

Documenting the Politics of Devadasis in Contemporary Maharashtra: Different Voices/ Different Concerns

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There has been abundant investigation of different discourses articulating the devadasi practice in colonial India. However mapping of the discourses in post-colonial India has remained largely ignored. It was the devadasi abolition movement of late 1970s and 1980s in Maharashtra that highlighted the practice as a form of prostitution sanctioned by brahmanical religion and located it in superstition, poverty and illiteracy among lower castes. It also sought to mobilize devadasis seeking to bring out their voices. A flood of writings- fictional and non- fictional- from men in the movement was a significant mark of the movement which brought out the lives and experiences of devadasis. Interestingly a challenge to the devadasi abolition movement that had become rather controversial came from a particular section within the feminist movement which argued that the movement by marking the devadasi practice as superstition and prostitution reflected the contempt for little traditions on one hand, and patriarchal bias against 'free' women on the other. This study attempts to examine these discourses around the devadasi practice in post-colonial Maharashtra by exploring the articulations of practice through social campaigns, literature and social sciences, legislations and government schemes, and organizations by and for devadasis.

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