

## VISIT TO BIJAPUR FROM FEBRUARY 3, 2023 TO FEBRUARY 5, 2023

A study on the socio-economic status of Devadasi women located in Bijapur.

**3<sup>rd</sup> February (Friday)**

### **1. Visit to Madherholi- Devadasi women within Bijapur city**



This village consists of people belonging to the Madher community. We interacted with 6 Devadasi women who were born in Madherholi. The women were forced into this system by their grandfathers and other relatives, as they made them believe that they will be dedicated to the god, particularly for the wellbeing of their family. Unfortunately, the women didn't know about this system and thus they were pushed into the act of prostitution. The only scheme they received is the pension scheme though some didn't receive it and no other schemes were allotted to them. The children of devadasis also faced a lot of hardships as they weren't eligible for the scholarship without mentioning their father's name in the Aadhar card. The children were admitted to government schools where they had to pay fees, without getting any exemptions from the school authorities and were denied reservations though 1% reservations were allotted to the girl child and sexual assault victims by the government of Karnataka. The devadasi women engaged in household chores to make a living where they used to earn 3000/- per month. Though the government provided schemes to build houses, none of the devadasi women owned any houses in this village and were residing in the parental home. Most of the devadasis would stop their profession after a certain age and thus they are allowed to reside in their family house only to look after their ailing parents or relatives. Some of them also mentioned how they were harassed by their family members and society, after leaving this profession. It also shows their courage to have an unapprehensive frame of mind towards the Policemen and society after returning from their day-to-day duties.

### **2. Visit to Women's police station in Bijapur**

The Women Police Station denied any cases being registered under the Karnataka Devadasi (Prohibition of Dedication) Act, 1982. They claimed that earlier such systems were prevalent but now they have been eradicated and no dedication happens. They also clarified that they have no jurisdiction on these matters and they merely deal with cases on domestic violence and complaints associated with harassment and abuse.

They did not have any idea as to the procedures regarding complaints on dedication. They also stated that cases regarding sex work and prostitution is handled by other police stations and they have no jurisdiction over these.



### **3. Visit to Men's Prison in Bijapur**



The next task was to visit the men's prison in Vijayapura. one of the volunteers of the prison sister mary had come with us and briefed us about the prison. It consisted of 550 inmates were around 300 people were under trial prisoners. The legal aid programme was being conducted by the DLSA presided by justice Venkanna Basappa Hosamani who is the senior civil judge and member secretary of DLSA Vijayapura. the Dias was presided by justice shri venkanna, jail supdt Imam followed by 3 advocates. The main purpose of this programme was to give free legal aid to the accused if there are no advocates to represent them. Many accused came forward citing the reason why they were put in the prison and also pleaded for getting bail. The atmosphere around the prison was not like any other prisons as it had space only for 300 inmates whereas around 550 inmates were residing in it. The construction of the new prison is still in process.

### **4. Meeting with District Sessions Judge and Senior Advocates in the prison**

The next meeting was with justice Shri Venkanna Basappa Hosamani who is the senior civil judge and member secretary of DLSA Vijayapura, Supdt of central prison imam sab and a government adv. The main discussion with the judge was all about devadasis. The main question put forward to the judge was related to whether they have come across any cases pertaining to devadasi women. In the past 2 and half years there hasn't been any cases under devadasi protection act or anything related to devadasi. The justice shared his thoughts about the devadasi system. 99% of devadasis are from the SC/ST community as we can see that how they were getting exploited day by day.



None from the upper caste took up this profession. The backward communities are forced to enter this profession by making them aware that by becoming a devadasi the families would reach greater heights in their future. But little they weren't aware of the fact that they are pushed into the act of prostitution. Thus the session was concluded by the justice on discussing about how to tackle this issue by educating the devadasis about the schemes they deserve and uplifting them from these atrocities.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> February (Saturday)**

#### **1. Visit to Karnataka State Akkamahadevi Women's university.**

##### **a) Discussion with Dr Hemalatha and Team**



The second day began with a visit to Karnataka State Akkamahadevi Women's University. We are first briefed by Ms. Hemalatha, Principal, Social Science Department and various other Assistant Professors who had previously done their research in the field of study of Devadasi women. We were asked to focus on some important points in the research and answer specific questions as to why dedication is still practiced and how the various schemes provided by the government to the Devadasi women are indirectly causing more harm than good and she provided the example of livestock. The government provides these women money to buy livestock, but to cater to the needs of the livestock, the women have to go back to their traditional way of earning income, which makes them stuck in a loop. The areas of prevalence of such practice included Kakkarniki, Bublehwara, Thikota, Belgaum, Yashodhganga, Koppal

and Bagalkot. The hierarchy between Devdasi women and regular commercial sex workers, the background of the families who tend to send girls for dedication, their caste, and income levels were discussed. We are also told about different practices of dedication in the SC/ ST, Kusuba, Madara, Lingayat, and Olleya communities as well as the practice of naming the devdasi children along with surnames of their mothers and their place of birth for identification. We were asked to focus on mainly four points

- a) Ex-Devdasis
- b) Prevention of New Dedication
- c) Women actively practicing sex work as devdasis
- d) Questioning the cultural belief systems and their prevalence.

We were also given names of people to approach and books, references etc that can aid our research. Later, we were also taught about the various practices of the devdasis such as special poojas on auspicious days which includes 'Bethelaseve', 'Gandhadha Seve', 'Beevina Seve' etc and were finally referred to another assistant professor of the university Dr. Kalavati H Kamble

## **2. Meeting at the Devadasi Rehabilitation Project office with the Project Implementation officer**

We interacted with Mr. Anand, the Project Implementation Officer of the Devadasi Rehabilitation Project. Mr. Madhusoodan is the Project Officer in charge of 6 districts including Bijapur. He mentioned the 4 schemes in place for Devadasi women at present, namely:

- 1) Pension- of Rs. 1,500 per month
- 2) Rs. 30,000/- in the form of subsidy for any self- employment.
  - The Devadasis have to inform the functionary of the type of self- employment they want to undertake. The Devadasis need to submit a number of documents including a Domicile certificate, Bank A/c details and an NOC from the Bank saying that they are not availing any government loan.
  - A target number is set per year and applications are called out year- wise. The DC selects the beneficiaries keeping in mind that those who have already availed the benefit are not to be selected.
  - Only in the year 2019-20- due to excess money remaining from another department, that was utilised to add beneficiaries to the Devadasi subsidy scheme- from those who had taken benefits prior to 2010.
  - Under this scheme, a 3day training is provided to the Devadasis by an organisation called Dharmasthala by paying Rs. 600/- per woman by the DRP.
  - An important point to note is that the benefits under the DRP are lesser than that available at the SCST/ Ambedkar Nigam. However, when DD approach the SCST Nigam, they sent away saying that they must only approach the DRP which is a specialised project only for them.
- 3) If the Devadasi woman owns any land, then benefit provided for house construction is as follows:
  - Rural- Rs. 1,75,000/-
  - Urban- Rs. 2,00,000/-

The PIO stated that he also tries to get the Devadasis the benefit of Rs. 1,50,000/- from the Central government additionally. The amount is transferred through RTGS in instalment basis the stage of construction of the house.
- 4) For Devadasi Children-

Subject to the condition that marriage must not be from within the community, but from other sub- castes/ castes:

- If a girl is married- 5 lakh is given
- If a boy is married- 3 lakh is given

Apart from this, no schemes have been made for the Devadasi Children. The DRP has sent a letter to the Government with suggestions and recommendations on education and employment.

5) Reservations-

- There is no reservation for Devadasis in jobs unlike the Trans community which has a 1% reservation.
- There is no express reservation for a Devadasi girl (done on request in some schools)- For instance- In the Morarji Desai School- applications for free education in the transition from 5<sup>th</sup> grade to 6<sup>th</sup> grade were called. Further, no exam fee was taken for DD Children.
- Anganwadi Helper and Teacher- 5% reservation for Devadasi Women.

6) The DRP also conducts awareness programmes through Street Plays, Wall painting, and programmes in the Yellamma Jaatre

**Difficulties noted by the DRP**

1) The difference in benefits for house construction between SC and Devadasis is unreasonable  
SC- 5 lakh

Devadasi- 2 lakh

Point to note is that almost 99% Devadasis belong to the SC Community.

- 2) Knowledge that 30,000/- subsidy for self- employment is very insufficient. The women would need at least 1 lakh to do anything substantial.
- 3) Derogatory words like SooLe are used for DD women. This is a serious attack on their dignity and self- respect. When their children hear words like this being used for their mothers, they feel humiliated. In other government offices, the DD are forced to expressly mention their identity in front of others which they are uncomfortable with. However, the DRP office is a comfort space for them to express because there is no such need to display their DD identity as it is understood that only DD women would come to the DRP.
- 4) Earlier, payments were made via RTGS. However, now the Aadhar linked DBT method is used, which in the PIO's opinion is unsuitable for DD. Most DD have their Aadhar cards with addresses in Pune/ Goa/ Maharashtra and their bank Accounts in those places are linked to their Aadhar. Hence, the DBT is made to those Bank accounts which do not have local branches in Bijapur. Thus DD can withdraw the amount only from the Home Branch. The issue was worse during COVID time. The PIO mentioned that is impractical for the PIO to travel with each DD to assist in withdrawal of the amount. The solution to the problem is for the DD to inactivate the account in that place and activate it in Bijapur. Even closure of account does not work since amount continues to go there. A further issue is where aged women cannot use Biometric since their fingerprints are unclear. Further, some have no Aadhar and find it difficult to get it done in their old age. Some who are blind cannot get their Aadhar done either. The office is set to close down once all the DD in the 2007-08 survey are no more. The issue of mismatch in documents is another major issue since some documents have a full name, some do not. In Bijapur- 70 DD have not received DBT due to these issues and 4 have no Aadhar as they are blind.
- 5) The government must consult PIOs before making schemes as they are well- versed with the ground realities.
- 6) No support schemes in case of death of DDs.

- 7) The last survey only took into consideration those above the age of 28 as of 2008, leaving out many other DDs. Further, many afraid of being arrested, did not register as DDs/ were busy with work. As per the PIO, there may be around 2,000 DD not registered in the survey. The number stands at 4103 DD out of which 700 deaths have taken place. The DD are found mainly in 6 villages of Bijapur.
- 8) In 3 instances in the previous year, the DRP has prevented dedication of girls as DD and gotten them married. Usually, cases are not filed. A single Trial had taken place but that too was unsuccessful.

### 3. Meeting with the transgender community at Navspoorthi



Navaspoorthi is an NGO Registered in the year 2009 under the trust act 2006 and headed by Ismail who is the president of the Ngo with Other members. The main People associated with this NGO are transgender mainly referred to as jogappa, hijra, kothi, and devadasis who are bisexual. Here the main discussion was related to jogappa. Around 260 jogappas reside in the villages of Bijapur. They are the men who marry a goddess to become women. There are two kinds of jogappa mainly- the one that is related to begging and the other category related to prostitution. The category related to prostitutes includes devadasis who have tied a sacred thread (Muthu). The reason to tie the thread was due to their bhakti towards the goddess. They are engaged in prostitution in the cities of Bangalore, Pune, and Mumbai. From their conversation, the jogappas have faced many hardships in society. The police often arrest them and force them to have sex. The customers indulge in snatching money from them. From a clear understanding, most of them are treated like slaves. Most of these atrocities are cruel and cannot be tolerated. They have to pay for their own hotel expenses while engaging in prostitution. Navaspoorthi engages in providing target awareness programs conducted for 3 days, mainly for the benefit of the community. The Government of Karnataka distributes pension (800/-) to those who are above the age of 25 and self-employment training for 3 days conducted by Karnataka state women development corporation with a stipend of 30000 rupees as a subsidy to start a business. Most of the other members whom we met and discussed have faced many other issues such as taunting and ragging in school by their classmates. Some of them joined this community as they were not supported by their parents and other relatives. One of the motivational story is of a person from this community who has faced several hardships from his colleagues. He went on to pursue MBA and works in one of the Pune IT Parks. Even today the main problem faced by him was ragging by his colleagues, he had an unapprehensive mind to tackle these obstacles. By listening to their obstacles, many of the atrocities committed against them are unlawful in this country, where many of us are to be treated equally.

**4. Meeting with the Superintendent of police and the crime statistics department at Bijapur-**

Next, we visited the superintendent of police HD Ananda Kumar IPS. He briefed us about the practices of the Devadasi system and how it is interlinked with poverty and about how the victims enter into this due to situations where there is nobody to take care of in their family. Further, he stated that financial stability can help in preventing such social evil. There are a lot of Elopement cases where girls are indulged in affairs, misused, and sold to Brothels. The victims are majorly targeted from places like North Karnataka (Raichur and Belagavi) Once they leave behind their past as a prostitute, they are not respected by our society and people hesitate to give them any jobs. He also stated that the earlier traditional system is not prevalent and that a polished version of such practices is in Brothels. It was further mentioned that a lot of Devadasi women have experienced brutality from the police department after being accused and arrested. There were various instances where the sex workers claimed to be Devadasi in order to avail special benefits and schemes provided by the legislature.



**5. Meeting with Ms. Shanta of Children Of India Foundation**



Miss. Shantha started off by stating that cases do not get registered easily since people in the district are mostly financially weak so their intellect or knowledge doesn't matter and there is also no scope for the opportunity of higher education. We were briefed on the seebi community consisting of about a thousand people and mentioned that all are aware of the Devadasi Prohibition Act but the society in which we live doesn't allow the acts to get reported. They get influenced by people around them thereby avoiding FIRs.

We were told about a recent case study from the Koppal district of which the FIR is still pending and even another trial of 2019 wherein the case was shut with a lot of politics involved. We were then briefed about the Children of India Foundation which was started in the year 2019 alongside DLSA with the motto of letting the children live their childhood. The

foundation aims to not only provide benefits for the devadasi women but also for men, since 2022.

## **6. Meeting with Mr. Vasudev and Ms. Sunanda Tolanandi**

The Karnataka State Aids Prevention Society, whose primary goal is to conduct health programs for women, including devadasis and sex workers, with a target population of at least 2000 women, was initially briefed to us. We were also informed about the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), which gives children 2000/- rupees per month for 3 years with a certificate confirming that they are attending school, and the child welfare committee (CWC), guarantees there are no issues with both education and shelter. We were also briefed on karmani, subsidy loans for devadasi women, Attini Vimochana sangha, and the various facilities including that of the hostel for devadasi women, their children as well as orphans and children of single parents. Miss. Sunanda opines that devadasi women, in general, are in a well-off position because they are aware of all the schemes that are designed to benefit them. However, procedures to avail of those schemes are still not known by them.



**5<sup>th</sup> February**

## **1. Heritage walk with Mr. Manthan from school of Architecture - Bijapur University**



Bijapur is known little for its archeological significance and heritage. There were several dynasties who ruled over Bijapur, out of which the Adil Shah Dynasty contributed vastly

towards the monumental heritage of the city. Manthan, a student from Mumbai, who studied architecture, has been living in Bijapur to study the architecture of these monuments. On 5th of February, he took us on a Heritage Walk giving us insights about the city and its history. The entire Bijapur city was fortified wherein, the palaces were within the fortified area and so were the commoners. The fortified wall was surrounded by water on all sides to protect itself from enemies and attacks. However, now roads and other developments have been made therefore, very little of the same is left. The stories of various rulers of the Chalukya Dynasty, The Mughals, The Tughlaqs and lastly the British Empire are engraved in the historical sites of the city. However, not much was done by the former two dynasties, but during the reign of Adil Shah around 400 monuments were built, which haven't been maintained till day and merely 82 remain today. The Gagan Mahal, was a classic example of magnificent architecture for it was a palace which seemed like it touched the skies. It was a two storey building, with arches in between, and the center of the palace was occupied by the King while the aisles were occupied by the queens and other members of the administration. Wood was used in the construction of windows which shows that property prevailed during the Shah dynasty and trade flourished. However, today only the ruins of the palace remain. Further, the Chalukyan temple has been declared as a world heritage site and has magnificent carvings on its pillars. The temple shows inscriptions in both Sanskrit and Arabic languages. However, there are several cases filed in the Supreme Court and the High Court with respect to the preservation of the architectural heritage of Bijapur.

## **2. Visit to Nidagundi Village - A settlement of Devadasi women**



Our visit to a small village near Nidagundi gave us deeper insights into the living conditions of the Devadasis. A relatively small community of 7 Devadasis residing there are migrants from the neighboring Madagur and Munugur villages which were afflicted by a flood. The government allotted some land for them in this village wherein sheds were put up. The government also allotted land for them in their names as compensation. However, due to lack of financial strength, the DD have not built houses there and continue to reside in the sheds with a lingering fear of eviction. Electricity meters have been installed and they pay monthly bills. However, space is a constraint adding to the already bad living conditions. No public toilets have been made in the area.

- 2 of the Devadasis have not been getting their pension for the last 1 year.

- 2 of the Devadasis were not registered in the 2007-08 survey.
- They are unsure of the reason as to why they were made a Devadasi by their parents, but continue to follow the practice. One of them was made a Devadasi since she was the first child and her parents did not have the hope of having a son, which they eventually had.
- Most of the Devadasis earn their livelihood and support the education and other needs of their children by doing coolie work. Earlier, one of the Devadasi in her younger days would play roles in Drama companies and currently has started a Bhajana Mandali with a few others including her son who plays the Harmonium. She has a visiting card made and goes around performing devotional songs too. Some Devadasis would cook in Dhabhas and earn Rs. 25 for 12 hours. They would bring the remaining food from the Dhabha for their children.
- Devadasis are very supportive of education for their children. One of them availed a loan to buy an auto for livelihood for her disabled son. However, they face immense difficulty in bringing up their children.
- Some of them have done/ are doing sex work. The arrangement has usually been a single partner who would come from the neighboring village. These partners would also give some financial support to the Devadasis and also their children but would not give their names to the children, especially when married. The Devadasis have accepted that they do not have the right to demand anything since the partners were married with a family that they do not want to disturb. In the case of one of the Devadasis who also has a mouth disability, her partner would come from the neighboring village to spend the night with her. He would pay her for the sex work by bringing in the necessities but she herself asked him to stop coming post the birth of the child due to some reasons.
- The Devadasis raised the issue that out of the Rs. 20,000/- subsidy availed by them 15 years back, only Rs. 5,000/- ultimately reached them.
- The Devadasis are not hopeful of what the DRP office can do for them and have not visited the DRP office in Bijapur either. There is a clear lack of awareness about schemes available for Devadasi women.
- The women feel very sad when their children ask them why they do not have a father's name as their surname, especially when they see other kids with their fathers.