



An Indepth Study of 3000 Stitches By Sudha Murthy

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ABSTRACT

Three Thousand Stitches speaks of the history of cruelty and sufferings of women lies behind the Devadasi system . Women has gone through numerous atrocities and unspeakable exploitation in our discriminated society. Being a multi –cultured nation, a lot of traditions are followed in our society .One such practice is the devadasi system which has been practiced since the period of seventh century in the reign of cholas ,chera’s and the Pandya’s and these practices existed in one of the southern region of Karnataka . Under this practice, women were exploited, abused ,deprived of education ,considered as female slaves and led a derogatory life . Sudha Murthy , a philanthropist and renowned feminist stood up against it by writing such a revolutionary literature which has aroused our empathy towards the deprived women and also depicts their pent up feelings .

Introduction:

The Devadasi system had a high position in the community back in time . These women were considered “ AKHANDA SOUBAGHYAVATHI” (to be eternally married and free from Widowhood) but the practice diminished and lost its chastity in the 20th century . The word Devadasi means “the servant of God” .They are recognized by various names in different part of India such as Natis in Assam ,Basavis in certain region of Karnataka ,Jogin in Andhra Pradesh ,Aradhini and Murali in Maharashtra .The Devadasi system has a long history and the information regarding the practice of Devadasi system is found in Babylon .Ishter – the deity usually appointed the Devadasis .Girls were asked to sit in the temple and silver coins were thrown on them and they become the property of men and the man who bought her



have all rights over her .Marco polo has also mentioned this system prevailing in Missore where the girls served the deity called Amma .He states that the parents of girls sent them to temple on an important festival and this practice continuous until their marriage .The dance of Devadasis was enjoyed by temple priests ,Kings and other powerful people in temple of Apple and Sun God temple of Greece .Dancing girls were present in the temple of Jews ,Juno ,Venus at Rome. Devadasi used to do dance and enchant hymns to please temple Gods .They had a dignified position in society as we have evidence of it in the caves of Badami and the Devadasi Vinapadi who was very dear to the ruling king of the chalukya dynasty in Northern Karnataka .

The practice of Devadasis system originated in India during the early medieval period but it was prevalent in countries like Greece ,Egypt and Iraq thousand years ago .The custom was found in Cyprus ,Iraq in Greece ,in Egypt at temples of Isis and of Osiris were mobbed with dancing girls .First time ,the practice of dedicating girls to the deity is said to be found in the temple of Aphrodite in Greece .

During Ancient times ,Devadasis were segregated into seven categories. When a kidnapped lady is dedicated to the deity ,She is known as ‘Hruta Devadasi’ , Dutta Devadasi (a father offering his daughter to the temple) , Birkrita Devadasi (sold lady) Bhakta Devadasi (girl devotionally offered as Devadasi) ,Bhrutya Devadasi (voluntarily becomes as Devadasi),Alankara Devadasi (on basis of degree of competence). Also ,if a Devadasi is getting money for her dance and music then She is called as ‘Gopika’.

An Indian scholar , Jogan Shankar has discussed the major points for the flourishment of this system . He said that to please and secure blessings for the community , girls were dedicated to Gods and Goddess . People have also developed the myth that if they offer women to the deity that will enhance the fertility of land and also increase population .But the Priestly class have encouraged this practice for their personal vested interests and the rich class got a chance to exploit the lower class . Devadasis performed various activities such as dressing the deities , temple cleaning and lightening the lamps . Apart from the above factors ,Patriarchal society ,Religious myths and economic problems plays an important role in exaggerating this practice .

Before the arrival of Britishers , Devadasis were treated in a dignified manner and they performed cultural dance and music .During Ancient times ,Girls who were dedicated to the Deity were considered as prestigious . Girls from rich background were also dedicated . As Sriram points out: ‘there was no particular caste from which women could be drawn for dedication and there were instances in the legends



of princesses and girls from priestly classes becoming handmaidens of God. The Devadasis thus formed an occupational group rather than a caste ?’

But Today , Only girls who belongs from Scheduled caste, lower class become Devadasis. Young girls are dedicated to the worship and service of the deity but later on led a dark and gloomy life as a sex workers . Girls who were caught a hair infection like the ringworm of the scalp were destined to be a Devadasi .It shows that how an infection war made an idiotic reason to get rid of girls and push them in such a dark world from where there is no point of return .Now the question arises : Why a girl was sacrificed to the deity , not a boy? The answer is crystal clear as this male –dominated society does not want to lose a single opportunity to demolish ,to degrade the female .

Till 19th century , Devadasi system was practiced in South India and declined in North India due to Muslim invasion . During the British period ,the identity of Devadasis was shifted to prostitutes . The Revivalists ,Reformists ,British government as well as the men and women who belonged to Devadasis community contributed to cease this practice . In 1882 ,the first anti –nautch and anti –dedication movement was launched .They held conferences, seminars for the abolition of this practice. Ironically ,the demand for the abolition and support of Devadasi system came from themselves .After Independence ,the Devadasi system has taken he form of Prostitution. According to United Nations ,supplementary convention on the abolition of slavery 1956 ,practicing of Devadasi system is considered as a form of slavery. The act of dedication is banned through Article1(d) which states that ‘any institution or practice whereby a child or a young person under the age of 18 is delivered by either or both of his natural parents or by his guardian to another person, whether for reward or not ,with a view to the exploitation of the child or young person.’

Sudha Murthy , one of the prominent writer of India ,was born in a small town of Karnataka in 1950 . She was a student of electrical engineering and after completing her degree ,she joined Tata Engineering and Locomotive company in Pune ,Maharastra.She was married with Narayan Murthy (co-founder of Infosys).Apart from working in technology ,she also started writing books and articles in English and Kannada.Her books reflect social and cultural issues prevailing in India and She used simple language rather than using sophisticated and fancy words so that idea behind the work reached to the common masses .Her works dealt with social issues such as poverty ,gender inequality and gender discrimination .Her tremendous contributions in Indian literature has earned her numerous awards. She was awarded the Padam Shri award in 2006 ,R.K Narayan award for literature,Lifetime achievement award from the Karnataka government and Tata literature lifetime achievement award .Major works of Sudha Murthy are



‘Dollar Sose’, ‘Wise and Otherwise’, ‘The day I stopped drinking milk’, ‘The magic drum and other favourite stories’ and ‘How I taught my grandmother to read’. Her works provides a deep understanding of Indian culture ,sensitive issues of Indian society and give voice to the subaltern ,marginalized people of India and leaves the readers with a lasting impression. Being the chairperson of Infosys foundation , She dealt with issues like malnutrition ,rural development and education. When she met with the group of Devadasis and asked about their grievances, they lobbed questions at her with increasing ferocity.

“Who are you ? Did we invite you here? Have you come to write about us? In that case we don’t want to talk to you”?

Those marginalized women have developed a pessimistic outlook of life and that cruel system has totally damaged their reasoning ability and they looked upon her with suspicion.

Now , when Sudha Murthy went there wearing a pair of jeans ,T-Shist and a cap, the Devadasis considered her as an alien and threw chapels and tomatoes on her .She felt disheartened and decided to resign and go back to her academic career .But her father sympathized with her and made her aware that prostitution is one of the root problem civilization ,but no nation in the world has been successful in bringing it down to zero .Many kings and saints have tried to eliminate this disgusting job from society and you are just an ordinary women .You have to reduce your expectations and first you should convince ten Devadasis to leave their profession and show them the other side of life which is colorful ,dignified and peaceful .Her father said her , “if you dressed up in jeans , Devadasi will never connect or identity with you but “ if you wear a sari , a mangalsutra, put on a bindi and tie your hair , I am sure that they will receive you much better than before ...”

This depicts the pre –defined stereotyped gender roles of our Indian society .As Judith butler influential concept of ‘ Gender Performativity’ states that we dress in certain ways, use particular body language and so on .Through such repetitions , Gender is reinforced , layer by layer , until it seems inescapable .

“Gender is a constructed identity ,a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience ,including the actors themselves ,come to believe and perform in the mode of belief .”

Judith Butler was influenced by the ‘sex’ and ‘Gender’ theory of Simone De Beauvoir who has mentioned in her book: “ One is not born, but rather becomes a women”.



In her book 'The second sex', She has reemphasized the same idea that Gender is constructed and it can be changed. It means that we are under a cultural compulsion to behave in a certain manner which makes our gender. We have to differentiate the terms 'Sex' and 'Gender' which are considered as synonyms but Sex is a biological term and Gender is constructed. In Gender Trouble, Butler further says that: "If gender is an object which a person wants to be, then gender is a process or action. Gender should not be used as a noun, an existence of essence or a static cultural label. It should be considered as a repeated behaviour".

The very thought that women are feminine and the men are masculine is also socially constructed not biologically determined. Society has always associated the terms such as inferior, passive, weak with a woman and the authoritative terms such as superior, active

,strong with men. One of the prominent aspects of performativity is the repetitiveness of the acts. Imagine if boys started wearing dresses and they continuously repeat the same act, then after a period of time it will be normal for boys to wear dresses. Gender is constructed on a daily basis through repeated acts. For example, some women put makeup in the morning as a ritual and believe that their identity relies on this habit and this act is important to feel like a woman. We believe that gender is natural but actually it is reinforced on us by the society and it is constantly learnt.

Sudha Murthy does not want to alter her appearance for their sake but her father said to her: "Well, if you want to change them, then you have to change yourself first ..."

It depicts that how deeply Gender roles have been engrained in our society which forced an educated and advanced woman to change her identity, to change her way of living to come at the level of the marginalized women, only then she will be able to solve their grievances.

Sudha Murthy along with her companion Abhay was able to attain a desirable change in the lives of Devadasis. Sudha started working among Devadasis as a Teacher and educate their children. Some of their children started going to the college and helped them in getting scholarships. Then, she took subject of AIDS and it took three years to develop a relationship with them. After that, they started sharing the stories of innocent girls who had been sold as sex workers by their husbands, brothers, fathers, boyfriends, uncles or other relatives. Sometimes Sudha could not stop her tears after hearing their dreadful stories. On the other hand, Sudha and Abhay were receiving death threats from pimps, local goons and others.



.Some pimps threw acid on three Devadasis who had left their profession for good . The plastic surgery of the victims underwent helped to bring back their confidence .The act of acid attack shows us that in order to maintain their superiority over women ,men do such acts so that women always live in fear .But the victims stands up with more strength and more courage .As Kate Alice Marshall states in “ I am still Alive” : - “They think I am wounded ,but there is a difference between a wound ,and a scar . I am done bleeding .I am tougher now .”

It was an uphill battle that took years of effort to provide a dignified life to the exploited women .Women left that hatred profession and started rearing goats ,cows and buffaloes ,some started their own bank and on the third anniversary of the bank ,women held a big celebration to celebrate their empowerment and their success over the stereotyped tradition of the society .Tears welled up in the eyes of Sudha Murthy when she reminded her journey from extreme hatred to unspeakable love and affection .On the day of function ,there were no politicians or garlands or long speeches but was a simple event .The Devadasis song of agony was sung ,they shared their journey of independence many of their children have become doctors ,nurses ,lawyers ,clerks ,government employees ,bank officers ,railway employee and teachers. When Sudha came to speak everyone was eager to listen her .She quoted a Sanskrit Shloka which was taught by her grandfather :

‘O God , I don't need a kingdom nor do I desire to be an emperor . I don't want rebirth or the golden vessels or heaven . I don't need any thing from you .O Lord , if you want to give me something , then give me a soft heart and hard hands ,so that I can wipe the tears of others .’

During the event ,an old Devadasi come and said : “We want to give our akka a special gift .It is an embroidered bedspread and each of us has stitched some portion of it .So there are Three Thousand Stitches. It may not look beautiful but we all wanted to be present in this bedspread. This is from our hearts to yours. This will keep you cool in the summer and warm in the winter... just like our affectation towards you. You were by our side during our difficult times, and we want to be with you too”. It was the best gift that Sudha has received in her life . The Three Thousand Stitches symbolizes here the pain and agony of the Devadasis .Sudha Murthy was the one who has stitched their wounds (i.e. Rape ,Exploitation ,Abuse) given by this conventional society .Murthy has healed that wounds with her love ,empathy and affectation and by her continuous effort for the upliftment of marginalized women. Murthy was quite successful in her journey as nearly 3000 Devadasis have left that undignified profession and now living a peaceful and an independent life.



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