

## Yellamma: A South India Goddess with a Bad Reputation

Philip E. Harding

History of Art 771

The Ohio State University

Spring 2002



While planning a trip to India last December I came across a web page featuring a temple in northern Karnataka dedicated to Yellamma.<sup>1</sup> I had never heard of her before but I found the image quite striking. I did a little additional, though superficial, searching for more information on her but could find none. This was in part due to the fact that her name is more commonly spelled with a double “M” rather than just the one as used on this particular web page.

During the trip I never made it to the temple this web site mentioned, but I did have an opportunity to visit a small Yellamma temple in the town of Badami. Unfortunately the sanctuary was locked up tight and there was nothing on the exterior to tell me more about the goddess. (I learned later that this temple was originally dedicated to Dattatreya.) I tried to find images of her around the town, and while I saw images of a great many other deities posted around shops and homes I never saw her image displayed. A week into my visit I spotted her image in a tiny frame shop about the size of a cupboard, and a day later I found several more at another little poster and framing shop.

---

<sup>1</sup> South Nexus – The Early word on Karnataka, [http://www.southnexus.com/temples\\_dharwad.php](http://www.southnexus.com/temples_dharwad.php); accessed November 2001.



No. 6247  
COPY RIGHT

SRI RENUKA DEVI

J.B. KHANNA & Co.,  
10 & 11, Deshpande Market St.,  
Chennai - 600 003.

After returning home I did a little more searching for information on Yellamma using different search engines and alternate spellings of her name and was disturbed by what started turning up.<sup>2</sup> These pages were almost uniformly critical and discussed her in the context of sexual slavery, child prostitution, devadasis (or temple prostitutes), transgenderism, ritual castration of eunuchs, and the spread of AIDS. These sites all had a moral agenda and chose the most shocking language and examples to make their point. However some were sponsored by organizations I would consider respectable including Human Rights Watch, Save the Children, and a variety of international news organizations. Then, digging into the anthropological literature available, I turned up a few more references to Yellamma (still focused on the sexual themes) and a considerable amount of information on devadasis (though focused on Orissa and Tamil Nadu where there are some differences in the practice). What has gradually become apparent is that most of the web sites and even some apparently scholarly authors were conflating a number of distinct, though related issues, and constructing a kind of urban legend that does not reflect the reality of those dedicated to Yellamma. My objective here is to sort out some of the complex issues surrounding Yellamma. First I will look at her myths and unique identity in Northern Karnataka, second I will examine the tradition and reform movements concerning devadasis in South India, and finally I will look at some of the specific issues relating to sexual identity and practice connected with Yellamma's devotees. (If there is a subtext to all of this it is how the identity of Yellamma and her devotees are constructed by those outside the tradition, and the need for a greater unfiltered voice by those within it.)

### Yellamma and her story

Yellamma's origins are unclear although they may have been as a village deity that later became Sanskritized. She is not found in the role of a village guardian like many regional goddesses but can be found as a household or lineage deity in households of all

---

<sup>2</sup> An annotated list of these sites is included in the bibliography.

castes.<sup>3</sup> Her main temple and pilgrimage site is on Yellamma Hill overlooking the Malaprabha River outside of Saundatti in the Begaum district of Karnataka, but there are also additional temples and pilgrimage sites for her throughout the region. She is seen as one of a group of goddesses associated with diseases but she is particularly connected with nonepidemic skin diseases such as leprosy.<sup>4</sup> She is known by different names, the most common being Yellamma and Renuka, and some authors will even refer to her with a hyphenated Yellamma-Renuka. (Yellamma and Renuka are also found in other areas of South India but her tradition in Karnataka seems to be unique.) The name Yellamma is not based on a Sanskrit root and has been variously glossed as “The Shameless One”<sup>5</sup> and “mother of all.”<sup>6</sup> Renuka, a Sanskrit term referring to a medicinal plant, is also the name used where her story is told in the Mahabharata. (I’ve also come across references to a Renukamahatmya<sup>7</sup> though it appears never to have been translated into English. There is also a version of her myth told in an appendix to the Skanda Purana and there are many regional variations.)

While there are many variations on her story,<sup>8</sup> the core elements remain fairly constant, and emphasize themes of asceticism, eroticism, purity, pollution, caste, disease, and impotence. She was born into an upper caste family but chose to marry out of caste an ascetic named Jamadagni. Some versions tell of Jamadagni winning a boon from a king and asking for Yellamma, the king’s daughter, as the boon. Living with Jamadagni at his ashram the couple then have four (or some say five) sons – one of whom is Parasurama, or “Rama with an axe” who is one of the ten incarnations of Vishnu. The story is told how Yellamma would go each day to the river to fetch water so Jamadagni could perform his rituals. Because of her great purity Yellamma was able to form a pot from fresh sand, or clay, beside the river to carry the water, and would use a cobra to form the ring to

---

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas J. Bradford, “Transgenderism and the Cult of Yellamma: Heat, Sex, and Sickness in South Indian Ritual,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39 (1983): 308.

<sup>4</sup> Bradford, 310.

<sup>5</sup> Nabanita Dutt, “Devadaasis,” [http://www.thingsasian.com/goto\\_article.1261.html](http://www.thingsasian.com/goto_article.1261.html), accessed April 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Bradford, 307.

<sup>7</sup> David Dean Shulman, *The King and the Clown in South Indian Myth and Poetry* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), 126.

<sup>8</sup> The best collection of variations I have come across is found in chapter seventeen, “Renuka and Yellamma,” of Sadashiv Ambadas Dange, *Towards Understanding Hindu Myths* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 1996), 382-416.



balance the pot on her head. (Some versions have her able to carry the water without a pot, as a pure bubble of water.) One day while returning from the river she saw a king (or in some versions a celestial being) “sporting” with several women in the water. Yellamma then experiences a twinge of lust and at that the water pot loses cohesion and the cobra runs away. When she returns home Jamadagni immediately sees what has happened, curses her with leprosy, and throws her out of the ashram. She then comes across two yogis, Ekayya and Yogayya, who instruct her to bathe in the sacred waters of Jogalabhavi where she is then cured. When Yellamma returns to the ashram cured Jamadagni is furious. He orders each of his first three sons in turn to kill her, but appalled, they refuse. Jamadagni curses them to become impotent (or eunuchs) and then asks Parasurama who beheads her without question. Pleased with Parasurama, Jamadagni then grants his son a boon. Parasurama asks for his mother and brothers to be restored without memory of the event, and that his father’s wrath should be calmed (or sent away). (Some versions also have Parasurama asking for invincibility in battle.)

There are a few other additional variations on the story, including one where Yellamma’s head falls before some leather tanners and thus she is worshipped by that caste today. Another version tells that when Parasurama cut off Yellamma’s head he accidentally cut off the head of a nearby woman of that same tanner’s caste, and when the heads were restored, they were reversed. Yet another version says “Renuka’s head multiplied by tens and hundreds and moved to different regions. This miracle made her four eunuch sons and others to become her followers, and worship her head.”<sup>9</sup> One can see from posters and sculptural icons of Yellamma today that her image is normally presented as just a bust or head – perhaps a reference to her beheading. I have only seen her presented in full figure when in the context of a narrative sequence telling her story.

### Devadasis

Almost all of the books, essays, and web sites that deal with Yellamma bring up the issue of *devadasis*, a term which literally means slave or servant of god and is often translated

---

<sup>9</sup> K.L. Kamat, “The Yellamma Cult,” <http://www.kamat.com/kalranga/people/yellamma/yellamma.htm>; accessed 18 April 2002.

as temple prostitute. There is also the frequent repetition of what I've come to regard as an urban legend of the fate of girls dedicated to Yellamma. Like the myth of Yellamma itself there are variations on the story but the basic scenario is fairly consistent and has even been made into a movie titled *Maya*.<sup>10</sup> The parents of a low caste girl dedicate their daughter to Yellamma when she is around seven to nine years old. This is done to fulfill a vow, so that Yellamma will fulfill a wish for a son, or if the girl exhibits signs that Yellamma wants her such as matted hair. The girl is then considered married to Jamadagni and is never allowed to marry an ordinary man. When she reaches puberty she is deflowered by a priest or auctioned off to a wealthy landowner who acts as her patron until he tires of her. (One site said men bid for the right to deflower her in the belief that sex with a virgin will cure them of sexually transmitted diseases.) She then belongs to every man in the village who wants to use her sexually, and is often recruited by pimps to work in brothels in large urban centers. Her children have no rights to her father's property and are condemned to live and work as prostitutes themselves. Huge numbers are often given of the problem such as 5,000 new girls entering the sex trade in Bombay every year, and of the 100,000 to 160,000 brothel workers in Bombay as many as 80% are devadasi. The causes that perpetuate the system are generally seen in terms of patriarchal exploitation of women by men, caste struggles by which upper castes seek to degrade and dominate lower castes, and the poverty and frequent droughts in Northern Karnataka that force the lower castes to turn to prostitution. There is also considerable blame placed on devotees of Yellamma who condone and perpetuate the system, and the devadasis themselves who are said to remain in the profession out of a fear of angering Yellamma. Some authors will acknowledge that the status of traditional devadasis was somewhat better, but contend that this is the state to which the current situation has sunk.

Most of the above scenario (which is repeated on many web sites) can be traced directly to a book called *Devadasi Cult: A Sociological Analysis*, by Jogan Shankar.<sup>11</sup> (Shankar is frequently cited as an authority.) Shankar's book seems scholarly at first. He gives a

---

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Tsering, "New Film About One of India's Ugliest Secrets," <http://www.ncmonline.com/content/ncm/2001/dec/1204uglysecret.html>, accessed May, 2002.. (There has also been made a film titled "Yellamma," but this film is an Indian remake of Shakespeare's Macbeth, and apparently has nothing to do with devadasis or the goddess Yellamma.)

<sup>11</sup> Jogan Shankar, *Devadasi Cult: A Sociological Analysis* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1990).

brief history of temple prostitution around the world and in India and then focuses special attention on devadasis in Yellapura village in Northern Karnataka, complete with eleven case histories. However Shankar's case histories never give voice to those who practice the tradition. Nor does he address or even acknowledge there may be an element of spirituality in a devadasi's life. Instead he treats them simply as victims of poverty, male exploitation, and caste oppression. He especially blames Hinduism itself and writes, "It is believed that the ideology of Hinduism is the great oppressor of women. Even today most Hindus subscribe to such ideologies preached in Vedas and a number of sacred books written in antiquity."<sup>12</sup> Shankar's sociological analysis is not interested in a sympathetic understanding of the practice so much as reforming it.

To really understand Yellamma's devadasis, and the situation in Karnataka, it would be helpful to take a brief look at the traditional institution of devadasis as practiced throughout South Asia. To begin with, translating the term devadasi as "Slave of God" or "temple prostitute" is misleading. Slave and prostitute are ugly terms that imply exploitation and degradation. There is nothing ugly about devadasis. These were traditionally honored, respected, ritual persons cultured in the arts.<sup>13</sup> They were not stigmatized as unclean prostitutes but were seen as highly auspicious persons. A devadasi is one whose husband never dies. She was not only part of the ritual life of the temple but was invited into homes for important functions like weddings and coming of age rituals. She was an artist, a temple dancer, freed from having to cook and wash for men in order to pursue and perfect her craft under the tutelage of her guru. In contrast to a prostitute, she was not available to every man in the village but often had a single patron for life. Her parents often arranged this patronage much as weddings are arranged. Her status was more like a second wife though she did not live with her patron. More often she remained in her parent's home or with other older devadasis. She had matrilineal property rights, a right to income from temple lands, and the right to collect

---

<sup>12</sup> Shankar, 109.

<sup>13</sup> There are a number of recent books and articles that have recently reexamined the life and role of devadasis in South Asia. For this paper I gleaned considerable information from Amrit Srinivasan, *Reform or Conformity? Temple 'Prostitution' and the Community in the Madras Presidency*, in Bina Agarwal, ed., *Structures of Patriarchy: State, Community and Household in Modernising Asia* (London, Zed Books Ltd., 1988).

alms as a ritual person. She had the right to adopt an heir if she chose, and her children were not considered illegitimate but were fathered by the deity. These children were often sought as desirable marriage partners by families of the same caste as the devadasi.<sup>14</sup> The biological father had no rights to her children and it was easier for a devadasi to get rid of an abusive patron than for a wife to get rid of an abusive husband. For the patron, the privilege of supporting a devadasi brought him prestige. One gets the impression that if he were to treat her badly he would be the one to bear the stigma.

For the devadasi, the tradition presented her with a valid, respected, lifestyle alternative to becoming a wife. Much of the decline in the institution can be blamed on the efforts of reformers. By stigmatizing them as prostitutes they have lost patronage, they have lost their rights to income from temple lands, and they have lost income from alms. One web site includes quotes from a devadasi in her 80's saying she had decided not to bring up a protégé into the life style. Her complaints however were not about being sexually exploited but about the loss of support from the temple and the resultant poverty.

One author, Chhaya Datar, sees reform efforts as a Brahmanical, and patriarchal attempt to get control over a matriarchal institution that emerged from the so-called little tradition of village Hinduism.<sup>15</sup> Prominent in the early debates were voices of Brahmins complaining that devadasi dedications were not sanctioned by the Vedas, and the presence of devadasis in temples was polluting due to their low caste. After laws were passed outlawing devadasi dedications, and thus breaking the monopoly devadasis had on the practice of classical dance, it was women of the Brahmin caste that then took it upon themselves to “rescue” the endangered art form. While laws outlawing devadasi dedication is targeted at the priests and families who support the dedications, no one has yet to be prosecuted under the laws. Rather, court cases have largely involved male heirs using the laws to challenge the matriarchal tradition of inheritance. Efforts to reform devadasi themselves often try to get them married, even to the extent that cash incentives

---

<sup>14</sup> Bradford, 315.

<sup>15</sup> Chhaya Datar, “Reform or New Form of Patriarchy? Devadasis in the Border Region of Maharashtra and Karnataka,” *Indian Journal of Social Work* 53, no. 1 (January 1992): 81-91. Datar’s views echo those of Srinivasan cited above but focus more directly on Yellamma’s devotees.



are provided to any man who marries a devadasi (and thus confine her to a more conventional patriarchal structure). These cash incentives are only available to devadasis of an age at which they are still sexually active. There is no help available to relieve the poverty of older devadasis. It is apparently the idea of sexually active single women that is deemed objectionable. Datar also points out that no objections have been raised against minor girls being dedicated as Christian Nuns or Jain Sadhwis because these girls and women are expected to remain celibate. (And I might add there seems to be no objection to arranged marriages.) The objections are thus not about age or a girl's choice but about the independent status of the devadasi as sexually active artisans. This point was made clear from a controversy that erupted in 1995 when the Jagannath Temple in Puri attempted to recruit five educated women in their thirties and forties (several of whom were already married and had independent careers) to act as devadasis for the temple.<sup>16</sup> For some the objection was that the women were not young and single and thus could not marry the deity as true devadasi, but for the reformers the fear was that it would give new legitimacy to a dying institution. These reformers simply could not understand why a woman who was already married and had a career would want to participate in what they believed was an exploitive custom.

#### Dedicated to Yellamma

Most of what has been written on devadasis focuses on Orissa and Tamil Nadu. In Karnataka the term devadasi is inadequate and misleading. There are actually three categories of people dedicated to Yellamma – jogappa, who are men that dress as women, jogamma (or jogavva), who are women that dress as men, and basavi, who could more properly be called devadasi. Yellamma is seen as a goddess that causes trouble and requires appeasement. This trouble may take the form of affliction such as crop failure, the buffalo's milk drying up, or a death in the family. It might also be a physical ailment such as insomnia, loss of appetite, skin problems, sexual problems and diseases, or matted hair. Yellamma even has the power to change one's sex. It might be enough to make a pilgrimage or resume worship of an image of her that has been left to languish on

---

<sup>16</sup> B.B. Sahoo, "Revival of the Devadasi System," *Indian Journal of Social Work* 58, no. 3 (July 1997): 361-369.

a shelf. In severe cases such as persistent growth of matted hair or a change in sexual orientation they say the person has been “caught” by the goddess.<sup>17</sup>

In the case of boys, if they show a loss of masculinity, matted hair or a lack of interest in women they become dedicated to Yellamma as jogappa.<sup>18</sup> This is done at an age when their elders would otherwise be arranging their marriage. They are not made into eunuchs like hajiras but dress in women clothes, sing, dance, and carry a copper water pot to which is attached an image of Yellamma as a portable shrine. Like traditional devadasis jogappa are not stigmatized but play an important, respected, ritual role in the community.<sup>19</sup> They too are invited to weddings and coming of age ceremonies. They may act as priests at small village temples to Yellamma or one of her sisters, and will accompany groups on pilgrimages to Yellamma Hill at Saundatti where they assist and guide pilgrims in completing the required rituals. An important aspect of the jogappa’s persona is that they engage in an aggressive, exaggerated display of female erotic energy. Like rambunctious drag queens they tease and flirt with ordinary men. They are not however male prostitutes and while they may be homosexual their partners are usually other jogappa.

Jogamma on the other hand are women who dress as men and carry an image of Yellamma on their heads in a basket. (Because of the images they carry, both jogappa and jogamma are called “carriers of Yellamma.”) Jogamma are not however the female equivalents of jogappa. Jogamma do not dance or emphasize their sexuality. They are rather to be understood as ascetics.<sup>20</sup> They often come to the role later in life after being “caught” by the goddess. But like jogappa and devadasi they too are invited to play a respected role in the ritual life of their communities. They may also have other occupations. I read an interesting story of a woman who worked as a street banker who would make the rounds each week to her clients and collect money which she would then deposit for them, thus helping them save for the down payment they need to get a

---

<sup>17</sup> Bradford, 307.

<sup>18</sup> Bradford, 312.

<sup>19</sup> Bradford, 312-314.

<sup>20</sup> Bradford, 317-318.

government approved housing loan. However, on Tuesdays and Thursdays she would go out as a jogamma, carrying an image of Yellamma in her basket and collecting alms.<sup>21</sup>

The third category of devotee dedicated to Yellamma is the devadasi proper, locally called basavi or sule.<sup>22</sup> These do not carry around an image of Yellamma but like devadasi elsewhere in South India they do practice the art of dance, (although I have found no information on their training, practice, or style of dance). The term basavi is from the word Basava, a regional name for Shiva's bull Nandi, and one that connotes female sexual potency. Sule is more properly translated prostitute and is applied to both the devadasis and commercial prostitutes. Some basavi are attached to a temple with specific duties and privileges and are known as jogati. These are inherited positions and come with income (or produce) from temple lands and gifts of cloth and jewelry from devotees. These temple basavis are married to Jamadagni while still virgins and deflowered by a man who agrees to pay the marriage expenses. Most basavi are not attached to a particular temple and are sometimes described as concubines of Jamadagni rather than his wives. In theory a basavi cannot refuse sexual access to any man that comes with gifts, but in practice, accessibility is limited in a number of ways. They may even live with the man who paid for the initiation and who helps to maintain her.

Like the jogappa and jogamma, basavi also play a respected role in the ritual life of their communities – a fact that seems to confound the reformers who try to get them married. All three categories of dedicated persons regularly make pilgrimages to Yellamma hill in Saundatti, and it is here that dedications are reported to still go on in secret. It is difficult to know the actual numbers of dedications still going on. Some websites report thousands each year but I think those kinds of numbers should be treated with skepticism.<sup>23</sup> Saundatti is also a site where reformers gather to protest the dedications.

---

<sup>21</sup> Sonia Pujari: Street Banker (Part 1), <http://www.ibaradio.org/programs/apna/sona2.htm>, accessed 18 April 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Bradford, 315-316.

<sup>23</sup> Jagjit Singh, *Devadasi: Sanctioned By Scriptures*, <http://www.womeninfoline.com/empowerment/social/devadasi.asp>, accessed 18 April 2002.

In addition to making pilgrimages those dedicated to Yellamma observe a ritual calendar that includes breaking of their bangles at the appropriate full moon when Yellamma is widowed, then dressing as widows, and finally putting on new bangles and cloth given by devotees at the “wife-making” full moon four months later. These devotees also all go collecting alms two days per week.

### Concluding remarks

The literature on traditional devadasis creates a picture of the practice that is more like that of Japanese Geishas, cultured in the arts, than as debased sex slaves. Poverty can destroy most any cultural institution. One cannot deny the existence of commercial prostitution in India’s urban centers, and it may well be as reformers claim that urban brothels recruit rural devadasis whom poverty has forced into a desperate situation. However commercial prostitution is a problem distinct from traditional devadasi practices of “prostitution.” Furthermore, because devadasis are treated with respect in India many urban prostitutes have taken to calling themselves devadasi in an effort to legitimize their profession – a fact to be born in mind when reformers report that as many as 80% of the prostitutes in Bombay are devadasis.

There is a lot about Yellamma and her devotees that has not been studied or reported on. For example, I have found no website, or published study, that gave an unfiltered voice to the devotees of Yellamma. I would like to know how Yellamma’s devadasis and their patrons (or clients) view their relationship. What do they say about Yellamma, and their own sexual experiences? I’ve found nothing to suggest any element of Tantric transformative practices, but I would not be surprised if they had deeper thoughts on sexuality than they are generally given credit for. As an art and architectural historian I would like know more about the images that jogamma and jogappa carry, the sacred geography of their pilgrimage sites, and the design of their temples. I also realize that as a white American male it would be a little suspicious of me to show up in Saundatti with a camera around my neck to study the pilgrims who may be circumambulating Yellamma’s temple wearing nothing but neem leaves.)

Finally, I have read of a documentary film titled *Guhya*<sup>24</sup> by Kirtana Kumar (completed with the aid of a 1997 MacArthur Fellowship) that focuses on the link between sexuality and spirituality, looking at the goddess traditions in village India. I've not been able to find a copy but according to descriptions it includes scenes of devadasis in Karnataka sitting in a field laughing and talking about intercourse, an interview with a jogappa talking about the goddesses power to change people, and still another interview with an old devadasi describing how Yellamma changed her life. This is the kind of direct voice, free from moralizing and social agendas, that is needed to understand some of the deeper layers of experience in the lives of those dedicated to Yellamma.

---

<sup>24</sup> C.K. Meena, *Initiating Debate*, The Hindu Online Edition, <http://www.hindu.com/2001/05/27/stories/1327061a.htm>, accessed May 2002.

### Bibliography: Print Sources

- Assayag, Jackie, "Women-Goddess, Women-Distress: Yellamma goddess' devotees in South India (Karnataka)," *Man In India* 69, no. 4 (December 1989): 359-372.
- Bradford, Nicholas J. "Transgenderism and the Cult of Yellamma: Heat, Sex, and Sickness in South Indian Ritual," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 39 (1983): 307-322.
- Datar, Chhaya, "Reform or New Form of Patriarchy? Devadasis in the Border Region of Maharashtra and Karnataka," *Indian Journal of Social Work* 53, no. 1 (January 1992): 81-91.
- Dange, Sadashiv Ambadas, *Towards Understanding Hindu Myths* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 1996).
- Hubel, Teresa, "Devadasi Defiance and the Man-Eater of Malgudi," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 29, no. 1 (1994) 15-28.
- Marglin, Frederique Apffel, *Wives of the God-King: The Rituals of the Devadasis of Puri* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1985).
- Orr, Leslie C., *Donors, Devotees, and Daughters of God: Temple Women in Medieval Tamilnadu* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Sahoo, B.B., "Revival of the Devadasi System," *Indian Journal of Social Work* 58, no. 3 (July 1997): 361-369.
- Shankar, Jogan, *Devadasi Cult: A Sociological Analysis* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1990).
- Shulman, David Dean, *The King and the Clown in South Indian Myth and Poetry* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985).
- Srinivasan, Amrit, *Reform or Conformity? Temple 'Prostitution' and the Community in the Madras Presidency*, in Bina Agarwal, ed., *Structures of Patriarchy: State, Community and Household in Modernising Asia* (London, Zed Books Ltd., 1988), 175-198.



### Annotated bibliography of web sites referencing Yellamma

Because of the nature of most of these sites (nearly all have a reform minded social agenda), it seems necessary to me to do more than just provide a list of URLs. I have here tried to give a one or two sentence review of each site. Not all sites provide the name of the author but I have listed it where available.

Apna Street, "Sonia Pujari: Street Banker (Part 1),"

<http://www.ibaradio.org/programs/apna/sona2.htm>, accessed 18 April 2002. This site tells the story of a jogamma who also works as a street banker. The site's author is not identified.

CPAmedia: The Asia Experts, "Syndication Spotlight: October 2001, Slave Girls of Yellamma." [http://www.cpamedia.com/services/syndication/0110\\_02/](http://www.cpamedia.com/services/syndication/0110_02/), Accessed 18 April 2002. This brief article reads like an in-flight magazine that simultaneously romanticizes India raises the specter of Sati, while characterizing the festival at Saundatti as a Hindu Woodstock, and getting the facts blatantly wrong like describing jogappa as castrated, saree-clad eunuchs.

Dutt, Nabanita, "Devadaasis," [http://www.thingsasian.com/goto\\_article.1261.html](http://www.thingsasian.com/goto_article.1261.html), accessed April 2002. This site seems to be largely a summation of Shankar's devadasi book and few repackaged quotes taken from the Hughes, Sporicic, Mendelsohn, and Chirgwin "factbook."

Garrett, Laurie, "Giving Daughters Away."

<http://www.newsday.com/news/health/ny-aids20-india3.story>; accessed 18 April 2002. The main thrust of this essay is the spread of AIDS, and focuses on devadasis dedicated to Yellamma. The paper includes what I consider something of an urban myth of devadasis, some unbelievable statistics, and some gross inaccuracies like referring to male devotees as castrated hijras (and including a detailed description of castration), rather than as jogappas.

Harth, Sid, "Of Human Trafficking and Goddess Yellamma."

<http://www.comebackkid.com/sid117.html>; accessed 18 April 2002. One of the most offensive sites I came across. Uses expressions like "Mother Fucking Hindus," and "saffron simians." The site goes on to repost information from other sites on Yellamma and prostitution in India.

Hughes, Sporicic, Mendelsohn, and Chirgwin, "India – Facts on Trafficking and Prostitution." <http://www.globalmarch.org/virtual-library/catw/factbook/india.htm>; accessed 18 April 2002. This site presents the equivalent of 15 single spaced pages of quotes from news articles and NGO reports on sexual exploitation in India. Reading it leaves one feeling like vomiting yet a close examination shows that the same handful of sources are cited over and over and I doubt the objectivity of many. There is no distinction between rural and urban, sacred and secular, modern or traditional, or hearsay and

disciplined, academic study. The material here has also been picked up by other reformer sites and is reprinted in its entirety on Sid Harth's web site.

Jamanadas, K., "Devadasis Were Degraded Buddhist Nuns."

[http://www.ambedkar.org/buddhism/Devadasi\\_Were\\_Degraded\\_Buddhist\\_Nuns.htm](http://www.ambedkar.org/buddhism/Devadasi_Were_Degraded_Buddhist_Nuns.htm); accessed 18 April 2002. This site gives a lengthy and detailed summary of Jogan Shankar's book condemning the practice of devadasi dedications and concludes with a theory that when Buddhism was driven out of India the nuns who remained were forced to become devadasis.

Kamat, K.L., "The Yellamma Cult," <http://www.kamat.com/kalranga/people/yellamma/yellamma.htm>; accessed 18 April 2002. One of the better, more objective web sites on Yellamma. Dr. Kamat gives a brief description of Yellamma's myths, and devotees, including a nice collection of photographs of some of those dedicated to Yellamma.

Krishnaswamy, Chetan, "Advocate of Hope. Personality: A Lawyer chucks his practice to reform Devadasis in a Karnataka town." <http://www.the-week.com/99feb21/life1.htm>; accessed 18 April 2002. This is a feel good story from a weekly news magazine on a social reformer and the difficulties he had to face to help devadasis. "What had touched his soul was a lecture by social scientist Sankara Jogan."

Meena, C.K., *Initiating Debate*, The Hindu Online Edition, <http://www.hindu.com/2001/05/27/stories/1327061a.htm>, accessed May 2002. This page gives a review of the documentary film *Guhya*, together with quotes from Kirtana Kumar, the filmmaker. The article also criticizes Shankar's book on Devadasis and acknowledges the possibility of a spiritual dimension to the tradition.

Menon, Meena, TWN Third World Network, "Women in India's Trafficking belt." <http://www.twinside.org.sg/title/belt-cn.htm>; accessed 18 April 2002. This essay looks at what "may or may not be part of a mafia," to explain the relationship between urban prostitution and devadasis dedicated to Yellamma. (Menon is a reformer whose articles are often cited by other reformers.)

Reuter News, posted by Ajay Shah, "Devadasis' life leads from India temple to brothel." [http://www.hindunet.org/srh\\_home/1997\\_1/0104.html](http://www.hindunet.org/srh_home/1997_1/0104.html); accessed 18 April 2002. This site tells the standard version of girls dedicated to Yellamma ending up working in urban brothels.

Saldanaha, Jean, "Galemma." <http://www.ippf.org/regions/sar/rl/issue4/daring.htm>; accessed 18 April 2002. The story of a woman whose hair becomes matted due to a skin disease that "marks" her by Yellamma. Health workers then persuade her to shave her head and apply an anti-fungal medication which gives her a new life.

Save the Children, "Children's Lives: Cult Status."

<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/functions/wedo/lives/india.html>; accessed 18 April 2002. This web page focuses on the tales of former devadasis of Yellamma and what is referred to as the "jogin cult." While undeniably sad, I wonder to what extent the handful of quotes really gives voice to these or other typical devadasis.

Singh, Jagjit, *Devadasi: Sanctioned By Scriptures*,

<http://www.womeninfoonline.com/empowerment/social/devadasi.asp>; accessed 18 April 2002. A brief description of devadasi dedications to Yellamma that characterizes the practice in terms of exploitation, and criticizes the ineffectiveness of laws designed to end it. An accompanying page by the same author (<http://www.womeninfoonline.com/empowerment/social/dedication.asp>) gives a summary of the Yellamma myth and references publications by reform minded social workers.

South Nexus – The Early word on Karnataka, "Dharwad Temples,"

[http://www.southnexus.com/temples\\_dharwad.php](http://www.southnexus.com/temples_dharwad.php); accessed November 2001. The first web site I found on Yellamma, and which started me off on this whole study.

Sunday Times of South Africa, "AIDS in India."

<http://sundaytimes.co.za/2002/04/07/insight/in01.asp>; accessed 18 April 2002. This essay focuses on the problem of AIDS and urban prostitution and describes several features of devadasi dedications to Yellamma as part of the problem.

"Unpleasant Rituals." <http://www.ambedkar.org/News/hl/Unpleasantrituals.htm>;

accessed 18 April 2002. This page begins with a news story on Yellamma jathra featuring animal sacrifices and semi nude dancing and then goes into a very lengthy paper on dalit oppression and "Ritualized Prostitution." Most of the footnotes refer to Human Rights Watch interviews.