

Vaghya Murali: folk tradition of Maharashtra

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India has been witness to the dancing girls in the temple who were popularly known as Devdasis. The present study was conducted on the Vaghya Murali Folk Tradition of Maharashtra. Vaghya Murali male and female children are offered to God Khandoba, a local malevolent deity. Study focuses on the exploitation of marginalized groups (economically poor people, women, and children). This study on Vaghya Murali has documented this gradually declining tradition. Tradition has its own peculiar aspects such as practice of devoting children to God, peculiar kinship alliances, family organization as well as has applied significance in terms of understanding social problems associated with this tradition such as exploitation of women, potential health hazards, unstable family units etc. The research was conducted in Jejuri where a temple of God Khandoba is situated. Jejuri is placed in Taluka Purandar, District Pune. The research used an ethnography approach. Data was collected from key informants with the help of in depth interviews which helped in getting first hand information on lives of Vaghya Murali. It also focused on the "temporary" nature of families that they form. In depth interviews were also conducted with the local priests who threw light on the commercialization of this folk tradition and the professional relationship between Vaghya Murali groups and local priests. Focused group interviews were conducted with the groups of Vaghya Murali on the tradition as a whole, their perceptions of Vaghya Murali being the "offered children" to God and problems faced by them. Case examples and observations were helpful in collecting data. NGO activists working on problems faced by Muralis were also interviewed. The results showed the existence of traditionally and legally disapproved relationship between Vaghya and Murali; its impact on Muralis and their children. Muralis are exploited by the religion and suffer from social, economic and legal problems. This tradition has been found to be a hindrance in achieving the goal of human well being.

Key words: Folk tradition, Vaghya, Murali, God Khandoba, Offered children

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