

Devadasi institution: Its Origin and Transformation in Assam.

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Abstract

The custom of the Devadasi institution held a significant place in the history of Indian culture. As a part of Hindu tradition, Devadasis and their service to God were positioned in respectable places in India along with the Assamese society. However, with time, this devotional practice experienced a lot of dilution. Since there is a dearth of studies on the evolution of Devadasi institutions in Assam, this paper is an attempt to grasp the historical background of the Devadasi institutions in Assam. This paper also critically analyses the changes in the Devadasi system. This study is based on secondary data with the following findings: a) Devadasi system rose in the medieval era due to the royal privileges in Assam b) The role of Devadasi was to take care of the temple apart from performing devotional dances c) With time the practice of these holy customs were replaced with sexual exploitation of women d) Britisher's social and economic control over the Indian continent has shaken the Devadasi system with the alternative recognition made by them. Hence, through this study we witness the changes in women's status in the Hindu tradition. Practically, the study also acts as a background knowledge to understand the growth and development of Hindu traditional practice in Assam.

Keywords: Devadasi Institution, Hindu Tradition, Women, Assam

Introduction

In ancient times, women's devotion to religious customs was considered eminent practice. The customs of Devadasis vary from one period to another and from one culture to another. A few thousand years ago, Babylonia, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Cyprus and few more states where women were dedicated to religious duty a few thousand years ago (Singh, 1990).

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