



Interpolation of Patriarchy: A Study of *Devadasi* through Select Literary Representations

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Abstract

Devadasi an old Indian temple/religious tradition enjoyed unquestioning reverence from the commoners. Its popularity and mass acceptance gave birth to various region/ culture/ community specific forms/ names such as *Jogini*, *Mahari*. *Devadasi* tradition and its deterioration and decline as a practice can be better understood if not seen just as gender exploitation is seen but as a gender question at the intersection of caste, class and sexuality. The paper is an attempt to understand *Devadasi* tradition and problematise the treatment of devadasis across time and generations through a critical reading of Vaasanthi's "The Symbol" and Rishi Reddi's "Devadasi."

Keywords: *Devadasi*, Exploitation, Jogini, Mahari, Patriarchy.

Introduction

Devadasi,ⁱ a much cherished and revered religious tradition in southern and eastern parts of India, seems to be a mythical history now. This cultural-religio traditional practice meant dedicating young girls to the Hindu temples either as a *dasi* (servant) or a bride in the *seva* (service) of God from the beginning of this tradition. Once committed to a temple, they remained in the service of God and his servants (demi-gods) on earth till death. They were highly respected in society as they were transformed from ordinary women to

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nityasumangali or *maha-nari* after dedication (Jain 132). On festive occasions, their presence was highly awaited and considered auspicious, and their position as a deity's *dasi* granted them a quasi-royal status in society. Aleena Anabelly A defines devadasis as, "skilled dancers or ritualists who earned great respect and appreciation from their audience . . . women with inordinate social visibility, enjoying exclusive privileges and benefits" (55). As the time changed, *Devadasi* system was infiltrated with moral corruption and soon the system became synonymous with prostitution and 'devadasi' became the symbol of sexual exploitation of women by temple authorities and wealthy patrons. Men, both outsiders and insiders within the *Devadasi* community, played a significant role in making decisions regarding the lives of the devadasis. The king was considered to be the deity's living embodiment (*chalanti pratima*ⁱⁱ), and the temple priest was regarded as a mediator between the devadasi and the deity itself. Religion sanctioned both the king and priest with an authority to dictate the socio-cultural-religio rules and norms for devadasis to follow. The gurus (*nattuvanars*) were endowed with power and control over devadasis through their "expertise" (Vishwanathan 69).

The premise on which *Devadasi* flourished, aligns with Sylvia Walby's definition of patriarchy as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Bhasin 5). Originally, socio-religious institution like temple played a central role in the life of a devadasi. It provided not only the physical space for her performances but also the religious and cultural framework that shaped her identity. The rules governing the whole *Devadasi* setup, were crafted and enforced by male elites/policy makers like the temple priests, the patrons and the landlords. The male authority frequently dictated the function of the devadasis within the temple, delineated the rites they would execute and established the parameters of their interaction with the outside world.

Objective

Devadasi is often portrayed as a tradition associated with religious, spiritual service and cultural preservation but in reality, it is deeply rooted in a patriarchal system that allows men – priests, patrons, or

landlords – to exercise control over the women who participated in it. The objective of the present paper is to lay bare the hetero-patriarchal power at work in the dominance and oppression of devadasis and the demise of *Devadasi* through a critical analysis of Vaasanthi's "The Symbol" and Rishi Reddi's "Devadasi." The study also examines the intersections of gender, caste, class, and sexuality to problematise how these factors shape the lives of devadasis across different contexts.

Discussion

The concept of *Devadasi* in this paper is viewed as a literary "heteroglot"ⁱⁱⁱ that encompasses the portrayal of regional variations of the system, such as *Jogini*, *Mahari*, *Matangi*, *Basavi*, *Jogati*, *Murali*, etc., in various literary works. Thus, *Devadasi* is used as an umbrella term to represent these related systems of oppression grounded in women's marginalisation since ages.

Men often held the power to initiate or terminate a devadasi's involvement in religious practices and her engagement in the royal services. The temple priests wielded significant authority over the devadasis by exerting control not only over their participation in religious rites but also dictated their personal and social behaviours. Frederique Apffel Marglin in her encounters with the *Devadasi* community in Puri points out the existence of a parallel culture where women were subjected to male dominance and control, just like devadasis: "[A] group of women attached to the palace, the palace equivalent of the devadasis who are affiliated to the temple . . . are known as *deis*. The devadasis have ritual duties both in the temple and in the palace whereas the *deis* have ritual duties only in the palace" (Marglin 26). Both devadasis and *deis* were given basic necessities like food, clothes, and shelter by the temple and the king. They were also provided with the opportunity to strengthen their artistic skills so that they could elevate their status and worth as performers. Thus, the devadasis, the temple, and the king had a mutually beneficial relationship with each side contributing to the well-being of the other. But the seamy side of this picture cannot be ignored that in the garb of the *Devadasi* tradition, women were forced to engage in sexual relations and abstain from mortal marriages. This amounts to a lifelong punishment of extreme social depravity in

terms of normal marital status, motherhood and general relational dynamics.

Devadasis were significant financial stakeholders in addition to being skilled artists in the temple culture. They were in charge of conducting religious rituals and upholding the cultural traditions of the temple. This enhanced the temple's general reputation and financial prosperity. In return, devadasis were well taken care of by the temple/king. Kings functioned as their patrons giving them the chance to perform at their palaces. Along with this under the patronage of the king, the local landowners and other powerful people indulged their sexual fantasies with devadasis who were attached to the temple. With the entry of this socio-moral corruption into *Devadasi*, devadasis' social standing declined significantly over the years, eventually degrading the highly honoured and royal dancers with outstanding talent to the level of sex workers. A devadasi was not an immoral or unusual being but rather a social and cultural construct of patriarchy – a construct of religious, gender, caste and class politics. Couched under the guise of patronage and protection, the relationships between patrons and devadasis often entailed implicit or explicit expectations of sexual favours that fudged the line between beneficence and exploitation.

In *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerda Lerner points out, “Men punish, by ridicule, exclusion, or ostracism, any woman who assumes the right to interpret her own role or – worst of all sins – the right to rewrite the script” (13). When compared to other women in terms of wealth and social status, devadasis may have held a relatively elevated position in the social hierarchy. They possessed a high level of education which was denied to women in general. They were socially extrovert, financially self-sufficient, and openly expressed their sexuality and disclosed their relationships with men. These signs of personal agency must have posed a possible threat to the patriarchal authority and the status quo, leading to a decline in their position. Voices against them started in 1883 in the form of Anti-Nautch campaigns across the nation and finally culminated as ‘Madras Devadasi Prevention of Dedication Act, 1947’ after voices of social reform joined forces to abolish *Devadasi*. This was framed as a moral effort to “rescue” *Devadasi* women but was largely rooted in patriarchal setup and went negatively against these women. By

outlawing *Devadasi*, the state effectively removed their religious and cultural roles thus leaving them with little social security or alternative livelihoods.

With their performances being banned under the pretext of upholding the ideals of female morality, they were denied their means of livelihood. The impact of Western influence on modern Indian society has led to the stigmatisation of devadasis as nothing more than prostitutes, and the devaluation of the art of dance as a mere expression of sexuality. *Devadasi* which was once a celebrated cultural tradition, under the modern/western gaze came on the verge of dying. Lakshmi Vishwanathan a celebrated exponent of *Bharatnatyam* in *Women of Pride: The Devadasi Heritage* recalls, “it seems ironic that Hindu society, which had encouraged and accepted the devadasi from time immemorial was now all of a sudden outraged at the so-called vulgarity of her dance” (185). The needs of the devadasis were not addressed even in the Nehruvian socialist/reformist agenda, leaving them without any assistance or acknowledgment. This led to the rapid deterioration of *Devadasi* in the post-independence era, forcing women from *Devadasi*, *Jogini*, *Mahari*, *Matangi*, *Basavi*, *Jogati*, *Murali* communities towards prostitution. A survey conducted in 2016 by the Joint Women’s Programme for NCW among 375 devadasis in Bangalore reports, “63.6 percent of young girls were compelled to become devadasis owing to tradition, and 38 percent claimed that their family had a history of devadasis. 40% of the devadasis worked in the commercial sex sector, while the rest worked in the communities” (Harishankar 20). The oppression and exploitation faced by the devadasis is rooted not only in religion but it also stems from systematic gender, caste, and class discrimination sustained by patriarchal structures. The social reform initiatives albeit well-intentioned further marginalised devadasis by stripping them of their economic independence and religious significance. While the efforts aimed at protecting women from exploitation but in reality, they resulted in unintended consequences including economic destitution and forced migration into sex work for many devadasis and severing their ties to temple-based support systems.

Literature provides a space for addressing and examining issues that history has shied away from or failed to mention. *Devadasi* has

been a subject of debate for many writers who seek to explore the complex issues of caste, class, gender, and sexuality associated with it. Like any socio- cultural tradition, *Devadasi* too underwent significant transformations. With two-three generations away from the times when *Devadasi* was a living tradition, it becomes impossible for the young generation to understand the tradition's true religious or cultural significance without any prejudice. As a result, contemporary devadasis are no longer at odds with outside of their community and country; rather, they seek approval from within their community and country.

Rishi Reddi is an India-born-US-based writer. Her story collection *Karma and Other Stories* published in 2007 highlights the cultural differences between India and America seen from the perspectives of “interconnected multigenerational” characters who are on a journey to find a balance between their Western and South-Eastern identity. Vaasanthi on the other hand is a Tamil writer and journalist from India. Her *Ganga's Choice and Other Stories* focuses on the representation of women from different cultural backgrounds as they battle repressive social conventions and gender stereotypes. Vaasanthi emphasises the boldness, tenacity, and bravery displayed by common people in the face of hardship via her stories. Both Reddi and Vaasanthi, in one way or the other, reflect upon the complex interactions between gender dynamics and societal injustice. Rishi Reddi's “Devadasi” and Vaasanthi's “The Symbol” provides an intricate examination of the patriarchal politics inherent in the *Devadasi* system. The stories depict the difficulties, victories, and personal development of characters like Uma Reddy, Guru-Ji, Soundari Ammal, Mallika, Karpagam and Senthil, who directly or indirectly are entangled in the web of power relations and gender stereotypes.

Rishi Reddi's story “Devadasi” captures the ethos of the *Devadasi* tradition from a multigenerational perspective. Uma Reddy, a young woman of third-generation Indian heritage, comes to India with her parents from America to attend a wedding in Hyderabad. Due to her upbringing in a foreign land and culture, Uma is unaware of Indian cultural traditions and fails to recognise their inherent value. Uma, a learner of *Bharatanatyam*,^{iv} is ignorant of the current plight of the devadasis in India. She identifies herself as an

American uprooted from the tradition and culture of her family. When she visits Guru-Ji's residence for her dance lessons, she is clueless why Guru-Ji resides on the outskirts of the city and questions Hafeez, her driver, "why did an accomplished Bharatanatyam dance instructor live far from the affluent Hindus beyond the Muslim section of the town?" (Reddi 169) Uma's failure to understand the situation depicts the ostracisation of dancers like Guru-Ji following the colonial legacy that later transformed into nationalist policy. The segregation of Guru-Ji from mainstream society is both literal (living on the outskirts of the city, in Muslim-majority or lower-caste areas) and symbolic and represents the patriarchal desire to keep certain women, particularly those associated with profanity outside the bounds of "respectable" society.

Urmimala Sarkar Munsri further explains how devadasis like Guru-Ji were forced to live on the fringes: "[F]rom the colonial to the nationalist discourse the transfer of power and responsibility for policy-making did not mean anything different for the Devadasis, as in both the discourses she remained the 'polluted one'" (Munsri 299). So in order to keep the city pollution free, women like Guru-Ji were restricted to the geographical, social and historical margins of the society. In the colonial period, the British moral discourse labelled devadasis as "polluted" due to their association with misuse of their sex in the name of religion and public performance which did not conform to the Victorian ideals of feminine purity. This moral judgment was also adopted and reinforced by Indian patriarchal system during the nationalist reforms that actively worked to stigmatise and suppress *Devadasi* legacy in an attempt to construct a sanitised version of Indian culture that conforms to societal ideals of morality and purity. The tradition was thus rendered invisible particularly to the emerging middle class and diaspora, who, like Uma, became disconnected from its historical and cultural importance. Hence, Uma's oblivious behaviour stems from the patriarchal attempt to shun devadasis and their history from the social discourse.

Uma represents the typical modern lens to view and understand Indian culture for it to be accepted as modern and civilised culture. However, this modification fails to recognise the legacy and contribution of the artists in the development of their dance form. The

west's perception of devadasis has brainwashed not only Uma but also the average common people of India. Guru-ji breaks her western lens and introduces her to the 'original' Indian culture. The story highlights how *Devadasi* legacy is fading away in contemporary times and the younger generations seem to lack the intent and effort to preserve their cultural heritage. By erasing the role of devadasis from the social discourse, patriarchy creates gaps in cultural memory leading to a disconnection between generations that prevents young women like Uma from understanding the full scope of their heritage.

Uma is westernised as a result of living in America since her childhood. However, her parents, the first-generation immigrants to America did not introduce their children to their Indian history, culture and tradition. Such western exposed generation is accountable for the loss of the devadasis' traditional heritage since they pushed rich cultural traditions like *Devadasi* to the margins of society. Uma's parents exhibit patriarchal control when as stereotypical conventional parents, they see that she is becoming overly friendly with Hafeez and are reluctant to let her travel to Guru-ji's house alone with him. Uma's parents aptly exemplify western educated Indians who can easily swap their allegiance between tradition and modernity depending on their needs and situations. Their actions mirror the patriarchal double standard as they embrace modernity when it suits them but revert to traditional gender norms when it comes to controlling their daughter's behaviour. Despite the fact that the devadasis and their dwellings are far removed from the mainstream society, Uma's parents permit her to learn *Bharatanatyam* from Guru-ji. Her parents' willingness to send Uma to Guruji without any resistance demonstrates their tolerance for the *Devadasi* community when it benefits them. This flexibility in swapping between tradition and modernity based on convenience reflects their cultural ambivalence where they hold onto patriarchal values in the private sphere while adopting modernity in public settings.

Vaasanthi's "The Symbol" attempts to capture the ethos of artists like Soundari Ammal, a Carnatic singer from the *Devadasi* community, whose life got disrupted due to the Reform movements of the early 20th century that forced artists to stop practising their art and retreat into domesticity. These movements aimed to liberate women, including devadasis, from the oppressive

clutches of the patriarchy. But these reformist systems hit many artist women including devadasis hard by disembodiment of their identity and their means of livelihood, that is, their art form. "The Symbol" shows how disrespectfully great artists and cultural ambassadors are treated in post-independent India. Mandakini, a journalist and the granddaughter of Soundari Ammal's friend, comes to interview Soundari about her past. The family of Soundari Ammal is reluctant to reveal her past as a devadasi. Senthil, Soundari Ammal's son-in-law, feels that disclosing her identity in public would bring dishonour to the family and make it impossible for anybody to want to marry his daughter Mallika, who is Soundari Ammal's granddaughter. Everyone including Mallika has been kept in the dark about Soundari Ammal's past and Mallika is inquisitive to learn more about her grandmother when Mandakini visits them to interview Soundari Ammal. Patriarchs like Senthil seek to control women's narratives and prioritise societal respectability over the recognition of women's artistic and cultural contributions. By hiding Soundari Ammal's past, Senthil and the family conform to the patriarchal mindset that devadasis should be seen as victims of an immoral system rather than as artists who contributed immensely to Indian culture.

The treatment that Soundari Ammal gets from Karpagam and Senthil illustrates the viewpoint of the second generation. Despite societal changes, Soundari Ammal remains devoted to her art because singing is her love and passion. Rathnam's efforts to get Soundari Ammal to join the Reform movement against the oppression of the devadasis by giving up her singing do not deter Soundari from her art. To the reformists, devadasis' art stands for their oppression within the tradition and to Soundari it is everything in her life. Soundari Ammal could not think of her life without singing because singing is what she is, her identity. The cultural capital that earlier came from performance, was replaced by a social shame that reformists associated with her former life as a devadasi. She is made to quit her profession and confine to the four walls with no agency: "It seemed to Mallika that aunt was the queen of some kingdom, although she had never left the house for two decades and remained seated in her reclining chair" (Vaasanthi 38). Soundari Ammal is left with no purpose to leave the house, a metaphoric prison

where her passion and art remains chained in 'free' India. Patriarchy manifests itself through the silencing of Soundari Ammal's past where her artistic accomplishments are overshadowed by the shame of her *Devadasi* identity.

Reflecting on the position of women like Soundari Ammal, the historian Daves Soneji writes, "Twentieth-century reform movements promised to grant Devadasis full participation as citizens in the emergent nation-state only if they were able to 'reform' themselves through marriage" (Soneji 113). This abrupt declaration of reform through marriage is amorphous and ambiguous in the context of devadasis. The emphasis on marriage as a tool of reform is emblematic of the patriarchal agenda that shaped the reform and sought to mould devadasi into a new version of womanhood that aligns with bourgeois, domestic ideals of the emerging nation-state. Soundari Ammal's decision to stay with her brother's life with an intent to fit into this new social order, does not give her an independent life of usual domesticity but rather leads her to a life where she is tamed to contain her voice, desire and freedom. The reform did not free her but rather silenced her and stripped her of the voice, freedom, and desire that were central to her identity as an artist.

The reformist push towards marriage was not a path to liberation or empowerment but rather a form of containment that served as a tool for patriarchy to coerce devadasis into a life of invisibility. But, Guru-ji who had married Ustad Mohammed Ali Khan too does not get a space in "reformed" society. Marriage, proposed as a tool of reform, could not bring changes in devadasis as a collective; it might have changed life for few individuals. However, the deep-seated tradition of *Devadasi* as well as devadasis as a community remains unaddressed and hence unreformed. Devadasis like Guru-Ji and Soundari Ammal become victims at the hands of this new social order in the name of civilisation, which takes away their individual identities. The narratives understudy also expose the society's hypocrisy and fake moral structure in the present times when on one hand, women from Devadasi community are forbidden from dancing and singing considering these arts as sexually explicit and filthy. On the other hand, the same society accepts and continues to popularise cheapness, obscenity presented through item numbers and dances in in the popular cinema. The double standards of a society that

continued to police female sexuality while celebrating or profiting from their sexualised performances highlights the continued existence in controlling of women's bodies and identities under patriarchy.

“Devadasi” by Rishi Reddi and “The Symbol” by Vaasanthi portray the characters belonging to three different generations and the conflicts arising from their association with the *Devadasi* community. Rishi Reddi’s “Devadasi” highlights the predicament of Uma, who experiences inner turmoil regarding her identity and sense of belongingness upon her arrival in India. Despite learning *Bharatanatyam*, she fails to appreciate Indian culture and its aesthetics. Guru-ji, a revered figure in the past, now lives on the fringes of society. Through her dance, she attempts to relive her past and keep the legacy of the devadasis alive. She shares anecdotes with the younger generation, including Uma, in an attempt to celebrate and preserve the *Devadasi* culture and tradition. In “The Symbol,” the publication of Soundari’s interview in a magazine prompts three distinct reactions from three different generations. As Soundari Ammal reflects on her glorified past, when her singing was praised and admired, the interview looks like an artefact/channel to preserve her legacy and share her love and passion with the world. On the other hand, Senthil comes home enraged and frustrated, unable to understand Ammal’s emotions and takes it as a blot on the family’s name. Mallika, who had earlier wanted to learn how to sing, changes her mind after learning about the challenges experienced by artists via the fate of her grandmother. The way art and women artists are treated in a male dominated world is quite enough to dissuade her. Mallika’s decision signifies the disempowering effect of patriarchal control that discourages younger women from embracing their artistic heritage due to the social and familial constraints imposed on them.

Both the narratives demonstrate how the patriarchal system in *Devadasi* tradition has resulted in the discrimination and marginalisation of women. They also show how these patriarchal ideals affect women’s autonomy, artistic expression, and sense of self. Soundari Ammal and Guru-Ji both have strong attachments to their past. They find it difficult to overcome the trauma and memories of being barred from performing. They lament how the patriarchal

regulations in the name of reforms have taken away their freedom of choice and their ability to express themselves creatively. Despite the fact that the family is financially dependent on Soundari Ammal's pension, her family has no respect for her because they are ashamed of the public image associated with devadasi status. Soundari Ammal's past continues to haunt her family, she herself point out that, "[e]very word that comes out of my mouth appears to them frightening as a spirit. But for my pension, this Karpagam would have driven me out on the streets" (Vaasanthi 23). Regardless of her position as an elder, Soundari Ammal's voice is stifled and her participation in family matters is restricted. She is valued by her family primarily for the financial support she provides through her pension. Women like Soundari Ammal are valued not for their wisdom or experience but only for the material benefit they bring to the household. Soundari Ammal is tolerated by her family because of her pension but her opinions, voice, and experiences are systematically suppressed. Her autonomy as an elder in the family is undermined and she is seen as a burden; a living reminder of a past that her family wishes to erase.

The publishing of her interview reveals the truth about her family, which puts up a facade of love and respect but the truth is that it is only to gain financially from her economic status but are ashamed of her identity as devadasi. Similarly, when it comes to sending girls like Uma to Guru-Ji for dance training, families have no qualms about doing so, but they shun devadasis from their temples and the city and characterise their dance as vulgar and immoral. The same family then requests Guru-Ji to teach its daughter the dance which had been denounced and shunned long back. Both the narratives expose the patriarchy's hypocrisy and double standards in its treatment of women. The regulatory frameworks, ritualistic practices and economic structures that govern the lives of devadasis are deliberately constructed and maintained by hegemonic power structures to ensure that devadasis remain subjugated and marginalised within the existing patriarchal order.

Devadasi or *Mahari* system, from the very start, had been exclusively women oriented and women of high-caste Brahmin households were committed as devadasi to serve in the temples. Contrary to this, Dalit women or women from lower castes were

generally chosen for dedication in its other manifestations such as that of *Jogini* or *Basavi*. With the changed social scenario around *Devadasi*, devadasis from the upper classes often fared better since they had access to resources and social and financial support and assistance from their family and relatives. Some of them could change careers and find alternative sources of income. However, devadasis from the lower class/caste background experienced more difficulties because they had either none or fewer income generating options. Many of them were compelled to work in professions exploitative in nature including prostitution. Reddi's Guru-Ji and Vaasanthi's Soundari Ammal belong to the former category of devadasis. Coming from privileged class they both are able to reposition themselves in lives away from prostitution but still could not enjoy social tolerance and acceptance just because of their past association with *Devadasi*. It is the patriarchal reforms that denied these women their most significant avenue for self-expression and public recognition by taking away their means of livelihood and their artistic platforms.

Conclusion

The contribution of *Devadasi* women in the history of social, political and cultural progress and growth of the society has been silenced. It was not religion but the nationalist agenda that prohibited any freedom to devadasis and stripped them of their identity as well as their legacy. The gendered labour of devadasis (as performers, religious intermediaries, and custodians of temple arts) was legitimised within a patriarchal context where men held institutional power (priests, patrons, kings). Gerda Lerner's words emphasises the paradox of devadasis' crucial involvement in shaping society and how they were marginalised in defining, understanding and making of new societal norms and practises: "the contradiction between women's centrality and active role in creating society and their marginality in the meaning-giving process of interpretation and explanation has been a dynamic force, causing women to struggle against their condition" (Lerner 5). Modern dance styles that descended from the ancient devadasi's dance styles, such as *Odissi* and *Bharatnatyam*, after a modern process of sanitisation are now celebrated and appreciated worldwide with no credit to their account.

Devadasis, nevertheless, continue to battle for the acceptance and respect that the society owes them.

To conclude, it is evident that devadasis have faced difficulties at many fronts with the sudden change in the social attitude of people, institutions and the state. *Devadasi* based traditional ideas of caste, class, and gender promotes patriarchal beliefs and maintains control over women's lives and bodies. Guru-Ji, Soundari Ammal, Mallika and Uma have to surrender their identity to fit into the changed modern context/situation. Devadasis like Guru-Ji and Soundari Ammal accept their changed situation clinging to the memory of their glorious past but Uma and Mallika, the younger generation women try to subvert the repressive societal conventions and gender roles that limit their space and distort their agency to uphold the male dominance but in vain. Reddi's "Devadasi" and Vaasanthi's "The Symbol" reveal the devastating effects of patriarchal control on *Devadasi* women. The patriarchal system, through reforms, economic dependency, and cultural stigma, has stripped devadasis of their autonomy, artistic expression, and sense of self.

Endnotes

- i. Italicised *Devadasi* denotes the institution, practice, culture, tradition, community etc., and Devadasi refers to an individual/being. The tradition was prevalent in ancient and medieval India as a sacred institution where girls were dedicated to temples through ritual marriage to the divine. As sacred servants, the devadasis performed dance and music as spiritual offerings to the deity and also participated in ritual ceremonies, sang hymns, and assisted priests in temple rites. Their artistic expressions were grounded in ancient treatises like *Nāṭya Śāstra* and *Abhinaya Darpana* which governed their stylised dance and classical music training.
- ii. In Orissa, the Gajapati/ King is seen as the living representative of Lord Jagannatha, so the king is known as the '*chalanti pratima*' which is translated as 'proxy-idol.' For details refer to Pattanaik, Devdutt. "Gazing at a Dying God." *Soulveda*, 9 Nov. 2021, <https://www.soulveda.com/guest-contributors/gazing-at-a-dying-god/>.
- iii. The term 'heteroglossia' is based on Bakhtin's idea of 'heteroglossia' that identifies a symbiotic relationship among

different languages and identities in certain social and cultural setting. The term ‘heteroglot’ describes the distinctive linguistic form and style that results from heteroglossia. For details refer to Bakhtin, Mikhail. “Discourse in the Novel.” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, translated by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, U of Texas P, 1981, pp. 259–422.

- iv. *Bharatanatyam* is a modern dance form developed on the repertoire of the *Devadasi* dance, i.e., *sadir kutcheri*. For details refer to Vishwanathan, Lakshmi. *Women of Pride: The Devadasi Heritage*. Roli Books, 2008.

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