



## Devadasi: Reclaiming the History

Devadasi (Sanskrit, female servant of God) has a complex, even contradictory background and set of associations. In its earliest designation, it referred to women who expressed their devotion through dance. Some say they led celibate lives, while others suggest sexuality was used for initiation purposes.

Devadasi originally described a Hindu religious practice in which girls were 'married' to a deity. The Devadasis took care of temples, were highly educated, practiced traditional music and dance, and enjoyed a high social status. Their practices formed the roots of several Indian classical dances.



Following the demise of the great Hindu kingdoms, the practice degenerated. Devadasis were now considered to be immoral. They were described as prostitutes since they engaged in sex outside of the Christian concept of marriage. Concurrently, with the Muslim invasion, women lost their independence and power. Revivalists propagated the model of the ancient temple dancer as sacred and chaste women. Likening them to nuns, they stressed that the Devadasi's dance was a form of Natya Yoga that enhanced an individual's spiritual plane. Others claimed that a Devadasi was neither a prostitute nor a nun: 'She was a professional artist who did not suppress or deny her feminine skills.'



The tradition of offering these girls to the temple exists to this day, but these Devadasi are mostly considered outcasts of society, imprisoned and enslaved within their enforced roles. Nevertheless, a respect for the name of Devadasi and what it once represented is still present within sectors of Hindu culture. Today, one can hardly find Devadasis of the original lineage or intention. Moving to the Infinite follows the travels and encounters of a modern Devadasi, and seeks to shed light on the nobility, mystery and beauty of this ancient, misunderstood heritage.