

Muthulakshmi Reddy and Abolition of Devadasi system

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Muthulakshmi Reddy is rightly given the credit for abolition of Devadasi system in **Tamil Nadu** by carrying campaigns amid opposition from certain sections of society including political leaders.



[Ref – Navbharat Times]

About Devadasi System:

- The term Devadasi is derived from “**devar adiyar**,” meaning, **Servants of God**.
- These females **served in the temple** and their duties included **fanning the deity** with **chamaras** (fans made of Tibetan oxtail hair), and carrying the **sacred light of kumbharathi**.
- Their main function was to provide **music and dance performances** as offerings to the deity.
- They were kept in administration of the temple and had roles in managing the **flower arrangements, decorations**, and the conduct of the **festivals**.
- There were **two categories** of such dedications to the temple:
 - **Higher-status devadasi**, who was given a **land grant** from the temple's endowment, also known as **inam lands**.
 - Another category was those women who had been **dedicated to singing and performing** other folk arts.

Later stages of Devadasi system:

- Over time, the system had degenerated and devadasis started living in **poverty**.
- One of the reasons was the **devastation of the Indian countryside** during the **17th and 18th century** and the impoverishment of the temple economy.
- The temple economy had deteriorated to such an extent that there were **only dancing girls** for **entertainment and pleasure purposes**.
- Their children had **no acceptability in society** and were often subject to **social discrimination**.
- Sometimes, the schools would refuse to admit children from devadasi families.

Anti-Devadasi campaigns:

- The **anti-Devadasi system campaigns** had asked for lands to be granted to those women who were otherwise entitled to get the economic benefits from the temples.
- The Devadasi system was **abolished in 1947**, through the **Madras Devadasi Act**.

About Muthulakshmi Reddy:

- She was an **Indian medical practitioner**, social **reformer**, and **Padma Bhushan** recipient.
- She criticized the system for **purchasing girls** and providing meagre remuneration.
- She advocated for women to explore **other means of earning**, emphasizing the importance of **education in their liberation**.
- She also sought **land grants** for women entitled to economic benefits from temples.
- She portrayed Devadasis as **victims of tradition**, leading to unhealthy lives.

Contribution:

- She was nominated to the **Madras Legislature** as a member of the legislative council in **1926** and became the **first woman to be a member of any legislature in India**.
- She worked to correct balances for women by **removing social abuses** and working for **equality** in moral standards.
- She was the prime mover behind the legislation that **abolished the Devadasi system** and played a keen role in **raising the minimum marriage age for women** in India.

Achievements:

- She was the first:
 - Indian **woman medical graduate** in the Madras presidency in **1912**.
 - Woman member of the **Legislative Council** in **1926** and
 - **Woman Deputy President** of the Council in **1927**.