

# Status of Jogini System and Rehabilitation of Joginis in Telangana State: Key Issues and Challenges

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## The context

Devadasis or *Joginis* constitute one of the most vulnerable and deprived sections of Indian society, particularly in the south Indian States of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Women of marginalised communities are initiated into the Jogini system – a local form of Devadasi system. Through this exploitative system young girls from historically disadvantaged castes are married to a local deity. In this centuries old system of sexual slavery, the disadvantaged women are subjected to collective abuse in the name of tradition. Mostly living in inhuman conditions *Joginis* undergo physical and mental distress and are deprived of their social, economic and political rights. The cumulative impact of these factors means that *Joginis* are deprived of their basic entitlements and they remain largely voiceless in society.

Although the nomenclature may differ in different regions or districts, the basic features of the *Jogini* system are practically the same: A young girl or woman is dedicated to the “service” of a local deity such as Yellamma or Poleramma. On an auspicious day, the girl is dedicated in a temple; the ceremony is conducted by Dasaris, Jangams, Ayyavarlu or Pothurajulu. A string of black beads is tied around the neck of the girl. The *Joginis* or *Basavis* are made to utter certain *mantras* and are asked to beg on specific days in a week; they are also expected to perform some other customary duties; and the girls are not allowed to marry.

State Governments claim that the Devadasi or Jogini system has been curtailed to a large extent. However, independent studies indicate that this “tradition” is still prevalent in different parts of the country and the respective governments are extending Devadasi Maintenance Allowance to such women. Although the figures may vary across different sources and time periods, the fact is that the system still prevails in south Indian

States despite the implementation of laws such as *The Andhra Pradesh Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act, 1988*. The persistence of the system can be attributed to factors such as poverty, ill-health, lack of awareness, debt-bondage, backwardness of the area, traditional beliefs and practices, vested interests such as Pujaris or Potharajus and village elders. The overarching cause is patriarchy which compels the poor Scheduled Caste women to dedicate themselves to the service of a Goddess. The life expectancy of Jogini women is much lower (less than fifty years) compared to the average expectancy of women in the country, indicating the intensity of the problem (Anil Chawla, 2002).

Jogini women suffer from social exclusion on account of their physical abuse and other deprivations. Family members of Jogini women, particularly children, are denied access to public institutions and programmes; girls in particular are prevented from exercising their fundamental rights such as the rights to education, health, work, and speech. Despite the government efforts the rehabilitation schemes have not really benefitted them and the deprivations still persists. It may be noted here that *Joginis* in conjunction with civil society organizations are articulating their concerns to influence the Central and State governments to formulate special schemes to improve their socio-economic status.

## Prevalence across Districts in Telangana State

Despite anti-Jogini system legislations and other interventions, women are still initiated into this evil system; at present the estimated number of *Joginis* ranges between 24,273 and 80,000 in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana States. In Telangana State according to the official sources their number is 14,879 (SC Corporation, Telangana State, 2014-15).

<sup>1</sup> Anil Chawla (2002), *Davadasis: Sinners or Sinned Against*, ([www.samarthabharat.com](http://www.samarthabharat.com)), accessed on 20 November, 2018.



**Table 1: District-wise distribution of Joginis in Telangana**

S.No	District	Number of Joginis
1	Nalgonda	40
2	Ranga Reddy	231
3	Hyderabad	740
4	Adilabad	922
5	Warangal	1059
6	Medak	1145
7	Karimnagar	2197
8	Mahabubnagar	2879
9	Nizamabad	5666
	<b>Total</b>	<b>14,879</b>

Source: SC Corporation, Telangana State, 2014-15

The study is aimed at assessing the prevalence of the *Jogini* system in the State and also to assess the impact of rehabilitation programmes on livelihood sustainability of *Joginis* and their families in Telangana. The present study was carried out in two erstwhile districts of Telangana which have high incidence of Jogini system, viz, Mahabubnagar and Nizamabad. Three villages from each district (Makthal, Pulimamidi and Dhanwada) of Mahabubnagar and Ummeda, Badguna and Ambam of Nizamabad were selected. A sample of 43 Jogini women were selected from both the districts (Nizamabad-21, Mahabubnagar-22) for the study; the respondents were aged between 18 and 50 years.

**Table 2: Budget Allocation and Expenditure for Rehabilitation and Economic Development of Jogini Women under SCSDP during 2014-15 to 2016-17**

Year	Budget Estimates (BE)	Budget Release Order (BRO)	% BRO to BE	Expenditure	% of Exp to BE
2014	2.53	1.05	41.5	1.4	55.3
2015	3.33	3.33	100	3.33	100.0
2016	3.66	1.82	49.7	1.82	49.7
Total	9.52	6.2	65.1	6.5	68.3

Source: Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan & SC Development Department, Govt of Telangana

The table 2 presents budget allocations and expenditure for the rehabilitation of Jogini women for three years. It shows that there are gaps between budget estimated, budget released and the actual expenditure during the years 2014-15 to 2016-17. The average expenditure per year works out to Rs 2.18 crore for rehabilitation, economic development, liberation and homes for *Jogini*

women in the State. Carrying forward the unspent budget to the subsequent years would benefit the target group.

### Rehabilitation of Jogini women

As per official records, during the period 1995-96 to 2014-15 a total number of 9,721 *Joginis* were rehabilitated in Telangana State at a cost of Rs 1,628 lakhs. The district-wise (erstwhile districts) analysis reveals that the highest number of *Jogini* women were rehabilitated in Nizamabad (3300), followed by Mahabubnagar (1843), Karimnagar (1553), Warangal (1007) and Medak (707). The impact of the rehabilitation initiatives has been patchy. However, the real rehabilitation of *Jogini* women and their integration into the mainstream hinges on collective efforts of different stakeholders such as women groups, public institutions, officials, non-governmental organizations and rural elite.

**Table 3: Rehabilitation of Joginis/Devadasis in Telangana State from 1995-96 to 2014-15**

S.No	District	Physical	Financial (Rs in Lakhs)
1	Adilabad	922	143.04
2	Nizamabad	3300	577.95
3	Karimnagar	1553	248.31
4	Warangal	1007	185.79
5	Khammam	0	0.00
6	Nalgonda	51	6.05
7	Medak	707	95.94
8	Mahabubnagar	1843	315.50
9	Ranga Reddy	142	34.96
10	Hyderabad	196	20.40
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>9721</b>	<b>1627.94</b>

Source: SC Corporation, Telangana State, 2014-15

The following case study illustrates a successful rehabilitation initiative on the part of the State Government. In 2017, the Mahabubnagar District Collector organized meetings in SC colonies of Dhanwada Mandal of the district to ascertain the problems confronted by *Joginis*. Close on the heels of the interactive sessions with *Jogini* families the District Collector arranged a training programme in tailoring for *Joginis* and their children. The programme was coordinated by the Scheduled Caste Development Department (SCDD) under the guidance of NAC (National Academy of Constructions); it imparted training to 40 *Joginis* and their children for three months. Following the completion of the training programme the

Department distributed sewing machines to all the 40 participants. The Collector followed it up by issuing directives to the District Educational Officer (DEO) to provide business to the trained Joginis by allotting the work of stitching around 11,000 uniforms of government school children belonging to Dhamaragidha, Dhanwada and Marikal mandals of the district.

### Findings of the field study

The study asked the respondents whether they have certain important identity cards that enable them to access different government schemes. The findings reveal that almost all the respondents possess ration card, Aadhaar card, voter card, and health card, and they are availing benefits from the government under the respective schemes. However, in Mahabubnagar district, two-thirds of the respondents (67%) do not have MGNREGS job cards indicating that the vast majority of *Jogini*-women are unable access employment opportunities under the scheme. The respondents reported that the authorities

administrative will and lapses on the part of implementing agencies are evident in this context.

The study findings with respect to different rehabilitation schemes show that slightly more than three-fourths (76.7%) have benefited from schemes such as bullocks with cart, chilli grinding machines, sewing machine and land purchase scheme, at different points of time during the past two decades. A sizeable proportion of them (40%) have received land (one acre each), followed by bullocks with carts (18%) (particularly in Nizamabad district), sewing machines (15%) and 7% of them received chilli grinding machines in Mahabubnagar district. Further, about a fifth of them (24%) have received training for operating sewing machine.

It is pertinent here to note that none of the beneficiaries has received land in Mahabubnagar district and even the land that they acquired through other means is being sold out due to its unproductive and unreliable nature.

Table 4: Official identity documents reported by the respondents

Type of official ID	Mahabubnagar			Nizamabad		Total		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	Total	Yes	No	Total
Ration card	21(95.5)	1(4.5)	22(100)	21(100)	21(100)	42(97.7)	1 (2.3)	43(100)
Aadhaar card	22(100)	0(0)	22(100)	21(100)	21(100)	42(97.7)	1 (2.3)	43(100)
Voter ID	21(95.5)	1 (4.5)	22(100)	21(100)	21(100)	42(97.7)	1 (2.3)	43(100)
MGNREGS	8(36.4)	14(63.6)	22(100)	21(100)	21(100)	29(67.4)	14(32.5)	43(100)
Health	19(86.4)	3(13.6)	22(100)	21(100)	21(100)	39(93.1)	3 (6.9)	43(100)

Source: Primary data

Table 5: Distribution of schemes among Jogini respondents

Scheme	Mahabubnagar			Nizamabad			Total		
	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
Bullocks with cart				6 (31.6)		6 (28.6)	6 (18.2)		6 (14)
Grinding machine (chilli)	1 (7.1)		1 (4.5)				1 (3)		1 (2.3)
land purchase scheme				13 (68.4)		13 (61.9)	13 (39.4)	13 (30.2)	
Sewing machine	5 (35.7)		5 (22.7)				5 (15.2)		5 (11.6)
Training on sewing machine	8 (57.1)		8 (36.4)				8 (24.2)		8 (18.6)
Not received schemes		8 (100)	8 (36.4)		2 (100)	2 (9.5)		10 (100)	10 (23.3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>14 (63.6)</b>	<b>8 (36.3)</b>	<b>22 (100)</b>	<b>19 (90.4)</b>	<b>2 (9.5)</b>	<b>21 (100)</b>	<b>33 (76.7)</b>	<b>10 (23.2)</b>	<b>43 (100)</b>

Source: Primary data

have not issued the cards although they had applied for them, Access to employment under the MGNREGA is important to *Jogini*-women particularly in the drought-prone districts such as Mahabubnagar. Lack of

However, a few of the *Jogini*-women reported that the government had deposited Rs 10,000 in the names of *Joginis*. The government had launched *Jeevana Jyothi* scheme meant for financially supporting poor *Jogini*

families. Under this scheme the Scheduled Castes Corporation transferred Rs10, 000 per *Jogini* as a relief and rehabilitation assistance. This scheme is applicable only to women who were dedicated to the deity before 1988.

During the course of study the stakeholders of *Jogini* system suggested that the Acts and rules enacted to eradicate *Jogini* system need to be implemented in letter and spirit, such as: providing separate burial ground for *Joginis*; providing protection to prevent exploitation; to provide old age shelters at district headquarters for *Joginis*; and extending government programmes to the household members and providing backward and forward linkages. The government mostly implemented non-land-based schemes in the sample villages (such as animal husbandry and sewing machines) which could not generate adequate employment and income to the beneficiaries due to lack of backward and forward linkages.

However, the *Jogini* women beneficiaries reported that they need viable land-based schemes, flexibility and freedom in choosing the schemes, checking corruption, up-gradation of skills of youth, employment opportunities under separate quota for children of *Joginis*, organizing awareness campaigns on the evil system and proper utilization of schemes would make the life of the victims more meaningful. Although the *Jogini* system is on the decline new initiations into the *Jogini* system do take place at regular intervals. But the difference is previously the initiations used to take place with pomp and ceremonies but these days the initiations are carried out without much ceremony and often in a surreptitious fashion.

### Way forward

The study further found that the schemes targeted at the *Jogini* women are mostly unviable such as milch animals and sewing machines which are not tailored to the needs of individual *Jogini* women; resultantly the schemes could not generate adequate employment and income to the beneficiary households. However, the land distribution scheme in Nizamabad district has considerably boosted the self-confidence of the beneficiaries to lead an independent life. Hence, the emphasis needs to be placed on the implementation of such rehabilitation schemes

which will have a direct and positive impact on the life of *Jogini* women.

### Key policy takeaways

- Saturation approach and exit policy: immediate action is needed in evolving a policy to identify and rehabilitate *Jogini* families covering all villages in a phased manner with a special focus on districts with relatively high concentration of *Jogini* women; they can be rehabilitated once and for all in about five years;
- Each *Jogini* family may be allocated three to four lakh Rupees (loan with a subsidy component) for starting income-generating ventures which are sustainable locally;
- The delay in releasing the budget needs to be done away with or at least minimized;
- The *Jogini* women should have the autonomy to choose the schemes they need.
- Distribution of land to *Jogini* women under the Land Purchase and Distribution Scheme to Scheduled Castes to be taken up on a priority basis; it needs to be ensured that the land is fertile and has access to irrigation (bore wells may also be provided, if necessary, particularly in districts such as Mahabubnagar);
- *Jogini* families need to be covered under the schemes meant for the BPL families (including housing schemes);
- Reservation of jobs for the children of *Jogini* women in public and private sectors;
- The existing *Jogini* rehabilitation interventions may now be taken care of or transferred to the Department of Rural Development/SERP or Department of Women and Child Development as the functionaries of these departments have good rapport and work closely with the rural women and children and work on related subjects such as poverty, SHGs and other rural development concerns.

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