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# Book: Servants Of The Goddess- The Modern Day Devadasis

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**Book:** Servants Of The Goddess- The Modern Day Devadasis

**Author:** Catherine Rubin Kermorgant

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**Pages:** 408

**Price:** Rs399

The premise of Servants of the Goddess can be summed up in its entirety in one line: 'You can judge a society by the way it treats its weaker sections'. The book takes the readers on a journey spanning from France to rural Karnataka, where the age-old practice of the devadasi system is

still prevalent.

It definitely makes for a good read as Kermorgant etches out the journey remarkably. From meeting her guide, Vani, to touching the lives of various devadasis in a village called Kalyana, she delves deeper into topics such as religious oppression, caste issues, prostitution and poverty.

The writer embarks on a journey to highlight the problems faced by rural devadasi women and is set to make a documentary commissioned by BBC along with her colleague Dilip. But, as the story plunges deeper, characters that seemed to be incumbent take centre-stage as Kermorgant has to convince the devadasis, who call her 'thangi' (sister in Kannada), to be a part of the film while Dilip attempts to jeopardise this endeavour.

What makes the narration striking is the way characters grow and develop and their relationship with Kermorgant, Vani and other crew members who eventually come down to Kalyana. From being prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice as goddess Yellamma's dasi (servant) to realising the ulterior motive behind a religious tradition that sought to oppress the prejudiced classes, the journey of the devadasis is slow yet serene and disturbing at the same time.

The book is divided into 37 chapters and every chapter is preceded by sonnets and commentaries written by famous poets, religious leaders and writers on societal fabric and equality from different eras.

The writer's journey leads to revelations that range from self-empathy to pity towards devadasis which is replaced by support and respect for a marginalised community that has thrived and how.

What hits the reader the most is how Dilip's mature, politically correct persona falls apart when his own bias and prejudices surface. This journey has its moments in tender bonding between Kermorgant and Ranava and other devadasis who come to trust her with their lives.

The conflict between Kermorgant, who wants the reality of the devadasi system exposed, and Dilip, who tries to fabricate it according to his fancy, is the highlight of the book. It raises questions on how educated people are influenced by society and toe the line at the critical juncture when their insights are needed the most.

An angst-ridden journey that translates the voyeuristic view into an empathetic one, Kermorgant's book holds the readers' attention with slick storytelling and descriptive narration.

The book is a must-read for everyone who has faced prejudices or are working for uplifting the numerous sections of society that suffer bias, injustice and disdain. It is also for those who believe that prejudices exist in Bharat and not India.