

Devadasi System: Divine Requitel Or Worldly Ordeal: A true form of violation of human right

Dr. Zafar Ahmad Khan*

“When men are oppressed, it is a tragedy, when women are oppressed, it is a tradition.”

-Bernadette Mosala

Introduction

Human beings are just a chunk of major institutions like family, marriage, education, religion, etc. When a child is born, he/she is oblivious of his/her ambience. It is the society which inculcates the gender differences and assigns roles to each individual. This inequality results to various kinds of exploitation and harassment of women.

India, the world's 7th largest in terms of size and 2nd most populous country witnesses an extremely high rate of exploitation against women. One of the most common crimes against women in India is sexual exploitation and Devadasi system is one of its forms. This institution of Devadasi began as religious and pious practice having venerable antiquity. However, it is excruciating to believe that women are exploited in the name of this centuries old tradition and religious customs even now. The term Devadasi generally means “woman relinquished in the service of God”. She is married to deity/God but, this does not preclude her from the normal pleasures of sex and child bearing. It is true that earlier Devadasis were not governed by the strict rules of sexual morality as applicable to married women. They lived a normal life and enjoyed a fair degree of choice in choosing their sexual partners, who were not their husbands. These devoted artists were the temple's most religious workers who served the temples and its inmates but at present, their status has deteriorated and this practice of dedication of girls has turned into a systematic abuse, serving as prostitutes for dominant caste community members. They have become the victims of economic, social and political turmoil.

Devadasis are neither delinquent figures nor extraordinary beings. They have been formed by socio cultural context, tyrannized by class and caste hierarchy along with divine superstition. This ideology is significant because the marginalisation of Devadasis

*Research Officer, Dr. Ambedkar Chair of Legal Studies & Research, Department of LAW, AMU, Aligarh