

Impact Stories

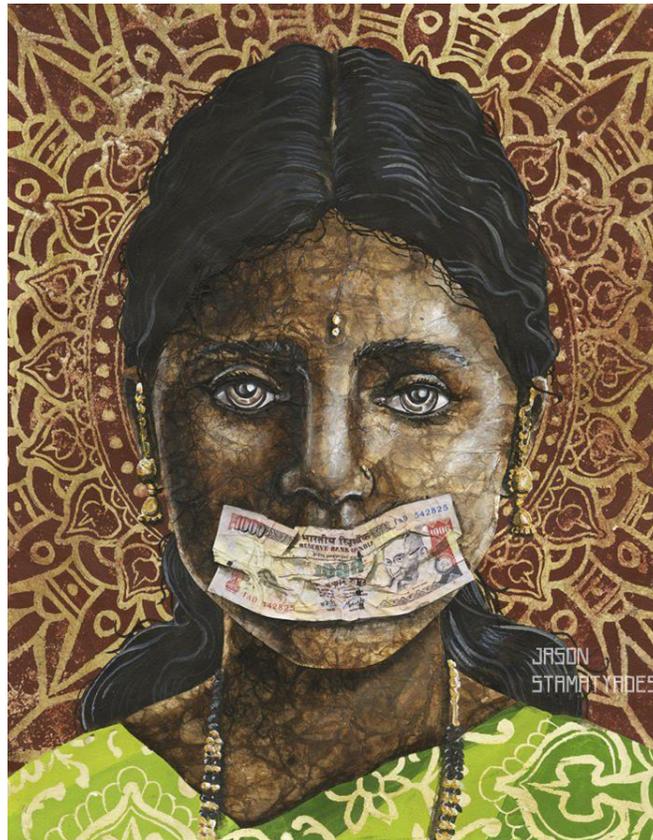


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T. from Papinakanahalli

The 50 year old T. from Papinakanahalli belongs to a Devadasi family with 8 members.



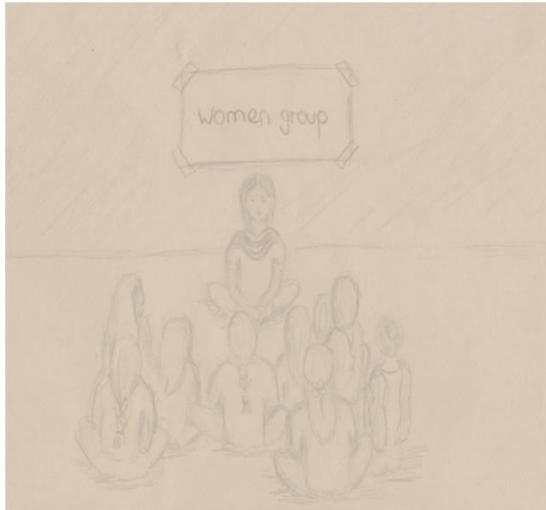
After the blooming of the mines in the area around the village, a lot of people like T. gave up the agricultural work to earn their money through mining work instead.

The unused fields then quickly became some kind of dumping yards and are furthermore used as toilets since most of the inhabitants of the village don't have proper toilets in their houses. That is because the mining workers don't earn enough money to finance real toilets meaning that most of them receive a salary of only 40 or 50 rupees per day.



Especially the women are affected by these issues due to the fact that they are not allowed to do their business on the open fields in sunlight, where everyone can see them as a result of

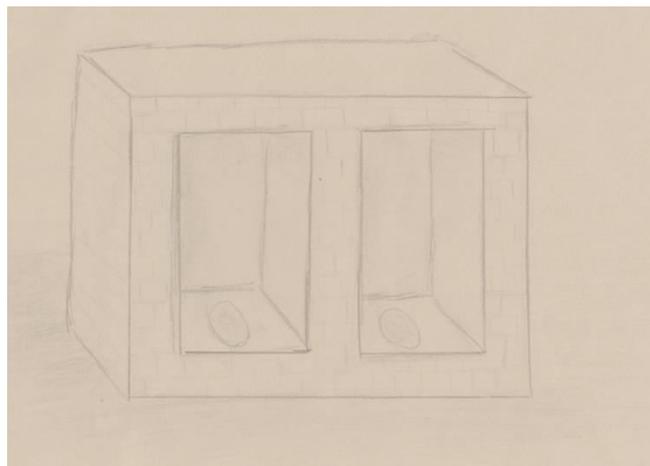
which they only use the fields before sunrise and then have to wait until sunset again. That is an unacceptable imposition for all of the women, particularly if they have already reached a certain age or if they are pregnant, for example. Since the people don't have access to or money for healthcare centres, they usually experience no treatment or help concerning their illnesses and various health problems.



Sakhi met up with a lot of members of the village community to arrange some motivation workshops promoting the construction of sanitary facilities by informing them about the importance of proper toilets in terms of hygiene and prevention of health issues. Following that Sakhi supported the people who actually decided to get some toilets and helped especially the women and the young girls to organise themselves in some women's or youth groups.

Today there are around 400 women in Papinakanahalli working in the MGNREGA programme. T. actively initiated the programme in her village and has mobilised a lot of women to take part in it. Due to the programme they are now earning a salary of 246 rupees per day.

With the credits received through the programme 26 families could build some proper toilets to remarkably improve their hygienic condition. 18 houses were built as new homes for the Devadasi families.



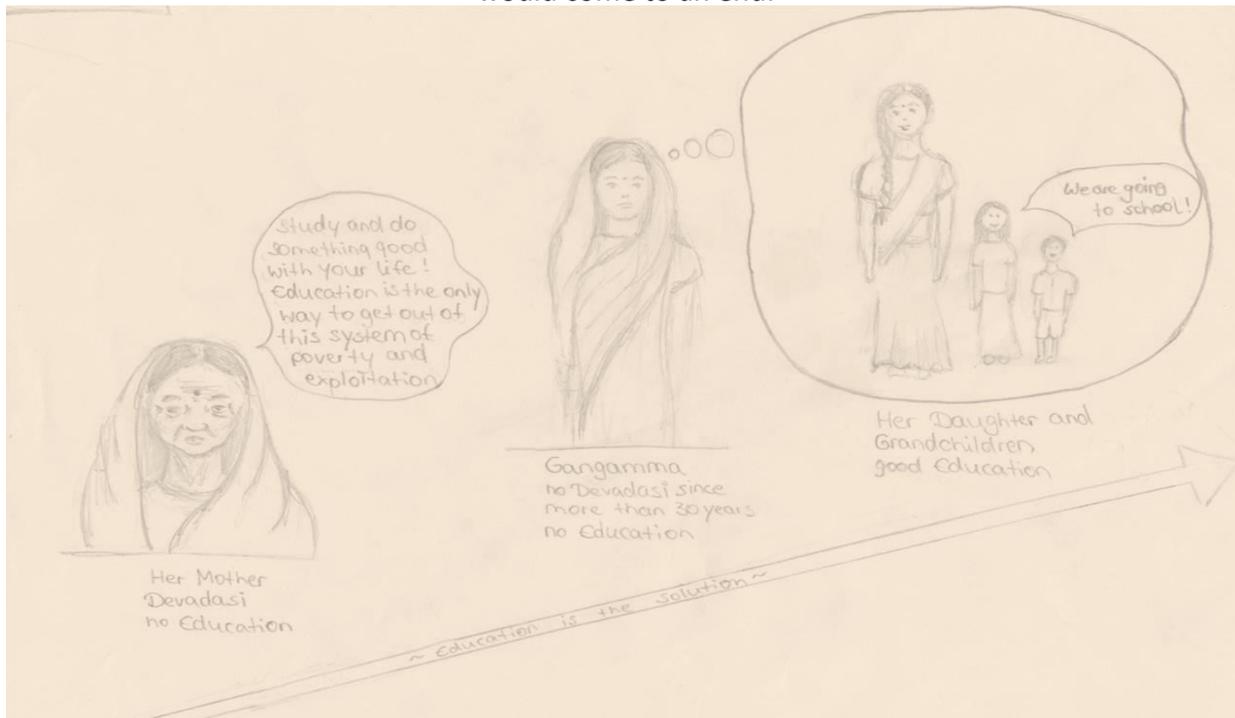
G. from Mariyamanahalli

G. is 75 years old and lives in Mariyamanahalli. She is a former third generation Devadasi who was forced to join the disastrous order when she was only 12 years old but she stopped performing the Devadasi rituals about thirty years ago.

Since she didn't get any governmental aid for building her house, she and her other family members depend on the daily wage work that they do to assure their livelihood.

In her life as a Devadasi she can only recount social discrimination and humiliation.

G. believes that social grievances like the Devadasi system and child marriages need to be abolished once and for all and education is the prime way of accomplishing this. She made sure that her daughter goes to school and has instructed her daughter-in-law to make her grandchildren study well, so that they can live a life in dignity and don't have to face any discrimination. It is her dream that they get good jobs so that one day all their financial troubles would come to an end.

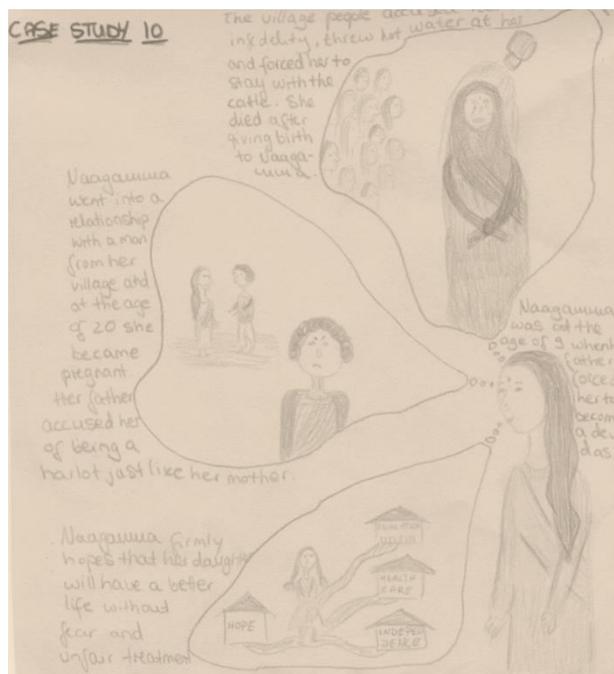


Since the Devadasi women are especially susceptible for all kinds of discrimination, exclusion and abuse, a Devadasi's path of life is full of loneliness and pain. In G.'s opinion, the strict implementation of laws is imperative to finally put an end to the Devadasi system. The government needs to provide quality education for the children from Devadasi families so that they can get out of this system of poverty and exploitation. G. doesn't want her grandchildren to suffer as she did. She remembers her mother who inspired her to study and do something good with her life. Now her biggest hope is that her grandchildren manage to fulfil her mother's dream.

N. from Danapura

38 year old N. lives in Danapura with her three children. She was forced into the Devadasi order at the age of nine by her father, who wanted her to support the household. When she was three months old her mother who was not a Devadasi passed away, leaving the baby girl in her father's care. The circumstances in which her mother died were quite traumatic.

N. recalls that her mother was accused of having sexual relationship with another man and cheating on her husband. At the time, when N. was conceived it was common knowledge that her father was impotent, so she was punished in front of the entire village community.



Her hands and legs were tied with a chain and people made her roam around like this throughout the village and threw hot water at her. Following this she was tied to a pillar where she was publicly humiliated. In the end she was thrown with the cattle as the people forced her to remain with the animals for five days during her pregnancy. She died three months after giving birth to her child. Her daughter N. entered into a relationship with a cobbler from her own village that belonged to the same caste. She conceived at the age of twenty and her father blamed her of being a harlot just like her mother.

N. narrates that her household suffers of severe financial problems but her partner's meagre earnings go to his wife's household rather than hers and he visits her only to satisfy his sexual urges. She is the only earning member in the family.

Contrary to popular belief, Devadasi do not change their partners on a daily basis like commercial sex workers. Most of the Devadasi women try to spend a stable life with one companion if he chooses to stay with them. However, the other upper caste men of the village mistakenly equate their practices with those of commercial sex workers. They believe that just because N. is a Devadasi she would provide sexual service to any man. Many of them approached N. her for sexual favours but she declined.

N. believes that her mother was innocent and she strongly hopes for her daughter that she won't have to suffer from the same kind of discrimination as she and her mother did. N. is a staunch supporter of gender equality and thinks that people who mistreat women ought to be

punished. She cites the example of all the men who come to her but are already married. However, no one is talking about punishing them. Her own father lives in a relationship with 4 women, so how does he have the right to question his daughter's character or her mother's honour, N. asks.

If we are living in a society where justice is for everyone, N. questions further, then where is the justice for the life that mistakenly took the form of a woman.