraderie, while providing them with necessary information. The location and timing of these workshops should be well thought out, to enable maximum participation and involvement.

Participants from MFG mentioned that, if not for Rita, their condition would have been much worse and they are really thankful for all the work she has been doing for them. Self-taught leaders like Rita are rare and not many Devadasi women are fortunate enough to have people like Rita among them. Workshops like these can be used as training platforms to provide leadership training to other women in the community.

Self-help groups. According to Ebaugh (1988), coming out of the system and being able to stay away is easier with a support group as opposed to doing it alone. Participation at the awareness workshops would help create networking opportunities. Additionally, creating local self-help groups would help create a sense of belonging and provide moral support in times of difficulty. According to a study, working in collective groups was associated with increased awareness and reduced sexually transmitted diseases.

Initiatives discussed above, when implemented efficiently and effectively would help address the problem at its roots. Many participants during the interviews mentioned that they did receive monetary help from different sources. Rita expressed her disapproval towards monetary help. She argued that the Devadasi women have many urgent needs that can be addressed using money. However, using the monetary help to address those needs would only benefit in the short-term and would do more harm to Devadasi women in the long run.

..... There are people who've made it with 1000 bucks. And we've seen people fail with a 100,000. What one needs is the know-how. There was

this NGO, a foreign group that spent Rs. 3 lakhs (\$ 4934) on a village. They knew nothing about the village and did not consult us or the locals before sending the money into the system. This leaves a bad taste about us to the NGOs and we suffer these consequences as well.

Most of the participants were previously approached by media and other political leaders. The women have learned the right discourse required to get them the financial help necessary to help them immediately. They were not aware of the long-term harm this discourse was causing. All my interviews except with Rita's had women using the same discourse with me as well. This creates a negative stigma around the system for an outsider as they look at the women as opportunists trying to get financial help and to spend the money. Additionally the women are used to receiving financial help from outside, thus making it an expectation for them. This further feeds into reproducing the habit of creating a discourse for financial help and feeling helpless when they do not receive it, thus contributing to symbolic violence. While financial help is required, interventions need to be holistic in their approach and include all or at least most of the elements discussed in this section. Monetary help without appropriate training and business initiatives would cause more harm than good to the community.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study reveals several lines of future research related to the current context. The new possibilities of research seek to explore the different theoretical and

structural factors influencing symbolic violence in various contexts. Table 5 summarizes a list of avenues for future research possibilities.

No.	Suggestions for Future Research
1	What kind of problems do men from this community face?
2	Expand the research to explore the experiences of women in other States of India
3	Explore the effects of intersectionality between other social identities
4	Examine deeper into the interconnectedness of intersectionality and Bourdieu's capital
5	Extend the research to include younger Devadasi women

Table 6: Suggestions for future research summary

Experiences of men in the community. During the NFG interview, men from the community were present at the interview as well. As discussed in chapter 4, the men who play a part in the system are called *Pothurajus*. Men from the system shared their experiences of discrimination and force from the village elders. However, given the scope of the current study I could not delve more into the details. Compared to women in the system, men enjoy considerable privileges. However, some of the male participants in NFG shared their dissatisfaction over the attention given to the problems faced by women and complete disregard for the problems faced by men from the community. Given the absence of literature on the experiences of men in this system, examining those experiences would help address this gap in literature.

Explore experiences of women from other States in India. Given resource constraints like time and funding, along with availability and willingness of participants, I could interview women only from three locations in India, specifically Andhrapradesh. While the themes in the data collected became repetitive indicating data saturation

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985), exploring the experiences of women in other States of India and more locations in Andhra Pradesh, would help uncover any unidentified themes and experiences.

Explore the effects of intersectionality between other forms of social identity.

The current study looks specifically at intersections between gender and caste, so future studies looking at various other intersections is warranted. Exploring intersections between other factors like gender, class, and geographic location would make a valuable contribution to literature. The effects of these factors and their intersections on capital and symbolic violence would have valuable implications for practice and research.

Examine deeper into the interconnectedness of intersectionality and

Bourdieu's capital. The theory of intersectionality examines the effect of intersections between different social identities at the individual level. The theory further explores the effect of these intersections on the perceptions of individuals experiencing the intersections. Bourdieu's theory of field and habitus and the discourse on capital examines structures and power relations at a collectivistic level. It is evident from the current study that intersections between different forms of capital create unique experiences as well. Thus extensive theoretical exploration examining the interconnectedness of these two theories is important.

Extend the research to include younger Devadasi women. All the participants interviewed for the current study are over 40 years old. Though the system is currently active I could not get access to any younger Devadasi women. One younger woman I identified in the temple was reluctant to talk to me and the temple authorities further

stonewalled me when I tried getting access to her. The legal ban on the system might be one of the reasons behind the difficulty in access to younger Devadasi women. Future research focused on younger Devadasi women would help shed light on the experiences of these women and how age, legal policies and other external factors influence their perceptions and experiences.

CONCLUSION

The process of creation of symbolic violence is unique for every context and is based on the experiences of the individuals involved in the process. Various factors like intersection between social identities, capital and interaction between the fields and habitus have contributed to the creation of symbolic violence. This study contributes to the literature in many ways.

This study includes a unique set of participants whose experiences have not been captured and examined using intersectionality and Bourdieu, thus contributing to literature. The study gives voice to a populace which has not been represented in the literature and was considered almost non-existent while designing developmental projects or affirmative action like policies by the governments (Symington, 2004).

Another contribution to literature is that the experiences of Devadasi women have not been explored in terms of the intersections of caste and gender in the context of Bourdieu's capital theory. Examining the experiences using the current theoretical framework helped address the underlying power structures sustaining and reproducing the practice. These findings would help better inform decisions while developing

frameworks, policies, and projects for individuals at these intersections who are often times excluded from research as outliers.

The research suggests that developmental projects and policies designed based on weak theoretical frameworks, deeply rooted and corrupted hierarchical social structures, and a male dominated and governed society are some of the major reasons for discrimination (Singh, 2010). A framework grounded in research that is bottom up as opposed to a top down approach, is needed to address the problem of oppression due to gender and caste intersections in the Indian society.

While the above mentioned interventions and implications for practice and research would help reduce the number of Devadasi women and also help alleviate the living conditions of the populace, the question regarding the sustenance of the system still exists. An opinion shared by a majority of the participants is that the Devadasi system cannot be eliminated and would take many years before it is completely obliterated. A system that is being sustained to serve the selfish needs of men from higher castes in the name of religion should be abolished in its entirety. While interventions suggested hope for better living conditions for Devadasi women, a greater change in the outlook and perception of people is required to end the system.

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APPENDIX A

**Texas A&M University
Division of Research - Office of Research Compliance and Biosafety**

750 Agronomy Road, Suite 2701
1186 TAMU, College Station,
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Tel. 979.458.1467
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APPROVAL DATE:	04/11/2013
MEMORANDUM	
TO:	Jia Wang
	TAMU - College Of Education - Educational Adm & Human Resource Develop
FROM:	Dr. James Fluckey Chair
	Institutional Review Board
SUBJECT:	Submission Response for Initial Review Submission Form Approval

Protocol Number:	IRB2013-0228
Title:	Challenging the Devadasi System from a Framework of Intersectionality
Review Type:	Expedite
Approved:	04/11/2013
Continuing Review Due:	02/28/2014
Expiration Date:	03/31/2014
Review Categories and Regulatory Determinations:	Category 6: Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes Category 7: Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies
Documents Reviewed and Approved:	IRB Application; Consent Form (version 1.2); Proposal; Recruitment Script; Interview guide
Document of Consent:	Written consent in accordance with 45 CF

	46.116/ 21 CFR 50.27
Waiver of Consent:	Partial waiver/alteration approved 46.116(c) or (d)

This research project has been approved. As principal investigator, you assume the following responsibilities

1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed by the expiration date in order to continue with the research project. A Continuing Review application along with required documents must be submitted by the continuing review deadline. Failure to do so may result in processing delays, study termination, and/or loss of funding.
2. **Completion Report:** Upon completion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a Completion Report must be submitted to the IRB.
3. **Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events:** Unanticipated problems and adverse events must be reported to the IRB immediately.
4. **Reports of Potential Non-compliance:** Potential non-compliance, including deviations from protocol and violations, must be reported to the IRB office immediately.
5. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an Amendment to the IRB for review. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented.
6. **Consent Forms:** When using a consent form or information sheet, you must use the IRB stamped approved version. Please log into iRIS to download your stamped approved version of the consenting instruments. If you are unable to locate the stamped version in iRIS, please contact the office.
7. **Audit:** Your protocol may be subject to audit by the Human Subjects Post Approval Monitor. During the life of the study please review and document study progress using the PI self-assessment found on the RCB website as a method of preparation for the potential audit. Investigators are responsible for maintaining complete and accurate study records and making them available for inspection. Investigators are encouraged to request a pre-initiation site visit with the Post Approval Monitor. These visits are designed to help ensure that all necessary documents are approved and in order prior to initiating the study and to help investigators maintain compliance.
8. **Recruitment:** All approved recruitment materials will be stamped electronically by the HSPP staff and available for download from iRIS. These IRB-stamped approved documents from iRIS must be used for recruitment. For materials that are distributed to potential participants electronically and for which you can only feasibly use the approved text rather than the stamped document, the study's IRB Protocol number, approval date, and expiration dates must be included in the following format: TAMU IRB#20XX-XXXX Approved: XX/XX/XXXX Expiration Date: XX/XX/XXXX.

The Office of Research Compliance and Biosafety is conducting a brief survey for the purpose of programmatic enhancements. Click here to take survey or copy and paste in a browser https://tamu.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1CgOkLNU45QebvT

This electronic document provides notification of the review results by the Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX B

IRB NUMBER: IRB2013-0228 IRB APPROVAL DATE: 04/11/2013 IRB
EXPIRATION DATE: 03/31/2014

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM CONSENT FORM

Project Title: **Challenging the Devadasi System from a Framework of Intersectionality**

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Mrudula Anne, a researcher from Texas A&M University. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits you normally would have.

Why Is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of women who are part of the Devadasi system and critically examine the underlying structures of discrimination through the framework of intersectionality and social capital. This study mainly focuses on gender minorities in India, who also are further discriminated due to their caste, thus revealing multiple identities of women who face different types of discrimination due to their converging identities.

Why Am I Being Asked To Be In This Study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you are/have been a part of the Devadasi system.

How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study?

10 - 15 people (participants) will be invited to participate in this study locally.

What Are the Alternatives to being in this study?

If this is not a treatment study:

No, the alternative to being in the study is not to participate.

What Will I Be Asked To Do In This Study?

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to engage in three, 45-90 minute face to face interviews. To assist you with preparation, you will be provided the Interview Protocol one week prior to the actual interviewing. The three interviews will be spaced a week apart from each other. After the transcription is complete, you will be

provided the opportunity to review the transcript to verify the accuracy. Overall your participation in this study will last up to 3 weeks in time and includes 3 visits.

Example template:

Visit 1 (Week 1)

This visit will last about 45 – 90 minutes. During this visit you will share your early encounters and past experiences with the Devadasi system. Below are some of the example questions during this interview

1. Can you share your earliest encounter with the Devadasi system? When was the first time you heard about the system?
2. Can you elaborate further on how you learnt more about the system and what it meant to you?

Will Photos, Video or Audio Recordings Be Made Of Me during the Study?

If video/audio recordings or photographs will not be taken in the study, remove this section completely.

Language for Optional recordings:

The researchers will make an audio recording of the three interviews during the study so that it would help with transcription of interview notes and only if you give your permission to do so. Indicate your decision below by initialing in the space provided.

_____ I give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

_____ I do not give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

Are There Any Risks To Me?

The things that you will be doing are no more than risks than you would come across in everyday life. Although the researchers have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions/procedures that are asked of you will be stressful or upsetting. You do not have to answer anything you do not want to and if you wish not to continue with the study you are free to do so anytime during the study/interviews. Information about individuals and/or organizations that may be able to help you with these problems will be given to you.

Will There Be Any Costs To Me?

Aside from your time, there are no costs for taking part in the study.

Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study?

You will not be paid for being in this study.

Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?

This study is confidential and only the protocol director (Mrudula Anne) and faculty advisor (Dr. Jamie Callahan) will have the information to relate your responses to you.

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Mrudula Anne and Dr. Jamie Callahan will have access to the records. Any records with identifying information will be deleted once the dissertation is defended successfully.

Information about you will be stored in locked file cabinet; computer files will be encrypted and protected with a password. This consent form will be filed securely in an official area.

People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly.

Information about you and related to this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law.

Who may I Contact for More Information?

You may contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Jia Wang, Associate Professor, Educational Administration and Human Resource Development to tell her about a concern or complaint about this research at (979) 862-7808 or jiawang@tamu.edu. *For student/resident research, add:* You may also contact the Protocol Director, Mrudula Anne at (734) 546-3050 or anne_mrudula@neo.tamu.edu. *For alternate contact (Co-I):* You may also contact the Co-Investigator, Dr. Jamie Callahan at (215) 571-4481 or jlc465@drexel.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant; or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program office at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

What if I Change My Mind About Participating?

This research is voluntary and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on your relationship with Texas A&M University.

**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTECTION PROGRAM
CONSENT FORM**

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I agree to be in this study and know that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. The procedures, risks, and benefits have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered. I know that new information about this research study will be provided to me as it becomes available and that the researcher will tell me if I must be removed from the study. I can ask more questions if I want. A copy of this entire consent form will be given to me.

Participant's Signature/ Thumbprint

Date

Printed Name

Date

INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT:

Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the participant the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

Signature of Presenter

Date

Printed Name

Date

APPENDIX C

IRB NUMBER: IRB2013-0228 IRB APPROVAL DATE: 04/11/2013 IRB
EXPIRATION DATE: 03/31/2014

Interview Guidelines

Interview I -- Life History

Task: To focus on the lived experiences of the participants by asking them to talk about:
1. her early encounters and past experiences, and 2. events and circumstances
that led up to her being involved in the Devadasi system.

Means: By asking the participants to share their early encounters and their influence in
shaping their past learning experiences. Also by asking the participants to
verbally reconstruct the events, circumstances and thoughts that led them into
being a part of the Devadasi system.

Outcome: Gives an understanding about participant's perception of this system and how
the participant came to be a part of this system.

Interview II – Current Experience

Task: To focus on the current experiences of the participants and to understand
participant's interpretation and perception about their daily lives.

Means: Participants in this interview will be asked to reflect on their current experiences
in relation to their living conditions, place of residence, customs, traditions and
responsibilities as Devadasis. They will be asked to bring with them an item that
they value the most and to talk about its importance.

Outcome: An understanding about the daily experiences of the participants and what
how they perceive these experiences. Also provides an insight regarding
participant's perception about the system and what they value the most about the
system.

Interview III – Sensemaking

Task: To capture participant's perceptions and meaning of their experiences.

Means: Ask participants to reflect on different factors in their life that resulted in them
being a part of the Devadasi system and further explore their perceptions about
their current living situation.

Outcome: An understanding of the lived experiences of participants and the how the
status of being a Devadasi impacted the participant's lives.

IRB NUMBER: IRB2013-0228 IRB APPROVAL DATE: 04/11/2013 IRB
EXPIRATION DATE: 03/31/2014

Interview Guidelines

First Interview

A. Introduce the Project

B. Interview Questions -- Focused Life History

1. Can you share your earliest encounter with the Devadasi system? When was the first time you heard about the system?
2. Can you elaborate further on how you learnt more about the system and what it meant to you?
3. When were you introduced to this system and what are the events or circumstances that led you to be a Devadasi?
4. I am interested in learning more about the rituals performed to initiate you as a Devadasi. Can you talk about them in detail?
5. Can you explain your initial days as a Devadasi? What are your responsibilities and duties as a Devadasi?

C. Conclude

- Any additional thoughts that you want to share.
- Confirm time and place of next interview.
- Request the participant to bring anything of value to them related to the Devadasi system.
- Thank participant.

Second Interview

A. Introduction

- Any additional thoughts about the last interview.
- Introduce today's topic

B. Interview II – Details of Current Experience

1. Think of a typical day in your life and can you describe all your experiences and chores you go through on a daily basis?

(Repeat the question to get additional experiences.)

2. Think of a recent ritual or a major festival you worked on that is most representative of the type of work that you do. Describe the ritual in general, and more specifically, what your role is in the ritual.
3. Can you explain the importance of the item you have with you and what it symbolizes for you?
 - i. How is it related to the Devadasi system?
 - ii. Why is this so important to you?

C. Conclude

- Any additional thoughts that you want to share.
- Confirm time and place of next interview.
- Thank participant.

Third Interview

A. Introduction

- Any additional thoughts from the second interview?
- Introduce today's topic

B. Interview III – Reflection and Sensemaking

1. Given your experiences with the Devadasi system can you share how you think that being a part of this system has impacted your life?
2. In our previous interview you shared something related to the Devadasi system that is really valuable to you. Can you explain why you think that is so important to you and what does it signify or symbolize to you?
3. Do you have a life and family outside the Devadasi system and according to you does your status as a Devadasi impact your life?
4. Given a choice, would you want to stay in the system or come out of it, and can you explain your choice?

C. Conclude

- Any additional thoughts that you want to share.
- Confirm contact information and estimated time for member checking.
- Thank participant.