



Mains Practice Question

Q. In the religious land of India, there exists the exploitative custom of sexual slavery known as the Jogini system (a local variation of the Devadasi system) which involves marrying young girls to a deity. This social evil has resisted the legal measures aimed at curbing it till date, despite having been prohibited as per the Devadasi (Prohibition of Dedication) Act. You are posted as a District Magistrate and you get to know about such practice taking place in the area of your jurisdiction. Two Dalit girls have been confined and being prepared for dedication to God as devadasis. The children are forced into becoming Devadasis by their own parents because girls are their only source of income in most cases. In a society where a girl child is often considered a liability, turning them into Devadasis is how patriarchy works to transform them into assets. You also get to know of child prostitution being practiced in the name of Devadasi.

(a) What course of action will you take in such a scenario?

(b) What are the issues involved in banning the practice of Devadasi system, in spite of the laws already present against it? (250 Words)

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Approach

- Briefly talk about the Devadasi system and its age-old prevalence in India
- Mention stakeholders involved here
- Suggest the right course of action which you will take as DM of that area, to deal with this problem
- Discuss issues involved in banning the practice of Devadasi system
- Conclude in a forward-looking manner

Introduction

The above case talks about an age-old evil tradition of 'Devadasi' which literally means "female slave to god". It originated around the sixth century AD when the young girls, often from wealthy family backgrounds were dedicated to the local temple and they would be 'married' to the deity. During those days, devadasis enjoyed great respect as they were married to the deities. However, over time, the tradition started deteriorating, their status in the society degraded leading to their exploitation and it became a vehicle for institutionalized sexual exploitation of the poorest segments of Indian society. At present, it is mainly prevalent in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Body

- **Stakeholders:**
 - **Young girls:** the poor girls of the Dalit community (in most cases) are being dedicated to God.
 - **Poor families:** Mostly Dalits, who also happen to be from lower strata of the society are involved in it.
 - **Temple System/priestly class:** This Jogini/Devadasi tradition is linked with temples who have been taking undue advantage of poor families.
 - **Legal System:** In spite of the presence of law against the tradition, this evil practice has survived to date.

- **District administration:** I being the DM of that area, who is responsible for curbing this illegal practice.
- **Being a DM of that area I can take the following steps to deal with this social evil -**
 - My first step should be to free the two girls and work for their rehabilitation.
 - Then, I will take legal action against their parents and other people involved in it. So that they abstain from repeating such acts.
 - To deal with child prostitution existing there, it is important to take stern legal action against those involved in it. Police can be mobilised to take action in such cases if reliable information is available.
 - The community must be made aware of multiple reporting mechanisms, such as approaching the Child helpline numbers, District Magistrate, police, and District Legal Services Authority.
 - The root cause of this practice lies in persistent poverty which should be eradicated in the long term through better implementation of poverty alleviation schemes policies, employment generation, etc.
 - Enrolment drives should be conducted to ensure all children are in school, and to prevent children from being pushed into child labor, child marriage, or dedicated as Devadasis.
 - Since the issue involves a religious angle, I should be cautious in initiating any step which could hurt public sentiments. Thus, it's my duty to achieve broader social support in favour of my actions; this could be achieved through awareness and educational campaigns.
- **The Devadasi system continues to survive because of a complex cocktail of religious pressures, economic necessity and social beliefs which are giving birth to many challenges. Some of them are -**
 - **Society's acceptance:** Devadasi dedication and the resulting sexual abuse of these girl children are accepted and celebrated by society. Those willing to report also fear the backlash of the society and community and refrain from reporting.
 - **Ineffective awareness programmes:** Awareness generation about the provisions of the legislation, in communities where the prevalence of dedication is high, is ineffective as it fails to bring behavioral changes.
 - **Lack of Police Action:** They are failing to take Suo Motu action in such cases and are not registering cases coming to them due to pressure from the community.
 - **Poor implementation of legislation:** There are several provisions under different laws (POCSO, ITPA, JJ Act, IPC) that would be relevant in such cases. However, there is a lack of application of all these legislations.

Conclusion

There can not be a place for such an unethical, evil act like the Devadasi system in a civilised society. It is high time that we eradicate such derogatory acts towards women from society and develop the scientific temper and humanism while fulfilling the aspiration of our founding fathers.