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“Against Her Will: Jogini Culture In Telangana Special Focus On Activities Of Hemalatha Lavanam In Emancipation Of Joginis”.

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Abstract: This paper looks at an ancient tradition of India called ‘Devadasis’, popularly known as Jogini in Telangana region, which literally means servants of God. It requires girls as young as eight years to be married or dedicated to a temple deity. For this village elders celebrated a festival called ‘Jogupattam’. In Telugu regions the term Jogi is a derivation of the Sanskrit word ‘Yogi’. A Yogi is a revered member of society who accepts alms as a gesture of respect. In its vulgarized form ‘Jogi’ word is derived. But joginis are seen as little more than beggars who prostitute and humiliate themselves for virtually no remuneration. In Telangana region particularly lower caste women are dedicated to this practice. The majority are landless and spent their lives as bonded laborers, trapped in an endless cycle of loans and debts. Because of their deep rooted socioeconomic poverty, the family decided to dedicate their daughter to the Jogini system. In small temple villages religious superstition often plays a key role in the decision making process. When someone in a village community falls ill, it is not uncommon for a landlord to circulate the rumor that the illness is a result of the village deity’s wrath. According to superstition, the deity’s anger can be pacified through the dedication of a young girl. Hoping for appeasement, a family might choose to dedicate their daughter to the Jogini system. It is not difficult to see how religion, poverty and centuries of gender inequality act together to ensure the continued existence of Jogini culture. Most of them are Dalits and weaker sections of society. If they have children their life also

deteriorates under poverty and bonded labour. Hereditary their girl child also became jogini under social pressure.

SAMSKAR: This foundation was established in 1986 by Hemalatha Lavanam. The organization dedicates itself to working with the Jogini population in the Nizamabad district. Its early efforts were aimed primarily at studying the living conditions and terms under which Jogini culture operates. Indeed Hemalatha engaged in extensive tours of villages, visiting Joginis and their families and compiling numerous case studies. In 1987 SAMSKAR opened its operating center known as Chelli Nilayam in the village of Varni in Nizamabad dist. This center played a vital role in organizing health camps, literacy programs, and individual counseling. With the financial assistance of groups such as HELP-AGE, U.K. and OXFAM, pensions for elderly Joginis as well as educational programs for the young now flourish. In fact, more than 600 Joginis, along with their children and aging parents, find their way to Chelli Nilayam at least once each week.

Since SAMSKAR began its work in 1986 they have received surprising amounts of support from government bodies in united Andhra Pradesh. In 1987 a National Convention of Jogini Welfare was hosted in New Delhi. In 1988 The Andhra Pradesh Devadasi Prohibition Act came into effect. The most important aspect of SAMSKAR's social reform philosophy is its dedication to awareness and education. Here, the women pledge not to engage in any Jogini practices and vow not to dedicate their daughters into the system of concubinage that has ensured their slavery for generations. Hemalavanam dedicated completely to her work with women in the Nizamabad district and served a lot for emancipation Joginis and their childrens also. With the support of governor Kumud bin Joshia and Chief Minister N.T.Rama rao, she has done marriages to Joginis. By these activities most of them came out from her past life and led a normal social life.

Key words: Devadasi, Jogini, Sexual assault, Murali, Basavi, Jogupattam, Mailapattam, Gudisani, Bhogam, Anti nautch movement, anti dedication movement, SAMSKAR, Chelli Nilayam, Rehabilitation, Self sufficient.

Objectives:

- ❖ To study and understand the life of Joginis.
- ❖ Exploitation of women in the name of custom and tradition and how Joginis were deteriorating their position to prostitution.
- ❖ To understand the social, economical causes for Joginis condition.
- ❖ Awareness on the future of their children and related social evils.
- ❖ Study and understand the rehabilitation activities undertaken by SAMSKAR.

Introduction:

Devadasi system is a socio-cultural practice which has a long history in India. In Telangana state they were called as Jogini or Basavis. Jogi word derived from Yogi, which means saint. Literally the meaning of Devadasi is 'servant of God'. Once a revered practice, over time the traditions evolved allowing women and children to become sexually exploited in the name of God.

- ❖ Majority of girls who are dedicated are from the Schedule Caste community
- ❖ Parents make the decision to dedicate their girls to village deities.
- ❖ Dedication is a forced act.
- ❖ Poverty is a significant factor which aids dedication. Poverty, illiteracy, hereditary, caste system combine together and facilitate the dedication.
- ❖ Begging and prostitution are two important social evils resulting from the Devadasi system.
- ❖ Many devadasis work in the commercial sex industry and practice prostitution till the age of 40.
- ❖ Devadasis are subjected to different forms of abuse.
- ❖ Children of devadasis face problems, such as branding and stigma.
- ❖ There are no uniform policies, programmes and schemes for the welfare and benefit of devadasis.
- ❖ There are no policies, programmes and schemes for children of devadasis.
- ❖ Lack of awareness is the major reason for the Poor/Non implementation of legislation.
- ❖ Rescue and rehabilitation become problematic because dedications happen within the closed family unit.

- ❖ Devadasis are not ready to reintegrate into the family and society because it is their family which forces them into the evil practice.

In early ages Jogini system started with the aim of very noble intentions like clean temple premises, perform the sacred arts, dance, literature development on god etc., Therefore they also known as Gudisani, Kalavathi, Boghamsani etc.,

However overtime the role of a devadasi started to evolve and it is believed that some devadasis in addition to their earlier roles, were expected to provide sexual pleasure to kings, priests. But in ancient times this position was considered as an honorable practice.

Jogupattam is a dedication ceremony celebrated near a temple. For this a lower caste girl was chosen by village nobles. Some blind beliefs also there that when pandemic or any droughts occurred in the village all believe that there is curse of deity. So fulfill the deity's desire one girl has to dedicate. Sometimes when she was pregnant they also made a vow or obeisance to a deity or God. Because of illiteracy, poverty, their social status, minor girls are trapped into this dark system. Jotupattam arranges financial needs met by village nobles. That girl was tagged with Mangalasutra by pothuraju. This ceremony is celebrated like a festival. When that girl attains puberty there is a sexual meeting with that noble. This program is known as Mailpattam. Based on her physical attraction he maintained her as his concubine. Later on she has to give sexual pleasure to the entire village community. In Telangana Khammam dist. Is not having this jogini system and Karimnagar dist. Stands first place. Because of social pressure and hereditary causes this system continued to grow generation by generation. Below poverty line families were dedicating their girls to deities. Joginis children don't have a father. Their life was thrown into again joginis if they were girls. If they were boys faced social boycott and stigma. Their future was deteriorated towards poverty and underdevelopment.

Here some Recommendations made by National commission of women, New Delhi:

1. Poverty is the lead cause for the continuance of this evil system. Effective poverty eradication schemes will help in prevention and abolition of dedication.
2. To prevent dedication and to abolish the system, the government has to provide alternative source of income generating programmes for their sustainable livelihood of devadasis.
3. The stigma attached to the children of devadasis prevents them from continuing their education. Hence school authorities need to be educated to not ask for details regarding their further details and not divulge to others.
4. Majority of the devadasis are rescued from their own families. Hence sensitizing the family members of the devadasis in the prevalence areas will help in reducing the number of dedications. Awareness campaigns about the socially inclusive policies and programmes need to be conducted among devadasis and various stakeholders of the system.
5. Stakeholders need to be educated on State Legislations to ensure effective implementation.
6. Awareness campaigns need to be conducted targeting young girls, especially educating the girl children of devadasis.
7. Dissemination programmes need to be conducted at various levels starting from block level to state level to enhance the number of beneficiaries for the existing schemes to be rectified.
8. Lack of focus on the victimological perspective in the existing legislations, policies, programmes and schemes
9. Devadasi system has to be approached holistically by considering the intersections of caste, class and religion
10. The immediate need in the rehabilitation of devadasis is to create safe shelter homes and provide monetary assistance.

Activities of Hemalatha Lavanam: Some Social service organizations also tried in the emancipation of Joginis. Hemalatha Lavanam is a settler in Nizamabad district. She established SAMSKAR in 1986 and dedicated herself to working with the Jogini population in the Nizamabad district of Telangana. Its early efforts were aimed primarily at studying the living conditions and terms under which the Jogini culture operates.

Indeed, Hemalatha engaged in extensive tours of villages, visiting Joginis and their families and compiling numerous case studies.

In April of 1987, SAMSKAR opened its operating center known as Chelli Nilayam in the village of Varni. It is at this centre that women who once practiced the Jogini custom can now come for literacy programs, health camps, individual counselling and occasional meals. With the financial assistance of groups such as HELP AGE, U.K. and OXFAM pensions for elderly Joginis as well as educational programs for the young now flourish. In fact, more than six hundred Joginis, along with their children and aging parents, find their way to Chelli Nilayam at least once each week. Here the women pledge not to engage in any Jogini practices and vow not to dedicate their daughters into the system of concubinage that has ensured their slavery for generations. In addition, Joginis are encouraged to break the Mangalsutra around their necks which serves as a physical reminder of their dedication to deity and servitude to a landlord.

The most important aspect of SAMSKAR's social reform philosophy is its dedication to awareness and education. The organization actively tries to raise awareness and educate Joginis with regards to existing progressive laws and how these laws can help to overcome social and economic hurdles. In addition, SAMSKAR believes that people must be supplied with the instruments of literacy, self confidence and social consciousness in order for them to realize that the traditions and forms of exploitation can be broken. From the onset, the organization stresses that they do not wish to impose occupational alternatives on Jogini women nor do they promise paradise should the Joginis choose to abandon their old way of life. Rather, SAMSKAR assists women in mobilizing their own strengths and places prime importance on Jogini's own rehabilitation proposals. For this reason, much of SAMSKAR's work is aimed at re-establishing women in occupations which will allow them to become self-sufficient and yet remain in close contact with their family and village support networks.

SAMSKAR began its work in 1986 they have received surprising amounts of support from government bodies in Andhra Pradesh. In 1987, a National Convention on Jogini Welfare was hosted in New Delhi. Since that time more than five million rupees has been granted by the government towards the purchase of goats and sheep for the Joginis and land has been donated to encourage the women's economic independence through the cultivation of paddy.

In 1988 the Andhra Pradesh Devadasi Act came into effect. The chief minister N.T.Ramarao took keen interest in bringing this act. Haripriya Rangarajan, wife of Governor Rangarajan arranged Jogini marriages also. The Act condemns the existence of all jogini/Devadasi systems in the ritual dances connected with the custom. To publicize the Act, thousands of posters with captions specifically mentioning that violations of the Act are punishable, were pasted on huts and trees. In addition meetings were conducted in the presence of village elders to explain the legal content of the Act.

Today, within the Nizamabad district of Telangana dedications of young girls into the Jogini system no longer take place. Although conditions for the women remain far from ideal, SAMSKAR stands dedicated to improving their standard of living.

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