

## **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.
- In 1988 Andhra Pradesh passed Devadasi (Prohibition of Dedication) Act and Dedication of women act.

\n\n

### **What is Mathamma system?**

\n\n

- The practice of “offering” girl children to Goddess Mathamma which is widely practiced by Madiga community and other adjoining communities.
- It thrives in the districts of Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh and Tiruvallur in Tamil Nadu.
- 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.
- They are then forced to live in the Mathamma temples, deemed to be public property, and face sexual exploitation.
- 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.
- The Mathamma system has its equivalent in other regions of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

\n\n

### **How girl children are affected by this system?**

\n\n

- Girls are exploited, and forced to live as sex workers, and are unable to leave the exploitative system due to social pressures.
- Few girl children are dedicated to the system right from age of three and live without marriage for life.
- 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*