

Women's Agency and Recovery from Devadasi Bondage in Sudha Murty's Three Thousand Stitches

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Abstract

This study examines Sudha Murty's treatment of Devadasi women and the shift from ritualised oppression to self-determined empowerment in *Three Thousand Stitches*. It examines the intersection of religious, gender and caste oppression and discusses how the Devadasi system has traditionally contained women through ritualised sexuality, economic dependence, internalised cultural expectations and institutionalised oppression. Using a qualitative approach to studying the novel, this thesis looks at Murty's method of emotional witnessing and how this avoids closure and didacticism, while foregrounding the importance of the materiality in the women's lives. The thesis also looks at community support, employment and education as important factors in transforming individual victimisation into community empowerment. Women can then transition from ritualised containment to self-determined empowerment. Resistance is seen not only in resistance to ritualised oppression but in transformation of work, social relations and identity through continuous self-assertion and critical consciousness. Re-embedding and dignity are also seen as part of empowerment, as economic independence and social acceptance can work to overcome marginalisation and invisibility. Murty's stories are also placed in the context of current issues of caste and subaltern feminism. This thesis aims to add to the study of gendered resistance through literature and to also point towards sustainable self-determination and dignity for marginalised women from systematic oppression. Empowerment is also seen as a socio-cultural process.

Keywords: Women's agency, Caste and gender oppression, Narrative resistance, Devadasi system, Empowerment and dignity

1. Introduction

Sudha Murty's story highlights the social and cultural structure of a tradition that generally institutionalises the oppression of women. The story also brings out the shift of system confinement to individual and community rehabilitation among women trapped in a cycle of inherited victimisation in the Devadasi tradition. (Vidhya & Jeyasala, 2026). Murty's story also brings out the patriarchal imposition on women and the commodification of womanhood. It thus makes an attempt to illustrate the shift from imposed exclusion to empowerment. (Vidhya & Jeyasala, 2026). The stories also place the women in their socio-political environment while emphasising the role of literature in defying tradition and promoting empowerment. (Gurav, 2025). These attempts to reclaim are studied and the intersection of gender and caste oppression is made evident. The shift made by the characters from state confinement to self-determination is also indicated. (Alcalá, 2026; Arshad et al., 2026). Furthermore, it is argued that such rejections are not just individual acts of resistance but systematic ones which also redefine cultural representations of femininity. (Arshad et al., 2025). Murty further highlights the silent resistance of victims of this cultural oppression and opens a discussion on the suffering caused by bondage and the quest for justice and equality (Qureshi & Javed, 2026). The narrative journey taken by these characters reflects a shift from suffering caused by religion based oppression to the acquisition of empowerment and also highlights the personal journey of individuals in the complexities of patriarchy (Nathiya M, 2026; Ratha, 2025). Murty thus highlights the various factors that contribute to the initial loss of power among these women such as castes, internalized socio-cultural norms etc. However, the stories also highlight the journey to empowerment and redefines self determination as an act of resistance to the performance of power in traditional systems (Menon & Thakur, 2025). Also a significant shift in going from complete oppression to a revised self is achieved through the internalization of these women. This internalization then becomes an effective tool in countering gender oppression (Anuradha, 2026). This paper analyses how these characters break the male dominated systems that result in the subordinating of women to second class citizens and how they shift their experience from silence to self expression (Olivia, 2026a, 2026b). This article suggests that the narratives involving these women do not operate in an either/or relationship between oppression and empowerment but instead operate in a manner which is heavily marked by the intersection of religion and caste (Jha, 2025a, 2025b). Furthermore, by unearthing the history that has constructed the Devadasi practice, this article can examine the precarious

nature between rejection and justice for these women (Mohanty & Babu, 2025). Murty also illuminates the sordid nature of the practice of Devadasi by reflecting the trend in Indian English literature to expose the social stigma and unfortunate circumstances experienced by women caught in a system of rigid patriarchy (Mukherjee, 2022). In addition, this article can examine the dissonance that exists between the religious significance attached to the devadasi and the social, psychological and physical violence that she experiences (Rohilla & Rani, 2024). Finally Murty can illustrate the nature of recovery as women are able to reconstruct their identity, reassert their self-worth and engage in acts of resistance that translate individual experiences into community potentiality (Vidhya & Jeyasala, 2026). Through these narratives an exploration of agency can be made that exists beyond the realm of the performative and can also include voice, self-respect and the ability to envision an existence outside of a fixed oppression.

2. Literature Review

2.1.Context of the Devadasi system

The Devadasi system was a religious mechanism that allowed for the subjugation of female sexuality through the marriage of a girl to a god. This in turn allowed for the exploitation of women by upper-caste, male figures of authority (Geetha, 2020). There was a definite social ranking through this Devadasi system and the outward show of religious commitment concealed the selling of a woman's sexuality and lack of agency (Howell, 2025). A socio-economic dependence on the Devadasi community then perpetuates this marginalization as it traps women in a cycle of poverty and without land or education they become subject to both social rejection and exploitation by upper-caste males (Singh, 2024). The intersection of gender and caste creates a unique kind of marginalization for the Devadasi as their perceived lack of 'purity' can be used as a reason for their socio-economic marginalization (Talat & Singh, 2023). External agencies also contribute to the marginalization of Devadasis because they tend to reduce the identity of these women to that of immoral and "dirty" women when in reality the Devadasi women themselves have specific expectations and desires which are ignored by these external actors (Aaron, 2015). Colonial constructions of the Devadasi also contribute to their marginalization because historically they were characterized as prostitutes instead of women in a state of forced sexual and labor subjugation.

2.2.History of Devadasi social structure

The history of Devadasi is from temple dance to a unstable form of sexual exploitation. However, the role of colonial administration in distorting or propelling this shift is evident (Deepak, 2025). Devadasi girls are often daughters given to the deity Yellamma in matrilineality and are considered to have replaced the eldest son in providing for the family. These girls are treated as an under-privileged group (AARON, 2016). Moreover, a caste position is also imposed on the Devadasi which essentially binds the girls to inherited performance in ritual and perpetuates their oppression in society (Sehgal & Patni, 2023). These patriarchal structures trap the girls into the transgenerational sexual exploitation. Socio economic conditions and social norms inhibit the escape from transgenerational sexual exploitation (Magotra et al., 2025). The community perceives them as inherently submissive women. This results in a gender specific identity for these women. Individuality is undermined and religious commitment is given more importance over health and individuality (Sharma, 2018). This implies that the community upholds its moral rationality on preservation of the social structures and as a result the Devadasi is susceptible to exploitation as well as poor health outcomes and social marginalization (Khan et al., 2017). The absence of support structures is also evident. Long-standing reclassification of Devadasi women as "social evils" or traffickers results in deprivation of legal and social rights (Najar, 2023). Today the religious cover has also been significantly removed and the Devadasi is considered to be economically and socially debarred and exploited for sexual purposes (Sharma, 2018). Although the Devadasi is officially banned since 1988 there are still cases of caste based discrimination and economic distress in northern Karnataka. Studies have shown that 90% + of female sex workers in the region originate from a Devadasi background (Javalkar et al., 2019).

2.2.1. Gendered Forms Bondage

Devadasi women are confined within a system that suppresses agency through the practice of devadasi sexual activity as ordained by god, and suppressing resistance through adherence to religion (Anand, 2024). In addition, economic dependency on immediate family leads to a higher likelihood of these women turning to sexual activity as the sole source to support their family (Sangha et al., 2018). Double standards are practised within these communities through an assumption that men can continue to uphold patriarchal power, while existing as parasites off the labour of the women (Rana, 2020). The practice of exploiting these women further leads to internalisation of this oppression because these women are made to believe that their oppression is ordained within the cultural fabric (Patkar & Patkar, 2024). This internalised belief in pre-ordained oppression leads to a lack of understanding of the systemic oppression

faced by these women, leading them further into a cycle of ongoing exclusion from civil rights and sexual abuse (Sabharwal & Sonalkar, 2015; Srivastava, 2025). Bureaucratic obstacles also exist which contribute to the oppression faced by devadasi women. For example, access to food and educational benefits require either a residence or a name provided by a father (Gurnani et al., 2011). All of these factors contribute to the overall marginalisation and precarious existence of the devadasi, as healthcare and economic survival are in constant battle and there is little space for individual dreams. (B & R, 2015; Pachauri et al., 2021).

2.2.2. Representation of Women Protagonists

Murty in *Three Thousand Stitches* has made an attempt to showcase how these women protagonists deal with the conflict between their imposed inferiority and the rise of their individuality and ability to make choices in their lives, and also the subtle rebellion they perform against the moral restraints placed on them (Divya et al., 2025; Malavika, 2025). The women protagonists are able to convert their inferiority into a platform for resistance. Malavika also talks about the importance of redefining their identities beyond the temple work so that the recovery of their self-worth can begin (Malavika, 2025). Their subtle resistance also allows them to break the term 'sacrificial object' and allows them to achieve economic and physical independence even within the presence of continued societal exclusion (Divya et al., 2025; Mitra et al., 2021). They also try to pass on this notion of resistance to their children thereby helping to break the chain of intergenerational inferiority (Thenmozhi, 2024). They also surpass the limitations imposed on them and create a narrative that is in opposition to society's imposed limitations. They shift from being victims of the system to become agents of their own change (Lodhi & Indraguru, 2026; Ranga & Prasad, 2025). This transition in agency highlights an understanding of resistance in the narratives of the marginalized. In these narratives, resistance is also evident as inner conflict and perseverance against deeply entrenched patriarchies (Kumar, 2024). Resistance among these women can manifest in two distinct forms: community formation and nuanced retreat. Community formation fosters a community structure that allows for communal survival. Instead of women being passive recipients of change, this strategy allows them to share resources, knowledge and types of survival. On the other hand, nuanced retreat allows the women to retain some degree of agency and resist the seeping in of patriarchal expectations. This type of resistance does not necessarily require overt resistance but can include silence, refusal and boundaries as expressions of resistance. Murty includes both forms of resistance because she does not want to define resilience to empowerment in one specific way. Rather, Murty wants to highlight the different forms of

agency, dignity and survival that can be attained by women within systems that are not immediately malleable.

2.2.3. Female Subjectivity

Murty's story provides for formation of female subjectivity that transcends victimization and instead locates identity formation within constant movements away from cultural domination. (Bankalagi & Shinde, 2025) These women begin to take ownership of their stories and as they gain an understanding of themselves, they use this growth as a mechanism to resist the strict caste and moral system that was imposed upon them. (Ann et al., 2025) As these women gain a subjective self they are better equipped to navigate within the constraints of patriarchy and begin to redefine their community identities as an act of resistance against being defined as subaltern. (Sivakumar & Saleem, 2025) They also strategically utilize vocational and literacy programs as a way to break the cycle of economic subjugation that had historically kept them tied to their oppressors. (Kishore, 2024) This re-skilling process is also a type of everyday resilience as these women are able to shape their conditions and direct their work and behaviors. ((España) & Cherechés, 2022) Murty focuses on these individual acts of resistance and shows how decolonization can also be a political process as well as an individual reclaiming of value. (Biswas, 2025) In the inward journey of self-discovery, the women re-define self agency as an ethical performance of identity instead as a response to external coercion. (Anuradha, 2026) The re-assertion of self agency reveals the potential of literature beyond testimony to become a tool for political and social change. (Raut, 2025; Vidhya & Jeyasala, 2026) Murty's text makes the experiences of the women legible and highlights their agency, dreams, choices and struggles. Thus it goes beyond positioning the Devadasi as a victim of a tradition and urges the audience to understand recovery as rights, dignity and agency and not as an act of charity. Personal empowerment is also linked to breaking down gender and caste exclusionary systems. (Mukherjee, 2022).

2.2.4. Collective Female Experience

Murty gives the individuality of the Devadasi struggle a connection to the silencing of women in different levels of Indian society and makes rehabilitation of Devadasis part of the larger process of feminism (Hiremath, 2026). Murty gives these women a role in changing society and makes the process of empowerment of these women an example of the larger difficulty in redefining the role of women in light of institutional apathy and inherited cultural expectations (Yadav, 2026). Murty also highlights the importance of collective empowerment in allowing

marginalized groups to form a collective which then may become a tool for transformation and to oppose the institutionalization of their silencing. (Ranjit & Namdeo, 2025) Collective empowerment can shift individual resistance to a process of group rights while also making the process of reclaiming self worth through knowledge and mutual support more successful (Markhumah & Hakim, 2025) There is also the possibility of community solidarity as an effective resistance to institutional silencing as local resistance can be made part of a larger process of justice (C. & Kumar, 2024) An intersectional understanding is necessary as oppression based on class, gender and caste is interconnected and must be addressed collectively to dismantle these institutional power structures. (Roshini et al., 2013) Murty also implies that the survival of these women can be utilised as a tool in opposing patriarchy. These women can move beyond mere survival to create spaces that oppose the intersections of class and caste oppression. (Kumar, 2026; Ranjit & Namdeo, 2025).

2.2.5. Three Thousand Stitches

Murty's short story places the story of the Devadasi in the context of contemporary social stories and uses the family space to question various institutions (Prashasti, 2026). It uses individual stories instead of sociological ones to make the point that the Devadasi culture had been accorded a certain social position in the past but had regressed into institutionalized subjugation. This past and present contrast highlights the continuance of this culture in the present (Godbole, 2020). Murty's narrative thus contributes to the modern Indian English narrative which emphasizes the expression of individual stories with the intent to uncover the ongoing influence of caste-based household arrangements (Lalwani, 2026). Murty's story also highlights the dichotomy between the burden of an ancient practice and the rising potential of women in a fast-changing society (Agrawal & Dwivedi, 2024; Clarissa, 2025). Murty uses the story of the Devadasi to discuss institutionalization of tradition along with the protection of human rights (Selvi, 2026). Supriya and Jayakanth examine the intersection of economic vulnerability and gendered violence in the Devadasi system. They argue the oppression of Devadasis is upheld by family complicity and apathy within society (Supriya & Jayakanth, 2024). Murty uses social realism to document these narratives. Murty sheds light on the materialities of gendered oppression behind the ritual veil of Devadasi practice. (Ambika, 2025) Murty also moves beyond the passive victim and instead portrays the Devadasis as utilizing the spaces inbetween ritual and tradition to assert control over their bodies. (Jothi & Selvi, 2024) The narratives also highlight the importance of breaking away from caste imposed roles in order to attain liberation. Personal agency is presented as key to overcoming the

institutional power of the Devadasi system. This allows for a connection between individual psychological freedom and the need for institutional change. There is also a current in literature that uses real registries in order to add credence to their social critique.

2.2.6. Narrative Strategies of Murthy's

Murty has made an effort to follow a strategy of empathetic witnessing in her narrative. Murty uses a narrative mode that does not involve didacticism or easy romanticization and violence associated with the life of a Devadasi. (Kumar, 2026). The narrative also encourages a closeness between the author and the reader. This facilitates the experience of the materiality of the lives of the Devadasi women. Murty transcends thematic expressions of suffering and addresses the structural conditions that require reform. (Hiremath, 2026). Murty's strategy of empathetic witnessing avoids the trap of prescribing a clean solution to the stories of the Devadasi women. Their experiences remain at the core of the narrative rather than being framed as a narrative of moral redemption. Furthermore, Murty's use of the autobiography also places Murty within the ethical framework of the narrative. Murty acts as a mediator between the stories of the Devadasi women and makes visible the power and representation issues that are associated with transforming the experiences of the oppressed into public discourse. (Mukherjee, 2022; Rohilla & Rani, 2024). Murty avoids the forced closure that is present in most narratives. Murty allows space for the narratives of the lives of these women to remain fluid. Murty avoids a reductive narrative of "empowerment" that simplifies the complexity and continuation of the efforts of these women. (Kumar, 2026). Murty also avoids the provision of a cathartic solution to their story. This avoids the cultural norm which requires the suffering of women to be redeemed through reconciliation. (Kumar, 2026a, 2026b). Murty instead focuses on a "feminist refusal" which avoids the emotional work that these women are expected to do or the closure that the reader wants from their narrative. Murty instead puts the silence and continued resistance of the women at the core of an ethical act.

2.2.7. Murthy's dedication to social realism

Murthy's dedication to social realism works against the exoticised and stereotyped representation of the oppressed in the existing literature by highlighting the material lack present in the system of caste servitude. (Mishra, 2026). It operates by focusing on socioeconomic realities rather than over-romanticisation. It conforms to the present trend of analysing the relationship between lack of economic power and lack of rights as a mechanism to sustain a system of exploitation. (Mary, 2025) Furthermore, Murthy's use of realism also

works against the continuation of social discrimination by making visible the use of 'tradition' as a mask for the continued material oppression of women. (Kumar, 2026) The trauma is thus seen to be structurally sustained and the focus is from individual escape to the need for breaking down the structures that necessitate the continual oppression. (kumar, 2026) Murthy also inserts personal stories within a larger structure of critique aiming to make the oppressed women "outsider-within" who contribute an important yet frequently overlooked contribution in shaping a radical feminist perception. (Sharma, 2019) Murthy's narrative thus works against the perpetuation of patriarchy by breaking out of the chains of exploitation that are passed down and which continue the system of oppression. (Kumar, 2026) Such breaking can only occur if we go beyond advocating and question the present apathy towards the oppressed in light of the historical institutionalisation. (Sattar, 2025).

2.2.8. Recovery through Agency

Education and the ability to secure a long-term and stable employment can be powerful catalysts in shifting from a state of victimization to one of autonomy (Awan et al., 2025). These resources give them the material capital in order to break the patterns established over the years by the cycle. These resources allow the women to empower themselves and make individual life choices that can potentially counter the larger systems of oppression that had subordinated them. (Zorat, 2024). Furthermore, community-led communal solidarity can be a powerful catalyst in shifting individual empowerment to a communal form of empowerment. This can in a sense substitute complicity to forced labor by substituting it for solidarity among women. (Pawar & Supriya, 2024). These community connections can parallel to the larger subaltern movement which recuperates dignity through collectivism and uses personal suffering as a means to realign within society. (Mughal, 2026), (Chandra, 2025). These women use both social and economic resources to alter their public self. This shift moves them from being commodified for ritual use to becoming active agents in their own recovery. (Mukherjee, 2025). This can also parallel the argument that visibility and voice are necessary in order to counteract the intersectionality of gender and caste oppression. This highlights the role of education as a tool not only to bridge a career but also to reclaim ownership over knowledge and agency within a society that has denied these to knowledge about caste. (A, 2026). Through education, women are also able to break shame narratives that reinforce caste power relations. Women begin to value self-assertation over adherence to structures. (Kumar, 2025). Conscientization in this context empowers women to turn their narratives of suffering into an active process of reclaiming social presence and self-worth from a position that shifts them

from a receiving subject to an active one. (P & Dhanaraj, 2025), (Saha, 2026). Furthermore, there is a move towards agency through collective action where women begin to learn to critically challenge and unlearn historical abuse through solidarity. (Sharma, 2021). Such efforts also highlight the role of education in conjunction with peer solidarity in breaking stigma and building the capacity to resist within caste oppression. (Monika et al., 2025), (Nagpal & Mirza, 2025). These shared spaces not only allow for public discourse but also allow for negotiation of women's demands outside the home. They also convert discrete acts of dissent into institutional struggle (Mangla, 2021). Through shared action, Dalit women's subjectivities can be seen as active and not only as a response to oppression. Instead, they are actively performed as a navigation through the intersecting technologies of gender, class and caste (Paik, 2018). The focus on organized self-help groups as a mechanism for achieving financial inclusion also points towards the utility of economic mobilization as a response to historical oppression. Through access to credit, savings and group based incomes Dalit women can begin to decrease their reliance on middle men and build up power in relation to their economic, familial and social lives (Kandpal, 2022; Sathyanarayana & Babu, 2012). Economic empowerment is also framed not as an individually attained goal but as something achieved through collective action that results in trust, visibility and power through financial solidarity. When economic empowerment is combined with peer solidarity the potential exists to convert psychological reliance into self-initiated behaviour. However, this emancipatory effect of livelihood programs also depends on dismantling caste oppression as well as institutionalization.

2.2.9. Resistance and Empowerment

Resistance is demonstrated in the characters' defiance of the pre-assigned social positions within the Devadasi system through resistance as active transformation of passivity to opposition (Mirza, 2023). Resistance includes the rejection of ritualised subjugation as well as the assertion over the body. These resistances work against the silence established through caste and patriarchy. The characters reject inherited expectations and gain the ability to make individual choices, challenging the commodification of their lives (A. & Senguttuvan, 2024). A shift towards empowerment requires breaking away from cultural justifications. Instead, characters make subversive choices that rework oppression into empowerment (Javier, 2025). Resistance is not only an opposition to ritual, but also a work towards resilience, transforming the knowledge of discrimination into a tool for transformation (Monika et al., 2025). There is also "power with" in which collective experiences are used to foster a social movement against

the normalisation of gender restrictions (Farnworth et al., 2023). These women's emphasis on shared trajectories of empowerment show how empowerment can be understood as contingent upon the strategic navigation of established social and structural barriers over time (Kabeer, 2011). The process of achieving empowerment also highlights that empowerment cannot be understood solely in terms of economic or legal change but rather in terms of a multifaceted shift in the cultural and psychological frameworks that shape these women's position in society (Rajak & Yeasmin, 2025). Murty's focus on placing resistance within a wider socio-political context shows the importance of literature as a means to trace the process of resistance as well as change within systemic and self-empowerment processes (Gurav, 2025). These texts also go beyond the documentation of victimization and instead highlight the agency women have in navigating and dismantling the intersecting structures of power between gender and caste (Alcalá, 2026). Additionally, the women in these texts create space for autonomy within rigid social order by redefining their narratives beyond the necessity of an inherited fate (Sharma & Sharma, 2024). This redefinition of self also serves as a way to disrupt patriarchal power and assert an element of self-empowerment as a new model for self-definition (Monika & Rathee, 2024). The characters regain their narratives and evolve from being controlled within ritual to becoming creators of their social and ethical identities (Arshad et al., 2026). Such a transformation highlights the importance of critical consciousness in dismantling structures of oppression as characters evolve from being on the periphery to being actors in society (Sakzlyan, 2024). This is also reflected in their rejection of societal expectations which highlight the importance of expressing individual demands as a first and essential step in resistance to centuries of suppression. This resistance starts at the individual level but eventually starts to evolve into an assertion of redefinitions of work, social relations and identity as well as the ability to conceive of futures outside the constraints of lineage. Murty demonstrates empowerment as a process which includes individual empowerment, social facilitation and material availability transforming isolated acts of empowerment into ongoing empowerment through self-awareness (Vidhya & Jeyasala, 2026).

3. Reintegration and Dignity

Rehabilitation is essentially about the re-gaining of social identity amongst the Devadasi women from being on the periphery of society as ritualized outcaste to being a part of the society. (Saha, 2026) Reintegration for these women demands acknowledgement of their individual value from the outside and a return from the Devadasi to an identity that is valuable and deserves recognition. (Menon & Thakur, 2025) Dignity is used as an indicator of

empowerment. The history of the women and their work becomes an indicator of empowerment instead of an indicator of history of oppression. (Priya, 2025) This emphasis on dignity also allows for a shift from an identity that is casted to an identity that is essentially and individually defined. (M & P., 2025) This identity shift also fits into the larger shift from shame to strength. The acquisition of social status becomes an important tool in combating historical oppression. (Sumarsono et al., 2025) As these women achieve social status, the society's acceptance of them serves as a direct counter to the invisibility created by the existing systems of power. (Kumar, 2025) A society integrated path requires the removal of oppressive norms that create and sustain historical oppression within. Path of restoration shows importance of tackling institutional disparities in education and economic policies which have created an exclusion of such women within the society for sustainable social justice (Mohanty & Babu, 2025). Murty's story emphasizes on institutional efforts that connect personal struggle to permanent societal integration as the path to restoration (Kapare, 2026). Restoration of dignity is also important as it demonstrates individual power. Restoring social position is significant in building resilience to break the chains of historical exploitation (Banu. & Baskaran, 2024). Educational and economic autonomy is a key to restoration. Access to middle class work provides individual dignity and institutional validation (Rawat, 2024). Murty emphasizes the importance of educational and economic empowerment as a strong determinant against recidivism of exploitation. Educational and economic empowerment also play a role in achieving sustainable social justice.

4. Conclusion

Sudha Murty's stories especially *Three Thousand Stitches* propose a shift in the representation of the Devadasi experience from victimhood to institutionalised servitude and to self chosen empowerment. Caste, gender and religion are identified as factors which contribute to the loss of power at the onset of Devadasi life. However, education, employment and community generated solidarity are identified as factors which transform individual trauma into community empowerment. Empathic witnessing and social realism are identified as not promoting either an essentialised narrative or a romanticised narrative but ensuring the importance of the experience of the lives and voices of the Devadasi women and not fitting them into a narrative of salvation. Resistance is identified not as individual acts but as complex and continuous acts of economic resistance, physical resistance and consciousness as well as integration and the restoration of status and social respect. Institutional inequities in economic and educational resources are identified as factors which need to be removed if status is to be restored. This

also identifies empowerment as not solely being about economic or legal empowerment but also involving a cultural and psychological empowerment. This research proposes that literature can play an important role in identifying the transformation from religious and state imposed servitude to self-chosen empowerment. Furthermore, it can provide a framework to examine the empowerment of subaltern women in relation to both gender and caste. Further research could use this literary example and apply it to other stories on the Devadasi experience or investigate the restored communities through empirical research. This would serve to further link literary narrative to real world policy in relation to gender and caste based exclusion.

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