

The Mathamma system

What is the issue?

\n\n

Devadasi system is still prevalent with a name of Mathamma system in few parts of south India.

\n\n

What is Devadasi system?

\n\n

\n

- It's a practice that is widely believed to have been abandoned decades ago.
- In South and parts of Western India, a devadasi is a girl "dedicated" to worship and service of a deity or a temple for the rest of her life.
- The age group of a girl to be converted as devadasi is 8-16 years.
- Originally, in addition to taking care of the temple and performing rituals, these women learned and practiced classical Indian artistic traditions like Bharatanatyam and Odissi dances.

\n

\n\n

What are the actions taken against devadasi system?

\n\n

\n

- During colonial times, reformists worked towards outlawing the devadasi tradition on grounds that it supported prostitution.
- The Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act is a law that was enacted in 1947 just after independence.
- The law gave devadasis the legal right to marry and made it illegal to dedicate girls to Hindu temples.

\n

- Before the bill became law, devadasis were not allowed to marry due to society taboo, and continued prostitution.
\n
- In 1988 Andhra Pradesh passed Devadasi (Prohibition of Dedication) Act and Dedication of women act.
\n

\n\n

What is Mathamma system?

\n\n

- \n
- The practice of “offering” girl children to Goddess Mathamma which is widely practiced by Madiga community and other adjoining communities.
\n
- It thrives in the districts of Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh and Tiruvallur in Tamil Nadu.
\n
- As part of the ritual, girls are dressed as brides and once the ceremony was over, their dresses are removed by five boys, virtually leaving them naked.
\n
- They are then forced to live in the Mathamma temples, deemed to be public property, and face sexual exploitation.
\n
- At present, there are an estimated 1,000 Mathammas in the Chittoor district, of them 363 are children in the age group of 4-15.
\n
- The Mathamma system has its equivalent in other regions of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
\n

\n\n

How girl children are affected by this system?

\n\n

- \n
- Girls are exploited, and forced to live as sex workers, and are unable to leave the exploitative system due to social pressures.
\n
- Few girl children are dedicated to the system right from age of three and live without marriage for life.
\n
- Many die old and lonely and sick as they are forced to sleep in the Mathamma temples or outside the homes where they work as domestic help.

\n

\n\n

Why government cannot take any action against Mathamma?

\n\n

\n

- The Dedication of Women (Prohibition) Act has had no effect on the Mathamma system in the district.

\n

- After the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh, there are no stipulated guidelines for the implementation of the Act.

\n

- No scientific rehabilitation measures were possible due to lack of proper data and non-cooperation from the victims and village elders

\n

- As it is linked with the sentiments of the community, the official machinery and the political parties shy away from taking on the tradition.

\n

- The victimised community is largely viewed as a minority group, with no influence on vote-bank politics.

\n

\n\n

What can be done?

\n\n

\n

- State and Union governments need to take strict actions on this regard.

\n

- NGO's role in spreading awareness through street plays and other remunerative methods is most significant, and community participation is required to abolish such kind of practices.

\n

- The affected girls needs rehabilitation and proper alternative livelihood opportunities.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n\n

\n\n

\n\n

\n



SHANKAR
IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering