

THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN AFFECTED WITH MATTED  
HAIR IN SOUTHWESTERN INDIA

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this scholarly work to my father, Late Shri Ganpati Ramchandra Dhaske (Aba) aka Dhaske Painter of Kadegaon, without whose value-based support to my intellectual freedom, I could not have found my Being.

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN AFFECTED WITH MATTED HAIR IN  
SOUTHWESTERN INDIA

Descriptions about the matting of hair given by medical practitioners show a significant commonality indicating it as a historic health problem prevalent across the globe, however with less clarity about its etiopathogenesis. In southwestern India, the emergence of matting of hair is considered a deific phenomenon; consequently, people worship the emerged matted hair and restrict its removal. Superstitious beliefs impose a ritualistic lifestyle on affected women depriving them of health and well-being, further leading to stigma, social isolation, and marginalization. For unmarried females, the matting of hair can result in dedication to the coercive devadasi custom whereby women end up marrying a god or goddess. To date, the state, academia, and disciplines such as medicine and psychology have paid far too little attention to the social, cultural, and health concerns of the women affected by matted hair. A Heideggerian interpretive phenomenological study was conducted to document the lived experience of women affected by the phenomenon of matting of hair. The subjective accounts of 13 jata-affected women selected through purposive sampling were documented to understand their health and human rights marginalization through harmful cultural practices surrounding matting of hair. Seven distinct thematic areas emerged from the study exemplified their lived experience as jata-affected women. The prevalent gender-based inequity revealed substantial vulnerability of women to health and human rights marginalization through harmful cultural practices. The ontological structure of the lived experience of matting of hair highlighted the unreflective internalization of religious-

based discourse of matting of hair. The hermeneutic exploration revealed events that exemplified jata-affected women's compromised religiosity, and control of their well-being, human development, and ontological security. The religious-based interpretation of matting of hair and associated practices marginalize the health and human rights of affected women through family members, institutions, society, and religious-based systems. The study demonstrates the need for collaborative, evidence-based interventions and for effective domestic as well as global policies to prevent the health and human rights violations of women through cultural practices. The study offered foundational evidential documentation of the phenomenon of matting of hair as a harmful cultural practice that compromises women's right to health and well-being.

Margaret E. Adamek, Ph.D., Chair

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This chapter provides a detailed overview of matting of hair with its cultural, historical, mythological, and medical aspects. Further, the chapter specifies the context of the research problem with its health and human rights issues and underlying marginalization and oppression of affected women. Further, the chapter outlines the possible research agenda and explicates the specific phenomenological research agenda on the issue of matting of hair.

### **Background of Research Problem**

Matted hair is dreadlocks or irreversibly tangled hair with multiple locks. Widely called *Jata* in India, it can happen to any female at any age. Under the influence of superstitions, people worship the severe knotting of women's hair as an appearance of a god or goddess and prohibit its removal. When the affected woman, her family members, or the society recognizes the emergence of matted hair, in most cases, tag it as a manifestation of the divine. In due course, the small matted portion of hair grows under the religious-based observance, eventually leading to several mental and physical health implications for the affected women. The matting of hair results in a multifaceted marginalization of women. The precise reasons and the pathological processes behind *Jata* are still not known sufficiently, but typically, it is believed to occur due to factors such as cultural customs, unhygienic living conditions, lack of self-care, and superstitions.

The characteristic matted hair consists of “entangled hair irreversibly cemented with crusted secretions, lice eggs, dirt, and bacteria” (Hirsch & Trautinger, 2010, p. 666). In one of the earliest documentation, Rayer (1833) mentioned matting of hair as the

“inextricable twisting” primarily seen among the “persons who have neglected the care of their hair for some weeks or months,” and also in cases with “convalescents from grave maladies of long duration, and in old indigent persons received into almshouses” (p. 369). The disorders<sup>1</sup> plica neuropathica, plica polonica, and trichoma show matting of hair as an epidemiological feature or comorbidity<sup>2</sup>. Importantly, hysteria was seen as a feature of plica neuropathica in five to seven cases reported (Simpson & Mullins, 1969).

There are various connotations used for matting of hair: *Jata* (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009), *Jade* (Ramberg, 2009), *Jutt* and Rat’s Nest (Krysl, 1998), *Jat* (Kamble N D, 1988), and *Jedi* (Bradford, 1983). Some medical practitioners and researchers have described the somatic manifestation of matted hair as a Bird’s Nest Hair (Dawber & Calnan, 1976), Twisted-Rolled Hair Knots (Itin, Bircher, Lautenschlager, Zuberbühler, & Guggenheim, 1994), Felted Hair (Bogaty & Dunlap, 1970), Tangling of Hair (Graham, 1953), and the Plaited Pigtail (Bradford, 1983).

In the Indian context, women suffering from matted hair often face heavy stigma, discrimination, and stereotyping due to the religious symbolism and superstitious practices surrounding matted hair. The superstitious beliefs and sanctions associated with matted hair amplify a health problem into complex health and human rights violation of affected women. *Jata*<sup>3</sup> becomes a serious challenge for the humanist disciplines such as social work mainly due to its sociocultural complexity, systemic marginalization of women, sensitive religious nature of matted hair, and the paucity of knowledge on it.

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<sup>1</sup> Plica neuropathica, plica polonica, and trichoma are three different hair-related disorders often reflected in medical literature. Matting of hair is common symptomatic feature to these disorders.

<sup>2</sup> Comorbidity is the co-occurrence of multiple symptomatic conditions. The comorbidity of disorders has been complex phenomenon to measure and understand in terms of its effects (de Groot et al 2003).

<sup>3</sup> The researcher has used the word *jata* to indicate matted hair in this study. The word *jata* has been widely used in the geographical context of the study.

Furthermore, there are no culturally sensitive institutional systems to address the plethora of problems associated with matting of hair despite human rights and health being the state responsibility and constitutional obligation in India since 1950.

### **Historical Existence**

In the year 1882, Le Page (1884) reported the first, somewhat clearly documented clinical case of matting of hair in a patient where he termed it as plica neuropathica. Until then, such matted locks of hair were mainly known as plica polonica (Minko, 1973; Schuster, 1968) with its origin believed as the marshy lands of Poland or the poles hence, the connotation 'elf-locks' or 'elf-knots' (Bishop, 1929). Schuster (1968) presented accounts of the English doctors in Russia, where a doctor named Lefevre reported the existence of matting of hair in the Polish region. Bishop (1929) noted similar reports by the physician Samuel Collins (1619-1670) who registered the existence of plica polonica in early 17<sup>th</sup> century. *The encyclopedia Americana* pointed out the existence of plica (also called plica polonica; trichoma) in Poland and its adjacent districts at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Beach & Rines, 1904).

Some early medical descriptions of matted hair termed it as a disease of the head or body where hair agglutinated due to a nauseous discharge from the roots of the hair (Beach & Rines, 1904). Schuster (1968), referring to Lefevre, added that plica polonica was a malady changing healthy hair into a foul matted hair forming plaits or twisted strands, alternatively called polish plaits. Referring to Agnes (1952), Suresh Kumar, Chakravarthy, Anthony, and Koyamu (2001) mentioned:

Plica neuropathica was a common condition of scalp hair in Poland during the 19th century. It was characterized by filthy, malodorous, inflamed scalp usually heavily infested by lice. The hair was matted into a sticky, moist mass probably due to deficient care of the hair. The Polish custom of wearing tight fur caps and the superstitious belief that a lousy scalp was healthy no doubt contributed to the frequency of plica polonica in Poland. (p. 281)

Forstl and Elliger (1995) highlighted that matting of hair formed a diagnostic sign for diseases such as trichoma (also mentioned by Hebra & Kaposi, 1874), plica polonica (Latin), *kottun* (Polish), and *hexenzopf* (German).

In the Indian context, Pestonji (1885) came across a female patient with matting of hair in October of 1883 in Mumbai; one year after Le Page identified a case of plica neuropathica in September 1882 in England. Almost a century later, Hajini, Ahamed and Ahamed (1982) reported the first clinically identified case of plica neuropathica in India. There are several cases reported in books and medical journals over a period of centuries, but without detailed and satisfactory elucidations about the pathology, taxonomy, diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis for matting of hair.

### **Mythological Existence**

Within Hinduism, *Jata* or the matted locks of hair have various meanings and cultural practices associated with it. In India, *Sadhus*<sup>4</sup> carry matted hair as an essential feature of their spiritual inclination (Kanwar & De, 2007) where it represents their abstinence from the mundane life. The Vedic scriptures<sup>5</sup> refer to matted hair as *Jata* (Gnanaraj, Venugopal, & Pandurangan, 2007). *Jata* has been associated with the deity *Shiva* and his followers, the *Tantric* tradition, and the *Tantric* goddess *Kali* who has matted and wild hair (McDaniel, 2010). Historically, matted hair is a principle symbol of

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<sup>4</sup> *Sadhus* are spiritual ascetics who believed to have denounced the mundane life seeking spiritual lifestyles.

<sup>5</sup> The scriptures associated with Hinduism.

the *Yellamma*<sup>6</sup> women who are seen as a medium of worldly appearance of the popular goddess *Yellamma* in the southern state of Karnataka in India (Ramberg, 2009).

Glazier (2001) compiled multicultural and historic occurrences of dreadlocks and noted, “The term (*Jata*) is probably derived from the Dravidian<sup>7</sup> word ‘*CaTai*’ which means ‘to twist or to wrap’” (p. 279). The presence of dreadlocks has been observed among various groups: the *Celts*, the *Germanic* tribes, the *Naga* people, the *Vikings*, the *Greeks*, the *Pacific Ocean* people, the *Nazrites* of Judaism, the *Darveshsis* of Islam, the *Coptic* Monks of Christianity, the *Aztec*, and *Mesoamericans* in Mexico, the Bayefall *Sufi* order in Senegal, the *Rastafarians* of Jamaica, and the *Nagti* of New Zealand (Glazier, 2001). A character in Greek mythology, *Medusa*<sup>8</sup>, had snake-like matted hair received after a curse (Niz, 2005). The Buddhist *Tantric* tradition shows dreadlocks; however, Cakya Chokden (1428-1507) suggested that its origin is after the 11<sup>th</sup> century (Bogin, 2008).

### **Etiology for Matting of Hair**

Etiology is the study of causative factors of any disorder or disease (Miller, Vandome & McBrewste, 2010). There are texts that deny matting of hair as a disease (Van Harlingen, 1884; Zajaczkowski, 2010) and call it a condition of aggravated lousiness (Van Harlingen, 1884). Along the same lines, Beschorner, in the year 1843, concluded that trichoma, which involves matting of hair, was not a disease, and has no

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<sup>6</sup> *Yellamma* is the main goddess associated with matted hair. The temple of goddess *Yellamma* is located in the state of Karnataka.

<sup>7</sup> The Dravidians are the non-Aryan population mainly based in the southern states of India (Elmore, 1925).

<sup>8</sup> Originally, a Greek mythical icon, *Medusa* was a beautiful maiden who was raped by *Neptune* in the temple of goddess *Minerva*. After that, *Minerva* transformed *Medusa*'s golden hair into serpent like hair and protected her by pronouncing a curse, which indicated that anyone looking at *Medusa* would turn into stone (McGann, 1972). While the symbolic meanings of serpent-like matted hair are not so explicit, it is noteworthy that the golden hair, which was an aesthetical symbol of beauty, was turned into matted hair after the incident of rape. The depiction of *Medusa*'s hair is indicative of the sexual appeal of hair and symbolic meanings associated with matted hair.

effect on other illnesses (Forstl & Elliger, 1995). However, this paper has documented considerable evidence that specifies matting of hair as a health problem. Historically, there are different idiosyncratic descriptions given to explain the etiology for matting of hair.

**The lack of cleanliness and chronic diseases.** The earlier etiological descriptions highlighted the lack of cleanliness and hair damage due to wearing a fur hat (Chromy, 1813; Schlegel, 1806, cited in Forstl & Elliger, 1995) as reasons for matting of hair. However, in the case of *plica polonica*, Lefevre (1798-1846) (as cited in Schuster, 1968) denied filth as the only cause for matting of hair and termed the disease as an effect of the termination of other health complaints. Matuszynski's (1832) specified trichoma as a local health crisis due to chronic diseases (as cited in Forstl & Elliger, 1995). Earlier, Frank (1788) and Wolfram (1804) viewed matting of hair as contagious and infectious as in trachoma with dreadlocks; they termed it as a modified form of lepra, or syphilis or of another venereal 'miasma' (as cited in Forstl & Elliger, 1995). In a latest text, total neglect of hair (Zajackowski, 2010) was stated as a causative reason for matting of hair. Notably, none of these historical etiological explanations is contested in the later medical literature.

**Mental health linked etiology.** Until late 19<sup>th</sup> century, dreadlocks were considered as a "cause, consequence and treatment" of mental disease (Wolf, Martin, Dirk, Josef, & Hans, 2008, p. 124). For trachoma that involves matted hair, "mental illness" was seen as the "cause and consequence" (Forstl & Elliger, 1995, p. 702). Le Page (1884) attributed matting of hair to the nervous force and named it as *plica neuropathica*. However, Le Page (1884) could not demonstrate the novelty of his findings

but gave first clinical recognition about the concomitant neuropsychiatric symptoms in matting of hair.

Simpson and Mullins (1969) noted kinky hair as a necessary condition for matting of hair and pointed that hysterical women are likely to develop kinky hair. Pavithran (1990) highlighted that plica neuropathica, usually, carries psychological disturbances. Bansal and Kuldeep (1992) attributed matting of hair to the anxiety element associated with hypertension. The etiological explanations with links of psychiatric and psychological problems with matting of hair are valid clinical observations. However, these observations lack unequivocal etiopathogenesis<sup>9</sup> or consensual endorsement within medical science.

**Mechanical process.** In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the etiological focus shifted from a comprehensive disease framework to the mechanical processes behind the matting of hair. The emphasis on the mechanical process was mainly stimulated by several cases showing matting of hair after the use of shampoo (Graham, 1953; Howell, 1956). However, the inability to create similar matting of hair experimentally using the same shampoo led to the conclusion that the etiology could not be explained for the use of shampoo (Graham, 1953). Categorically, Howell (1956) used the term ‘matting of hair’ to explain the phenomenon of matting without ascribing it to previously mentioned diseases such as plica polonica or plica neuropathica. In later years, Bogaty and Dunlap (1970) attributed the cause behind the matting and tangling of hair to the process of

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<sup>9</sup> Etiopathogenesis is commonly understood as the cause and the consequent development of a disease condition. It is a combination of two words viz. etiology and pathogenesis (Kramer, 2005). The word ‘etiopathogenesis’, although indicates a comprehensive understanding of disease rather than cognate symptomatic clinical explanations, is not used frequently in the latest medical literature.

felting—a process of physical compaction in morphological, mechanical, and frictional properties of animal fiber.

**Body fluids.** Dawber and Calnan (1976) put forth viscous fluid welding, felting, and electric forces as the pathogenesis for matting of hair. Dawber (1984) indicated role of viscous fluid welding in hair as a reason for the matting; however, he could not expound further on the ‘nature of liquid’ involved in the process. Some researchers argued that the “sweating associated with the concurrent febrile illness moistened the hair enough to allow the head covering to serve as a frictional force” (Kwinter & Weinstein, 2006, p. 791) and led to matting of hair. However, the religious practice of covering the head was obvious predisposing factor for the matting of hair in the case described by Kwinter and Weinstein (2006). The process related to sweating or the secretions within the hair mentioned by Kwinter and Weinstein (2006) is similar to the historical observations by Kowalewski (1838) who pointed out a pathological commonality linking the sensibility of the roots of hair and secretions forming the matting of hair.

**Involvement of substances.** Based on the observations made in the case of a 40-year-old woman, Marshall and Parker (1989) mentioned that felting and factors such as shampoo are the causative factors for matting of hair. Pavithran (1990) reported a case of a female patient who attributed matting of hair to a homemade shampoo that contained leaves of *Hibiscus Rosasiensis*<sup>10</sup>. Wilson, Ferguson, and Dawber (1990) reported a case of *Sikh*<sup>11</sup> woman whose hair formed matting after shampooing where the pathogenesis was attributed to mechanical factors; however, physicians admitted the enigma about the

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<sup>10</sup> *Hibiscus Rosasiensis* is a flower largely known as Tropical Hibiscus or Chinese Hibiscus. The leaf and flower extract of the plant are found effective on hair growth (Adhirajan, Ravi Kumar, Shanmugasundaram, & Babu, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> *Sikhs* are members of a sect called *Sikhism*. Keeping natural hair uncut for whole life is a religious-based symbolic obligation for *Sikhs*.

exact causative factors and mechanisms behind matting. Zawar and Mhasakar (2003) reported a case of 32-year-old woman who carried large knots and clumps of scalp hair after use of herbal shampoo; in this case, bending and the entanglement of hair forming the irreversible matting were the main contributing factors, whereas the use of an unaccustomed shampoo and forceful combing of wet hair were seen as the precipitating factors. Ramanan and Ghorpade (1993) reported a case of 22-year-old woman who experienced matting of hair after using a soap containing *Acacia Concinna*<sup>12</sup>. Bansal and Kuldeep (1992) documented a case of 60-year-old woman with moderate hypertension who faced plica neuropathica after applying oil-containing herbals. Bharti and Singh (1994) reported a female patient who encountered sudden matting of hair where physicians attributed mechanical and psychological disturbances as reasons for matting of hair. Use of various herbs and herbal products has showed some association with matting of hair; however, it needs further focused investigation by experts about the actual events, etiopathogenesis, and the substances involved.

**Psychiatric comorbidity.** Some cases with concomitant psychiatric symptoms indicate an appealing etiopathogenesis for matting of hair. Khare (1985) reported a case of 17-year-old girl with tangled scalp hair and a history of depression where hair matted when the patient was depressed for a period of six months before approaching the physician. However, this report does not give details about the psychiatric referral or the effects of possible degraded personal care during the phase of depression. Suresh Kumar et al. (2001) reported a case of 30-year-old Hindu woman who faced matting of hair during the onset of psychiatric problems. In this case, Suresh Kumar and colleagues

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<sup>12</sup> *Acacia Concinna* is locally known as *Shikakai*. It is traditionally used for hair care in India and other parts of Asia. The dry fruit of this plant is used mainly for application on hair and known to have considerable anti dermatophytic properties (Madan, Arun, & Verma, 2014).

(2001) noted lack of hair care during illness and the religious coloring of matted hair by the patient and her parents as a reason for matting of hair. Sarkar et al. (2000) diagnosed a 16-year-old female student with some psychological issues who experienced irreversible matting of hair after routine bath. Remarkably, some cases of plica neuropathica involved the existence of hysterical features (Simpson & Mullins, 1969). However, there are no studies on comorbidity between matted hair and hysteria.

Thapa (2002) reported a case of plica polonica where he differentiated the symptomatic appearance from plica neuropathica highlighting apparent lack of psychological issues in a female patient. Based on their observations, Joshi and Singh (2010) indicated that psychiatric morbidities might result in the development of matted hair mainly because of the neglect of hair care, secondary infestations, and religious or superstitious beliefs. Referring to two cases of plica neuropathica in female patients, Palwade and Malik (2008) highlighted the possibility of multifactorial etiologies for matting of hair; further, they mentioned that cases of plica neuropathica carry apparent causative factors (substances like shampoo, soap, oil).

Apparently, differentiating between plica polonica and plica neuropathica has remained challenging (Simpson & Mullins, 1969). The existence of psychological problems as primary or secondary symptoms is seen in a few cases of matting of hair reported in medical journals. The ambiguity about comorbidity of psychiatric symptoms with matting of hair has increased the complexity about the etiology for matting of hair. Notably, the co-existence of psychiatric or psychological symptoms is less attended in an effort to establish its possible etiological links with matting of hair.

**Hair care practices.** The nature of hair care practices is integral to the explanations about the pathogenesis for matting of hair. Not getting hair cut for a long time is assumed to induce and complicate the possibility of forming matted hair (Kanwar & De, 2007; Marshall & Parker, 1989). De, Narang, and Kanwar (2007) reported a case of 10-year-old *Sikh* boy who did not cut his hair for religious reasons and developed matting of hair due to excessive combing (six times per day). In this case, the reasons for matting of hair were speculated as mechanical factors, specifically the electrostatic force generated by excessive combing. Remarkably, the high frequency of combing possibly indicates some prevalent psychological problems manifested in obsessive combing; however, physicians have not reported further clinical investigation about it. Describing the uncertain and challenging etiopathogenesis for matting of hair, Siragusa and colleagues (1996) reported a case of 26-year-old woman who faced matting of hair due to the energetic brushing of hair.

Among other factors possibly leading to matting of hair, the scalp damage due to infections, felted hair being perceived as an ornament or seen as beneficial and necessary for the mental or bodily recovery, are reported historically (Hebra & Kaposi, 1874). Some researchers have argued that matting of hair results from damage to the cuticle sections of hair, which exposes the sticky cortex and stick to similar hair leading to matting of hair (Gnanaraj, Venugopal, & Pandurangan, 2007).

**Macro factors.** Non-medical factors are pertaining to quality of living play a significant role in matting of hair, but less attended in the literature. Mozer (1995) attributed the existence of *plica polonica* in Hungary to the increased aging and growing poverty, which indicates the role of macro factors such as poverty, low quality of life, and

the lack of proper care for an aging population. Rural hardship such as unavailability of adequate water and necessary resources to maintain a required hygiene in far-flung hilly rural parts is noted in some cases of matting of hair (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009). The possibility of matting of hair is very high in case of the rural population due to the lack of basic minimum services and infrastructure in rural India. Notably, the majority of devadasis<sup>13</sup> that carry matted hair are seen in rural parts of India.

**Artificial creation.** It is possible that some women deliberately develop matted hair considering the religious value attached to it. The intentions behind developing such artificial matted hair could be a wish to gain a powerful position in society (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009). However, there is no substantial research-based evidence that outlines patterns of such artificial production of matted hair and intentions behind it. The spiritual ascetics (Hindu Sadhus) conduct some rituals for the artificial development of matted hair when they first accept the vows of denunciation; however, there is no documented evidence about such practices (R. Kumbhar, personal communication, August 12, 2011). Quite vividly, the patterns of artificial development of matted hair require an in-depth exploration about reasons associated, forms of cultural practices and the various substances used.

**Multifactorial etiology.** Al-Ghani, Geilen, Blume-Peytavi, and Orfanos (2000) provided one of the most comprehensive etiological descriptions for matting of hair. Al-Ghani et al. (2000) suggested role of physical conditions such as mechanical action, temperature, electrostatic forces, hair fineness, hair density, fibre elasticity, fibre coiling; chemical agents such as detergents, colors, cream, and gel perms; and behavioral factors

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<sup>13</sup> *Devadasi* is a “religious practice that consists of the votive offering of girls to the deities in Hindu temples. The dedication usually occurs before the girl reaches puberty and requires the girl to become sexually available for community members.” (Shivasharanappa & Srinivasa, 2012, p.1)

such as the neglect of scalp care, pediculosis capitis, no combing, and psychological conflicts in matting of hair . Astoundingly, Al-Ghani and his team (2000) have not elaborated on the psychological factors that contribute to matting of hair. In view of the difficulties involved in the etiopathogenesis of matting of hair, Dogra and Kanwar (2004) acknowledged the multifactorial model of Al-Ghani and colleagues. Similarly, Palwade and Malik (2008) indicated role of multifactorial etiologies but did not give a detailed description about different types of factors responsible for matting of hair.

Kiichenmeister (1857) noted two dominant theories about the process of spreading of matting of hair: across the river path and along the mountains. Kiichenmeister (1857) discarded the river path route. The latest literature does not mention anything about the method of spread for matting of hair.

### **The Context of Research Problem**

Matted hair-related practices and the subsequent marginalization of women is found in southwestern states of India. Primarily seen among the families that worship goddesses associated with jata, matting of hair is an issue closely linked to the age-old gender oppressive devadasi custom and superstitious belief systems surrounding it.

### **Devadasi Custom and Matted Hair**

The devadasi tradition, intrinsically linked to matting of hair, is the primary source of superstitions about matted hair in southwestern India. Most devadasis have matted hair as an imperative religious-based symbol that carries ritualistic significance and homogeneous cultural meanings attached to it.

**Devadasi custom.** Devadasi custom is known by many names in India: *Jogini*, *Basivi*, *Matangi*, *Venkatasani*, *Nailis*, *Muralis*, *Theradiyan*, and a caste (local term, *Jati*);

in Europe similar custom is occasionally referred to as *Bayadere* (Shivasharanappa & Srinivasa, 2012). The devadasi custom involves dedication of young girls for marriage to a god, mainly before they attain puberty (Lalou, 1995; O’Neil, Moses, Gurav, Blanchard, Swarankar, & Orchard, 2004; Tarachand, 1991). Etymologically speaking, the word devadasi or *Jogini* has a Sanskrit origin and denotes a female servant of the deity (Torri, 2009). The origin of devadasi custom is still being contested but speculated to be as early as 700 AD (Basham, 1959). The sacred status of devadasi means, “devadasi cannot be married to one particular man” (Shivasharanappa & Srinivasa, 2012, p.1).

The Joint Women’s Programme, Bangalore (n.d.) documented following reasons for devadasi dedication for National Commission for Women:

Being a blind, a deaf or a dumb or a crippled girl; well-being of the family; no male issues in the family; mother was a devadasi; only female child in the family; followed from generations; poverty; father had undergone an operation and vowed to fulfill; it was a religious ritual; to appease gods for the well-being; father’s brother made her a devadasi; and due to skin ailments. (p. 101)

The unexplored superstitious beliefs and the lack of substantial research on devadasi customs hint at the possibility of several other reasons for devadasi dedication.

The origin and historical modifications in devadasi tradition are less attended in scholarly texts. Evidence indicates that the devadasi custom, in its present form and nature, must have been an amalgamation of historically different traditions of matrilineal societies, which might have merged with the patriarchal culture (Datar, 1992). The cultural practices similar to devadasi custom and prevalence of superstitious practices about matted hair are seen around the temples of matriarchal goddesses located in different states such as Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal, Tamilnadu, and Andhra Pradesh. While there is no research-based evidence, it appears that the communities that

mainly worship male gods have less or no existence of practices associated with matted hair.

**Devadasi dedication due to matted hair.** It is believed that matted hair is the “invitation from goddess *Yellamma* to join the order of *Jogtins*” (Kamble N D, 1988, p. 162). When “a girl presents matting or knotting of her hair or has copper-coloured hair,” it is taken as a sign of predestination and a mark of the divinity choosing that girl to become her servant” (Torri, 2009, p. 38). The growth of matted hair is linked to the divine power capable of changing the femininity, as the goddess is believed to have powers of changing the sex and its meanings through the development of matted hair (Bradford, 1983). Notably, a survey about reasons behind devadasi dedication revealed that the emergence of matted hair is one of the principal reasons for the dedication of young girls (Kamble N D, 1988).

When an unmarried female comes across matting of hair on her head, family members and people start worshipping the small matted hair. In a reasonable amount of time, the person is taken either to old devadasis in the same village or nearby villages or to temple priests for religious consultation and rituals. Later, the ritual of *Paradi*<sup>14</sup> happens under the supervision and guidance of senior devadasis or temple priests where the affected woman ceremonially offers holy foods to the deity, where the act of such ritual offering is believed to reduce the severity of suffering and the curse (Enthoven, 1976). *Paradi* and other rituals designate the affected woman’s dedication as a devadasi,

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<sup>14</sup> *Paradi*, literally means a basket. This ritual is performed for reducing the severity of diseases. In India, there are several deities associated with diseases, who are believed to give diseases and for curing those diseases, certain rituals are performed. *Paradi* is the first and foremost remedial ritual when it comes to diseases or misfortune. *Paradi* also refers to holy bucket woven with bamboo stripes within which the offering are kept during the worship. The jata-affected women use *Paradi* for the worship of the goddess and begging.

and few other rituals take place. After becoming devadasi, she lives with her family or in isolation in the same village or at the allocated temple.

When a married woman shows the emergence of matted hair, consultations with the temple priest as well as old devadasi are performed for remedial measures. In the case of married women, the devadasi dedication does not take place<sup>15</sup>. However, matted hair is not allowed to be removed regardless of the affected woman's will. Further, the social isolation and rituals are imposed on the affected woman, and she is made obliged to perform religious-based rituals. Family members and community members maintain vigilant monitoring to make sure about compliance to the customary lifestyle and isolation from normal socializing.

**Devadasi custom and untouchable communities.** The devadasi custom has striking links with untouchability<sup>16</sup>, caste conflicts, and caste marginalization (Torri, 2009). Almost all devadasi come from the previously untouchable communities (Tarachand, 1991). Almost 95% devadasi come from the *Mahar* and *Mang* castes, the historical untouchable castes (Kamble N D, 1988). Poverty, lack of education, poor living conditions, lack of access to adequate health care, and socioeconomic oppression due to the caste system are the common problems faced by untouchable communities that are the primary victims of the devadasi custom and associated cultural practices.

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<sup>15</sup> Devadasi custom presumably involves a marriage of a virgin girl with a god or goddess. Therefore, married women are not dedicated to any temple or forced to become devadasis for the obvious reason that they are married, which means they have lost their virginity.

<sup>16</sup> By being born into a particular caste, "he or she is born and remains within that caste until death, although the particular ranking of that caste may vary among regions and over time. Differences in status are traditionally justified by the religious doctrine of karma, a belief that one's place in life is determined by one's deeds in previous lifetimes. Traditional scholarship has described this more than 2,000-year-old system within the context of the four principal *varnas*, or large caste categories. In order of precedence these are the Brahmins (priests and teachers), the *Ksyatriyas* (rulers and soldiers), the *Vaisyas* (merchants and traders), and the *Shudras* (laborers and artisans). A fifth category falls outside the *varna* system and consists of those known as "untouchables" or *Dalits*; they are often assigned tasks too ritually polluting to merit inclusion within the traditional Varna system" (Human Rights Watch, 1999, p.5, italics original).

**Devadasi custom and human rights.** The devadasi custom is banned through legislation such as the *Bombay Devadasi Prevention Act (1934)* (Appendix G), *Madras Devadasi (Prevention of Dedication) Act of 1947* (Srinivasan Amrit, 1985), and the *Karnataka Devadasi (Prohibition of Dedication) Act of 1982*. A feminist legislator, Muthulakshami Reddy, started a campaign in 1929 to ban the devadasi dedication but, the actual law came in 1947 (Nair, 1994). At present, all rituals under the process of dedication are barred through the mentioned legislation.

The ambiguity in the legal ban on devadasi customs and allied rituals become complicated when it comes to matting of hair among married non-devadasi women. As widely seen, matting of hair becomes a ritualistic cultural practice leading to affected women's marginalization in case of married non-devadasi women. As matting of hair can happen to any female, a legal ban on the devadasi custom does not ensure ban on matted hair-related oppressive cultural practices. Therefore, a legislative ban on superstitious practices about matting of hair is necessary. Such comprehensive legal ban is expected to prevent all oppressive cultural practices and their proliferated forms that maintain or endorse the original coercive customs such as devadasi. There are several fundamental rights stipulated in Articles 47, 15, 39, 51 (A) (e), 14, 15 (3) of the constitution of India that support legal ban on matting of hair related cultural practices. However, operationalizing such band through appropriate institutional mechanisms to ensure proper legal support for the jata-affected women remains a challenge in India.

**Devadasi custom and its implications.** Historically, devadasis have functioned as dancers as a service to temples (Gathia, 1999; Srinivasan Amrit, 1985). Under the customary convention, devadasis remain ascetic and serve temples by making livelihood

through religious-based ritual begging. However, in its most oppressive form, the patriarchal culture found to exploit devadasis through sex trafficking. The sexual exploitation of devadasis becomes vivid through the dominant saying, “a devadasi is servant of god but wife of the whole town” (Shivasharanappa & Srinivasa, 2012, p. 1).

Devadasis are forced to serve as prostitutes and provide sexual services to priests and devotees (Bales, 2004; Kamble Uttam, 1988; O’Neil et. al, 2004). The devadasi custom is seen in terms of religious prostitution as devadasis end up doing sex work in their homes or small brothels (Shivasharanappa & Srinivasa, 2012). Most of the urban and semi-urban brothels in southwestern India have a large number of sex workers who are mostly trafficked devadasis. With non-volitional marriage to a god or goddess and imposed sex work through religious-based superstitions, devadasis remain deprived of their ‘sexual rights’ and ‘right to have a family.’ It should be noted that most of the devadasis are minor, and their parents decide the religious-based course for their matted hair-affected daughters.

Devadasis have to maintain matted hair as a customary symbol throughout their life without receiving any appropriate help, medical or otherwise. The sexual objectification of devadasis takes place through the symbolic role of matted hair. Furthermore, the defamatory and stigmatizing social interpretation about matting of hair happens regardless of the affected woman is a devadasi or not. The sexual objectification married women with matted hair involves relatively heavy stigma, and it severely restricts their social life. Devadasis are the most neglected segment of society. Therefore, their health standards are likely to be meager as compared to the non-devadasi women. The low health and human development of devadasi is linked to their entry into forced

sex work, lack of a proper livelihood, and the restricted institutional access. Hence, Kamble N D (1988) has suggested that the issue of devadasi women should be considered within the larger social and economic context, rather than confining it only to a religious coercion framework.

### **Superstitions and Beliefs about Matting of Hair**

Matting of hair is subjected to multifarious superstitions across the globe. The nature and impact of superstitions is a major factor to consider while understanding the issue of matting of hair.

**Matted hair as a divine call.** Among various cultures across the globe, matting of hair is attributed to a god or a goddess. In an ethnographic study in western Africa, Jell-Bahlsen (1997) noted that dreadlocks were locally linked to the reincarnation of the river god *Urashi*<sup>17</sup>. Matted hair is seen as a call from the goddess in southwestern India (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009; Ramberg, 2009). Further, matted hair is taken as the presence of *Devi* (the goddess) inside the body of the affected person (Ramberg, 2009). The emergence of matted hair indicates that the *Yellamma* (the goddess) has caught (possessed) the person and fancies him/her about her entry in the body (Bradford, 1983). Ramberg (2009) highlighted the dominant cultural belief that “women wearing it (matted hair) being uniquely capable of entering states of possession and giving oracles” (p. 512). Any attempt to go against the obvious sign of the divine wish (matted hair) is seen as calling one’s death (Bradford, 1983; Kamble Uttam, 1988; Lalou, 1995; Torri, 2009).

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<sup>17</sup> There are various water deities across the globe. Communities worship natural resources such as rivers and ponds and associate deities with such resources as its keeper. In the Indian context, deities such as *Saati Asara* are associated with water bodies. While there is no substantial ethno-methodological documentation on such deities, there are ritual worship practices and folklore among rural communities about such deities.

Physicians have documented the existence of religious-based coloring of matted hair in clinical records. In the first case of plica neuropathica, Le Page (1884) reported that parents of the affected girl did not allow cutting matted hair as they called it a “visitation of God” (p. 160). Similar beliefs and superstitions are documented among other clinical cases of matted hair (Minko, 1973; Suresh Kumar et al., 2001; Zajaczkowski, 2010).

**Matted hair as an evil, a cure, and a prophylaxis for disease.** A review of British physician Samuel Collins’s (1619-1670) work revealed that the matted hair was seen as an activity of wicked elves where any interference with it was believed to lead to fatal consequences (Bishop, 1929). Referring to Dr. Dietl’s (1857, 1862) pioneer work, Zajaczkowski (2010) emphasized a belief in Poland which highlighted that matted hair (known as *Koltun*) carry an ability to get rid of several chronic diseases. Cazenave (1851) stated beliefs which termed plica as a “frequent sequence” or an “accompaniment” of diseases such as “small-pox, fever, consumption” where “all serious diseases of the system preceded by unhealthy matting or entanglement of the hair” (p. 39). Patients with plica polonica found fostering plica by considering it as a self-cure for chronic illnesses such as rheumatism and eye problems (Schuster, 1968). Minko (1973) highlighted that matted or tangled hair indicated the escape of the spirit to the matted hair hence the “external” matting was deliberately ignored (p. 50).

In western Africa, when a person begins to grow matted hair, widely called as *Dada*<sup>18</sup>, his/her life is assumed to be in danger. *Dada* is taken as an expression of individual's “profuse existential crisis” which can be “physical, emotional, or both; being

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<sup>18</sup> This is a widely used connotation for matted hair or a person with matted hair in African context. The *Rice University Neologisms Database* (2008) clarifies that the word *Dada* has a *Yoruba*, that is, a West African origin, and it indicates a child born with matted hair.

on the brink of death, or close to the spirit world sets a person apart from ordinary human life” (Jell-Bahlsen, 1997, p. 117). Reviewing ethnographic evidence, Minko (1973) revealed a folk belief that signified plica as a “living being” or “evil spirit” entered into the organism and it “twisted and turned until released” (p. 50). As documented in clinical encounters, plaited hair is viewed as a safety valve in severe illnesses and its development is termed as a recovery from the pre-existing disease (Simpson & Mullins, 1969). In Africa, matted hair was kept forever to avoid the entry of disease into the organism as a preventive measure for future maladies (Minko, 1973).

**Beliefs and practices.** Based on the cases seen during clinical practice, several physicians have mentioned that the scalp hair is the primary target of superstitious beliefs (Simpson & Mullins, 1969; Suresh Kumar et al., 2001). In Africa, dreadlocks and unkempt hair are culturally significant and associated with person’s destiny and state of mind (Jell-Bahlsen, 1997). In the Indian context, matted hair has ascetic significance. Among some religious traditions “hairs are not trimmed and proper hair-care is not observed” (Kanwar & De, 2007, p. 411). The devadasi women carry matted hair as a symbol of their customary religious-based existence (Kamble N D, 1988; Krysl, 1998). Largely along the religious-based lines, in some parts of Africa, a person having dreadlocks is called as a prophet; other connotations used in the same context are dada, a madman, and madwoman (Jell-Bahlsen, 1997).

In Nigeria, dada lives in isolation from the normal life as the water spirit (Jell-Bahlsen, 1997) was linked matted hair to possession. The devadasi women who have matted hair mainly stay at the affiliated temple in isolation, or choose to stay with other devadasi groups in their social and demographic network. Devadasis survive on a sacred

begging, which involves going to different homes, and asking for grains (Kersenboom-Story, 1987); it is pragmatically understandable that the matted hair is a key symbol that helps the identification of matted hair affected women as religious-based person.

**Removal of matted hair.** There are uniform superstitions about the removal of matted hair across the globe. In African context, a widely followed suggests waiting for the hair to fall out rather than shaved off (Minko, 1973). Few notable beliefs about cutting matted hair highlight that cutting leads to “convulsions or madness” (Schuster, 1968, p. 187), and the untangling or clipping matted hair follows the most serious symptoms for the person (Beigel, 1859). Zajackowski (2010) shared superstitions noted by Dr. Dietl, which indicated that the person who shaves his/her matted hair suffers from convulsions, paralysis, blindness, mental disturbances, and even death. Notably, cutting matted hair with scissors was forbidden as it was believed that person who cuts it would be made blind by the *Koltun* (matted hair), and it would torture the person (Minko, 1973).

Based on medical encounters, Suresh Kumar et al. (2001) reported a case of plica neuropathica in 30-year-old Hindu woman suffering from a joint condition of schizophrenia and a sudden tangling of hair. The female patient rejected the suggestion of cutting matted hair where her parents of the patient highlighted “the hair can be cut only in the religious set up” (Suresh Kumar et al. 2001, p. 282). In another case of a two-year-old boy, his parents did not comply with the suggestion of cutting the irreversible tangling of hair where hair was not combed for religious reasons since birth (Kanwar & De, 2007). Due to its cultural significance and customary social ban on removal, majority of the physicians in India avoid removal and treat other symptoms such as headache and

backache primarily associated with matted hair (R. Kumbhar, personal communication, August 12, 2011).

Notably, Dr. Dietl, who prepared two significant studies on *plica polonica* (1862, 1857), shared the prevalence of superstitious beliefs about *plica* among the uneducated masses as well as doctors holding eminent positions (Zajaczkowski, 2010). The researcher has witnessed that local barbers refuse to cut the matted hair highlighting fear of the curse from the goddess.

### **Women's Status and Subjugation in Hinduism**

The old Hindu scriptures are explicit in their biased and oppressive approach toward women. *Athaarv Veda*<sup>19</sup> expresses rejection of women while *Aitreya Bramhana*<sup>20</sup> puts daughters as the sources of misery (Srinivasan G, 1994). *Dharmasastras*<sup>21</sup>, the moral code of law in Hinduism, views women as mean and immoral (Verma, 1995). Hinduism assigns low ritual status to women based on their biological functions such as menstruation and childbirth, which are considered unclean by the religion (Wadley, 1977). Reviewing ancient texts, Tyagi (2004) noted that women's roles were underlined in a sexual sense and seen strictly within the norms of conduct. The prominent texts such as *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Bhagavad-Gita* give a negative outlook about women (Srinivasan G, 1994)<sup>22</sup>. Pointing out the discrimination of daughters in the religion, Tyagi (2004) mentioned that the physiological development stages of women are not considered worthy of celebration as compared to their male counterparts. *Manusmruti*, another legal

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<sup>19</sup> *Vedas* are the core scriptures of *Vedic* Hinduism. *Athaarv Veda* is an important *Vedic* text among the four basic *Vedas* of Brahmanical Hinduism.

<sup>20</sup> *Aitreya Bramhana* is a part of Rig Veda and contains explanation of various rites (Keith, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> *Dharmasastras* are considered as the law books of *Vedic* Hinduism (Rocher, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are the important epics of Hinduism. *Bhagavad-Gita* is part of the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*.

and moral codebook in Hinduism, gives a subordinate status to untouchable women who have the lowest position in society (Viswanathan, 2008). The twofold caste and gender identity provides the intersectionality of identity among women. Verma (1995) highlighted the negative attitude of Hindu traditions toward women's equality. Overall, the scriptures maintain the dominant patriarchal religious attitude while assigning the lowest status to women. The subordinate religious-based status of women is intensified owing to the caste hierarchy.

### **The Caste Intersectionality and Rituals**

Women coming from the so-called lower castes are extremely vulnerable to the superstitious practices surrounding matting of hair. The caste-based stratification of Indian society has given a twofold drudgery to women from the formerly untouchable castes as they face both gender and caste-based domination (Omvedt, 1977). Furthermore, women from formerly untouchable castes remain oppressed within the rigid caste structures (Leonard, 1979). The social status of women is largely determined from the caste hierarchy where Brahmins have the highest privileges whereas the untouchables remain deprived and marginalized.

Bayes and Tohidi (2001) argued that the status of women in any religion is a reflection of their status in the society, shaping and mediating women's status. The bi-directionality in assigning the status becomes explicit where religion has accorded place in rites and rituals based on social status of the person in Indian context (Paswan & Jaideva, 2003). The integral religious and social rubric to assign the status indicates the structural control of the process by powerful actors such as Brahmins. Explaining the systemic structure, Chakravarti (1993) underscored that the interconnected caste and

gender hierarchy has remained the organizing principle of Brahminical <sup>23</sup>order, which further forms the structures of Brahminical patriarchy. Importantly, the female oppression in India is a known feature of the orthodox Sanskritic (prescribed in the Sanskrit text) and Brahminic (practices and prescriptions of the elite and priestly category in Hindus) Hinduism through the social-cultural process of Sanskritization<sup>24</sup>(Miller, 1993).

Indicating control of women's head and hair, there is a practice of tonsure of widowed female's head among Brahmins. The practice of tonsure of women's head provides sufficient proof that the so-called upper castes maintain religious-based traditions to victimize women (Chakravarti, 1995). The practice of shaving a widow's head and the code of particular costumes for widows symbolizes the degraded status of women (Harper, 1969). Traditionally, the tonsure or cutting women's hair has been practiced as a punishment for adultery (Rook & Dawber, 1982). While barbers, an occupational caste, has been part of the ritual of tonsure of Brahmin women's head, the same community is less or not willing to remove matted hair among women. The caste-based control of women's bodies through religious patriarchy becomes explicit in the inaction of barbers on matted hair. The caste intersectionality (See McCall, 2005 for a detailed perspective) creates powerful dynamics in the issue of matting of hair due to the diverse caste-based gendered practices. Historically, an eminent social reformer, J. G. Phule<sup>25</sup> organized a strike of barbers against the tonsure of widowed Brahmin women's head. It should be noted that J. G. Phule, who opposed the tonsure of Brahmin widows'

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<sup>23</sup> *Brahmins* are the priestly caste and class within the *Varna* and *Caste-Stratified* society in India. As a priestly group, *Brahmins* have the highest religious-based status and authority in Brahmanical Hinduism.

<sup>24</sup> "*Sanskritisation*" is a process by which the lower groups seek to increase their status in the hierarchy by emulating the lifestyles and *Dharma* of the upper castes (Omvedt, 2000, p. 189, emphasis added).

<sup>25</sup> J. G. Phule was a revolutionary non-*Brahmin* activist and social reformer who wrote about gender (Omvedt, 1990) and caste subordination within the holy texts of Brahmanical Hinduism.

head, was not a Brahmin, and his activism was against the caste-based oppressive Brahmanism. Evidently, Phule's action emphasizes the fact that men with advantage of the structural arrangements of religion would bolster oppressive religious practices rather than opposing it (Derné, 1994).

### **The Brahminical Patriarchy and Control of Women's Sexuality**

The *Brahminical* patriarchy has been the most powerful structure within the politico-religious society of India. During the formation of *Brahminic* ideology, the *Vedic* approach redefined and linked "high caste status to a life of the extreme ritualism for men and extreme bondage for women" (Omvedt, 2000, p. 187). Further, the social relations and the hierarchical gender relationships are reproduced by ensuring the compliance of women through consent or coercion as per the requirement of dominant actors (Chakravarti, 1993). The control of women's sexuality within the caste hierarchy is reflected in the practice of marriage where the upper caste women are allowed to marry the upper caste men and not otherwise; this is controlled through religious protocols and punishments (Chakravarti, 1993).

The interlocking of religious symbols and spreading specific meanings through religious beliefs and dogmas has remained the visible strategy of *Brahminical* systems. The upper caste *Brahmin* women have been seen as the instruments for *Brahminical* patriarchy that function through the control of *Brahmin* women's sexuality (Chakravarti, 1995). The control of sexuality exists in terms of the sanction on marriage of Brahmin women with men from other castes and similar restrictions on women from other castes in the caste and Varna-based hierarchy<sup>26</sup>. Men from the non-Brahmin castes have fewer

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<sup>26</sup> The religious-based control of women's sexual relationships can be referred from the practice of *Niyoga* in Brahminical Hinduism. In *Niyoga*, "It is laid down that should a woman become a widow before

privileges within the Brahmin controlled politico-religious system and institutions.

Effectively, religion, patriarchy and its practices are created and maintained by the males from Brahmin communities.

### **Women's Health, Education, and Development in India**

Education and health are interlinked and have an instrumental role in women's human development (Dreze & Murthi, 2001; Sridhar, 2009). In the Indian context, there are accessibility, availability, and affordability issues faced by the vulnerable sections in getting proper education and health (Ramani & Mavalankar, 2006). Using 2001 census data, Wu, and colleagues (2007) revealed that 75 percent of males and just 54 percent of females were literate in India. Further, Wu et al. (2007) highlighted that rural women are twice as likely to remain illiterate as compared to their male counterparts. Notably, twenty-four percent illiterate women come from traditionally deprived *Schedule Castes* (SCs, mainly previously untouchables) and *Schedule Tribes* (STs) communities which show that policy commitments of government are not translated into literacy programs in India (Ghose, 2007).

An examination of gender differences in health done by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2007) revealed that there are no biological reasons for the higher mortality rate in females (in the age group of 0-4 years) than males. This implies that social and institutional causes adversely affect the mortality rate for girls. There are gender-related health issues such as malnutrition, anemia (Galloway et al., 2002), and the skewed sex ratio (Guilmoto, 2007; Jha et al., 2006; Oldenburg, 1992) which have

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becoming a mother (or pregnant) the *Devara* or some, *Sapinda* or *Sagotra* should raise a son on her (or, according to some, two), and ever afterwards should treat her as a daughter-in-law (i.e., in strict abstinence from sexual action or thought). The custom is technically known as *Niyoga*" (Chattopadhyay, 1922, p.37, emphasis added) where *Devara* is the younger brother of husband and *Sapinda* or *Sagotra* refers to men from similar kinship.

normative, social, and cultural factors responsible for its undesirable outcomes. The report of the working group on empowerment of women for the eleventh plan

(Government of India, 2006) declared:

The weak social infrastructure such as the lack of adequate schools or health centers, drinking water, sanitation and hygiene facilities inhibits a very large section of women from accessing these facilities. This is a major reason why women continue to face problems as poor literacy rates, or health issues. It is also one of the reasons for the high incidence of MMR (Maternal Mortality Rate) and IMR (Infant Mortality Rate). (p. 10)

Discussing the deep-rooted nature of gender inequity, Mehta and Shah (2003) pointed out that implicit gender inequalities are harder to capture in statistics; further, the inequity creates an unequal distribution of resources, control and decision-making, unfair, unequal distribution of work, drudgery, and more importantly, food. The obvious lack of understanding of the integrated nature of women's issues in India indicates the extent of policy advocacy required for women's well-being and human development.

### **Prevalence**

**Global prevalence.** As compared to the prevalence in the past, matted hair is less common in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Historically, Hebra and Kaposi (1874) noted the endemic existence of plica polonica in several regions of Europe including Galicia, Posen, and Poland (also Schuster, 1968); on the banks of the Weichsel and of the Dnieper, Ukraine, Lithuania, Bukowina, Podolia, Silesia, and the countries inhabited by the Sclavonian race (Beigel, 1859). The existence of Medusa-like hair was identified near the Alps and Weser, Moravia, Hungary, Carniola, Ceylon, Paris, France, England, and among native Indians (Kiichenmeister, 1857). The prevalence of plica polonica was seen in Hungary, Moldo-Wallachia, the south of Hussia, and in the South Sea Islands (Hebra & Kaposi, 1874). Historically, plica polonica existed among the habitants of Poland and

Austria, especially among the poor (Halrlingen, 1889). At present, there is a paucity of literature about the prevalence of matting of hair across the globe. Mozer (1995) has pointed out that despite the prevalence of the matting of hair in Hungary; there is not much literature and research.

**Prevalence in India.** The ascetic, shamanic, ritualistic, devotional, and cultural value attached to matted hair indicates a relatively high prevalence across India. The matting of hair related customs such as devadasi is mostly seen in the Western and Southern parts of India. Devadasi are a prominent group of women who carry matted hair as a customary symbol (Kamble N D, 1988; Ramberg, 2009). Since the custom of devadasi is mainly attached to few temples, the prevalence of matted hair is high among communities that worship the goddesses *Yellamma* of *Saundatti* and *Kokatnur*<sup>27</sup>, and the goddess *Mayakka* from *Chinchali*<sup>28</sup> both belonging to Karnataka state, and the goddess *Bhavani* temple at *Tulzapur* in Maharashtra state<sup>29</sup>.

Karnataka State Women Development Corporation (2009) has identified 22873 former devadasi women. The informal estimates by NGOs indicate that 5,000 to 15,000 girls get dedicated through the devadasi custom annually and later auctioned secretly mainly to urban brothels (Varhade, 1998 as cited in Human Rights Watch, 1999). Nag (2001) highlighted estimated 2.5 lakhs of female dedication to the temples of the goddess *Yellamma* and other gods such as *Hanuman* and *Khandoba* in the border areas of Maharashtra-Karnataka state. Based on the data provided by the National Legal Service

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<sup>27</sup> *Kokatnur* is a small village in the state of Karnataka, the place for second largest temple of goddess *Yellamma*. This temple is around 3 hours' drive from *Saundatti* by bus. The spatial locations of *Yellamma* temples cover the large population of devotees on the border region of Maharashtra and Karnataka states in southwestern India.

<sup>28</sup> *Chinchali* is a small town in the state of Karnataka, a place for the temple of goddess *Mayakka* who is considered as the younger sister of goddess *Yellamma* and is associated with jata-related practices.

<sup>29</sup> The temple of goddess *Bhavani* is located in a small town, *Tulzapur* in the state of Maharashtra.

Authority (NALSA), a media report stated that out of 250,000 girls dedicated under devadasi include 16,624 girls from Andhra Pradesh, 22,941 from Karnataka, and 2,479 from Maharashtra (Jadhav, 2012). The devadasi statistics indicates the possible high prevalence of matting of hair across India.

Matting of hair is prevalent among devadasi as well as non-devadasi women. However, matted hair is unnoticed in medical statistics as it is rarely reported to medical institutions as a health problem. Matting of hair is not viewed as a health problem mainly due to the religious coloring and lack of health education among affected women and their families. Furthermore, the exact estimate about prevalence of matted hair is difficult due to the paucity of statistics, lack of public health surveillance and data keeping, and the predominant rural existence. Remarkably, the fact that affected women tend to hide matted hair to avoid the stigma contributes to the invisibility of matted hair.

### **Consequences of Matting of Hair**

There are multipronged implications of matted hair for the affected women on different fronts such as social, cultural, religious, economic, and health and other unexplored areas.

**Physical health.** The troublesome symptoms affecting head, skin, and eyes are seen when heavy matting is formed (Beigel, 1859). A joint medical condition of matted hair with pediculi capitis leads to the nits and fungal infections during the maturing of matted hair (Hebra & Kaposi, 1874). Several women have mentioned consistent itching, disagreeable odor (Hebra & Kaposi, 1874), lack of concentration, neck pain, headache (Pestonji, 1885), and a heaviness in the head (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009) due to matted hair. In southwestern India, few jata-affected women have shared about the foul smell

from matted hair leading to nausea and reducing their appetite (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009). There is a lack of substantial latest evidence about the physical health problems associated with matted hair except for some documentation by activists.

**Mental health.** The role of psychological issues in matting of hair (Al-Ghani et al., 2000) hints at the possible mental health linked etiopathogenesis. Among the mental health problems, women have reported persistent irritations, feelings of embarrassment, inferiority, uncleanliness, and guilt (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009). In the case of a joint condition of matted hair and mental health problems, self-care is almost impossible which leads to further aggravation of matted hair (Suresh Kumar et al., 2001). Jata-affected women remain stressed due to the persistent gaze and vigilant social and familial monitoring for the compliance to ritual behaviors and superstitions such as fasting on certain days, religious begging, and isolated living. The psychiatric issues associated with matted hair create a vulnerability to more complicated psychological problems for the affected women (Sarkar, Kaur, Thami, & Kanwar, 2000). Khare (1985) came across a case of depression and matted hair where the rapid aggravation of matting was attributed to prevalent mental health problems.

**Stigma.** Any stigma reduces access to resources and puts the stigmatized person at a significant social disadvantage in terms of social connections, money, power, and prestige (Link & Phelan, 2006). The stigma attached to matted hair is mainly due to its links with the devadasi-related sexual symbolism and the psychiatric problems such as hysteria that are highly stigmatized in Indian society. In addition, matting of hair is also associated with the historically oppressed untouchable communities; hence, it leads to a twofold stigma of gender and caste. Jata-affected women from so-called upper castes are

more likely to feel the caste-based stigma as jata is primarily viewed as a phenomenon associated with so-called lower caste groups. The caste-induced stigma can be very intense for the so-called upper caste families who see their women as ‘symbolic medium’ for maintaining their upper caste status. Another important source of stigma due to matted hair is from the symbolic association of it with black magic and witchcraft as shamans carry matted locks of hair symbolically indicating their supernatural powers.

The stigma resulting from the modified body features can be very high among adolescents and young girls who are concerned about the aesthetic value attached to their hair and physical appearance. Link and Phelan (2006) identified the elements of stigma as labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination. To apply the elements of stigma to the issue of matting of hair, first, the labeling happens when matting of hair begins, next, the stereotypical linking of matted hair to a divine call from a goddess takes place, and it leads to the abstinence from normal life leading to further status loss. Such stigma culminates in multiple forms of health and human rights discrimination for the affected women. As the stigma elements appear in a very dynamic power situation (Link & Phelan, 2006), the dominant structures of patriarchy and caste intersectionality can intensify stigma for vulnerable women coming from untouchable castes. However, the stigma attached to the matted hair is less likely to be questioned by the affected women considering the religious value assigned and maintained by the powerful religious patriarchy.

**Isolation.** People affected with matted hair mostly live in isolation due to the cultural and ritual meanings attached to the practice of isolation (Jell-Bahlsen, 1997; Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009). The social isolation of devadasi women is mainly about their

ascetic status, ritual following, and the denunciation of material life. For the non-devadasi women, the isolation is mainly due to the stigma derived from the deformed physical feature and the sexual objectification. Restrictions on the participation in social functions and gatherings for non-devadasi women highlight their separation from ordinary life due to stigma<sup>30</sup> (Link & Phelan, 2006). The isolation from social eating is also rampant as the religious ban on eating certain foods is imposed on women through superstitious belief systems (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009).

**Human rights.** The human rights violation involved in the problem of matting of hair needs consideration within its particular cultural context and the global context of human rights. The dominant arguments along the lines of culturalism are likely to see the matting of hair as a specific cultural phenomenon, which would eventually suppress the human rights violations involved in the problem. Ife (2001), a globally known authority on human rights, highlighted that cultural traditions are pluralistic and further refuted the widely held view that cultures are monolithic.

While the prevalence of matting of hair is across the globe, the reification of a health problem through establishment of oppressive cultural practice is a dominant contextual phenomenon central to this study. Therefore, as a globally seen health problem, matting of hair can be viewed as a health problem regardless of geographical prevalence. Furthermore, the reification of health problems in the name of cultural practice is the primary feature of matting of hair in the southwestern Indian context. The protest from various activists against matting of hair and the existence of the matted hair

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<sup>30</sup> The social participation of jata-affected women is restricted due to superstitious beliefs. In many cases, the participation is restricted due to the preoccupation with multiple rituals that limit interacting with other women in society. However, the detailed nature of such restrictions needs further exploration and documentation considering the implicit nature of beliefs and practices.

removal movement highlights the cultural awareness about the human rights of matted hair-affected women.

Ife (2001) emphasized understanding the global dimension of local issues while considering the culture-specific human rights violations. While the health problem related to aspects of matting of hair are globally established, the cultural practice related to violation of human rights awaits detailed phenomenological exploration. Therefore, the local and global claim by the right holders that is women affected by matted hair and their families remains less explicit.

The existing evidence mentioned under different sections of this dissertation indicates that matted hair is likely to emerge due to several unhygienic conditions, lack of proper self-care, improper living conditions, the double burden of work, and unavailability of health services for its proper treatment. There could be several other unexplored factors likely to have a bearing and effective causal relationship with matting of hair. Here, health as a human right of jata-affected women is subjugated. Furthermore, a phenomenological understanding of the lived experience of women affected by matted hair reveals further violations of human rights.

A second violation of human rights takes place when affected women are forced to become devadasis if they are unmarried, or if married, are told to keep the matted hair and follow the superstitions and religious rituals. A majority of the devadasi dedication takes place when there is the emergence of matting of hair among unmarried females. The devadasi dedication involves remaining unmarried for one's whole life by dedicating one's life to the service of the goddess. The reification of matting of hair as a religious-based symbol and consequent dedication of the affected woman through the oppressive

devadasi custom violates several globally and locally recognized stipulations in UDHR: the right to life, liberty and security of person (Article 3), the right to marry and start a family (Article 16), and the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being (Article 25). For married jata-affected women, the most significant human rights violation can be derived from Article 25, which outlines the right to medical care.

Article 28 of UDHR explicitly emphasizes the entitlement to social and international order where the human rights and freedoms are fully acknowledged. However, the non-recognition of human rights of jata-affected women is not explored in the human rights literature. Furthermore, there is no phenomenological documentation of various forms of human rights violation of jata-affected women. Notably, there is no comprehensive discourse about human rights of jata-affected women except few advocacy actions from activist groups.

**Economic.** Matting of hair is prevalent chiefly among women coming from financially weak, traditionally oppressed, formerly untouchable and rural families. The superstitious rituals attached to matted hair compel the families of affected women to spend money on various rituals such as *Paradi*, *Savasanya*<sup>31</sup>, *Jagaran*<sup>32</sup>, and *Maand*<sup>33</sup> that involves a relatively challenging cost for poor families. The priests, old devadasis, and other influential members view such rituals obligatory to get the mercy of the

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<sup>31</sup> *Savasanya* is the holy ritual ceremony where families affiliated to the goddesses perform a ritual worship in their village once a year. This ritual worship involves inviting married women from the community in odd numbers such as five or seven as per the capacity of host family. A procession with holy orchestra takes place from the home of host family to the village-based temple of the goddess. This ritual worship ends with ritual food offering to women from community.

<sup>32</sup> *Jagaran* refers to the annual ritual worship of the goddess with a holy orchestra for one whole night. *Jagaran* literally means remaining awake for one whole night doing service of the goddess.

<sup>33</sup> *Maand* is special food and worship of the deity under the guidance of a priest. This involves offering food items to the deity. The ritual also involves devotional signing during the worship to appease the deity with a plea to reduce the intensity of suffering. In literal terms, *Maand* means something arranged and kept in a conventional order. It is believed that the deity makes affected people suffer for some wrong doings. Appeasing the goddess, by offering things liked by her, is believed to lead to the reduction in the suffering.

goddess who has given the matted hair. Moreover, for performing rituals, visits to temples of deity involve traveling to far-off places, which implies compromising one's work commitments despite the detrimental impact on their income. For a school-going girl child, matting of hair led to the underperformance in school, putting her at the risk of career and financial self-reliance (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009). Notably, making fun of the hairstyles of co-workers is seen at workplace (Scott & McClain, 2014) which substantiates possible existence of embarrassing situations at formal/informal workplaces for jata-affected women.

**Human development and well-being.** It is recognized globally that the gender discrimination at each stage of the female life cycle contributes to cumulative gender disparity over the life course of women (Fikree & Pasha, 2004). Matting of hair, being possible to emerge among females of any age, is likely to accentuate the degradation of their human development in future stages, particularly for young females. In the Indian context, there are accessibility, availability, and affordability issues for members of vulnerable populations (Ramani & Mavalankar, 2006) which become intense for jata-affected women.

### **Treatment Options for Matting of Hair**

Among different treatment options, activist-led interventions, religious-based treatments are the dominant options available for jata problem. Notably, there is no documentation of various treatment options available and particular preferences of jata-affected women. Moreover, there is no research on the acceptance and efficacy of such treatment options.

**Medical treatments.** The dominant medical treatment for the removal of matted hair involves cutting matted hair or shaving it further treating the medically detected secondary symptoms such as headache, scalp infections, and psychiatric issues. For the first clinically identified case of plica neuropathica, Le Page (1884) suggested cutting matted the portion of hair as a treatment but the parents of the 17-year-old female patient turned it down. Several medical practitioners have recommended cutting the matted part of hair (Bharti & Singh, 1994; Dawber & Calnan, 1976; Kanwar & De, 2007; Khare, 1985; Kowalewski, 1838; Suresh Kumar, Chakravarthy, Anthony & Koyamu, 2001; Sarkar, Kaur, Thami & Kanwar, 2000; Zawar & Mhasakar, 2003). Some physicians have suggested treating the underlying predisposing factors (Dogra & Kanwar, 2004) and avoiding the triggering factors (Al-Ghani et al., 2000) responsible for matting of hair. For cases with joint psychiatric epidemiology, Bharti and Singh (1994) mentioned the need for psychiatric management to avoid deterioration of matted hair. Historically, Van Harlingen (1884) suggested cutting matted hair short for applying the parasiticide remedies for the detected pest infections. In one of the oldest medical treatment suggestions, Sibley (1912) proposed full doses of x-rays for about one month intervals to get a permanent termination of growth of matted hair.

**Untangling matted hair.** For untangling matted hair, Hebra and Kaposi (1874) recommended practices such as the use of scissor and hands for unraveling the hair locks, application of oil, and the use of petroleum with safety in case of existence of pidiculus<sup>34</sup>. Mani and Sahni (1983) successfully untangled matted hair developed after the use of

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<sup>34</sup> Another name for louse.

shampoo by dipping the matted part in oil (arachis oil)<sup>35</sup> for a few hours each night; in this case, it took five days to untangle matted hair manually. Palwade and Malik (2008) suggested that during the early stages of matting, the hair is probably reversible with the application of organic solvents. It should be noted that the untangling of matted hair becomes difficult due to the rigid twists and foul smell coming from fungal infections and yeasts (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009). Palwade and Malik (2008) clarified that, in rare cases, the manual separation is possible, but in most cases, cutting matted hair remains the most feasible option. Notably, Marshall and Parker (1989) offered the possibility of cutting the matted portion only, or all hair or the manual untangling to a female patient who ultimately chose disentangling matted hair as a treatment option.

**Medicinal treatments.** Historically, there are no substantial attempts to explore the etiopathogenesis behind matting of hair to treat it with medicines. The most notable form of the treatment mentioned in the literature is Homoeopathy (Redwood & Gray, 1847) where the use of *Lycopodium Clavatum*<sup>36</sup>, in the form of a decoction<sup>37</sup> or powder, internally and/or externally, was suggested as a treatment for plica polonica. There is a lack of research on medicinal interventions for matting of hair among other streams of medicine.

**Religious-based treatments.** Due to various beliefs and superstitions, many affected women do not seek medical treatment for the removal of matted hair. There is sufficient evidence that people avoid medical procedures for removing matted hair (Le

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<sup>35</sup> Peanut oil. During the earlier interventions on jata removal, Dr. Rajendra Kumbhar applied peanut oil on matted hair of affected women around twenty-four hours before the actual untangling. However, it used to make hands slip from heavily oiled matted hair during untangling. At present, dry matted hair are considered easy for untangling.

<sup>36</sup> *Lycopodium Clavatum* is a widely used herbal plant in ethno-medicinal practices. Mainly used for preparing medicines in Homeopathy, the anti-inflammatory properties of *Lycopodium Clavatum* are recognized within the modern medical techniques as well (Orhan, Küpeli, Şener, & Yesilada, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> An extract remained after boiling herbal or mineral substance.

Page, 1884; Suresh Kumar et al., 2001). For the removal of matted hair, some temple priests suggest a costly ritual and removal under religious supervision. However, the cost of such removal rituals is unbearable, and the fear of the curse due to the removal is intense among the affected women and their family members; therefore, such procedures rarely take place. Effectively, there are no feasible treatment options for the removal of matted hair. Therefore, worshipping matted hair and following the assigned rituals remains the only resort for affected women and their families. There is no in-depth documentation of a variety of religious-based treatments for matted hair in cultural anthropology or sociology literature.

**Activist and nonprofit-led interventions.** Many nonprofits and voluntary movement groups in southwestern India have been conducting the “*Jade* cutting campaigns” (Ramberg, 2009) or “*Jata Nirmulan Abhiyan*” (matted hair removal campaign) (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009). Matted hair is seen as a superstition, dirt, and a medical problem among such voluntary and government-sponsored campaigns. Some activist groups<sup>38</sup> see untangling the matted portions of hair and restoring healthy hair as a more scientific option. The affected women prefer untangling rather than shaving head or cutting all hair (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009). However, a few other activist groups, along the lines of the dominant medical intervention, prefer to cut matted hair or shave the head. There are pros and cons to both approaches, and there is no scientific research or evidence base available about the comparative evaluation of the methods followed by the diverse activist groups.

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<sup>38</sup> *Jata Nirmulan Abhiyan* is a community movement that uses method of untangling matted hair to restore healthy hair. Drs. Rajendra and Sudhir Kumbhar use method of untangling matted hair unlike a few other groups, which insist on cutting matted hair or shaving the head of the jata-affected woman.

Sometimes, these activists or nonprofit agencies-led matted hair removals take place in collaboration with the local government officers or young volunteers from schools. There is no statistics or documentation about number of agencies involved and the type of intervention used.

**Care to avoid matting of hair.** Unhygienic practices are seen as an important factor leading to the matting of hair. However, in the light of the formation of matted hair after the use of certain soap or shampoo, physicians have recommended a cautious use of such substances. In view of the religious significance of hair (as among the *Sikhs*) where the possibility of matting is high, physicians have suggested following a washing technique such as backwash or washing in the bathtub (Dogra & Kanwar, 2004). Markedly, Hebra and Kaposi (1874) wrote about a teacher named Stieff, in Kaczkower-Rojewerdorf who rooted out *plica polonica* within ten years' time from his locality by promoting cleanliness (from 100 cases in 1837 to 8 in 1842). The promotion of hygiene and self-care is seen as a significant intervention to reduce the prevalence of matting of hair. Some activist-led jata removal interventions involve hygiene education as a primary strategy and a health education component (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009).

### **Taxonomical Issues about Matting of Hair**

The lack of diagnostic clarity among physicians about the diverse symptoms and the etiopathogenesis behind matting of hair exemplifies the underlying taxonomical issues. Many physicians consider *plica polonica* and *plica neuropathica* as substitutes (Dogra & Kanwar, 2004; Joshi & Singh, 2010; Kanwar & De, 2007; Palwade & Malik, 2008; Pavithran, 1990; Siragusa & Fabrizi & Calvieri & Schepis, 1996; Suresh Kumar et al, 2001; Wolf, Martin, Dirk, Josef, & Hans, 2008; Zawar & Mhasakar, 2003). Le Page

(1884) is the first physician who coined the term ‘neuropathic plica’ where the sudden onset of the matting of hair was accompanied by neuropathic force.

In later years, Simpson and Mullins (1969) attempted to differentiate between plica polonica and plica neuropathica based on mechanical processes involved in the matting of hair and the diagnosable appearance of hysterical personality features among the affected women. However, the attempt by Simpson and Mullins (1969) did not lead to any significant taxonomical clarity about matting of hair. In one of the oldest medical case reports, Sibley (1912) described plica neuropathica as “a condition of idiopathic tangling or matting together of some locks of hair of the head without apparent cause” (p. 1717); whereas, plica polonica was seen as the matting of hair due to lack of cleanliness and secretions in the scalp. Quite vividly, the rubric provided for the differentiation between different conditions of matting of hair is not proficient enough to establish clear diagnostic guidelines. In a latest medical report, Hirsch and Trautinger (2010) signified matting of hair as ‘dreadlocks’ which adds more confusion about the way matting of hair is seen in medical science.

Based on the case descriptions published in journals, it is worth registering that there is no standardized nomenclature of matting of hair in a structured, well-defined disease framework with an explicit mention of the clinical features and the scientific diagnostic procedures. The diagnostic rationale for matting of hair shows ambiguity, especially when differentiating the symptomatic matting of hair in plica polonica, plica neuropathica, and other such manifestations. The individual idiosyncratic mode of diagnostic reasoning (Sadegh-Zadeh, 2000) appears to be most prominent in diagnosis of matting of hair. The varied considerations of psychiatric symptoms attached to matted

hair and the underlying pathophysiological processes appear complex, therefore challenging for physicians.

The present difficulties in clinical settings to gain a diagnostic agreement about psychiatric viewpoints highlight that “... common definitions and precise terminology, differences will assume a more meaningful function in the increasing understanding of human behavior” (Taylor & Heiser, 1971, p. 485); however, the medical practice on matted hair does not indicate such attempts or scientific rigor. Moreover, the dominance of pathophysiological processes while classifying mental illness highlights the ontological issues within psychiatry (Patil & Giordano, 2010) where psychosocial factors receive less or no consideration. The complexity in achieving well-defined and standard medical diagnostic criteria is likely to be rooted in the various issues highlighted above.

### **The Significance of the Problem**

The problem of matting of hair is important for several reasons: the historical prevalence among the traditionally oppressed social groups, women’s systemic marginalization through religious-based superstitions, and its implications for the lives of affected women. In view of the minimal knowledge base on matting of hair and underlying health and human rights violations of affected women through cultural practice, the problem needs knowledge production, evidence-based advocacy and intervention from social work. While the disciplinary significance of matting of hair to social work revolves around the human rights and social justice framework, the multidisciplinary relevance is established with the psychological, medical, sociological, and anthropological aspects integral the problem of matting of hair.

## **The Emerging Research Agenda**

Based on the literature review and the analysis presented, the researcher has drawn a research agenda on the matting of hair among women in India. The complexity involved in the issue of matting of hair among women in southwestern India and the paucity of knowledge base makes it a challenging to identify a comprehensive formative research agenda. In view of the lack of an extensive baseline, the initial studies on matting of hair are expected to present exploratory analysis using the existing multidisciplinary knowledge base about matting of hair. Based on a thorough analysis of the multidisciplinary literature on the issue of matting of hair, there are some possible research problems:

- The comparative study of existing interventions on matted hair.
- The exploration of the perceptions of health care practitioners about matted hair.
- The exploration of gendered patterns of institutional health care delivery for the women affected with matted hair.
- The lived experience and marginalization of women affected by matting of hair.
- The impact of superstitions on the institutional practice of medicine in the case of matted hair.
- The religious patriarchy and its structural systemic oppression of women affected by matted hair.
- The role of rituals in structural reinforcement of women's oppression.

- The social processes in symbolic interpretations of customs such as devadasi in the context of matted of hair.
- The social creation of stigma for women affected by matted hair.
- The impact of forced rituals on the health of women affected by matted hair.
- The relationship of women's absolute and relative social and family level status in culturally oppressive customs.
- The politico-religious roots of gender-based health discrimination of women affected by matting of hair.
- Theoretical framework for the matting of hair and affected women's marginalization.

Several such research problems can be operationalized to put together a substantial knowledge base about the issue of matting of hair among women in southwestern India. Among all possible research topics presented, based on the researcher's personal judgment, the health and human rights marginalization of women affected with matting of hair was chosen as a focus for the study.

### **The Specific Research Agenda**

The lived experience of women affected with matting of hair is the specific research agenda considered by the researcher. The present study is specifically designed to understand the phenomenon of matting of hair and its features such as the marginalization of health and human rights. The disciplinary focus of the research is to capture the process of health and human rights marginalization in a comprehensive manner through the subjective accounts of women. Effectively, the broad research

agenda included establishing the phenomenon of matting of hair with associated multifarious aspects.

The rationale behind choosing this specific research agenda was multipronged. First, there is a lack of phenomenological understanding on matting of hair among women. The research was aimed at creating knowledge base that can orient the contemporary social construction of matting of hair to an alternative empowering perspective while dismantling the web of superstitions and irrational ritual following. The research aimed a phenomenological study with women who were undergoing or who have undergone the suffering and marginalization due to matting of hair. Further, the research aimed to document the nature of stigma and its operationalization affecting the health and mental health of affected women.

The research was focused on documenting and understanding the process of victimization and marginalization through religious symbols, superstitions, customs, and ritual enforcement as these are the core aspects indicating violation of human rights of affected women. The construction of social status around symbols such as matted hair, the patterns of social isolation, ritual following, the financial drudgery due to the ritual expenditures, effects on the life stage development and career, treatment-seeking behavior, and the formal and informal institutional experiences were assumed to constitute the central concerns in phenomenon of matting of hair. Being aware of the nature of phenomenological inquiry, the researcher focused on the subjective accounts of women as the analytical target of the phenomenological approach. As far as the researcher could determine, there have been no attempts, to date, to explore the issue of matted hair using a phenomenological approach by any discipline.

The phenomenological inquiry involves exploration of the lived experience. The lived experience aims to capture the world as lived and perceived by a person (Van Manen, 2002). For social workers who have questioned the superstitious practices around matted hair, it could be coming from practice wisdom and tacit knowledge leading to value-based judgments and questioning to cultural practices. However, the researcher was intended to gain more evidence-rooted understanding through critical examination.

The central question of the study was “What is the lived experience of being a woman affected with matted hair?” Within this larger question, relevant threads were assumed to emerge as essential constituents of the broader experiences of women’s marginalization and suffering due to the matted hair. Presumably, the epistemological importance of the lived experience of women affected by the matted hair was assumed to form substantial evidence explicating the marginalization.

### **Objectives of the Research**

In view of the dearth of knowledge base and phenomenological understanding of matting of hair, the study had multiple exploratory, formative, and translational objectives.

- To explore the multiple physical and mental health issues faced by women affected by matted hair.
- To document the multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization of women affected by matted hair.
- To document and analyze the lived experience as viewed by the women affected by matted hair.

- To document superstitious beliefs and practices surrounding matted hair and explore the actors and processes involved in maintaining the superstitious beliefs and customs.
- To examine the symbolic role of matted hair and allied social and cultural practices as witnessed by the affected women.
- To document and examine the nature and process of stigma faced by devadasi and non-devadasi women due to their matted hair.
- To understand the caste intersectionality in gender issues through the religious-based traditions and structures such as *Brahminical* patriarchy.
- To explore effective treatment options and other services for matting of hair as viewed by affected women.
- To understand the role of social work in the religious-based oppression of women.
- To understand various rituals and the problems associated with it as seen by women affected by matting of hair.

### **Rationale for the Research**

The marginalization of women on the health front is obvious in matting of hair. However, the lack of adequate institutional treatments for physical and mental health issues highlights the need for evidence-based action and advocacy. Within the Indian politico-religious society, there is a religious-based angle attached to matting of hair that creates a complex social and institutional scenario. The complex forms of oppression involved in matting of hair show varied vulnerability due to caste, as women from so-called lower caste are more susceptible to human right violations as compared to the so-

called upper castes. Despite the historic evidence indicating matting of hair as a health problem of women, there have been no efforts to develop a knowledge base about intricacies involved in it. Without an understanding grounded in the lived experiences of women affected by matting of hair, there will be no scientific basis for intervention and practice. Further, policy advocacy for legislative reform demands evidential baseline rooted in lived experiences of marginalization, and other latent forms of violation of human rights as experienced by the affected women.

### **Researcher's Personal Engagement**

The researcher has been engaged with the issue of matting of hair through various roles: volunteer, activist, social worker, social researcher, and engaged citizen. The researcher, coming from a similar cultural context as that of the research problem, holds an in-depth cultural understanding about matting of hair and allied issues. As a member of the social group from the caste-stratified rural Indian society, the researcher has witnessed the social fabric, the role of religion, and the power dynamics of caste and class involved in the issue of matted hair. The researcher has been a part of society where the superstitions and the customs such as devadasi are practiced among a many families. The researcher has seen the cultural fabric, social communication, and the social processes involved in the typical rural agrarian communities in India. The researcher has conducted an eight-month long pre-research consultation with activists, academicians, and other important experts in rural India on the issue of matting of hair.

The researcher has been a part of activism called the *Jata Removal Movement*<sup>39</sup> that works for the removal of matted hair and the consequent marginalization of women. After completion of a scientific study on women affected with matted hair using case

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<sup>39</sup> In literal terms, it means the matted hair removal movement.

study approach, the researcher gained substantial understanding about the ground realities of the marginalization of affected women due to matted hair. Later, the researcher designed an online survey to investigate the perceptions of health care providers about the matting of hair to document the violation of affected women's health rights and the gendered nature of health system. This online survey had a low response rate; hence, the results could not be generalized; however, the results gave conceptual clarity about the gendered aspects of the health system, health education, and its impact on women's health access. Summarily, multiple sources such as thorough literature review, personal engagement and inquiry, and expert consultation has led to the identification of the research problem and led to a comprehensive phenomenological research agenda on matting of hair.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter provides detailed multidisciplinary literature about various symbolic, religious, human rights, and medical aspects of matting of hair. The literature provided in this chapter informs the phenomenological research agenda outlined.

### **Symbolism about Head and Hair**

The symbolic utility of hair within gender roles and moral rules is noteworthy and reflected in social communication (Mageo, 1994). The female head is a prominent locale “in the symbolization of gender and in the linking of gender to transcend values of specific cultural or religious systems” (Eilberg-Schwartz & Doniger, 1995, p. 1). Symbols constitute rubric for moral messages and moral codes, which further substantiates its function in social and institutional power dynamics (Mageo, 1994). The beliefs about hair and its social cognitive existence can act as the operative instruments in establishing the social and cultural process around gendered hair. The most relevant example of symbolic hair can be the changes in women’s hairstyles after their marriage, particularly in the Indian context (Nabokov, 1997).

**Religion as a symbolic system.** The status of women in the religious philosophy of Hinduism has a bearing on the existing beliefs and its manifestation in cultural practices. It should be noted that the cultural practices such as devadasi or the matting of hair are not necessarily directly rooted within the larger religious system of Hinduism; however, the powerful social and religious entities have been found utilizing religion to maintain their privileges. Hence, it is imperative to consider cultural practices within the structural framework of the dominant religion in India. In definitional terms, religion is a “system of symbols, rituals, beliefs, and practices based on recognizing the sacred”

(Bayes & Tohidi, 2001, p. 44). Furseth and Repstad (2006) have separated the definition of religion in a twofold manner as “substantive definitions” (what religion is) and the “functional” (what religion does) (p. 16). A comprehensive conceptualization of religion by Geertz (1973) views religion as:

A system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.  
(p. 90)

Various definitions of religion show its symbolic structure that acts as a useful heuristic to explicate the functionalist design of religion as a structural system. The symbolic interactions of religion are important to understand the social processes and behaviors as Asad (1983) argued, “social disciplines are intrinsic to the field in which religious representations acquire their force and their truthfulness” (p. 251). Putting religion as the culturally controlled institutional system, Banton (1966) defined religion as an “institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings” (p. 96). The matted hair and the religious-based symbolism around it outline the controlling institutional nature of religion through instrumental cultural practices. However, the institutional role and function of religion and its cultural postulations as well as the culturally postulated human beings need further exploration in the issue of matting of hair. Therefore, the interlinked social and religious processes within the priestly controlled *Brahminical* ideology of religious patriarchy in India become central to the issue of matting of hair.

**Symbolic meanings of hair.** Hair is seen as a symbol of sexual desire where the shaven head indicate no desire for sexual relations while the long and unkempt hair

indicate unrestrained sexuality (Leach, 1958). Long hair is a symbol of freedom from social regulation whereas the short or blond hair designates subordination to the social authority (Hallpike, 1969). In Hindu culture, hair is a symbol of self-abnegation through which people “offer their tonsures to tutelary deities” (Nabokov, 1997, p. 309). The *Brahminical* patriarchy in India considered hair as a marker of pollution, purity, and auspiciousness, mainly for women (Chakravarti, 1995). The different meanings within hair symbolism postulate ritual hair as a symbol of metaphysical abstraction such as fertility, soul stuff, and personal power (Leach, 1958). The prevalence of customs such as the tonsure of *Brahmin* women’s head after the death of one’s husband is symbolically seen as degradation of their sexuality (Nabokov, 1997) through the rituals (Chakravarti, 1995).

Matted hair is a phallic symbol and represents marriage of the woman to a male god (Obeyesekere, 1981). The roles of matted hair, in terms of its sexual meanings, indicate innate physico-psychological interpretations; however, it is being seen within the cultural realms outwardly. The life histories of women with matted hair reveal that they have undergone some trauma related to their marriage, whereas, at an explicit level, matted hair represent their asceticism and a symbolic marriage to god (Obeyesekere, 1981).

**Sources of symbols.** Symbols come from the personal unconscious and later take on public meanings (Eilberg-Schwartz & Doniger, 1995). Mageo (1994) viewed the origin of symbols within the ‘psychogenetic’ mechanisms. Based on their function, Leach (1958) termed symbols as public (sociological symbols) and private (psychological symbols). Psychoanalysts assume the potency of such symbols as they originate from

innate and individual based components where sexuality is seen as a “psycho physical motive force” (Leach, 1958, p. 159). However, Hallpike (1969) suggested that treating symbolism in relation to the world has an advantage as compared to treating them as emerging from the subconscious of the concerned person. Importantly, Leach (1958) pointed out that the anthropologists assume that ritual symbols are given potency by society and not by the individual. Quite vividly, the disciplinary epistemological approach of anthropology appears different from psychoanalysts who locate the origin of symbol within the individual (Eilberg-Schwartz & Doniger, 1995).

There is an advantage in locating issues at social level due to the possibility of empirical verifiability of symbols in relation to the society (Hallpike, 1969). Furthermore, the process and function of symbols can be viewed in the shifting demands of the larger society on the resisting cultural sub-groups (Mageo, 1994). Arguably, the pressure on the oppressed groups such as untouchables and women to remain within the assigned structural traps of customs such as devadasi and superstitious practices about matted hair highlights symbolic mechanisms derived from to the shifting demands of the dominant society to maintain the historical hierarchy (Mageo, 1994).

Leach (1958) viewed symbolism as public property having the cultural rules of legal or religious nature as its source. The ontological and epistemological complexity involved in the analysis of symbols, their sources, and function becomes more meaningful with Mageo (1994) who clarified that the public symbols obtain private meanings through personal histories as well as the cultural histories. Mageo’s (1994) view about personal and cultural histories provides identifiable sources for mapping the

larger symbolic process that underscore women's discrimination and marginalization through the cultural practices about matted hair.

**Symbolic process and social communication.** The public symbols are more communicative than the psychological ones; hence, individuals tend to borrow the public symbols for a representative conceptualization and expression of a private complex (Mageo, 1994). Obeyesekere (1981) found that women ascetics represented their matted hair as a means to denounce marital duties in bed. Moreover, such process is symbolic of overcoming the control of women's sexuality and gives them prestige, liberty, and income (Obeyesekere, 1981). The nature of messages reflected within the social communication through symbols is associated with individuals and their respective inner world (Mageo, 1994). Arguably, the intercommunicative (social) and intracommunicative (psychological) aspects of symbols (Mageo, 1994) are likely to have an explanatory utility in revealing the mechanisms pertaining to the symbolism associated with matted hair. Hallpike (1969) added that if the verification of social symbolism fails, then it would lead to the resources of psychology, which is the individual.

Explicating functions of symbols, Mageo (1994) argued that the public symbols provide an avenue for the social reintegration of personal complexes. The personal and social meanings attached to matted hair, within the context of a well-structured religious symbolism, signify an important phenomenon that may involve control of women's sexuality through control of their body. Mageo (1994) proposed that groups believing in particular patterns of body symbolism are likely to have personal and cultural histories about it, which further is reflected in various mechanisms about symbols. Matting of hair is largely seen among females coming from the untouchable and other oppressed castes

that have cultural histories of religious-based oppression through *Casteism*<sup>40</sup>. Further, women from the so-called lower caste groups have personal histories around their gendered being compounded with their social being within the religious framework of *Brahminical* Hinduism. It is important to note that the symbols with psychogenetic origin are assimilated in the social communication (Mageo, 1994). In this process, the private complex and the personal resistance to social morality remains as a common feature shared by the subgroups involved (Mageo, 1994). Furthermore, the high religious nature and voluminous instances of religious and mystical experience reported by women (Leslie, 1997) implies that the religion-based symbolism and practices have remained as major avenues, either imposed or strategically made available for women to express their personal complexes.

### **Hair and Its Significance**

In India, hair carries many important roles and function in women's lives through the aesthetic and the gender-specific value assigned through cultural standards. The phenomenon of objectification and its underlying mechanisms (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) play a role in the gendering process of hair. Hair, embedded within the socio-cultural symbolism, has subtle and complex nature. While explicating the complexity of hair symbolism, Bromberger (2008) said, "society reveals much by its locks" (p. 396).

**Genetic and health marker.** In the process of sexual selection, males select females on the grounds of hairlessness (Darwin, 1872). The length of hair and its quality is likely to indicate women's youth and health, and it signals reproductive potential (Hinsz, Matz, & Patienc, 2001). Hair is linked with one's personal growth, maturity, life,

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<sup>40</sup> *Casteism* refers to the caste-based discriminatory behavior from the so-called upper caste groups toward the so-called lower caste groups in India.

and the life processes (Batchelor, 2001). Hereditary disorders are associated with abnormal hair development as hair can be a good genetic marker (Porter & Lobitz, 1970). Several researchers have found that hair is an indicator of several health matters arising due to chemical exposure (Airey, 1983; Chuang & Emery, 1978; Mastromatteo & Sutherland, 1970; Wilhelm, Mueller, & Idel, 1996). Notably, human hair is seen as a biomarker for the assessment of exposure to pollutants in occupational and environmental health (Vladimír, 1995). Hair can be a useful medium to investigate the chronic drug intake by people as the drug passes from the body circulating fluids and remains within hair (Kintz & Magnin, 1992).

**Cultural value.** Hair is an important display feature of human body (Ebling, 1976). As a symbol of self, hair play a role in visual appeal and sociosexual interactions (Batchelor, 2001). The cultural practice of tonsuring widowed women's head involves mutilation of physical features to degrade the social status of women. Similarly, matted hair among the so-called lower caste women are not allowed to be removed which could be for maintaining their social status.

As the body satisfaction of women is less than males (Feingold & Mazzella, 1996), women's vulnerability to cultural standards is comparatively high. The importance given to physical attributes in the matrimonial advertisements (Willigen & Chanana, 1991) can be the most explanatory example of intense gendered cultural standards surrounding women's body. Physical characteristics play an important role in the marriage market as beauty was mentioned in over 70 percent of the matrimonial advertisements (Banerjee, Duflo, Ghatak, & Lafortune, 2009). In the Indian context, hair

is an important feature that decides the beauty of women. Long black hair is widely considered as a sign of beauty.

Hair is a symbol of attractiveness and personal identity (Mageo, 1994). As a feature of appearance, hair has a direct influence on the cultural constructions about appearance and the interlinked self-image. Notably, a lack of scalp hair is viewed as a disaster for women (Ebling, 1976). Further, having excessive body or facial hair beyond the locally set cultural norms can be distressful for women (Ebling, 1976) as it is equated with masculinity. However, the implications of woman's hair on their self-image (Hinsz, Matz, & Patienc, 2001) and the body image of gender (Feingold & Mazzella, 1996) requires additional research to understand the phenomenon and dynamics involved in it.

Hallpike (1969) asserted that hair is linked to the vitality as it grows and represents extensions of the person; further, hair is understood as an extension of person, which can be mutilated or changed. The shamanic importance attached to long hair or the matted locks of hair is widely known in India where shamans carry it as a symbol of their mysticism and superhuman abilities. Charles (1953) noted that several shamans among communities such as the Lamba, the Chukchee, the Koniag, and the Huichol use different types of hairstyles and practices across the globe. The magical practices consider hair as a holistic representation of the concerned person (Hallpike, 1969) and use it in ritualistic practices.

**Communication tool.** Hair can be seen as a tool for communication as ethnicity, culture, religious affiliation, and gender can be identified by observing the hairstyles and practices about hair. Batchelor (2001) noted the role of hair in social and sexual communication. The expressions referring to hair in the form of public symbols provide

an opportunity for an individual to negotiate and integrate the personal complex in the larger cultural connotations (Mageo, 1994). Matted hair can have an interlinked personal or internal distress differently expressed in the form of the available cultural symbolism. The representation of matted hair as a symbol of distress needs further exploration to know the possible nature of the distress and the nature of negotiation or reintegration of it through the superstitious beliefs.

Sperling (1954) indicated that patients with obsession about their hair show a notable use of hair as a symbol to express their unconscious bisexual conflict. In this case, it was pointed out that the fluctuation in the attitude toward hair was indicative of changes within patient's basic bisexual conflict (Sperling, 1954). The communicative and representational utility of hair or matted hair requires meaningful and evidence-based explanation about its social interplay through cultural practices. It is pragmatic to assume that hair can practically a strong predictor of body image and body esteem considering its social psychological embedded nature. When matted hair is cut or the head is shaved, it leads to a certain body deformity and a distinct change in the appearance that is likely to be viewed as a diminished feminine appearance. The feelings about the appearance might carry striking effects on self-perception, well-being, health behaviors, and adherence to treatment (Rumsey, 2008). Conclusively, the body perception linked with the identity and social communication around it can be an important tool for controlling women's identity formation, sexuality, health, and well-being.

## **Human Rights**

**Human rights, social justice, and women's health.** Human rights and social justice are interlinked and important to social work. Women's health and human rights

issues range from the social gender to macro aspects such as poverty and access to infrastructure. Women's multifarious marginalization due to matting of hair is a matter of social justice and human rights. The human rights are the rights of individuals, applying to all (Mann, Gostin, Gruskin, Brennan, Lazzarini, & Fineberg, 1994). In the history of human rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (UN, 1948) is the most influential global human rights action. Human rights are reflected in many political declarations such as 'The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen' (1789) and the 'Declaration of Independence' (1776). The United Nations Human Rights Council, International Human Rights Law, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch are some notable agencies that work for the global adoption of human rights frameworks in global and local legislation.

The history of human rights in India began with acquiring freedom from the British Rule in 1947. The formal constitution, adopted in 1950, outlined the rights framework for the Indian citizenry. The fundamental rights mentioned in the Indian constitution deal with several aspects of human rights (Articles 14 through 32) (Sripathi, 1998). The fundamental rights in Indian constitution are important while looking at the culturally oppressive problem of matting of hair. Article 14 of the Indian constitution provides the 'right to equality.' Article 47 clarifies the state responsibility in ensuring an adequate standard of living and public health for the citizenry. Article 15 restricts any discrimination of any citizen on the grounds of sex, religion, race, or caste. Importantly, the Indian constitution has given a special status to women through Article 15 (3) which gives power to the state for making positive discrimination in favor of women. The economic rights are assured by Article 39 which endorses equality in the 'right to

livelihood', 'just and humane condition at work ', and 'maternity benefits.' Article 51 (A) (e) has been revolutionary in terms of respecting the diversity of religion; more importantly, it renounces the practices that are derogatory to the dignity of women. Article 51 (A) (e) is an essential consideration for matting of hair among women considering the health impact of the coercive cultural practices that violate the human rights of affected women. The Indian constitution has comprehensive incorporation of global understanding of human rights; however, the translation of constitutional rights into effective legislation and institutions has remained challenging.

**Human rights and its operationalization for health.** The extent of awareness among health professionals about health as a human right makes the institutional operationalization of it complicated (Mann, 1996). The present day medicine and ethics of medical science have a substantial lack of a theoretically sustainable concept of care (Martinsen, 2011). However, the apparent need for the review of principles of medical ethics and its sufficiency to assure women's human rights was emphasized globally few decades earlier (Global Commission on Women's Health, 1992). An extensive action on human rights within the health sector demands a legislative protocol for institutions, vigilant monitoring of the right's operationalization process, as well as regular training and incorporation of human rights within medical education and practice.

Social work practice and research have a significant role to play in the operationalization of human rights related to health. Social causes and consequences of health inequities are a major challenge to social work as health inequities are issues of human rights and social justice (Bywaters, 2009). The discrimination and abuse of women based on their gender and violation of their human rights is due to the political

repression of women (Bunch, 1990). Clearly, women's substantial political participation and larger role in decision-making is implied to ensure women's human rights.

Strikingly, women prefer to invest in women-centered infrastructure based on the needs of rural women (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004) which is more likely to affect the health and human development achievements of women. The existing human rights operationalization in women's health is not adequate to address the complex health issues of women such as matting of hair.

**Women's health and harmful cultural practices.** Human rights are seen as an important framework to analyze and address the public health challenges more so than any other approach in the biomedical tradition (Mann, 1996). The intersection of health and human rights is likely to help in regenerating health care and contributing in broadening the human rights thinking and practice (Mann et al., 1994). Therefore, reducing the social inequalities in health and meeting the human needs is an issue of social justice (Marmot, 2005). The human rights and equity perspectives make it imperative for health institutions to deal with poverty and health in a conjoined manner by providing care to improve health for the poor, and by helping to alter the conditions that are responsible for poverty and marginalization (Braveman & Gruskin, 2003). Notably, the constitution of the World Health Organization (preamble) mentions that "the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition" (2006, p. 1).

Health is seen as a basic human right by many global organizations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (UN, 1948), The Vienna Declaration

and Programme of Action (UN General Assembly, 1993) , and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW,1999) are the most important global declarations about women’s human rights that inform the issue of matting of hair. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (UN, 1948) includes a stipulation about health and allied aspects. Article 25 in UDHR (1948) states:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or another lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (p. 5)

The UDHR (1948) does not mention anything in particular about women, but Article 2 of UDHR (1948) assures freedom regardless of sex (Bunch, 1990). The Article 16 of UDHR (1948) stipulated:

Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. The marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. (pp. 3-4)

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (UN General Assembly, 1993) (Appendix H) emphasized the “eradication of any conflicts which may arise between the rights of women and the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices, and religious extremism” (Para II, p. 38). There is sufficient evidence to conclude that the lack of access to the desired and appropriate health treatment for the matting of hair and allied health problems is an obvious violation of human rights of the affected women.

Further, Article 12 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1999) highlights the responsibility of state to ensure equality among

men and women in access to health care services. Article 12 recommends that the state should assure, wherever necessary for free, the services pertaining to family planning, pregnancy, and nutrition during pregnancy and lactation. However, the CEDAW (1999) stipulations mainly focus on the reproductive health of women and ignore other health issues. Article 14 (b) of CEDAW (1999) specifically mentions the right to health care for the rural women and the state obligation attached to it. Article 5 (a) of CEDAW (1999) is important for the issue of matting of hair among women as it stipulates the state obligation to take necessary measures to:

Modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices, which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women. (Part 1)

Further, Article 5 (a) of CEDAW (1999) suggested governments to respond appropriately against the social and cultural traditions that violate women's rights, which is the case of women affected with matting of hair.

However, the elimination of societal attitudes and structures that support the systematic forms of oppression of women has remained as an obstacle in ensuring implementation of human rights (O'Hare, 1999). The human rights of women are complex to understand due to the problems of interpretations in distinctly different local situations of women across the globe. The violation of women's rights has remained unrecognized and without intervention due to the lack of understanding among the rights guardians or legal services to advocate remedies in favor of women (Cook, 1995).

The violation of women's human rights through cultural practices such as widow immolation, devadasi, matting of hair, and the tonsure of women's head have been seen

in India. Although India has ratified CEDAW and the declarations of World Health Organization, there is still a long way to go in terms of operationalizing human rights for women and their particular gender-afflicted vulnerability. There are multiple issues in India about land rights, indebtedness, and caste discrimination that create complex scenario for operationalizing health as a human right (Petchesky, 2000). Importantly, human rights, reproductive health, and economic justice are interlinked for the women belonging to the untouchable groups (Petchesky, 2000) due to their particular vulnerability from caste-gender intersectionality. Though the rights of untouchables are internationally recognized as human rights (Clifford, 2007), they are yet to be translated substantially within the domestic legislation and institutional mechanisms in India.

### **Knowledge Production on Women's Health: Epistemological Issues**

The existing knowledge production on women's health issues necessitates a critical look about its appropriateness to address the complex health issues of women. It is essential to examine the gender interplay in health-related knowledge production while looking at the neglected health issue of matting of hair.

**Epidemiological research.** The dominant medical knowledge production through epidemiological approaches has received notable criticism for ignoring women's health issues. The current epidemiological practices invoke particular concerns about the problems of definition, biological essentialization of women as reproducers, and the decontextualization and depoliticization of women's health risks (Inhorn & Whittle, 2001). In medical knowledge production, gender biases can be found in development hypotheses as well as in the methodological processes in epidemiological research (Cantero-Ruiz et al., 2007). Highlighting the inadequacy of existing theoretical

frameworks used in epidemiology, Krieger (2001) highlighted the need of new theoretical frameworks in social epidemiology to capture the understanding of shared observations about disparities in health. However, there is resistance to feminist knowledge in epidemiological research (Inhorn & Whittle, 2001) despite the fact that the feminist scholarship advocates for the inclusion of psychosocial background of women in health research. In a comprehensive conceptual manner, Krieger and Zierler (1995) framed the biological expressions of gender and gender discrimination as the “incorporation of the social experiences of gender in the body and expressed biologically” (p. 10). Clearly, the existing epidemiological research frameworks are less likely to capture the intricacies involved in the issue of matting of hair among women considering the social, political, religious, and gender complexities attached to it.

**Gender and sex conceptualization.** Gender can have social and contextual meanings as compared to sex, which has only the biological significance. It is widely understood that several non-biological (social, cultural, and economic) factors contribute to women’s health. Notably, gender is rarely defined as a determinant of health in a proper manner (Phillips, 2008). The ambiguity while conceptualizing gender and sex is obvious; hence, a thorough look at research is needed considering the likelihood of forming the gender co-efficient using only measurable variables (Phillips, 2005). The use of the appropriate conception of gender matters as “the social factors that led to the shift in the medical gaze have fundamentally altered what constitutes a disease” (Piko & Stempsey, 2002, p. 235). However, it was noted that the definitional issues about ‘gender as a determinant’ mainly happen due to the data interpretation rather than by the direct measurement through scientific methods (Phillips, 2008).

Gender is central to the structural systems where questioning the discriminatory and marginalizing structural arrangements becomes a determinant of the health attainment processes, which is visible in the issue of matting of hair. The imposition on the gender variable to explain fully the phenomenon under inquiry is not scientific; however, the methodological domain can be enhanced to capture the interaction of gender in health issues. Therefore, the concept of gender is borrowed from the social sciences to scale up the etiologic concepts of women's health needs and, further redefining gender within the context of health outcomes, keeping in mind the biological and social aspects (Phillips, 2005). For the issue of matting of hair, considering it as a health issue devoid of any reference to gender, underscores an exclusion of women's multifaceted accounts about their gendered experiences of suffering through oppressive cultural practices.

**Hierarchy of research designs.** In medical knowledge production, randomized control trials hold a top place while the observational research has the last place. In contrast to the dominant hierarchy in research designs, Concato, Shah, and Horwitz (2000) found that “the ‘average results’ from well-designed observational studies (with a cohort or case-control design) did not systematically over-estimate the magnitude of the associations between exposure and outcome as compared with the results of randomized, controlled trials of the same topic” (p. 4).

While research-based knowledge is overvalued, it is argued that the evidence-based public health knowledge involves not just formal knowledge but also the silent or informal knowledge (Kamper-Jørgensen, 2000). As the silent knowledge is viewed within the personal experience of public health workers, hence the reflective practitioner

can contribute largely in attaining the goals of public health (Eriksson, 2000). As medical research and practice are interlinked through dialectical interplay, silent knowledge has a substantial epistemic potential (Malterud, 1995) within the medical approaches for knowledge production. Unfortunately, the human interaction and interpretation cannot be investigated from the epistemic positions offered by the biomedical paradigm (Malterud, 1995). It is argued that the medical epistemology and its monopolistic biomedical roots are inadequate in representing medical knowledge (Malterud, 1995). Therefore, there is an emphasis on the reconciliation of the natural and social scientific paradigms to form a new medical paradigm (Piko & Stempsey, 2002).

The medical paradigm controls knowledge production on women's health needs. Within the issue of matting of hair among women, the exclusionary practice of medicalization<sup>41</sup> (Conrad, 1975; Kittrie, 1971) and demedicalization<sup>42</sup> (Conrad, 2005) are visible. It should be noted that the medicine is situated in the contexts of historical, societal, and cultural determinants; however, the broader context of medicine is seldom explored within the medical education (Bardes, 2004). Hence, there is a requirement of new theoretical frameworks and data to test, refine, and gain clarity on the barriers to and causes of the social inequalities in health (Krieger, 2001). Pragmatically, the importance of value-based social work research paradigm and its ability to inform medical science is apparent in the issue of matting of hair among women.

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<sup>41</sup> Medicalization is viewed as a political process used for the deconstruction of social problems by providing an individual-based pathological explanation.

<sup>42</sup> Broadly, demedicalization is a process whereby the visible health problems are ignored and no medical treatments suggested as a solution.

## **The Importance of Women's Experiences**

The experience serves as a way of talking about what happened, the differences and similarities involved in the referred event, and more importantly, the unique and indisputable claim of knowledge (Fox, 2008). In simplified form, experience is something that one wants to explain (Scott, 1991). The role of experience in connecting social, psychological, and physiological aspects is shaped by the culture and language (Fox, 2008). Hence, the interpretation of the 'interpretation of experience' is emphasized for understanding its discursive and ubiquitous nature (Fox, 2008). However, the experiences also have an intentionality, which may not be consistent with the reality of experience (Harman, 1990).

The 'political' nature of experience demands a focus on the politics in construction of experience (Fox, 2008). Experience does not undercut the politics of denying the existence of subjects, rather it inquires about the construction of the experience (Scott, 1991). Quite vividly, experience calls for participation in exploring the meaning of the phenomenon experienced and narrated (Stone-Mediatore, 1998). Experience is being seen as representational and, in some cases, partially representational and partially subjective (Martin, 2002). The act of representing the experience happens through the language process that "restructures, describes, re-describes, translates, interprets, and reinterprets experience" (Fox, 2008, p. 47). It is important to understand that the language is derived from the bodily experience, but the experience cannot be derived from language as the discourse may impose altered meanings on the bodily experience (Swann & Ussher, 1995). Due to the linkages with cognitive science, experience is likely to be examined within the discipline of psychology. However, the

discipline of psychology has devalued consideration of women's experiences (Crawford & Marecek, 1989) as the dominant concept of 'self' is a misfit to women's experience (Miller, 1984) and hints at the politics of knowledge production about women's experience.

As their own group and the dominant culture (McKinley, 1999) may have simultaneously shaped the body experiences of women coming from the non-dominant groups, experience can be checked for its acculturative vulnerability and negative impact on oppressed groups. As mother's body experience may influence daughters, a generational influence of experience and reproduction of similar patterns is likely to be cultured through experience (McKinley, 1999). Women's experiences are powerfully conditioned by patriarchy as a broader structural system (Jejeebhoy, 1998). However, despite the evidential and epistemic value of experience, methodological issues exist about capturing experience through appropriate epistemological framework. Moreover, the present state of knowledge is not equipped to reason the subjective character of experience without getting help from imagination unless the point of view of the experiencing subject is considered (Nagel, 1974).

Women's experiences about their health problems are coherent source to provide a rationale for the changes required within the health system. To mention a few, women feel uncomfortable undergoing examinations in the public hospitals largely due to the relative lack of privacy (Bhatia & Cleland, 2004), women underreport their experience of domestic violence when asked by strangers (Jejeebhoy, 1998), and they underreport health problems by thinking that that treatment is not available or is not effective (Glazener, 1997). Healthcare professionals use cognitive shortcuts about clinical data in

making practice and clinical decisions which can lead to errors in health care decision-making (Thompson, 2003). Moreover, in a gendered health care system, women try to normalize their mental health problems likely due to the lack of social enforcement or validation for their experiences (Walters, 1993). Although physicians are advised to have a sympathetic conversation (Glazener, 1997), the complexity in health communication aggravates when patients tend to present their psychological complaints as somatic ones; this is largely due to the perception that biomedical treatments are useful only for physiological complaints while mental health problems are beyond the medical expertise and may be treated with alternatives such as worship (Ecks, 2005). Such nature of non-recognition of psychological complaints can be attributed to the patient's perceptions of the biomedical system (Ecks, 2005).

In summation, the disease conceptualization based on women's' lived experiences and subjective accounts hold high potential for knowledge production in health. To describe the subjective character of experience in a comprehensible form for another individual who is incapable of having those experiences, Nagel (1974) has suggested the use of objective phenomenology. Further, the evidential utility of the subjective experiences of women about their health implies an effective translational appeal for enhancing the clinical practice about women's health. The narratives constructed by people to make sense of their experience provide an alternative perspective for researchers, policymakers, and future intervention studies (Sinclair & Green, 2005). Women's health experience can act as an alternative avenue to recognize the illness in its generic manifested form and may help overcome the possible epistemological biases

hampering the scientificity<sup>43</sup> and humanist values in the health care systems. For the effective redress of the issue of matting of hair by the health care and policy systems, it is imperative to document the generic subjective accounts of women about the matting of hair and the experiential marginalization.

### **Existing Knowledge**

Medical practitioners have noticed existence of matting of hair as an independent health issue as well as a co-existing medical condition with other health problems. The case reports published, mainly in the professional medical journals, are the major source of information about matted hair (e.g. Dogra & Kanwar, 2004; Joshi & Singh, 2010; Kanwar & De, 2007; Palwade & Malik, 2008; Pavithran, 1990; Siragusa & Fabrizi & Calvieri & Schepis, 1996; Suresh Kumar, et al., 2001; Wolf, Martin, Dirk, Josef, & Hans, 2008; Zawar & Mhasakar, 2003).

Different customs, superstitions, and the spiritual and social symbolism attached to matted hair are seen within different cultures. There is sufficient literature about the devadasi custom and the symbolic value attached to matted hair. The interpretation of the matted hair as a 'divine call' was noted through medical case reports as well as social research (Bradford, 1983; Jell-Bahlsen, 1997; Kamble Uttam, 1988; Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009; Lalou, 1995; Le Page, 1884; Ramberg, 2009; Torri, 2009). The cultural practice where unmarried women with matted hair are dedicated to the god or goddess as a devadasi is highlighted in existing literature (Bradford, 1983; Kamble Uttam, 1988; Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009; Lalou, 1995; Ramberg, 2009).

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<sup>43</sup> Using Foucauldian concepts, Lather (2006) argued that scientificity "neither constricts 'science' to one or two privileged models nor allows an anything goes arbitrary concept of science" (p.9); moreover, it replaces the methodological reductionism that emphasizes clubbing certain methods into a single model.

The attribution of matted hair to certain gods and goddesses has been prominent among different cultures across the globe and largely prevalent in southwestern India. The superstitious and religious value attached to matted hair of women is witnessed around regions where communities worship goddesses. There are multiple superstitions about matted hair believing it as a sign of exit of disease, a divine call, and a development of madness or mental illness. The major superstitions about matted hair suggest that the removal of matted hair leads to fatal events for the person (Beigel, 1859; Bishop, 1929; Cazenave, 1851; Kanwar & De, 2007; Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009; Minko, 1973; Suresh Kumar, et al., 2001; Schuster, 1968; Simpson & Mullins, 1969; Zajackowski, 2010). For women affected with the matted hair, there is a set of rituals assigned and vigilantly monitored for its compliance in the politico-religious societies in India (Enthoven, 1976; Kersenboom-Story, 1987; Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009).

The causative factors for the matting of hair include multifactorial etiological processes that involve physical, chemical, psychological, and behavioral factors. The frequently mentioned factors responsible for the matting of hair are unhygienic practices such as not washing or combing hair regularly, use of fur caps, long-term sickness, and superstitions. However, there is no comprehensive etiopathogenesis provided for matting of hair. Apart from its generic existence from various possible sources, matting of hair was seen after the use of soap, shampoo, and hair oil in some cases. Based on the role of triggering substances involved in matting of hair, physicians tried to explain matting as a mechanistic process, but failed to explain the phenomenon comprehensively in terms of its actual etiology (Bansal & Kuldeep, 1992; Bharti & Singh, 1994; Dawber, 1984; Forstl & Elliger, 1995; Graham, 1953; Howell, 1956; Kowalewski, 1838; Kwinter & Weinstein,

2006; Marshall & Parker, 1989; Pavithran,1990; Ramanan & Ghorpade,1993;Wilson, Ferguson, & Dawber,1990; Zajaczkowski, 2010; Zavar & Mhasakar, 2003). Historically, the focus on matted hair and the way it is viewed by medical practitioners shows a dominant focus on the mechanical process behind matting rather than analyzing the multifarious symptoms such as psychological issues and the socio-cultural correlates. It is obvious from the existing medical reports and practices that the women affected by matted hair are not sufficiently served through the appropriate diagnostic processes and medical treatments.

The estimates about the prevalence of matted hair are not available due to the lack of medical statistics, reluctance of women to self-report it as a health issue, and inclination to informal religious or shamanic treatments. The prevalence of matting of hair is high in rural India where the customs such as devadasi and allied cultural practices are still being followed. In an informal estimate, activists shared that at least one woman in nearly every village carries matted hair (S. Kumbhar, personal communication, January 12, 2012). The prevalence of devadasi custom and the matting of hair is primarily seen among untouchable and oppressed communities. The legal ban on dedication of women through devadasi custom is insufficient to curb matted hair related cultural practices.

There are three major actions taken by the affected women or her family on their matted hair: the removal through activists (untangling of hair or shaving the head), the removal of matted hair through a medical intervention (shaving the head), and consulting the priests or religious clergy for rituals and customary observance. Some family members found to approach local barbers for removing matted hair but local barbers

refuse to remove matted hair due to the stronghold of superstitions (S. Kumbhar, personal communication, January 12, 2012). Jata-affected women undergo several experiences, which include indigenous treatments, self-medication, shamanic practices, local healing practices, devotional practices, medical treatments from different streams, activists, and other such unexplored arenas. Importantly, the symbolism surrounding women's hair indicates different meanings attached to it: ascetic, sexual, and aesthetic. Women in India are given a degraded social and religious status, which is reflected in various religious texts (Bayes & Tohidi, 2001; Chakravarti, 1993, 1995; Harper, 1969; Leonard, 1979; Miller, 1993; Omvedt, 1977; Paswan & Jaideva, 2003; Rook & Dawber, 1982).

The range of experiences of women due to matting of hair shows several issues such as stigma, stress, deterioration of physical and mental health, social and institutional discrimination, and marginalization of their health and human rights. The health issues reported due to the matting of hair mainly show headaches, backaches, nausea, stress, consistent itching, lack of concentration, neck pain, heaviness in the head, and skin infections. The mental health issues reported involve persistent irritations, feeling of embarrassment, inferiority, guilt, depression, and fear. Apart from the health and mental health issues, there are several implications for women due to the matting of hair such as social isolation, violation of human rights and well-being, fewer or no economic opportunities, and a distinct customary lifestyle (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009).

Through linkages with cultural practices and norms, hair-related symbolism is likely to affect the self-image of women. The major hair-related research comes from anthropology pertaining to the cultural factors and symbolism, whereas the intervention-related research from social work and medical science. It is widely accepted that any

deformity in the physical features is likely to affect the self-image and self-esteem of women. The low status of women, the lack of education and economic empowerment, the gender and demographic biases among health institutions, and the patriarchal family fold are mainly responsible for the lack of health accessibility, availability, and affordability issues prevalent among women in India. The caste and gender-based stratifications create intersectionality among women in India, which gives them particular vulnerability affecting their health and development attainments.

There is no proper classification of matting of hair in a structured disease category. There have been few attempts of classification within the medical sciences, but it has not led to any clarity (Dogra & Kanwar, 2004; Joshi & Singh, 2010; Kanwar & De, 2007; Palwade & Malik, 2008; Pavithran, 1990; Siragusa & Fabrizi & Calvieri & Schepis, 1996; Suresh Kumar, et al., 2001; Wolf, Martin, Dirk, Josef, & Hans, 2008; Zawar & Mhasakar, 2003). At present, there is no adequate disciplinary knowledge base about the matting of hair in medical science, psychiatry, or other relevant disciplines except anthropology. The gendered nature of medical science shows several issues pertaining to definitions of health, equity, lack of structural spaces for women, authoritative and gendered health communication, and restricted doctor-patient relationship. Medicalization (Conrad, 1975; Kittrick, 1971) and demedicalization (Conrad, 2005) are the prominent political processes within the health system that exclude women's health complaints by not medicalizing or specifically medicalizing to create medical control over social problems. The use of the gold standard such as the randomized control trials in creating knowledge on women's health is widespread. However, it is seen that careful research study, without using gold standard, can also

inform the multifarious factors having determinative role in women's health and contribute to the knowledge base (Concato, Shah, & Horwitz, 2000).

The public health responsibility of the state, as mentioned in the Indian constitution, has remained politically handled and under executed to match the original vision of the Indian constitution. Some major issues within the health system of India include less budgetary allocation for health care, rural-urban disparity in health infrastructure, growing cost of health expenditures making health access difficult for the poor, privatization of the health system, lack of appropriate legislative framework, and lack of protocols on complex issues such as matting of hair.

Women's health issues are likely to involve several other factors than the clinical medical factors, and it can have a strong bearing on women's health. The importance of women's subjective experiences is immense in developing the knowledge base on women's issues. Moreover, women's subjective experiences have evidential value for policy and practice. Until now, there are only a few qualitative studies on matted hair mainly coming from anthropology (Ramberg, 2009) and social work (Kumbhar & Dhaske, 2009). There is no study on matting of hair among women and their marginalization within the Indian context using phenomenological method.

### **Gaps in Knowledge**

Until the 19th century, documentation on matting of hair is descriptive whereas the latest literature presenting the clinical reports on matting of hair are short and do not expound sufficiently on psychological co-morbidity. There is no clear taxonomical categorization of matting of hair in available case records, which shows the limitations of medical science and its research tradition (Dogra & Kanwar, 2004; Joshi & Singh, 2010;

Kanwar & De, 2007; Palwade & Malik, 2008; Pavithran, 1990; Siragusa & Fabrizi & Calvieri & Schepis, 1996; Suresh Kumar et al., 2001; Wolf, et al., 2008; Zawar & Mhasakar, 2003). The phenomenon of the artificial development of matted hair using substances such as latex from banyan trees or other methods are not explored and documented in the literature (S. Kumbhar, personal communication, January 12, 2012). The impact of jata and jata removal on the social and religious status of the affected woman remains a theoretical reflection until field-based exploration of the phenomenon is operationalized. The present literature does not fully explain the positive and negative utility of the matted hair for the affected women and their family members, either symbolically or religiously. Although matting of hair is seen as a divine call, the underlying mechanisms are still not revealed in elaborate manner in order to know the entities and processes.

There are no diagnostic or treatment protocols for treating women affected by the matting of hair in the Indian context. The available literature indicates that physicians are not sufficiently aware of the existence of superstitions and its bearing on the disease presentation, diagnosis, and prognosis in matting of hair. The health impact due to matting of hair is documented clinically based on the complaints presented by the affected women or family members without a detailed inquiry about primary and secondary symptoms and etiopathogenesis. Furthermore, there is no documentation of women's experiences of stigma, isolation, physical, and mental illnesses, and the larger phenomenon of marginalization due to matting of hair.

The etiological explanations given by the medical practitioners are not sufficiently explanatory in terms of the interplay of identifiable factors responsible for the matting of

hair. Physicians have mainly reported single clinical cases on matting of hair, which does not qualify for validity or generalizability (Dogra & Kanwar, 2004; Joshi & Singh, 2010; Kanwar & De, 2007; Palwade & Malik, 2008; Pavithran, 1990; Siragusa & Fabrizi & Calvieri & Schepis, 1996; Suresh Kumar, et al., 2001; Wolf, et al., 2008; Zawar & Mhasakar, 2003). The epistemological value of the case reports by physicians remains questionable due to improper attention given social, cultural, and medical details. The psychological co-morbidity observed in matting of hair is not explored. There is no literature that provides information or estimates about the prevalence of matted hair in India.

Among the existing studies on the devadasi custom, there is less attention given to health impact of matting of hair as it is largely described as a religious-based symbol (Basham, 1959; Chawla, 2002; Lalou, 1995; O'Neil, Moses, Gurav, Blanchard, Swarankar, & Orchard, 2004; Shivasharanappa & Srinivasa, 2012; Tarachand, 1991; Torri, 2009). For the non-devadasi women, the impact of symbolic meanings of matted hair is not covered in the available literature. The structural and functional aspects of religious symbolism are unable to provide a substantial theoretical guide to understand the operational framework of marginalization involved in the issue of matting of hair. Despite the noteworthy negative outcomes, there are no attempts to provide empirical or theoretical explanation about the apparently fatalistic abidance to customs linked to matted hair.

A review of different treatments available and followed by the jata-affected women shows no comprehensive documentation or comparative analysis as well as women's preference for particular method is not provided any reasoning. A review of

literature highlights that matted hair and allied symptoms are under-diagnosed and undertreated or not treated. There are several alternative health interventions such as the use of herbals and self-medication possibly followed by rural women; however, such practices are not yet documented. In the case of matting of hair, such treatment-seeking behavior is not considered for research adequately. In addition, there is no research about the malnutrition among women due to the matted hair. The need for early identification and the effective treatment for matting of hair is less verbalized and less explored in the existing literature.

The links of devadasi tradition and oppressive cultural practices is rooted in the shift of Indian society from the matrilineal structures to the religious, but detailed historical, sociological process has not been explored until date. As the symbolic meanings of matted hair in the matrilineal societies were less explored, the social, historical shift in the symbolic meanings and the associated practices about the matted hair are missing in literature. The caste intersectionality in health status of women in India is less attended; hence, no substantial knowledge base exists about the health and development issues of females from the oppressed castes.

The self-image issues of women affected with matted hair and its impact on their self-esteem is less explored to know detailed sociological and psychological process involved. The stigma attached to matted hair, its nature, function, and impact on the affected women have received less or no scientific exploration until today. In this regard, the existing theoretical constructs about stigma cannot be assumed to explain the stigma operative within the context-specific phenomenon of matting of hair. The literature about policy research on women's health lacks footing in the human rights perspective, which

could have led to questioning the cultural practices and the underlying suppression of human rights in India.

## Chapter Three: Methods

This chapter elaborates on the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research and Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology. Further, it provides details about the research method, research process, ethical aspects of the study, and human subject issues.

### Research Method

**Qualitative research.** Any research method can be considered as an applied research process, rooted in a particular ontology and epistemology that broadly forms the research paradigm. Predominantly, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research (Jick, 1979; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) approaches are used in social science.

Qualitative research is assumed to have the ability to integrate with quantitative methods as it uses a certain set of methods and answers certain research questions (Devers, 1999).

The researcher preferred a qualitative research method for investigating the lived experience of women affected with matted hair. The researcher's preference for qualitative research is primarily due to the epistemological appropriateness and ethicality in research methods such as hermeneutic phenomenology where lived experience of research participants is valued.

Due to their holistic nature, qualitative research methods play an important role in social work research (Wilcke, 2002) and social change (Padgett, 1998). In social work, qualitative research is used for the development of critical theories of societies and for the production of multiple products that enhance social work practice (Gilgun & Abrams, 2002). The multiple products derived from the qualitative research include "descriptions of lived experiences, typologies, concepts and theories that are close to lived experience, hypotheses that can be tested on large samples, case examples that can answer questions

that surveys cannot, and items for surveys, standardized instruments, and clinical tools” (Gilgun, 2001 as cited in Gilgun & Abrams, 2002, p. 43).

Grounded in interpretivism and constructivism (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002), qualitative research approaches reject positivism (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Instead of a detached way of writing, qualitative approaches use a detailed and thick description (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). More importantly, qualitative methods adhere to the phenomenological paradigm that believes in the social construction of reality through individual or collective definitions about the situation (Firestone, 1987; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Qualitative methods emphasize an immersed researcher (Firestone, 1987) and prefer research within the natural settings (Tomal, 2005). Through qualitative research, the mutual construction of knowledge with the engaged participation of the researcher and the researched takes place (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The core ontological assumption behind the qualitative method signifies that there are multiple realities based on one’s construction of reality (Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002) which leads to an emphasis on process and meaning. Qualitative research does not necessarily involve a hypothesis, or sometimes, it can have a tentative hypothesis as every study is viewed as independent and emerging (Tomal, 2005).

Considering the complex health and human rights aspects attached to the issue of matting of hair, the researcher chose a qualitative research method. The need for qualitative research in health service research is emphasized (Devers, 1999). However, medical research ethics committees often find the assessment of qualitative projects difficult (Richards & Schwartz, 2002). Despite the co-existence of psychological problems with matting of hair, there are no sufficient efforts to describe or categorize

from medical science or other pertinent disciplines. As the lay perspectives about depression, anxiety, and stress are less explored in the medical sciences (Barnes, Buck, Williams, Webb, & Aylward, 2008), the evidence-based advocacy in favor of the matted hair-affected women became an imperative for the value-based social work discipline. The paucity of research on matting of hair implicates the necessity of a comprehensive symptom assessment through the disciplinary focus of social work considering the health and human rights marginalization of women. The resonance between the value roots of social work and qualitative research (Gilgun & Abrams, 2002) make it an appropriate scientific approach to examine such a neglected health and human rights issue.

It is possible to have formative knowledge production through qualitative research as it can make different variables explicit with a cognate and context-specific understanding about the interplay of various social, cultural, gender, and medical factors. The qualitative approach aims to develop greater and deeper historical, philosophical, cultural, critical, or other meta-understandings of events (Sandelowski, 1997). With a particular epistemic focus, through the connections made during the qualitative research engagements, the social work researcher abides by the research framework and leads it to a concrete response to human situations understood through the “voices and experiences” of participants (Gilgun & Abrams, 2002, p. 46). Some characteristic features among the jata-affected women such as the lack of education, health education, and awareness, and less exposure to research activities, makes qualitative research methods relevant. Importantly, a dialectical and culturally sensitive research method becomes necessary while engaging the jata-affected women who have rarely been vocal about their health and development needs.

For this study, the researcher demanded a set of abilities such as flexibility in terms of going with the flow, reflexivity, multitasking, observation, interpersonal communication, empathy and sensitivity, and finally, conceptual thinking and writing (Padgett, 1986). The qualitative researcher embodies several important characteristics such as responsiveness and adaptability to changing circumstances, a holistic perspective, processional immediacy, sensitivity, and finally, the ability for clarification and summarization (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

**Use of Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology.** Qualitative research demands a philosophical grounding that provides appropriateness for the methodological process and guides the researcher's approach to the analysis of data (Mackey, 2005). Among the various descriptive and interpretive qualitative research methods (Elliott & Timulak, 2005), the researcher used Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology for the present study on lived experiences of women affected by matted hair. The definitive purpose of this phenomenological study was to establish the phenomenon of matting of hair and its multifarious aspects through documentation of the lived experiences of the affected women.

The phenomenological approach is a research method and a fundamental philosophy with a distinct ontological and epistemological grounding, which had a strong influence on knowledge development in the 20th century (Mackey, 2005). Heidegger (1962) defines phenomenon as "...what shows itself in itself, what is manifest" (p.25), whereas phenomenology is termed as:

..the way of access to, and the demonstrative manner of determination of, what is to become the theme of ontology. Ontology is possible only as phenomenology. The phenomenological concept of phenomenon, as self-

showing, means the being of beings-its meaning, modifications, and derivatives. (p. 31)

Phenomenology is aimed at capturing the “experiential essence” of participants but is not aimed at reclaimed and neutral descriptions (Berrios, 1993, p. 213). Through any phenomenological study, the ‘taken for granted views’ about experiences are reexamined to uncover “new and/ or forgotten meanings” (Lavery, 2003, p. 22). Plausibly, phenomenology is concerned with “the question of relation of mental events to physical events” (Taylor & Heiser, 1971, p. 480). To understand comprehensive meanings of the lived experience as it is being lived, phenomenology asks a prominent question such as “what is this experience like?” (Lavery, 2003, p. 22). Hermeneutic<sup>44</sup> or interpretive phenomenology focuses on the life world or human experience as it is being lived (Lavery, 2003).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is emphasized in social work research to understand complex human experiences (Wilcke, 2002). Phenomenology understands that human behavior can only be comprehended “from the vantage points of the perceptions of the actors” (Black & Enos, 1981, p. 34). The extent of understanding of other human’s lived experiences mutually indicates one’s own understanding of the experience of self, which clearly highlights the importance of phenomenology in reflective social work (Black & Enos, 1981). After a careful evaluation of the existing knowledge base and the requirement of formative social work knowledge about the phenomenon of matting of hair, the researcher selected Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology, which fulfilled the epistemological and ontological requirements of the study.

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<sup>44</sup> The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* states “hermeneutics covers both the first order art and the second order theory of understanding and interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions” (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2009, Para 1).

The utility of phenomenology in providing useful accounts about the diagnostically challenging health problems such as delirium (Gupta, Jonghe, Schieveld, Leonard, & Meagher, 2008) is appealing. The phenomenological tradition emphasizes a descriptive approach towards signs and symptoms of individual illness that provides precision in “diagnosis of symptom clusters and signs into psychopathologic categories” (Taylor & Heiser, 1971, p. 482). Further, the understanding of subjective experiences of illness may provide improved clinical outcomes and patient satisfaction (Bhui & Bhugra, 2002). Taylor and Heiser (1971) advocated for the use of phenomenology to develop alternative descriptions of mental illness by highlighting the fact that the phenomenologist focuses more on process and form rather than content. The interpretive phenomenological approach was assumed to inform the taxonomical issues about matting of hair, its possible subtypes, and explanations of undocumented primary and secondary symptoms. The disciplinary use of phenomenology as a research method in social work is imperative due to the epistemic linkages between descriptive psychopathology and phenomenology that have gradually declined in medical research (Berrios, 1993). Furthermore, with the phenomenological method, a “number of salubrious personal and societal results” are possible as the “research is done within an epistemological framework that acknowledges the experiences of participants and situates participants as expert knower” (McCoyd & Shdaimah, 2007, p. 347).

To make qualitative research usable and useful, Sandelowski (1997) has proposed several activities such as clarifying conceptions of findings, using representational styles, enabling use, addressing the complexity of qualitative meta-syntheses, and assuming and sharing responsibility for signifying and translating findings. Estabrooks (2001) provided

classification of research utilization in three ways: instrumental, conceptual, and symbolic. The instrumental utility of phenomenological research on lived experiences of women affected with matted hair ranges from research and practice in social work and other pertinent disciplines. The knowledge base explored and built through interpretive phenomenology is pragmatically assume to provide a political tool for advocacy for institutional and policy reforms.

**Heideggerian phenomenological method and philosophy.** The Heideggerian phenomenological approach and its methodological details first appeared in Prof. Martin Heidegger's seminal work 'Being and Time' (1927). Heidegger introduced the concept of da-sein, which means "the human way of being in the world" (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 174). Heidegger (1962) explicated, "the understanding of being that belongs to Da-sein just as originally implies the understanding of something like 'world' and the understanding of the being of beings accessible within the world" (p.11). Heidegger proposed that the existential analysis of da-sein to be conducted about its "possibility and necessity in the ontic constitution" (1962, p.11). Ontic and ontological are two foundational aspects of Da-sein where ontic means the apparent physical characteristics of the being. For a "lucid" inquiry, Heidegger suggested the ontological analysis of da-sein that has revealed it to be that being considered under the inquiry (Heidegger, 1962, p.12).

For da-sein, its understanding about itself and its being are always in terms of the world (Heidegger, 1962, p.19). The ontic nature of immediate da-sein is firm, but in ontological terms, when analytics are performed, it is far away from itself; yet, Heidegger (1962) emphasized that it is "pre-ontologically certainly not foreign to itself" (p.14). Da-

sein, with its understanding of the world, projects itself upon the actual possibility of “being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 1962, p.187). Beings are spatial in their being; however, the spatiality of da-sein is constituted by the world in accordance with its fundamental constitution of being-in-the-world, and it is discovered with the same ontological understanding about it (Heidegger, 1962, p.105). Heidegger’s notion indicated the ‘situatedness of the being in the context’, which implies knowing the being within its context in the larger matrix of existentiality.

Logically, the subjective lived experiences are the source for such establishment of the phenomenal being in the world; Heidegger (1962) termed it as the “everydayness” (p. 15). In broad terms, everydayness indicates the usual day-to-day activities of the being. Everydayness “signifies a certain *How* of existence that prevails in Da-sein “as long as it lives”” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 338, emphasis original). Everydayness is helpful in bringing out the “preparatory way the being of this being” (Heidegger, 1962, p.15). As the average everydayness has ontic characteristics integral to the da-sein, it should be uncovered in different ways it exists. Hence, pursuing the everyday being-in-the-world is assumed to uncover the world and its formation (Heidegger, 1962).

The analysis of everydayness has a purpose of explicating the ‘thrownness’ of the being toward the establishment of the “primordial mode of being of da-sein” (Heidegger, 1962, p.156). Heidegger (1962) clarified, “da-sein can never escape the everyday way of being interpreted into which da-sein has grown initially” (p.159); however, the stated analytics of being does not provide the complete ontology of da-sein as Heidegger (1962) indicates it as “preliminary” (p.15).

The complexity of ontological analytics becomes more intricate due to its 'appearance' as "beings can show themselves from themselves in various ways, depending on the mode of access to them. The possibility even exists that they can show themselves as they are *not* in themselves" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 25, emphasis original). May it be in varied forms, the "fundamental formal structure of appearing" (Heidegger, 1962, p.26), hence the appearance, are dependent on the phenomenon. Thus, establishing phenomenon involves an understanding of appearance.

Understanding the 'appearance of being' in terms of historicity becomes a complex task as da-sein understands its being in the context of certain "customary interpretations" and propagates within those interpretive structures (Heidegger, 1962, p.17). Moreover, the tradition overrides da-sein in such a way that it "falls prey" to the world (Heidegger, 1962, p.42). Falling prey is associated with tradition through 'they' where 'they' is the anonymous being (Crotty, 1996). The sense of conformity in the ontic-ontological bi-polarity of da-sein is a complex process, particularly when the ontological analytics of tradition is less or not known. The handover of tradition blocks the "original "wellsprings" out of which the traditional categories and concepts were in part genuinely drawn" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 19). Here, two important concepts of Heidegger come in picture: thrownness and attunement. Thrownness refers to the process "to find oneself in such and such a way" in the existential sense, whereas attunement is understood as the mood of being that discloses da-sein in its thrownness (Heidegger, 1962, p. 312). There is an essential integral nature to thrownness and attunement where "attunement *discloses da-sein in its thrownness, initially and for the most part in the mode of an evasive turning away*" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 128, emphasis original).

The process of da-sein's disclosedness involves "attunement, understanding, and discourse" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 203). The 'understanding' refers to a process where "*this being discloses in itself what its very being is about*" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 135 emphasis original). The discourse is all about the language as Heidegger contends the discourse as "*the existential-ontological foundation of language*" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 150, emphasis original). Heidegger holds an exceptional view of language where speaking is seen as gathering beings in their totality; further, gathering in turn is seen as revealing the "rootedness in and differentiation from Being" (Nwodo, 1985, p. 25).

The phenomenological understanding constitutes beings by the imperative to bring forward the being in right way. Heidegger proclaims, "these beings must likewise show themselves in the way of access that genuinely belong to them" (1962, p.33). However, the phenomenon can be covered up in two modes, "undiscovered", and "buried over" (p.32). The covered phenomenon needs a particular approach to uncover it. To uncover the phenomenon, Heidegger proposed the process of deconstructing the ontological tradition on the ground of original experiences (1962, p.20/23). Heidegger (1962) suggested three constitutive factors of phenomenon on which the analytical action takes place: in-the-world (questioning the ontological structure of the world and defining worldliness), being (who is in the average everydayness of da-sein), and being-in (the ontological constitution on in-ness) (p.50). Based on these three elements, Heidegger (1962) draws the definition of the phenomenon in phenomenological sense "as that which shows itself as being and the structure of being" (p.63).

**Hermeneutic approach.** Hermeneutics is the central approach of the phenomenological method and philosophy propounded by Heidegger (1962). The

instrumentality of underlying hermeneutic or of the interpretive process is "...through which the proper meaning of being and the basic structures of the very being of da-sein are *made known* to the understanding of being that belongs to da-sein itself" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 33) (original emphasis). The Heideggerian notion of hermeneutics advises the researcher engaging in the phenomenon of interest to begin with the beings that constitute the da-sein in its dialectical context. Heidegger explicates:

The *logos* of the phenomenology of Da-sein has the character of *hermeneuein*, through which the proper meaning of being and the basic structures of the very being of Da-sein are *made known* to the understanding of being that belongs to Da-sein itself. (p. 33) (original emphasis)

For the most part, the dialectical context indicates the particular linguistic form, its semantics with assigned meanings, and corresponding symbolic forms, and processes. However, on a broad horizon, Heidegger (1962) views 'discourse' as the existential ontological foundation of language. Heidegger's comprehensive perspective does not hold a parochial view of language and expands it to the underlying discourse about the phenomenon under study. With a pragmatic consideration, the expansion of semantics to its possible ontological limits through the hermeneutic approach presumes the mechanics intended by Heidegger (1962). Teixeira (2006) feels that Heidegger, in his attempt to provide the ontological grounding to hermeneutics, changed the instrumentality of interpretation to gain 'understanding' in a reverse manner. The traditional approach to devise understanding through interpretation is used differently in Heideggerian method where the understanding is considered primary and the interpretation assumed to have utility to make the understanding more explicit in its progression (Teixeira, 2006).

The possible systematic, coherent, and consistent heuristic indicated by Heidegger for the hermeneutic approach “employs a detailed, progressive description of episodes of social interchange and gradually articulates more and more of their organization”(Packer, 1985, p. 1092). Roy (1992) highlighted the utility of hermeneutics along the lines of Heidegger as:

...hermeneutics does not create anything new in the object or text to be understood, it rather uncovers what was originally present but has not yet been discovered and grasped by man, yet in process of discovery, hermeneutics often reveals or points out some undisclosed dimensions, which may appear new and illuminating.(p. 291)

The underlying social interchanges of beings occur on particular social, cultural platforms and can be sourced from the concerned beings and interpreted further for its meaning, keeping in mind the cultural context of the phenomenon under exploration. While problematizing the cultural tradition about matted hair as the coercion of affected women, there are many culture-specific sociolinguistic considerations. Habermas (1980) views hermeneutics as “an 'ability' we acquire to the extent to which we learn to 'master' a natural language: the art of understanding linguistically communicable meaning and to render it comprehensible in cases of distorted communication” (p. 245). While using Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher was in full grasp of the fact that hermeneutics is not about the ‘pure content of human subjectivity’ (Lopez & Willis, 2004). To maintain the epistemological consistency while integrating the hermeneutics and phenomenology as a philosophy and research method, Heidegger has emphasized the importance of “self-clarification of understanding” (1962, p. 363). The researcher has clarified his understanding throughout the research report.

**Fore structure.** Fore structure is a core component of the Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology. Mackey (2005) puts fore structure as "...what is understood or known in advance of interpretation" (p. 182). Hermeneutic phenomenological research demands pre-understanding about the research topic for the best outcome of the research process (Geanellos, 1998). The Heideggerian understanding of fore structure underscores the research process as "an epistemologically specified mode of being-in-the-world" (Ginev, 1999, p.146). The researcher's being-in-the-world, thus understood, implicates elaboration about the epistemological and ontological characteristics of the researcher in a considerably extensive and explicit manner to outline the pre-understanding and awareness (Geanellos, 1998; Mackey, 2005), which conclusively forms the Heideggerian fore structure. While elucidating on the requirement of fore structure and its declaration, Heidegger (1962) recommended:

If such an interpretation becomes an explicit task of an inquiry, the totality of these "presuppositions" (which we call the *hermeneutical situation*) needs to be clarified and made secure beforehand both in a fundamental experience of the "object" to be disclosed, and in terms of that experience. (p. 214)

The researcher has been associated with the issue of matted hair through various roles: activist, social worker, rural youth, a student volunteer, citizen, and researcher. For the researcher, the theory and practice-driven praxes about the infinitesimal sides of matting of hair have evolved temporally through the various roles mentioned. Heidegger provided the integral role of fore structure and its epistemic value in a comprehensive manner:

The interpretation of something as something is essentially grounded in fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. Interpretation is never a *presuppositionless* grasping of something previously given. When the particular concretion of the interpretation in the sense of exact text interpretation likes to appeal to what 'is there', what is initially 'there' is nothing else than the self-evident, undisputed prejudice of the interpreter, which is necessarily there in each point of departure of the interpretation of what is already 'posited' with interpretation as such, that is, *pre-given with fore-having, fore-sight, fore-conception*. (p. 141) (emphasis added)

In sections ahead, the researcher has outlined his fore structure in terms of his value-based position about ontology and epistemology. It is important to note that the conceptual presentation about the marginalization of jata-affected women in the literature review and the consequent research agenda reflects the value-based critical position, theoretical attitude, and pre-research understanding of the researcher, which constituted the fore structure.

### **Ontology**

The ontological views of the researcher play an important role in the research formulation, conduct, and analysis of data. Broadly understood as the nature of reality, ontology refers to 'what is to be known.' The ontological assumptions mainly deal with the nature of the world and human beings in the social context (Bryman, 2001). Ontology asks questions such as 'what is the form and nature of reality' and 'what can be known about it' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Heidegger (1999) views ontology as a "doctrine of being" (p. 1).

The researcher concurs that the dominant ontological views reflected in the androcentric knowledge production approaches (e.g. women as 'weaker segments as compared to their male counterparts) has ruled knowledge production through biased research designs. Such kind of ontological politics controls the higher truths about the "nature of ultimate being" (Sheldon, 1981, p. 403). Hence, the researcher advocated for a

value-based humanistic ontology, particularly with a disciplinary position as a social work researcher to study the oppression and marginalization of jata-affected women.

The researcher had distinct ontological position derived from his anthropological locale in same cultural system that of the research problem. However, the ontological position of the researcher has evolved through various formal and informal engagements and roles. The researcher believes that the superstition-based behavior in cultural practices and the consequent marginalization of women by the dominant entities from social, health and religious-based system, exists because of the sociohistorical vulnerability of the historically discriminated women and social groups. For the researcher, the religious-based and gendered construct about matted hair, the disrespect to affected women's religiosity, imposition of oppressive cultural practices, and women's oppression through overarching patriarchal and religious-based structures, are the most complex and challenging human rights issues.

The researcher has derived his critical questioning to the dominant ontological politics from the feminist standpoint that uses 'distinctive features of women's situation in a gender-stratified society as resources for the new feminist research' (Harding, 1991, p. 119). Feminism has enabled the clear recognition of ontological and social subordination within the gender binaries (Linstead & Pullen, 2006). In the context of the present study, the researcher has been consistent with the foundational philosophical ontology and its core questions such as "why there exists something rather than nothing and why there exists exactly one logically contingent actual world" (Jacquette, 2002, p. 9).

The researcher views matting of hair within its religious, social, cultural, and political structures, and its underlying structural vulnerabilities and oppressive processes. The affected women are not blamed for lack of awareness or widely termed irrational behavior about matted hair. The researcher has been functional through activist groups who believe in static rationalist perspectives condemning cultural practices about matted hair as superstition. However, the researcher considers such views biased and imposing an oppressive atheist patriarchal conceptualization on affected women's religiosity. Moreover, the researcher holds a position that unless the ontological structure of cultural practices surrounding matted hair is explored substantially there should not be biased theorizations devaluing jata-affected women's individuality.

The researcher believes that women can exercise their human rights through comprehensive institutional structures to protect and further enable their human rights. The researcher advocates that given non-biased and equity-based social and institutional systems, women are capable of controlling their health and development. With such an ontological foundation, the researcher believes that any knowledge about women's health and development should fundamentally start from their subjective experiences to gain basic conceptual understanding as baseline for future research. The ontological assumption that women can define their health, illness, and marginalization through their subjective accounts of lived experiences is the central credence of the researcher.

### **Epistemology**

Epistemology, as a branch of philosophy, deals with questions concerning the nature, scope, and sources of knowledge (DeRose, 2005). It is also seen as the methodology of knowing reality (Tyson, 1995) and the science of finding out (Rubin &

Babbie, 2008). The function of epistemology pertains to creation and dissemination of knowledge in particular areas of inquiry (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2011, para 1). Epistemology deals with questions such as- what is the nature of the relationship between the knower, and what can be known (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). One goal of epistemology is to determine the criteria of knowledge to help in knowing or not knowing and deciding the limits of knowledge, which is broadly termed as meta-epistemology (Truncellito, 2007).

Individual and social epistemologies are further bifurcations within the broader conceptualization of epistemology. The subfield, social epistemology deals with how “groups, institutions, or other collective bodies might come to acquire knowledge” (Truncellito, 2007, Para. 7). Social epistemology focuses “on the extent to which social and interpersonal practices promote true or false belief” (Goldman, 1994, p. 28). The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Goldman, 2010) sees social epistemology as a study of “the social dimensions of knowledge or information” which focuses on “what beliefs are ‘institutionalized’ in this or that community, culture, or context” (para. 1).

For the present study and its cultural context, the concepts of epistemology and social epistemology are important due to the epistemic power dynamics between individual and social epistemologies in establishing the phenomenon of matting of hair. The power structure of social epistemology (the religious patriarchy) and structural vulnerability of the individual epistemology (jata-affected women and their families) are assumed to co-constitute the larger knowledge production process. While maintaining an analytical focus on the cultural reproduction of oppressive practices, the researcher’s individual epistemology became ontology due to the immersed engagement and

intersubjective epistemic awareness with jata-affected women. Notably, Anderson (1995) views feminist epistemologies under the broader umbrella of social epistemology “that investigates the influence of socially constructed conceptions and norms of gender and gender-specific interests and experiences on the production of knowledge” (p. 54).

The interpretive phenomenological approach offered the meta-epistemological advantage whereby the researcher was able to document the experiences of affected women through reflexive engagement within the cultural context and its gendered imperatives. It is worth noting that qualitative research methods are assumed to deal directly with the issue of human connectedness between the researcher and research participants, where the goal of the research methods is to inspect natural social situations, forming a disciplined construct, and explaining the state of affairs when the investigator is absent from the social situation (Haworth, 1984). For the researcher, the epistemology and ontology are not separate watertight compartments. As witnessed and interpreted reflexively, the researcher believes in establishing the ontology of important aspects and the larger phenomenon of matting of hair among women. The epistemic focus of the researcher is rooted in the value base of social work, which outlines the disciplinary imperative to identify the nature of oppression and human rights violation as well as suggest culturally suitable measures to uphold the dignity and well-being of jata-affected women.

### **Pre-research Consultation**

For the present study, researcher performed an eight-week long pre-research consultation with various activists and experts (Appendix C). The consultation process involved identification, contacting, and consultation with different activists and experts.

The researcher had to travel to various towns to meet experts based in different cities and villages within the study area. In some cases, where the experts could not meet the researcher despite prior appointment, the researcher had to rearrange meetings on another day and travel to the locations convenient for the experts.

The pre-research consultation was necessitated by the fact that the researcher was away from the context of study for a considerable time. For Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology, which believes in the intersubjective ontology, the researcher felt that it was essential to reestablish effective hermeneutic engagement and connections with all possible entities that constitute the larger context of the study. Moreover, the issue of matting of hair carries an inherent multidisciplinary nature due to the health, religion, and gender-related features; hence, it demanded substantial understanding about the interdisciplinary field and academic knowledge on matting of hair.

Along the line of consultative process, as emphasized within the consensual qualitative research approaches (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997), the researcher was given various inputs about the ontological understanding of the devadasi custom and matted hair, the functioning and approach of activist groups on matted hair and its removal, and the historical overview of the matted hair removal movement. The consultation helped the researcher to capture the conceptual diversity within the field-based understanding about the phenomenon of matted hair and affected women's oppression.

The academic pre-research consultation was performed mainly with students working on social justice, feminism, and gender problems in India through roles such as social workers or researchers. The primary form for such academic consultation was in-

person interactions and web-based exchange of views. The academic consultations were helpful for enhancing the researcher's understanding about the context-specific academic paradigm about the religious-based oppression of women through oppressive cultural practices.

### **The Research Setting**

The research setting was primarily agricultural and rural areas, villages located at the urban peripheries, and a few remote villages in southwestern parts of Maharashtra state of India. The researcher attempted to incorporate the demographic diversity as it emerged with the flow of research process. The researcher did not restrict the context of study based on any rigid assumptions or biases. In addition to demographic, caste, and class diversity, the study incorporated more diverse characteristic among the study participants based on their occupation, work roles, marital status, and jata status. The underlying principle to attain diversity in sampling was incorporation of study participants with wide-ranging experience to capture the phenomenon comprehensively. The study was conducted within four districts of the southwestern region of Maharashtra state: Sangli, Satara, Solapur, and Kolhapur. The purpose behind restricting the context of the study was done in cognizance to the prevalence of temple-based devadasi practice, social, cultural, and economic homogeneity, and the vicinity of the major temples associated with jata.

### **Sampling**

Qualitative research methods, particularly phenomenology uses a small and purposely selected sample (Patton, 2002). Such sample selection helps to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under inquiry. The researcher used purposive

sampling (Coyne, 1997) for the present phenomenological study. The researcher preferred to capture the diversity of experiences among the study participants rather than looking for a representative sample (Barbour, 2001). The sampling process was based on the theoretical understanding of the researcher aimed at capturing the conceptual generalizations about matting of hair, forms of women's marginalization, and patterns demonstrating the impact of superstitions and cultural practices on women's health and human rights. The sample included women who have experienced matted hair in the past or were experiencing it during the time of interview. The theoretical sampling provided the researcher an opportunity to engage with diverse lived experiences of women affected by matted hair. Moreover, the researcher was open for snowball sampling considering the possibility of receiving referrals from the already recruited study participants or their family members.

### **Recruitment Strategy**

There were four apparent categories of study participants depending on their jata status. Based on each category, the sample recruitment strategies are explained.

**Former jata-affected non-devadasi women who have undergone jata removal through activist-led interventions.** For the selection of research participants who have undergone jata removal through activist interventions, the researcher used the database available with activists. After learning the study purpose, the activist shared a list of study participants with their contact numbers. Simultaneously, the activists and their volunteers were asked to inform the potential research participants about the study using the recruitment letters shared by the researcher (Appendix A). Considering the remote and distant locations of the potential research participants and the lack of literacy,

oral messaging about the invitation for participation in the study was encouraged. For study participants whose contact numbers were available, they were contacted by phone, informed about the study, and invited to participate. For study participants who were staying in remote villages and lacked contact numbers, volunteers from those villages were informed by activists and were given a message about the request for study participation.

For each interview, the researcher confirmed about the willingness of the study participants and their families with the activists before approaching the potential study participants. The screening of potential study participants, using the predefined inclusion-exclusion criteria, was performed with the activists beforehand and then a list of potential research participants was generated. The activist provided the necessary permission for the researcher to approach and consent the former jata-affected women for interviews. Women who have undergone jata removal through activist-led interventions have shared voluntary commitment to cooperate for other jata removal and research activities as an act of reciprocation.

Among the former jata-affected women who have undergone jata removal through activist-led interventions, 15 names of potential study participants were given. Two names from the list were omitted due to exclusion criteria. One potential study participant was diagnosed for psychiatric problems and undergoing a treatment. The other potential participant was a young girl who was recently married and was pregnant during the data collection period. Out of the 13 women contacted for participation in the study, seven were able to participate. The remaining six potential participants were omitted for various reasons discussed below.

**Jata-affected married non-devadasi women.** To maintain the purposive sampling and capture the possible diversity, it was necessary to recruit married non-devadasi women who presently have matted hair. For this research recruitment, the researcher used his social network and collected information about the availability of potential research participants. The major entry points were independent social workers or those associated with non-profits, journalists, relatives, and friends of the researcher. Identifying the married jata-affected women was challenging due to patriarchy, cultural constraints, and superstitions such as sharing about jata leads to fatalistic events for the jata-affected person and her family. Despite the cultural constraints, the researcher recruited two married jata-affected women (presently carrying jata) after gathering information through his social network. One participant was recruited through a referral and facilitation by a female relative of the researcher. The second participant was recruited with the help of a non-profit employee who coordinated and facilitated the interview.

**Jata-affected devadasi women.** The recruitment of jata-affected devadasi was the most challenging due to their religious-based status and minimal appearance in public places or social circles. For the recruitment of jata-affected devadasi, the researcher adopted various strategies. Visiting temples of the goddess on the auspicious days where devadasi women are likely to come for weekly ritual worship and beggary was the primary strategy for this. Other strategies were visiting the weekly village markets where devadasis roam around for beggary and visiting ritual ceremonies where devadasi women are likely come for hosting the ritual ceremonies. The researcher spent substantial time and energy to gather information about jata-affected devadasi women. The complexity

involved in recruiting this sub-group among research participants consumed additional time for the data collection process.

Furthermore, the recruitment of jata-affected devadasi women was challenging due to their social stigma derived from their sexual objectification. Despite explaining the study purpose, the researcher came across striking negative gestures from some people when he asked information about jata-affected devadasi. In the initial few attempts, after considerable lack of success in recruiting jata-affected devadasi women, the researcher had to spend substantial time in mapping the possible middle range temples in the study area where such potential study participants were expected to appear. The only participant interviewed under this category was found living in a shanty near a temple of goddess<sup>45</sup>. The participant requested promptly for an interview considering her roaming for survival in and around villages. A young journalist and social activist provided useful information and logistics for the recruitment of this research participant. The refusals under this category of participants are discussed below.

**Former jata-affected women who have undergone jata removal through other interventions.** Under this category, the major challenge was the invisibility of such women due to lack of records with local council office, activist groups, or temple priests. The researcher recruited two participants under this category. One study participant was recruited with the help of a female relative of the researcher and the other research participant was recruited through a non-profit employee.

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<sup>45</sup> Considering the life history shared by the concerned study participant, it is more likely that the participant was not formally married with her husband. As per the devadasi tradition, only unmarried women are dedicated to the temple. The participant might be co-habiting with her so-called husband after becoming devadasi. There are practices such as *Jhulva* (Rajas, 2004) where the devadasi women are forced to go with the highest bidder man. In this case, the relationship is unlike the formal marriage and children born out of such relationship are stigmatized. The researcher avoided probing questions on relationships aspects considering possible psychological distress while sharing private matters.

All participants were given the recruitment letter (Appendix A) printed in local language prior to the interview. In case of illiterate participants or those who were not keen on reading the recruitment letter, the researcher read out or asked relatives or neighborhood members from the participant's locality to read the letter aloud. All questions asked by the participants, in the beginning, during the interview, or at the end of the interview, were answered satisfactorily before moving further with the research process.

### **Rejections/ Omission**

This study suffered 12 rejections/omissions for various reasons mentioned below. The rejections were mainly responsible for the extended data collection period for this study. The primary processes involved in the recruitment of research participants involved establishing contact, persuasion of the potential research participant and her family members with proper explanation of the study purpose and importance of participation for jata-affected women, their health, and the overall gendered health scenario. Considering the faith-based social outlook which has bearing on the decisions about study participation, the researcher was careful to highlight that the study was guided by experts and did not aim at harming any religious beliefs of the participant or their family. Such type of study is highly prone to rejection due to the orthodox cultural context of religious patriarchy.

In the case of one middle-aged jata-affected married woman, when asked by the researcher to participate in the study, the woman suggested the researcher to first consult with her family members. When the researcher explained study purpose and process to the married son of the potential participant, he agreed reluctantly to allow his mother to

participate; however, he clarified jata being a religious matter and women are not supposed to share about it. Despite the researcher approaching the home of the potential study participant three times, the participant did not come forward for the interview and family members ultimately told her not to participate in the interview. Since there was no clear refusal given and frequent hopes about interview were given to the researcher, it took more than six weeks to realize the real rejection.

A devadasi woman who had her jata removed recently appeared in a religious-based ritual ceremony in the researcher's village. When the host informed the researcher about the possible participation of the devadasi in a research interview, as a formal gesture, the researcher asked the host to approach the priestess and ask for an interview time at her convenience. Agreeing to the request, the devadasi came forward after the ceremony but refused to share anything except that she is a woman of the goddess. When requested to consider a detailed interview, the potential participant said that she had to go to another town for conducting a ritual ceremony and left the scene. It was clear from the body language that she was not willing to participate in the study.

One jata-affected devadasi surviving on beggary was contacted through a relative of the researcher who owns a village-based restaurant. The relative gave information that the jata-affected devadasi visits the restaurant once a week on the market day. The potential participant agreed to participate in the study when asked by the relative of the researcher. However, when the researcher visited the village restaurant for three consecutive weeks, the potential research participant did not turn up. On the fourth visit to the village restaurant, the researcher was told that the jata-affected devadasi had gone for a pilgrimage.

In another instance, one friend informed the researcher about a jata-affected devadasi surviving on beggary in a small village. The researcher explained the study purpose to the friend and asked to check the possibilities of a research interview. However, suddenly, the friend who referred the devadasi woman to the researcher called and informed about some severe psychological issues going on with the devadasi and that led to the refusal.

The researcher approached one jata-affected devadasi surviving on beggary while she was roaming in a local market. The researcher approached the devadasi through another host woman who was selling vegetables. The devadasi initially resisted but when explained in detail about the study, agreed to the interview. The devadasi told the researcher to come the next day to her home located in another village. When the researcher approached her home next day, there was a message left at her homeowner that the potential participant had gone out of station and would not return for a few days.

The researcher came across a devadasi near a temple of the goddess in a small village. After the initial conversation, the devadasi agreed to take part in the study; however, when the researcher took the recruitment letter out from his bag, the woman suddenly said no to the interview.

For two women who have undergone jata removal through activists, for one potential research participant, the contact number was not working and for the other it was a wrong number in the records maintained by the activist. For another potential participant, when approached at her home in a small village, the neighbor told the researcher that the family has moved to another town and there was not any contact number left.

In another event of rejection, when the researcher approached the son of a woman who had undergone jata removal through activist-led intervention, the son refused to allow an interview telling the researcher that it was more than three years since jata removal and there is nothing about jata in their family.

In the case of another potential research participant, when the researcher approached the home, the mother-in-law of the potential participant told the researcher to talk to her son (husband of the woman). When contacted over phone it turned out that the number was not working. Therefore, the researcher contacted the activist again to see if there was any alternative contact number. On second thought, the activist suggested the researcher not talk to the husband about an interview. The activist shared that her husband was very aggressive, arrogant, and un-cooperative during the jata removal event.

When approached another potential research participant, she communicated her non-willingness to talk about jata anymore. Later, the activist told the researcher that the woman belongs to a rich family in the village and the family does not mix with other villagers much. The rejections received for the study participation are indicative of the various social, cultural, and religious-based factors and the summative context that has a strong influence on the lives of jata-affected women.

### **Participant Reimbursement**

There was no participant reimbursement in the study as communities within the cultural context of study view it negatively. Furthermore, suggestions emerged during the expert consultation supported the researcher's decision of not providing any participant reimbursement.

## **Participant Consent**

The Institutional Review Board of Indiana University (IRB Study Number: 1301010297) provided an exempt certificate for the study and stated no requirement of obtaining written consent of participants. However, the researcher took oral consent for the audio recording of interviews and orally read out the consent form with the intent of providing information about participant's rights to maintain the ethical research process.

## **Sample Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

For effective phenomenological interviewing, Roulston (2010) suggested including participants who have undergone the experience of the phenomenon under inquiry and who are able to speak about it. This study included participants who had previous experience of jata or those who are presently going through the experience of jata. The study recruited participants within the age group 18-70 years who could speak in Marathi language. The researcher did not include following participants: those who had any major cognitive incapacity making it difficult to understand the research and their role as a research participant; women who felt they have religious-based sanctions about not sharing due to jata; women who expressed their inability for any reason; pregnant women; and women suffering from severe physical or psychological issues.

## **Sample Size**

The size of the sample in phenomenological inquiry is based on reaching a point of saturation; however, experts such as Boyd (2001) and Creswell (1998) have suggested sample sizes from two to ten participants as sufficient. Initially, the researcher intended to have a pragmatic sample size-about seven to ten participants; a similar suggestion came from a dissertation committee member. The researcher kept the intuitive feeling of

saturation as the prominent criterion and ended up interviewing 13 women from four districts of southwestern parts of Maharashtra state in India. Data saturation was a personal judgment based on the epistemological structure and philosophy of phenomenology. The primary indication of saturation is when the study participants report no new experiences, perspectives, or perceptions (Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, 2009; Morse, 1995).

The researcher came across such saturation in the fifth interview when participants were sharing similar patterns of practices with respect to their religious-based ritual following. However, within his phenomenological philosophical rooting, the researcher interpreted the saturation point based on repetitive patterns of experiences and praxis shared by diverse group of participants. The diversity within the context of experiences as well as the intersectionality in terms of caste, class, occupation, and geographical area was taken into the consideration to reach the decision about saturation. To register some important demographic details of study participants, the researcher used a short form, which was filled out based on the information shared during the interview. For the missing information, the individuals who provided the referral were contacted.

### **Sample Diversity and Characteristics**

The final sample selected for the study included substantial diversity in terms of demographic area (rural, semi-rural, urban periphery, remote rural, dam displaced village, and same caste village) (Table 1). In terms of caste and religious affiliation, three participants were from labor castes where two participants belonged to the washer community and one belonged to the gardener community. Five study participants were from an agricultural upper caste community. One study participant was a Buddhist and

one participant was from the nomadic labor caste while the other one was from the nomadic warrior caste. One participant did not share her personal details.

Table 1: Demographic Details

#	Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Caste	Jata Status	Marital status
1	Uma	35	Farmer <sup>46</sup>	Maratha	Removed by activists	Married
2	Rati	60	Farm labor	Maratha	Removed by activists	Married
3	Seeta	65	Farm labor	Maratha	Removed at temple	Married
4	Savitri	68	Farm labor	Gardener	Jata	Married
5	Laxmi	55	Farmer	Maratha	Removed by activist	Married
6	Ragini	65	Beggar	-	Jata	Married
7	Anjani	50	Cleaner	Buddhist	Jata	Widowed
8	Rambha	58	Housewife	Sanagar	Removed by activist	Married
9	Udita	58	Housewife	Maratha	Removed by activist	Widowed
10	Sakshi	29	Farmer	Maratha	Removed by activist	Married
11	Utkarsha	57	Farmer	Ramoshi	Removed by activist	Married
12	Sonali	60	Bidi <sup>47</sup> rolling	Washer	Fallen off	Widowed
13	Draupadi	36	Laundry	Washer	Jata	Married

In terms of economic class, the sample included study participants who were homeless beggar, well-settled middle class, petty poor, and below the poverty line. Age wise, the sample was dominated by women aged 50 or above (10 participants). However, three young participants (average age 33) added the age-related intersectionality in the sample. The diversity constituted in the effective sample is reflected in the data analysis section.

<sup>46</sup> The occupations shared by study participants are their family-owned small businesses or traditional caste-based occupations.

<sup>47</sup> *Bidi* is a cigarette prepared by rolling tobacco in a leaf a tree instead of the cigarette paper. It is a home-based income generation activity for many women coming from low-income groups.

## **Location of Interviews**

The location of interviews was determined based on the convenience of the participants. It was necessary to go by the flow of the cultural constraints and the preferences of research participants to make sure about ethical procedures and making sure about no damage or harm to the participants. Out of 13 interviews, one interview took place at the home of an individual who referred the study participant. One interview happened in a shanty of the homeless participant. The remaining 11 interviews took place at the homes of individual study participants. The typical places where the interviews took place were rural homes with chickens and goats inside, slum type homes, and porch areas outside a well-constructed house in the village. All interview locations were unexpected. Nevertheless, hermeneutic interpretive paradigm has this embedded assumption that “every situation is a context, where people, place, time, mood, resources, rules, global events, local gossip, a rainy day, untold influences come together” (Smythe, 2011, p.36).

## **In-depth Interviews**

Based on the phenomenological research design, the study used unstructured, in-depth phenomenological face-to-face interviews. The phenomenological interviews are used for understanding the detailed human experience and the participant’s views about the phenomenon under inquiry (Roulston, 2010). The researcher established rapport through the initial discussion over phone and in face-to-face meetings with participants. As a majority of the participants needed permission from their families to provide an interview, there were clarifying conversations with the research participants and their family members, which helped in rapport building. For the majority of interviews, family

members were present during the interview and shared some pertinent details. The study participants gave consent for the presence of family members during their interview prior to the beginning of interview.

The questions used for the interview were generic and not sequenced in any specific order to avoid obtrusiveness during the data collection process. The primary stance of the researcher was neutral and pedagogical (Roulston, 2010). However, the researcher was aware that the natural unobtrusiveness assumed with the phenomenological interviewing could not be said to suffice the demand of unobtrusiveness (Basson & Mawson, 2011). Gradually, the researcher made efforts to identify possible obtrusive processes and tried to overcome them during the latter part of data collection process. The researcher was aware that the success of phenomenological research depends on the quality of questions in capturing lived experiences and avoiding the influence of theoretical explanations in the process (Colaizzi, 1978).

The difference between research questions and interview questions was apparently less in phenomenological interviewing as all questions explored the life world and lived experiences of research participants. The researcher asked open-ended questions intended to seek the unique perspectives of participants and the meaning of their lived experience, description of events, feelings, opinions, and suggestions related to matted hair. To avoid the researcher's influence on views, opinions, or feelings as seen in a close-ended question-based interview, the questions asked were broad (Baker, Wuest, & Stern, 1992). However, when clarifications were needed, the researcher asked short probing and clarifying questions. The researcher asked situation-specific questions to

understand events, descriptions, and their temporal progression as experienced by the participants. The interview guide used for the study involved questions such as:

- What does it mean to be a woman with matting of hair?
- What challenges do you face in daily life as a woman affected by matting of hair?
- What are the discriminatory practices and stigma you face due to matting of hair?
- What health problems do you face as a woman affected by matted hair?
- How do you manage the health and mental health problems due to matted hair?
- How do you see yourself as a woman affected by matting of hair starting from the beginning of matting of hair?
- How is the lived experience of being a woman affected by matting of hair?
- What rituals have you had to follow/have been following due to the matting of hair? How do you feel about it?
- How do you see the discrimination faced by women with matted hair? How does that affect you, culturally, socially, economically, etc.?

Considering the particular sociolinguistic context of study participants, the researcher had to form questions in such way that the participants find it easy to draw particular cognitive references of their lived experience and share it with their subjective preferences. Further, the researcher had to simplify language of questions to suit it to the dialects of Marathi language. The researcher conducted conversations with particular linguistic and semantic awareness observed in the cultural context and its norms.

## Interview Length

The total length for all audiotaped interviews was 268:63 minutes. The shortest interview was 12:37 minutes. The longest was 33:39 minutes. The average time spent on each interview was 20:06 minutes (see Table 2).

In most cases, the interview length was short due to the reluctance of participants for detailed sharing of superstitious beliefs and practices, their gendered cultural context, and preoccupation with various work roles. As interviews were conducted in the mother tongue of study participants, for the most part, they used meaningful cultural terms, which provided substantial accounts of their lived experience.

Table 2: Interview Length

#	Pseudonym	Interview Length
1	Uma	27.26
2	Rati	33.39
3	Seeta	18.43
4	Savitri	21.46
5	Laxmi	23.54
6	Ragini	21.43
7	Anjani	19.47
8	Rambha	19.03
9	Udita	16.28
10	Sakshi	16.15
11	Utkarsha	14.52
12	Sonali	25.30
13	Draupadi	12.37

## Recording

The researcher used a portable audio recorder device for recording interviews in this study. Care was taken to keep a proper audio recording device, additional batteries, and attempts were made to reduce the noise disturbance and interruptions during the interview process (Easton, McComish, & Greenberg, 2000). However, in most cases it

was impossible to reduce noise during the interviews due to the rural agricultural settings with animals and farm activities at the locations of interviews.

### **Transcribing**

The interviews were conducted in various local dialects of Marathi language; hence, transcribing interviews in the local language was the first necessary step. The transcribing was performed keeping in mind the features of the ‘talk’ that involved emphasis, speed, tone of voice, timing, and pauses (Bailey, 2008). The researcher used the Express Scribe software for transcribing all interviews. The Marathi typing was performed using Google Marathi Input Method. During a few interviews, there was some spontaneous exchange of words by family members who were present during the interview. After careful consideration, the researcher decided to summarize the sharing by individuals apart from the research participant (Bailey, 2008).

The semantic consciousness maintained during the interview process was ensured during the transcribing by noting the use of particular indigenous words in local language to describe rituals, feelings, symptoms, and various other sub-phenomenal aspects. The audio files were listened repetitively, and the transcription was checked to ensure that the experience was captured as close to how it was shared during the actual interview. To add substantial rigor in the research process, the complexities from different individuals conducting interviews and transcription was avoided in the study (Tilley, 2003). The first two interviews were immediately transcribed to understand the process and to overcome mistakes made by the researcher during the interview, if any. The process adopted by the researcher helped him to establish the interpretive quality in transcribing (Poland, 1995) with its impact on the effective rigor of the phenomenological study.

## **Translating**

Phenomenological study, as a method within the larger qualitative research approaches, is conducted in the language of the participants where translators or interpreters are not used at any point of data collection or analysis (Squires, 2009). For the present phenomenological study, the researcher who conducted interviews translated the interview transcripts into English for data analysis purposes and abided by the epistemological consistency of the phenomenological research design. The IRB did not require the translation certificate for the study; however, to honor the hermeneutic process, the researcher requested two experts from the field to check the translation of the interview text. The experts found the translation up to the mark and suggested adding more notes for words and expressions in the local language shared by the research participants. Similar suggestions came from dissertation committee members regarding the translation of the transcribed interview data.

The researcher/translator role made the researcher understand the cross-cultural context of the meanings and provided practical interpretive position (Temple & Young, 2004) that added rigor to the research process. The deep interpretive engagement during the expert scrutiny of the translation from native English speaking experts is assumed to have provided additional substantial rigor to the study. Such procedures used in this study using the Heideggerian approach are likely to enhance the intersubjective hermeneutics. During the translation, for expressions used by the participants, the researcher searched for equivalent expressions, emotional content, and vocabulary in English. In some cases, due to diverse cultural context, there were no parallel words. In such cases, the researcher

added detailed notes about particular cultural terms, expressions, and processes to establish the meaning equivalence.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking is considered contrasting with the Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2011). For the present study, member checking had some value particularly for finding the factual details, which may have been missed during the interview. Further, member checking could play a significant role in the extrapolation process. Doyle (2007) found member checking helpful to create a participatory and supportive structure and encourage negotiation of meaning between the participant and the researcher. However, for the present study, member checking was not performed.

Member checking was avoided mainly because of the gendered context where requesting the study participants for an additional meeting was feared to create psychological strain among study participants due to the cultural constraints of patriarchy. Keeping in mind the restrictive and gendered experience recruiting the research participant for the first interview, member checking was rejected on ethical grounds. To add to the restrictions, there were infrastructural constraints to reestablish contact with family members of research participants. In addition, requesting more time from busy agricultural activities for an additional interview was found unethical by the researcher.

Furthermore, there were some epistemological constraints for member checking in the present study. In its progression, the hermeneutic process integral to the Heideggerian phenomenology is likely to lead to a different interpretation of participant's

discourse as compared to their sharing in the initial interview. Heidegger (1962) explicated the understanding of being as derived from da-sein “develops and decays according to the actual manner of being of da-sein at any given time” (p.14). Apparently, the discourse and interpretations are dynamic and change with time; hence, member checking has less or no logical validity. Moreover, it is known that when alternatives become available, the cultural conflict can appear as a new idea challenging old ones (Firestone, 1990). Such new discourse is likely to be highly problematic to the epistemological consistency of the research design. Importantly, Krefling (1991) warned about member checking processes due to the possible internalization of the initial interview by the participants and harm due to the presentation of data<sup>48</sup>, which could lead to distress among the participants. Although member checking has been recommended for trustworthiness and enhancing rigor in qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000), for this study, the researcher did not conduct member checking for reasons provided in this section.

### **Data Management**

The present study used pseudonyms for the research participants. Throughout the research process, the researcher has maintained confidentiality about the identity of research participants by assigning a unique number for each transcript with a corresponding pseudonym. The researcher took notes on interviews documenting the event descriptions and factual details. In particular, the momentous insights, spontaneous thoughts, observations, reflections, and feelings of the researcher were noted. Interactions with activists during the consultations were documented in the form of notes. All such

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<sup>48</sup> When the researcher presents contents from the initial interview, it provides the broader picture to the participant about their situation. Such comprehensive perspective, derived from one’s subjective accounts, can be distressful when understood in more comprehensive manner.

data have been included in the data analysis to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon under study-the lived experience of matting of hair. The researcher kept all data in his personal computer which is password protected and exclusively used by the researcher. The data will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.

### **Software Use**

Based on the researcher's evaluation of the nature of data and the interpretive considerations of Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher decided not to use any standard qualitative research software programs such as Atlas ti, or Maxqda. John and Johnson (2000) highlighted that the majority of the software programs used for qualitative data management and analysis do not provide conceptual categories or themes or any theoretical understanding. The present study used Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology that emphasizes exploring the lived experiences of study participants. The researcher was concerned that using the software program could have caused the reduction of shared experiences. To avoid such risks and engage more internally with the original experiences of research participants, the researcher did not use any software program for analysis of the transcribed interviews. However, the researcher used MS Word for data analysis using a customized table for the coding and analysis of transcripts.

The study relied on conceptual mapping software called Free Mind (Appendix D) which helped develop a better understanding of a wide array of events and stage-specific lived experience of affected women. Moreover, considering the large volume of sub-patterns within the experiences of research participants, the conceptual mapping software was useful for the researcher to understand the variations within individual experiences and its possible integrated form within the constitutive experience.

## Data Analysis and Interpretive Process

The present study involved transcribing and translating interviews as a first step. The researcher tried to integrate the “recurring phrases, the researcher’s questions, their own emotions, and descriptions of, or comments on, the language used” (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008, p. 179) in the final data analysis. Before the coding process, the audiotapes were repeatedly listened along with reading the transcripts to understand the content and its essence.

To carry out the coding and documenting emergent themes in a more structured manner, the researcher prepared a tabulated form for data analysis (Table 3) based on Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009).

Table 3: The Transcription and Coding Format

No	Marathi Transcription	English Translation	Exploratory comments  (Linguistic, observational, conceptual, contextual, construction of expression related comments)	Personal Reflections of Researcher  (Approach, Self-witnessing, biases, judgments, assumptions, self-awareness, gender awareness, theoretical positions and its position along the process )	First Stage Cumulative Coding  (Coding for individual interviews based on the content)	Second Stage Integrative Coding  (Extrapolation of individual coding done in first stage coding with all transcripts)

The researcher assigned line numbers to each thread of conversation in each interview. Such threads involved sharing of relevant experiences on particular topical areas within the larger lived experience of jata-affected woman. These line numbers were the pointers used for primary and secondary codes while copying quotes during the data analysis and presentation. All transcripts were analyzed using the coding approach suggested by Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006) through “cumulative coding (when

patterns of meaning are generated within a transcript) and integrative coding (when patterns of meaning are generated across a set of transcripts)” (p. 116). The first order descriptive coding included identification, description, and understanding two related aspects of the respondent’s account. Further, the process led to identifying “the key ‘objects of concern’ in the participant’s world, and the ‘experiential claims’ made by the participant” (Larkin, et al., 2006, p. 111).

In Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology, it is essential to capture the constituent themes that establish the broader phenomenon under inquiry. While primary codes provide individualized experiences of study participants, the secondary codes provide an integrated version of conceptual commonality within the experiences. However, the lived experiences need to be understood in the form of the more extensive rubric of themes. The researcher used steps summarized by Pringle, Hendry, and McLafferty (2011), initially given by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) for identifying themes based on preliminary and secondary codes.

The coding steps are as below:

- Read transcript through several times, making notes and comments.
- Identify and label emerging themes and meanings within the text.
- Relate back and link themes to quotes in text, using a cyclical process.
- Look for potential links between themes that may lead to master/super-ordinate themes.
- Repeat the process with subsequent transcripts.
- Connect/cluster the themes from the texts into super-ordinate themes, with related subthemes.
- Examine texts more closely for greater depth of meaning and interpretation.
- Produce a summary table of themes for the group, and a detailed, interpretative, reflexive written account. (p. 15)

One primary goal of phenomenology is to achieve the essential structure of experience (Thorne, 2000). The core parts of hermeneutic analysis are the analysis of the whole text, systematic analysis of parts, and comparison of interpretations for conflicts and understanding (Benner, 1985).

A consolidated table of themes was developed based on the primary and secondary codes (see Table 4).

Table 4: Consolidated Themes Format

Themes	Secondary coding	Primary coding
(Sub-themes, if emerged)		

The next chapter describes thematic and sub-thematic areas identified in the data analysis.

### **Paradigm Cases, Exemplars, and Themes**

For the presentation of findings, the researcher used paradigm cases, exemplars, and themes (Benner, 1985, 1994; Crist & Tanner, 2003). The researcher used paradigm cases, which is “a strong instance of particular pattern of meanings” (Benner, 1985, p. 10). Exemplars are related to paradigm cases but are shorter and explicate “a strong instance of particularly meaningful transaction, intention, or capacity” (Benner, 1985, p. 10). Exemplars are “parts of stories, or instances that have similar meanings within informants’ stories” (Crist & Tanner, 2003, p. 204). Themes are essential elements of a particular phenomenon (Willis, 2001). Benner (1985) considers paradigm cases, exemplars, and themes as discovery and presentation strategies of the phenomenological study. The researcher used Heideggerian concepts to present the reflexive process and to clarify the interpretations of jata-affected women’s being and their lived experience.

## **Quality Assessment of Phenomenological Study**

Pragmatically speaking, the rigor of a qualitative study takes intentionality of the researcher towards a more authentic qualitative research process, hence the outcome. The parallels are drawn from quantitative research such as reliability, validity, and generalizations are not necessarily the appropriate apparatus that can demonstrate the robustness within naturalistic inquiries (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Triangulation, which is a major process to establish quality within qualitative research, is seen as a conflictual process due to the distinct intentionality of participants and researcher as well as the variety in methods used for triangulation (Barbour, 2001). However, Tobin and Begley (2004) added that the triangulation is aimed at comprehensiveness in qualitative research rather than confirmation. Notably, purposive sampling, grounded theory, multiple coding, triangulation, and respondent validation do not necessarily assure the rigor in qualitative research (Barbour, 2001). Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) have given criteria for establishing the validity in qualitative research, which includes authenticity, criticality, integrity, explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence, and sensitivity.

For phenomenological research, Creswell and Miller (2000) highlighted Moustakas's (1994) emphasis on the reflexivity into narrative accounts or interpretive commentary while presenting the findings. Lavery (2003) reviewed several criteria for rigor suggested for hermeneutic phenomenology, which includes a reflective process of inquiry along the line of the study purpose as proposed by Hall and Stevens (1991), and vivid and faithful descriptions of lived experience suggested by Beck (1993). Witt and Ploeg (2006) proposed five expressions: integration, openness, concreteness, resonance, and actualization, to assess the rigor in interpretive phenomenological study.

Presenting a comprehensive criteria, Morse and colleagues (2002, p.12-13) proposed methodological coherence (to ensure congruence between the research question and the components of the method); appropriateness of sample (consisting of participants who best represent or have knowledge of the research topic); concurrent collection and analysis of data (to form a mutual interaction between what is known and what one needs to know); thinking theoretically (through macro-micro perspectives, inching forward without making cognitive leaps, constantly checking and rechecking, and building a solid foundation); and theory development (to move with deliberation between a micro perspective of the data and a macro conceptual/theoretical understanding). The phenomenological investigation needs to address investigator's bias (explicitness) and an emic perspective (vividness) as well as explain a very specific phenomenon in depth (thoroughness) for meeting the validity criteria (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001).

After careful evaluation of several criteria proposed for quality assessment, the researcher followed the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) due to its comprehensiveness. The criteria proposed for Lincoln and Guba (1985) is used for establishing trustworthiness in the qualitative research on aspects such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability altogether known as trustworthiness criteria.

Credibility indicates the match between the researcher's interpretation and the subjective accounts of research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the present study, two senior activists working in the jata removal movement have examined the transcripts and their translation. This process was hermeneutic where several questions were asked about the actual expressions and the typical language used by the study

participants. The ontology and epistemology merge in the case of the problem of matted hair, as the 'being' is known through women's subjective experiences. Along the same lines, the ontological being becomes epistemology through the phenomenological position as the method uses actor's perspective, which is signified as the "empirical point of departure" (Bryman, 1984, p. 78). To meet the requirement to fulfill the criteria of trustworthiness, the audiotaped interviews, transcription, its translation, and the final analysis are available for scrutiny of third parties. The researcher claims achieving the credibility criteria considering the evidential documentation and transparency demonstrated in capturing and presenting the lived experiences.

Transferability indicates generalizability to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher has stated the details of the research context including its cultural, social, economic, gender, and political background. Considering the cultural uniqueness and gendered interpretations of religiosity involved in the issue of matted hair among women in southwestern Maharashtra, the transferability is difficult to recommend. However, the researcher believes that conceptual generalizability on various aspects of religious patriarchy, structural systems, religious-based symbolic systems, its meanings and processes, and more importantly, the symbolic meanings about hair are more likely to have reasonable generalizability to other contexts considering its psychogenetic nature. The researcher had documented the detailed research process in the final study report to facilitate the judgments about partial, full, or conceptual generalizability to other such contexts.

Dependability assumes providing detailed descriptions about the research context and the dynamics involved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It demands flexibility on the part of

the researcher while approaching the changes in the context of research. The researcher has considered following components under dependability as suggested by Shenton (2004):

1. The research design and its implementation, describing what was planned and executed on a strategic level,
2. The operational detail of data gathering, addressing the minutiae of what was done in the field,
3. Reflective appraisal of the project, evaluating the effectiveness of the process of inquiry undertaken. (pp. 71-72)

The first two points mentioned by Shenton (2004) are covered throughout the presentation under different sections. The researcher has provided event descriptions for each interview with brief case details, which informs the first two points. For the third point mentioned by Shenton (2004), the researcher has provided reflective descriptions about the interpretive process throughout the findings chapter in order to meet the dependability criteria.

Confirmability is an important component of the trustworthiness criteria. It indicates the scale at which others can confirm the results of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Shenton (2004) suggested providing detailed methodological description so that readers can comprehend the data and the construct emerged from it. However, there are arguments that Guba and Lincoln's confirmability is not relevant to phenomenology (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). The researcher feels that the confirmability is possible to some extent provided the fore structure of the third party significantly resembles with that of the researcher. However, the uniqueness of hermeneutic structure and the dynamic nature of the interpretive processes, confirmability appear as epistemologically unsound criteria for Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology.

## **Research Ethics**

Grounded in humanist ethics, the researcher respects the cultural diversity and human rights of communities affected by matted hair. A sound scientific research process is the prime ethical requirement of any research (Richards & Schwartz, 2002). The researcher believes in the ethical, humanistic view that the human thought is the source for the method and the content of science (Bernard, 2000). The researcher feels that given a chance to participate, the human actors can self-advocate the real issues, and construct a knowledge base to minimize the interpretive and epistemological politics around the cultural practices surrounding matted hair. Notably, social science researchers tend to give more attention to ethics while doing research (Arksey & Knight, 1999).

The researcher is aware of the fact that the ethical considerations have been marginal in most phases in many qualitative studies reported in journals, which raise questions about what exactly is a proper ethical standard (Peled & Leichtenritt, 2002). To overcome such ambiguity in ethics, the researcher has been explicit about several aspects such as the ethical compliance in all stages of this study, the declarations about ethical dilemmas, the application of the ethical framework stipulated, and biases. The researcher was conscious throughout the research consultation and data collection process to see if any new ethical requirement emerged from the experts or the research participants. The researcher made an ethical decision to cancel the process of member checking to avoid the possible psychological harm to the research participants.

Qualitative research, through its probing nature, is likely to obtain data on sensitive topics; however, the process may lead to distress among the participants (Richards & Schwartz, 2002). The researcher maintained awareness about the

sociolinguistic context of each participant with their class, caste, religion, occupation and other apparent intersectionality characteristics throughout the data collection and analysis along the lines of the necessary IRB requirement.

The researcher complied with the principles of informed consent, confidentiality and privacy, social justice, and practitioner research<sup>49</sup> that are prominent ethical considerations in any qualitative research (Shaw, 2003). Any qualitative research study demands strict compliance with the significant ethical considerations such as informed consent and voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality and privacy, trust and protection from harm (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

The researcher has abided by the Code of Ethics upheld by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), which believes in values such as service, social justice, dignity, and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (NASW, 1999). The research design devised for this study included the core ethical principles of NASW (1999) which are responsibility towards the client, commitment to clients, self-determination, informed consent, cultural competence and social diversity, conflicts of interest, privacy and confidentiality, access to records, sexual relationships, physical contact, sexual harassment, derogatory language, payment for services, clients who lack decision- making capacity, interruption of services, and termination of services.

Among the core ethical principles of NASW, certain principles deserved an important consideration for research on jata-affected women: commitment, self-determination, informed consent, cultural competence and social diversity, derogatory language, and finally, privacy and confidentiality. The primary approach of the NASW

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<sup>49</sup> A scenario when the practitioner and researcher roles are different but performed by one person.

Code of Ethics, while conducting research, is about treating all research participants properly without harming their basic rights, dignity, and freedom (NASW, 1999). This study complied with all of the above. The NASW is a major organization engaged in the training of social workers on women's health issues and advocacy for legislative reforms about women's health issues (Dunkley, 1997).

The ethical principle of cultural competence and social diversity was vital for the research process involving participants from diverse cultural groups. The researcher incorporated the intersectionality among research participants to maintain a culturally sensitive approach throughout the research process. The ethical principle about the use of derogatory language indicates the need for linguistic competency. As the researcher speaks the same dialects as that of the research participants, this study has successfully demonstrated the ethical compliance.

The researcher has a value-based preference for feminist ethics. Feminist ethics provide a moral ground for "addressing such inequities by attending specific issues, procedural justice focused on exercising capacities and determining actions, fair share of resources and just rewards, rich empiricism in research, and importantly, the political solutions for problems" (Rogers, 2006, p. 354). The feminist ethical principles involve four tasks:

The provision of an emphasis on the importance of women and their interests, the provision of a focus on issues especially affecting women, the reexamination of fundamental assumptions, and the incorporation of feminist insights from other fields into the field of ethics.(Women's Health Encyclopedia, 2011, Para 2)

The researcher, through his disciplinary social work inquiry on the issue of matted hair, adopted feminist ethics as an additional rubric to devise a value-based ontology for the present study.

The present study was designed with awareness that it should have particular applicability for the research participants and their issues considered in the inquiry process (Morris, 1999). Along the same lines, the NASW Code of Ethics strongly recommended the use of research findings for practice (Rubin & Babie, 2008). The present study considers advocacy on the issue of matted hair among women as an ethically binding aspect. The researcher has given adequate attention to the translational aspects (Woolf, 2008) of the current phenomenological inquiry and aims to accomplish policy advocacy through necessary research dissemination. The researcher is scheduled to present the findings of the study and its translational utility in a multidisciplinary context at a national forum. In addition, a small note about the findings of the study is going to be shared with the research participants and other stakeholders in India. Further, the researcher has planned to disseminate relevant findings from the study to respective disciplines by writing papers in disciplinary journals.

### **Biases**

Biases are inherent to any research activity. In particular, the hermeneutic research is likely to be exposed to a majority of biases in its operational form due to the dialectical engagement in a particular cultural context. Among the significant biases, this study came across are the social desirability bias among participants and the selection bias in the researcher (McCoyd & Shdaimah, 2007). The social desirability bias among the participants was visible with those research participants who shared their subjective

lived experiences within a structural linguistic context as perceived by them. However, in the context of this phenomenological inquiry, the social desirability bias among the study participants is interpreted as a feature of their Being. Further, the social desirability bias became an ontological aspect of study participants further assessed for the extensive semantics of it.

Although primarily seen in quantitative research, the selection bias was reflected in this study while using purposive sampling. The researcher has reported the selection bias by making the sampling process explicit and maintained the epistemological consistency with the Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology. The selection of participants was purposive to capture the diversity within the lived experiences of the participants. However, it is reasonable to claim that, for any phenomenon, it is challenging to have a full grasp of diversity involved in that phenomenon. Thus, purposive sampling has this inherent epistemological issue while using it within Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology.

The interpretive bias (Kaptchuk, 2003) is likely to be reflected in this study due to the particular cultural position, gender, and theoretical attitude of the researcher. The clarity about what paradigm informs and guides the research approach is crucial and awareness of the guiding paradigm is expected on the researcher's part (Goldman, 1994). The conflictual epistemological structures within a paradigm are likely to indicate a particular ideological inclination of the researcher compromising the value roots of the original research paradigm.

The risks of paradigm conflict due to the epistemological deviation are less possible in the case of the present study considering the resonance between the social

work values and qualitative research methods. However, the researcher has reported the research process in detail to maintain the explicitness and transparency in terms of evidence availability for the confirmation of interpretive bias. The interpretive politics about superstitious beliefs and women's suffering is best known from women's subjective accounts. The heuristic utility of the hermeneutic process in understanding the interpretive politics throws light on the nature of social epistemology that rules the structural existence and instrumentality of cultural practices such as matted hair.

Anderson (1995) explicated that social epistemology uncovers:

The influence of specifically social factors on knowledge production: who gets to participate in theoretical inquiry, who listens to whom, the relative prestige of different styles and fields of research, the political and economic conditions in which inquirers conduct their investigations, the social settings in which they interact with the subjects of study, their ideological commitments, the availability of models and narrative forms in the culture that can be used to structure scientific observation and explain phenomena, and so forth. (p. 54)

The researcher incorporated the understanding of social epistemology for clarifying the social construction of beliefs and its influence on the researcher and the research process.

The context of the phenomenological study was rural India, which is known for its caste, class, and gender biases. The caste and class structures are so rigid and subtle that the caste-class bias can enter into the research process in implicit or sometimes explicit forms. The researcher believes that the caste or class biases have appeared in the hermeneutic process due to the researcher's cultural positioning and socialization within the context. However, those biases were explained in the data analysis process in terms of epistemic reflexivity particularly in the data analysis process.

Gender bias is logical to assume when there is a male researcher conducting a hermeneutic phenomenological study on women's issue. The researcher learned a certain

level of bias through matted hair-related activism, which indicated that in an effort to gain the social advantages of respect and power some women create artificial jata. The negative and judgmental attitude about the artificial creation of matted hair held by the researcher was exposed to the real life experiences of jata-affected women through the phenomenological study. The researcher realized the subtle gendered social process involved behind the allegations of artificial production of matted hair and the patriarchal nature of rationalist activism.

It is pragmatic to assume that any bias can be identified through the examination of research reports by third parties who should determine the presence and effects of the researcher's bias. To maintain the ethicality and epistemological consistency, the researcher has reported the biases in the present hermeneutic analysis. The research presentation is a possible strategy to avoid researcher bias (Mays & Pope, 2000) through which a convincing narrative can be presented stating the biases, and demonstrating the researcher's integrity to overcome such biases. The researcher's "prolonged engagement" with the issue is considered useful in the identification and bracketing<sup>50</sup> of preconceptions, understanding the distortions in data, and getting an insider position to see and understand the context (Barusch, Gringeri, & George, 2011, p.12 ).

The researcher's engagement has helped him to learn about various concerns such as the sensitivity to the cultural beliefs, women's individuality, and capability to control their own lives. Through the clashes with villagers and families of affected women during the activist-led jata removal interventions, the researcher has recognized the thin line between the religious faith and religious faith-based oppression, which takes a

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<sup>50</sup> Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology has a sound epistemological approach that emphasizes on the declaration of the researcher's fore structure. Bracketing is performed in Husserl's phenomenological approach.

controversial shape while dealing with the issue of matting of hair. Through social interactions within the gendered context of the present phenomenological study, the researcher witnessed the blurred social demarcations between the superstitions and religious beliefs.

## Chapter Four: Findings

In this chapter, the researcher provides brief profiles of study participants, event descriptions, and thematic analysis of the lived experience of women affected with matted hair using Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology. The cultural context of the study and the researcher's interpretations are made explicit through detailed reflexive accounts.

### Event Descriptions

**Uma.** Uma is a 35-year-old mother of two children. When contacted on her husband's phone number shared by the activists, Uma told the researcher to come right away for an interview as she was at home. She appeared enthusiastic over the phone and gave directions to reach her home. Uma's home was located at the outskirts of the village on a farm. Uma completed seventh grade and married a young farmer living in a prosperous agricultural village. Uma belongs to the upper caste community and lives in a prosperous agricultural and social milieu. Her family includes her husband, his parents, and her two children. In addition, Uma's family has a large farm, many cattle including cows, Indian buffalos, bullocks, and a few hens. As a responsible daughter-in-law, Uma has been looking after her family including her aging in-laws and children.

Reaching Uma's house was challenging for the researcher, as it was located inside the farm full of crops and without a proper road. After reaching Uma's home, the researcher first spoke with her husband about the study providing all his credentials and explaining how Uma's contribution was significant. Uma's father-in-law and mother-in-law asked questions about the researcher's village and work. When the researcher explained the nature of the meeting and the purpose of the study, her husband gave

permission for the interview and offered tea. The researcher had to comply with particular cultural norms such as accepting tea when offered as denying tea is viewed very negatively. Moreover, the family members, especially the research participant, were likely to find it very negative, and might have tagged the researcher as urban and sophisticated. When the researcher explained the privacy needed for an interview, the family appeared reluctant in their body language. Then Uma came forward and communicated that her family had to be present when she was talking because she would not share anything that her family is not aware of regarding her jata. She clarified that the family was with her throughout her jata experience, and she was fine having them around when the interview was conducted.

The initial time spent on describing the study was sufficient for rapport building with all members in the family. However, to normalize things before the start of the interview, the researcher interacted with Uma's children and husband about the education of their children. Uma's children, who study in a local English medium school, were curious and excited by the fact that someone studying in America had arrived at their home. Uma's husband and children understood the researcher's view about the need for privacy and uninterrupted interview; however, Uma's in-laws were not so aware of the research interview process. Moreover, culturally, Uma's in-laws were from a typical patriarchal family where women are not allowed to speak with outside males unless they are supervised by the elderly or permitted by her husband. There were few instances during the interview when Uma's mother-in-law pitched in and shared a few thoughts about events related to Uma's jata experience. Uma's father-in-law spoke once during the interview. There was no sharing by the children or Uma's husband. Uma's husband

appeared to be an obedient son. Uma's jata remained for 7-8 years until it was untangled through activist intervention when another former jata-affected woman referred her to the activists. The interview was over when Uma seemed tired of talking.

**Rati.** Rati is a motivator for many jata-affected women in her village and the surrounding area. Rati has been a respected elder in her village for her dedicated and community centric behavior. Although in her sixties, Rati has been working on the farm regularly and looking after cattle with her husband. When the researcher approached Rati, she was busy with some domestic work with her husband. Rati was aware of the possibility of the interview through the volunteer network in advance.

After reaching Rati's home, the researcher waited until she finished her work and got ready for the interview. The researcher interacted with Rati and her husband for some time to build rapport. Rati appeared very vocal and articulate about her views. After the initial conversation, Rati's husband left for some work outside their home. As a welcome drink, Rati offered a glass of hot milk to the researcher while explaining her typical rural agricultural background and family. Rati's family owns a small piece of land. To fulfill the annual demand for grain for her family, her family collaborated with another farmer and Rati contributes her labor. Rati stays in a small rural house located in the central part of the village with her husband and grown children and their spouses. In addition to domestic chores, she has much agricultural work including feeding the cattle. Although staying in a prosperous agricultural village and belonging to an upper caste community, Rati comes from the lower economic strata. At the entrance to Rati's home, there is a big worship place where gods were kept. When Rati was told about the privacy required for the interview, she clarified that her husband has been there with her right from the

beginning, and they have faced jata together. As Rati was comfortable having her husband around during the interview, the researcher started speaking and suggested that her husband share his views at the end of the interview. Rati's husband pitched in during the interview 2-3 times. Rati shared her experience as a jata-affected woman in detail including descriptions of episodes of illness. Rati's jata was there for a considerably longer period of 10-15 years and was later removed by activists. After her jata removal, Rati has been actively motivating other jata-affected women in the village to undergo jata removal through activist-led interventions. Rati has immense knowledge about jata-affected women and their ritual practices probably due to her social nature and active engagement.

**Seeta.** Seeta's interview took place at the home of the person who referred her. Staying in a small house and working as a farm labor, 65-year-old Seeta is a vocal woman. Considering her small house and grandsons and daughters around, Seeta proposed conducting the interview at the home of the person who referred her. The person who referred Seeta provided needed privacy for the interview. Seeta's appearance was marked by her apparently bold personality and glimpse of leadership and authority. Seeta has been living as a typical life of a farm laborer, looking after two Indian buffaloes to support her family with milk and additional income. When approached for an interview by a person who referred Seeta, she took few days to convey her willingness. At the start of her interview, Seeta asked some questions regarding the study and was unclear about what was expected from her in an interview. The researcher had to simplify the study purpose and research activity to her in local language until she understood it. Further, the researcher presented his detailed credentials to Seeta so that she felt

comfortable talking and sharing. During the interview, Seeta shared her experience of jata without any interruption; however, she appeared emotional when she shared about her young son's death. It was very clear from Seeta's sharing that she had been going through hardship for the survival of her family and was doing multiple tasks for livelihood. Seeta's jata remained for almost 20-25 years, and later she volitionally removed it at the temple of goddess through priests. It was less than a year since her jata was removed when the interview took place.

**Savitri.** Savitri, a 68-year-old elder, agreed to an interview when the female relative of the researcher approached her. It is challenging to find and recruit jata-affected married women. It took more than three weeks for Savitri to give a day for an interview as she was busy working at the farm. When the researcher approached her for an interview, Savitri was out for some work and a message was left with a neighbor that she would be back at late afternoon for an interview. When the researcher went to her house for an interview, Savitri was cooking rice outside her home on a wood-fired brick stove. The researcher suggested Savitri to take her time and waited for her to come inside after cooking. In less than 10 minutes, Savitri came inside the home. When the researcher first saw her, she looked timeworn and weary probably due to working hard all her life. The person who referred Savitri for the study participation indicated that Savitri has spent all of her life on the farm, and she might be shy talking with the researcher alone. When the researcher asked Savitri about the presence of her husband's second wife and the person who referred her during the interview, Savitri said it was fine. Savitri started talking promptly when the researcher was explaining the research purpose to her. Savitri lived with her husband and his other wife in a small rented slum type house. Savitri migrated a

few years before when her husband's family left their native village due to property issues. After migrating to a new place, initially, she looked after the herd of goats and worked as a farm laborer. Savitri and her husband could not conceive children. In Indian society, the blame is always put on a woman when a couple is unable to conceive. Savitri's jata experience is conjoined with her distressful livelihood, immigration, and the stigma of being an impotent woman. Savitri belongs to a labor caste called gardener in the traditional Indian caste hierarchy. Savitri's husband is married to another woman who had children from her ex-husband. It appeared that Savitri had been keeping a very low profile compared to the other young wife of her husband. Savitri's jata started 7-8 years after her marriage and since then she has been living with jata.

**Laxmi.** When the researcher approached Laxmi's family to seek permission for an interview, her nephew told the researcher that she was gone to another town. It took around seven weeks for Laxmi to return from a trip back to her village. When the researcher approached her family about Laxmi's availability for an interview after a few more days, the researcher was told to forget the interview as her family is very orthodox. The researcher attempted to convince Laxmi's family by explaining the purpose of the study and providing his credentials. Finally, the college-going nephew of Laxmi became convinced and persuaded his family to agree to Laxmi's interview eventually. Laxmi stays in a clan hamlet outside the main village surrounded by farms. Laxmi, a 55-year-old farmer, had jata for 12 years; eventually, activists removed it. Laxmi's jata emerged during the drought with some notable phase of psychological distress. Laxmi has gone through a distressful journey with her jata as she hails from a staunch patriarchal community where women have very little or no space. Moreover, her family is not

affiliated with any of the goddesses who are known for jata practice. On the day of the meeting, when the researcher reached her home, Laxmi was still working on the farm. The researcher waited for her to arrive at home. After explaining the purpose of the study, the researcher asked her family members and Laxmi about the privacy requirement for an interview. It was obvious to the researcher that her family members saw such privacy negatively. Laxmi promptly mentioned that she wanted to share her jata experience in front of her family, as jata matter is a divine thing. Laxmi was very articulate when she inquired about the study with the researcher. Throughout the interview, Laxmi explained her jata experience in a very lucid manner sometimes using different metaphors demonstrating her spiritual outlook. Laxmi underwent jata removal through activist intervention a year before the interview.

**Ragini.** When the researcher was visiting village temples of the goddess to recruit devadasi women with jata for the study, he came across Ragini. Roaming around a temple, the researcher saw Ragini sitting in a small shanty beside a dusty street. The researcher inquired to her about willingness to participate in the study. Ragini requested that the researcher conduct the interview right away. Staying in a small shanty and surviving on beggary, Ragini is a deserted wife, an unfortunate mother, and a helpless devotee of the goddess. Ragini's jata was emerged after marriage when she had little children. Due to the affiliation of her mother's family and husband's family with the jata deity, she had to leave the family to abide by the religious-based restrictions imposed on her due to jata. As it happens in a typical patriarchal cultural scenario, her husband married another woman. After the emergence of jata, Ragini left her husband's home and began living on her own with children supporting herself by doing housework. When

Ragini became very sick and unable to look after her children, she left them with her husband and started living alone by begging in the name of the goddess. Since last five years, Ragini has been living in a shanty near a local temple of the goddess. Ragini has been surviving through poverty, several episodes of crises in her life, and an unforgivable negligence of her family members. Throughout the interview, Ragini shared different experiences she has gone through. In old age, Ragini carries a very long jata. Ragini shared with the researcher that she was planning to remove the jata shortly with the help of a priest in the local temple.

**Anjani.** One young journalist from Anjani's community who stays in the same neighborhood referred Anjani for the study. Initially, Anjani, a 50-year-old village council worker, was not willing to be interviewed, however, when asked by a journalist for the second time she agreed. Considering her duty hours at the village council where she works as a cleaner, she asked the researcher to come late in the evening when she was done with her household chores. When the researcher approached her home, she had some more cooking to finish. After finishing her cooking, she shared her experiences of jata with the researcher. Anjani lives with her liquor-addicted young son in a small village home. Anjani's jata emerged after the death of her husband when her son was little. She has been carrying jata for more than nine years. However, she is unaware of the attribution of jata to any god or goddess, which has kept her puzzled about the religious-based ritual following. Anjani was vocal throughout the interview and willingly shared many of her experiences. Anjani has been doing monthly visits to the temple of goddess to know about the attribution of her jata. As Anjani clarified, her jata cannot be removed unless the exact attribution is known; otherwise, she fears that something fatalistic might

happen. Anjani belongs to the so-called lower caste community, and she feels that due to the negligence of the obligatory worship of the goddess for last two generations in her family she is captured by jata.

**Rambha.** Rambha is an active participant of jata removal studies since jata removal by activist interventions. Rambha was informed about the study in advance through the volunteers' network. Rambha was willing to be interviewed right away as she was at home. Rambha is a 58-year-old elder homemaker staying in a small village. The researcher shared his credentials and spoke in general with Rambha. Although the interview began when she was alone, her husband came home after some time. When her husband arrived, Rambha stopped the interview and explained the study and interview to her husband. Her husband sat beside her and shared a few things during the interview. Rambha's husband shared some information and more or less highlighted what she shared. Rambha and her husband stay outside the village in a well-constructed house. Rambha's children live in Mumbai, almost 250 kilometers away from the village. Rambha's jata emerged more than ten years ago. Her jata was on one side of her head and did not trouble her much mainly because she did not share much about her jata in the village. Rambha linked her jata emergence to the water goddess. After a phase with jata for 4-5 years, a female volunteer referred her to the activists, and her jata was removed.

**Udita.** Udita, an elder of age 58, lived in a small house located in a hilly village. Udita was informed about the study prior to the interview. Udita wanted the researcher to interview her promptly when the researcher approached her home. Udita was busy sorting grains, and she participated in an interview while she was doing the activity. Udita's sister-in-law arrived during the interview and sat beside her when the interview

was in progress. During the interview, Udita shared her experience with jata in a very open and vocal manner. A few years before, Udita and her family were displaced from their village home due to a dam project. As an elderly widow, Udita has been very active, kept herself busy, and occupied by doing various activities. Udita's jata remained for 10-12 years, and she did some religious-based ritual following during her jata phase. Udita's jata emerged when her children almost reached the age of marriage. Udita's children and husband were always against keeping the jata, which means she has gone through lot of resistance for her religious-based ritual following. Udita's jata was removed when her husband insisted firmly on jata removal and accepted help from a community-based female volunteer and activists. Udita experienced some health issues during her jata phase. For Udita's jata removal, physicians were made available for medical help to treat wounds on her scalp. After jata removal, Udita has been associated with a spiritual group and her spiritual worship practices have changed from what she used to do as a jata-affected woman.

**Sakshi.** Sakshi was informed about the study through volunteers associated with the jata removal movement. When the researcher reached her home on a late afternoon, she was still at the farm finishing some work. Sakshi's mother-in-law told the researcher to come after two hours when Sakshi was expected back home from the farm. After almost three hours, Sakshi came home. The researcher explained the study, and she agreed to an interview. When the researcher asked Sakshi about her mother-in-law's presence during the interview, she was fine her mother-in-law being present during her interview. Sakshi's mother-in-law pitched in during the interview and added details about few jata-related events. The meeting took place in a small room at Sakshi's village house.

The room was noisy due to goats and hens around. The mother of two small children, 29-year-old Sakshi stays in a small village in the hilly region. Sakshi's husband works in Mumbai, and she remains in the village home with her mother-in-law and children. Sakshi comes from the upper caste family and looks after the cattle and farm in addition to her domestic chores and parenting. Sakshi was pregnant when her jata emerged. Jata remained on Sakshi for around 3-4 years. Activists removed her jata after a referral from a community-based school-going female volunteer. Sakshi pleaded to the god for a son, which she believes led to her jata emergence. It appeared that Sakshi was not entirely willing to undergo jata removal. Sakshi faced some skin problems during her jata phase, which were cured after her jata removal. Sakshi's maternal family does not have any affiliation with the goddesses associated with jata. Considering her wish for privacy, Sakshi's jata removal was performed in the local government health facility.

**Utkarsha.** Utkarsha's home was located in a neighborhood outside the village. Utkarsha, a 57-year-old elder, was working babysitting small children in the family when the researcher approached her for an interview. Utkarsha agreed to the interview promptly but indicated she had some domestic work to do and asked to keep the interview short. Utkarsha's daughter remained around during the interview to look after the children. Utkarsha went through jata experience for around 20 years of her life. Her jata started when her daughter was two years old. Utkarsha believes that she was blessed with children due to the worship of the goddess. Utkarsha described many health issues and the impact of jata on her health. Apart from other reasons, Utkarsha was motivated for her jata removal when she saw photos of previous jata removal of other women. Utkarsha belongs to a nomadic tribe community that mainly survives on farming.

Utkarsha's daughter, who was present during the interview, shared her views about her mother's jata without interrupting. Utkarsha had many queries about audio recording of the interview. The researcher clarified Utkarsha's queries whenever she asked during the interview. At the end of the meeting, Utkarsha asked if the audiotaping of interviews is safe. The researcher again explained the whole research procedure in detail, and she became convinced.

**Sonali.** Sonali is an authority on jata due to her knowledge about rituals and her image in the community as an elder who carried jata for 14 years. A nonprofit employee referred Sonali, a 60-year-old elder, for the study. Sonali stayed in a slum at the periphery of the city known for its leaf-rolled cigarettes and cotton industry. Sonali belongs to the washer labor caste and earns an income by rolling cigarettes at home. When approached for an interview, her son welcomed the researcher. Sonali was fine having people around when the interview was conducted since according to her it was a divine matter. The discussion began with the researcher explaining the purpose of the study and Sonali's rights as a study participant. Sonali, being a respected former jata-affected woman, was coherent in her expression about her jata experience. Sonali has gone through some humiliating experiences during jata removal. During the jata emergence phase, Sonali had to go through friction with her mother-in-law and husband about religious-based following for jata. Sonali's mother-in-law had jata. Sonali's jata fell off on its own after 14 years, after which she performed the religious-based immersion of it at the temple of the goddess. Sonali's jata fell off a year before the time of the interview.

**Draupadi.** A nonprofit employee referred Draupadi for the study, and the interview took place at her home. A young married woman of age 36 and mother of two

children, Draupadi came across jata emergence less than a year before from the time of interview. Draupadi's family has a generational pattern of jata emergence, and she happens to be the third woman in a row in her family going through jata experience. Draupadi, as a presently jata-affected woman, has a happy feeling about jata emergence and feels that her frequent spells of illness are reduced after the emergence of jata. With her small and latest jata, Draupadi faced some painful stretching on her scalp. Draupadi and her husband run a laundry located in a slum habitat. In addition to domestic and laundry business, she rolls cigarettes to earn money for survival. Draupadi's interview was short but informative. Draupadi's husband has been cooperative in her jata ritual following, and her children have no negative attitude about jata. Draupadi receives guidance on the religious-based matters from her mother-in-law, a former jata-affected woman.

### **Theme-based Analysis**

For the present study, the data analysis was carried out using Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology. Through primary coding of individual narratives of study participants, the structure of lived experience was explored and documented. Through secondary coding, the researcher recognized the commonality of experience and integrated it further to establish the overlapping superstructure of lived experiences of the study participants. The thematic areas were identified based on the indicative temporal structures visible in the lived experience of jata-affected women. The stages identified were pre-jata emergence stage, jata emergence stage, post-jata emergence stage, jata stage, pre-jata removal stage, jata removal stage, and the post-jata removal stage

(Appendix E). Each thematic area is explained further in an elaborate manner with evidential experiential testimonies of the study participants.

### **Pre-Jata Emergence Stage**

The pre-jata emergence stage refers to the situation and context of jata-affected women before the emergence of matted hair. Heidegger (1962) puts da-sein as ‘being in the world’ which implies a ‘world’, as well as a ‘being’, understood in terms of the accessible being within that world (p. 11). It is necessary to understand the being of jata-affected women in various spatial contexts beginning from the pre-jata emergence stage to understand their progression toward being-a-jata-affected-woman. The pre-jata emergence stage is characteristic of a particular da-sein in affected women’s life. Here, the ‘world’ of jata-affected women symbolizes a prevalent gendered context structured by complex forms of patriarchy.

**Situation during the emergence of jata.** The situation during the jata emergence is characteristic of various aspects of jata-affected women’s prevalent gendered life. Study participants explored the situation during the jata emergence in a retrospective manner. Seeta highlighted the sudden appearance of matted hair in the normal course of her life:

Participant: Nothing as such.... It was good. I was not sick at all. I used to look after cattle.... graze them. Nothing as such... It happened suddenly from the center of the hair bunch.... it started, my jata.

Seeta shared her everydayness during the jata-pre emergence stage that exemplified her absorption with assigned gendered roles in typical patriarchal society. Seeta’s presentation of her context specifies an attempt to highlight gendered roles as the routine part of her everydayness. Seeta’s denial of health problems during the jata-pre emergence

stage validates the existence of possibilities of comorbidity during the jata-pre emergence stage. Seeta showed intersubjective awareness about the commonly seen co-existing illnesses with jata. The denial of illness prior to jata emergence appears as an attempt to highlight jata as a standalone deific phenomenon, not a health condition. On the other hand, Uma's experience revealed her characteristic gendered being that had a lack of awareness about jata:

Participant: It did not come to my mind that it might be jata. It would happen this way (matting of hair), and it is jata and all-such things never came to my mind... I used to think that I might have missed combing (my hair) in a hurry... It might have been the usual tangling of hair. Thinking like this, I was removing the tangled hair...

Uma's being-in-the-world during the pre jata-emergence stage provided the structure of her being with missing knowledge on jata. Uma's feelings due the unexpected emergence of jata exposed her to a relatively new experience. Uma's ignorance about jata can be also linked to her being a young and educated woman. Uma presented her experience using the thought process she had about jata emergence. Her conviction that jata might have emerged due to lack of combing highlights the primary nature of experience during the jata emergence. For a person who is less aware of jata as a religious-based phenomenon, the psychological unpreparedness is relatively high as seen in Uma's case

For study participants, the temporal awareness about jata emergence was associated with significant life events. The pre-jata emergence stage featured an important life event of pregnancy for Sakshi. Uma, Udita, and Utkarsha were lactating mothers looking after their small child during the jata emergence. Savitri was carrying the stigma of having no children while distressfully settling at a new place. Anjani faced jata emergence soon after the death of her husband. She was left with a small child. It is

notable that most life events associated with jata emergence is about the reproductive roles of women. The distressful family situation, helplessness, drudgery of a single mother, and negligence by relatives constituted the pre jata-emergence stage for Anjani:

Researcher: When jata emerged in the beginning, how were things at home?

Participant: Things were not so good at home. (Sweepingly)

Researcher: No?

Participant: There is no proper attention. No one from my family gives attention.... Moreover, my husband is no more so who will give attention? I have a son. Now, I have to do all the inquiry, who else will do it?  
(Desperation in the voice)

Anjani's experience showed different forms of gender-related vulnerability. The marital status of jata-affected women indicates a particular intersectionality that controls the diversity in the lived experience of jata. During the pre-jata emergence stage, the characteristic vulnerability and helplessness of women within the patriarchal system becomes apparent as seen in Anjani's experience.

**Illness during/ prior to the emergence of jata.** The pre-jata emergence stage showed presence of physical and psychological health problems for some study participants. The health problems reported by study participants included high fever, headaches, and pain in their hands and legs. Furthermore, the pre-jata emergence stage highlights mental health-related experiences specifying noteworthy psychological distress such as mad-person like roaming, sleeplessness, hearing voices of a goddess and a lack of focus on work. Anjani went through different health issues prior to her jata emergence:

Researcher: Can you remember the situation when jata came to you?  
 Participant: I remember, means<sup>51</sup>, only the head. Only head.... No focus on work. Head was as if getting cracked.  
 Researcher: Ok. How long was that phase?  
 Participant: Around a month or two... Means... It was paining with a gap of an hour or two...  
 Researcher: Used to pain?  
 Participant: Yes. It was as if a nail stroked in the head... It was like that in head...  
 Researcher: Then jata emerged?  
 Participant: Yes...  
 Researcher: Was this the situation a month before the jata emerged?  
 Participant: 2-3 months before.  
 Researcher: Then jata emerged?  
 Participant: Hmm... (Agreeing)

The three-month long phase of illness indicated a severe and persistent suffering for Anjani bearing in mind her being a single mother looking after a small son without any help. Anjani presented the symptomatic features of the illness during the pre-jata emergence stage in the abstract manner. The characteristic nature of the presentation of psychological health problems reveals use of a particular language and semantics to explain symptoms. Anjani's phenomenological explanation about headache further shows the ontological nature of illness experience where bodily feeling derived semantics was used to understand and present illness<sup>52</sup>. Laxmi's jata emerged during the drought in the region. The distressful psychological phase faced by Laxmi showed suffering beyond the typical gendered experience of illness:

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<sup>51</sup> The word "means" appeared in the expressions of study participants is rooted in the typical gendered communication patterns of women in rural India. In a way, it suggests the way participants are apprehensive about misinterpretation of their expressions beyond their acceptable gendered positions and expressions. Moreover, it is a comparatively new context of communications for them (a study-related interview).

<sup>52</sup> The dominant diagnosis methods heavily rely on the objective symptomatic manifestation of illness. The phenomenological manifestation and explanation of illness has less or no significance in such diagnostic approaches, such rupture highlights the amount of cultural sensitivity and knowledge needed while dealing with health issues associated with jata.

Participant: I did not experience how jata emerged on me. How did it come? Why did it come? I did not experience much... (In low pitch)... (A short pause). I was wandering around such as mad women and hair was tangled on their own. Those tangled hair, when I used to remove that tangled hair, it used to tangle again. I could not realize as to how I sensed that (emergence of jata) (in those days)...

Laxmi's experience underscored that she could not sense how jata emerged on her in the beginning. Such inability to witness the change in body feature underlines a severe psychological distress with impaired cognitive functionality and general awareness about her body. Laxmi's particular linguistic expression involved various questions about jata emergence that highlights the possible broad lines of inquiry in thought processes. The repetitive tangling, despite her attempts to untangle, was explicit in Laxmi's experience. It is notable that despite psychological distress she attempted removing the initial matting of hair. Rati shared her psychological distress by conceptualizing it in terms of the ethno-religious discourse associated with jata:

Researcher: You mean the physical suffering you had that time.

Participant: Mean... She used to come close to me. (A short pause). That is why she troubled me a lot...

Researcher: Who is she?

Participant: Mother (the goddess)... The god used to come, you know...

Researcher: Ok.

Participant: She, for 3-3 days, never used to let me get out of the bed.

Researcher: Ok.

Participant: If I fall at this hour (afternoon), I would get up from that place after two-three days....

Researcher: Ok.

Participant: That much trouble she has given to me.

Rati's physical and mental distress was presented using the religious-based discourse where the goddess considerably controlled the body. Rati's presentation of her illness shows how she objectified herself as the target of the divine using a particular hermeneutic structure. Heidegger (1962) stated, "things at hand are always already

understood in terms of a totality of relevance” (p. 140). Rati’s interpretive appropriation through religious-based discourse shows that the ‘totality of relevance’ of her jata was understood in terms of the religious-based deific discourse. Rati’s symbolic use of goddess to present psychological distress highlights the possible reification of health issues. However, primarily, it could be due to the exclusive availability of the deific discourse of jata to interpret what she was experiencing.

**Prevalence of jata.** The prevalence of jata in the social environment of women provides understanding about the nature of social-cognitive reference of jata in their gendered lives. The prevalence of jata as a deific phenomenon and religious-based practice is the most obvious source and trigger for the cultural reproduction of jata. Sonali was oriented to the jata practice in her family as her mother-in-law had jata:

Researcher: Three months after your jata fell off, (and) it emerged on her (daughter-in-law)?

Participant: It came after three months... (a short pause) Jata emerged on me three months after my mother-in-law’s fell off.

Researcher: Means, your mother-in-law’s also fell off?

Participant: Mother-in-law’s were big like this. (Shown by hands)

While the prevalence of jata within the family of jata-affected women highlights the orientation to jata practices during the pre-jata emergence stage, it puts the jata-affected person in a twofold position. For Sonali, she could have abided the tradition or denied it by judging the demerits of jata since she was already oriented to jata. However, Sonali accepted the religious-based jata and continued with the religious-based ritual following along the lines of the religious-based discourse. The prevalence of jata could be among family members, relatives, in the neighborhood, in the village of jata-affected women. The ontological structure of prevalence of jata as revealed in the case of Sonali shows that intersubjective awareness about the religious-based discourse is derived from the

spatial being of jata-affected women. The availability of matting of hair related symbolic resources can be viewed as the structural arrangement as it gives a very limited options for the affected women.

The ontological constitution of the “in-ness” of jata-affected women shows the gendered being absorbed in their everydayness as being-a-woman-in-the-religious-based patriarchy (Heidegger, 1962, p.50). The denial of health problems during her pre-jata emergence stage by Seeta, and mention of notable psychological distress by Anjani, Laxmi and Rati, highlighted the gendered health context where problematizing health problems is performed within the available sources of gendered health discourse, language, and semantics. The ontological existence of ethno-religious discourse surrounding matted hair and its availability and access by jata-affected women exemplifies the religion-gender-health nexus. Such religion-gender-health is likely to have heuristic utility in informing other such health problems where religious-based discourses are imposed. The reification of health problems is apparent in the symbolic politics of jata, and the process of reification can be seen as the foundational constituent of the phenomenon of matting of hair.

### **Jata Emergence Stage**

The jata emergence stage shows the sequential manifestation of religious-based jata discourse through noteworthy events in study participant’s experiences. The events carry a particular gendered path beginning from the realization of emergence of matting of hair.

**Realization about the emergence of matted hair.** The realization of the emergence of matted hair took place within the typical everydayness of jata-affected

women. The incidental realization of matting of hair happened while performing regular activities such as combing or bathing. Utkarsha realized the formation of matted hair when she was combing in usual manner:

Participant: How did I come to know? I used to comb hair frequently. I used to separate that, but it was not happening (not being separated).

The primary realization about the emergence of the matted hair involved frustration for Utkarsha as she was not able to remove tangled hair. Savitri realized the emergence of matted hair during her everydayness with self-care:

Participant: That way only. Even if I comb or bath, then also, the amassed hair remained as it is (could not be separated). It came down in the form of a ponytail down below. When told that it is of a god, we did not do anything to it.

The realization of the emergence of matted hair, as seen in the case of Utkarsha and Savitri, highlighted the self-realization, attempts of untangling, and frustration due to the inability to untangle the initial matted hair. For matting of hair among young females, elders in the family noticed the emergence of matted hair. Rati shared about the emergence of jata on her nine-month-old granddaughter<sup>53</sup>:

Participant: Then, we took the nine-month-old daughter (of her son) to the hill.

Researcher: A small kid of that age got jata.

Participant: It happened. There were two (hair clumps) of this size. (Shown by hand)

If seen in conjunction with her aggregate perspective on jata, Rati's mention of the emergence of matted hair on her young granddaughter involved her attempt to glorify jata as uncontrollable deific phenomenon. Nevertheless, the emergence of jata on children shows its prevalence regardless of the age. Furthermore, the prevalence of jata among

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<sup>53</sup> The emergence of matted hair on small child is called as *Javali Jata* in local language. Here, "*Javali*" means 'from the birth hair' or 'from the natural hair since birth.'

children indicates improper childcare practices where mother's education can play a vital role to prevent jata. It is noteworthy that most of the young jata-affected rural women came across the emergence of jata when they were pregnant and lactating mothers. Particular feelings accompanied the realization about the emergence of jata through various modalities.

**Feelings about jata during the emergence stage.** Feelings about the jata emergence are a pragmatic source for understanding the self-interpretive positions of jata-affected women in their temporal situatedness. Sakshi's lack of inclination for having jata was reflected in her feelings about the emergence of matted hair:

Participant: Means, it was very small. It started as small, as I have faith on the god right from the beginning I said let it be whatever, slowly jata started growing big. How it happens you know, as I did not have children, so the way people ask to the god, I also asked for having kids. Then, I was wondering why this is happening (jata), why I need jata? Is not it? Although I never wanted, it happened slowly-slowly.

The sense of awe expressed by Sakshi highlighted the ontological nature of her psychological state due to her encounter with matted hair. Sakshi's interpretive position has exemplified the existence of 'questioning' the emergence of matted hair and, in effect, questioning the possibility of being-a-jata-affected-woman. In Sakshi's case, her expression highlights that jata grew although she was not willing for it. Such interpretation is more likely to have used to highlight the powerful deific existence of jata on her. Rati's shared non-inclination to jata during the emergence stage:

Participant: I only realized that. (Promptly). Then, I went to ask a priest about its removal as I never wanted it, "When you (the goddess) are there why jata for me? Why a heavy load on my head?"

Rati's self-interpretative position showed a being that finds itself accountable for its assigned gendered role in the religious-based matters. The cognitive dissonance about

matting of hair is expressed by Rati within the available resources of language and semantics. Further, the presentation of jata emergence involved a respectful mention of jata. Such respectful mention shows the ontological nature of retrospective thinking about matted hair using the religious-based discourse even after removal. In Heideggerian terms, the feeling about the emergence of jata is performed with an explication of “history” about the “context of a becoming” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 347) a jata-affected-woman. Evidently, the context of becoming the jata-affected woman showed notable friction through the apparent non-inclination and frustration about the emergence of jata. The self-realization about the emergence of matted hair comes across gendered events during its disclosure.

**The disclosure of emergence.** The disclosure of emerged matted hair is an important event in the making of being-a-jata-affected-woman. Uma, a young married woman, faced the emergence of jata as a lactating mother at her maternal home:

Participant: I thought it happened because I did not comb. I used to say this to my mind. The matted hair clump, we thought, happened because I might not have combed. There (in maternal home), other women, my mother, and me untangled it ...ammmmm...but after some time, it became as it was. Then, I came here (husband’s place). Here, again, my mother-in-law untangled, but it became as it was before. ..Ammm....Then my sister-in-law from *Khale* (A village name) came here. She said to me “Why are you untangling it? It could be god’s jata (jata given by the god)”. ... We were like...

Uma disclosed jata to her mother and women in the neighborhood. Uma’s disclosure modalities<sup>54</sup> show her gendered situatedness as a woman in the patriarchal family and society, her subordinate position, and the consequential self-view. Uma’s gendered being

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<sup>54</sup> The disclosure modalities of jata have bearing on the overall religious-based experience of jata-affected women. The first order disclosure modalities mostly involve disclosure of emergence of matted hair to one’s spouse or other powerful family members. The second order disclosure modalities involve neighbors or close members from social circles. The role of entities, to which the jata emergence was disclosed, is likely to decide the future course of matted hair.

led to the approval for the external control of her body. Uma was less aware of the religious-based jata and was a young woman who had to depend on the advice from other senior women. The structural vulnerability of jata-affected women is visible within their gendered behavior about their body within the patriarchal society. Uma was not exposed to the cultural phenomenon of jata; however, her spatiality as an educated young woman among other rural women dragged her into the religious-based discourse of jata. The fact that Uma highlighted her lack of awareness about jata repetitively is indicative of her subordinate position as a daughter-in-law who has less control over the religious-based jata or her body. It is notable that the conversation about jata was revealing the ontological nature of the vulnerable being of jata-affected women where familial, social, and institutional beliefs and practices blocked the availability of institutional intervention (health outreach or counselling). The complexity of such social and institutional environment situates jata-affected women in a challenging scenario. Uma's example showed the ontological existence of a structural system controlled by the religious-based patriarchy where Uma's rationality about her matted hair was overridden by the religious-based discourse of jata.

The disclosure modalities reveal about the familial or social entities accessible or made variable for jata-affected women. Anjani, who was living with her small son as a widowed single mother, disclosed her jata to women in her neighborhood:

Participant: Means, I saw it when it struck to the comb. I showed it to women around. Then, they said it is the jata.

Anjani is in a situation where she handles most of her matters without any help from others. Anjani's spatiality made her vulnerable and dependent on the other women in the neighborhood. Anjani's experience highlights her spatial position within the spatial

structure where most women abide by the gendered semantics and discourses imposed on them by patriarchy. The nature of intentionality behind a particular form of disclosure of matted hair underscores the extra-subjective control of intentionality. The incident of disclosure, with family or social members, outlined the particular spatial structure for further experience of the jata-affected woman as seen in Anjani's case. The disclosure of jata was linked to one's social identification as a jata-affected woman. Sakshi shared the social awareness about her jata and her identity as a jata-affected woman:

Participant: No. I used to go like this whenever I had to go out (shown the way she used to cover her head). Then, after coming back home, I used to remove the corner of the sari, and used to remain like that. Everyone knew about it. Everyone knew.

The social awareness about one's jata is likely to have a significant role in forming the identity of jata-affected women. Sakshi's experience indicated her acceptance of identity as a jata-affected woman, which she must have appropriated during her lived experience. Sakshi's socially identified being of a jata-affected woman overlapped with her primary identity of being-a-daughter-in-law in a typical rural agrarian upper caste family. Sakshi demonstrated her two-fold identity by explaining how she used to cover her head using the corner of her sari. For young married women in rural society, covering head with sari is an essential ontic feature and culturally normative behavior. The multifold identities of jata-affected women and the normative imposition of it are challenging for women as it can be difficult to decipher between the norms of patriarchy and religious-based patriarchy. Heidegger (1962) suggested looking and the "fundamental constitution of the everydayness of Da-sein" to form the preparatory way of being (p.15). For jata-affected women, multiple gendered roles and imposed culturally normative behaviors constitute everydayness and inform about the ontological nature of being.

**Physical characteristics of jata during the emergence stage.** The physical characteristic of jata during the emergence stage tells about awareness among jata-affected women about changing body features. In Heideggerian terms, the physical characteristic of jata during the emergence state is a significant ontic feature for being-a-jata-affected-woman. Laxmi shared the self-witnessing of the deformation in an important body feature meticulously:

Participant: It came from this side. It emerged from behind (my head). Growing from behind the head, it propagated along on its own.

The detailed mention physical form of jata highlights the awareness and memories about the emerged matted hair in the early stage. Laxmi's mentioned 'jata propagated on its own' that specifies the standalone existence of jata and inability of jata-affected woman to control it. The perceptual process about jata in the early stage and the role played by the physical form of matted hair is visible in Laxmi's expression. Rambha experienced jata emergence with rare physical characteristics:

Participant: My jata emerged here. (Shown the right side of the head). It came only on one side like this. Half of my hair was there, and, in a half portion, there was jata.

For Rambha, the matted hair emerged on only one side of her head. The omnipotent nature of jata explicated by Laxmi or the capture of jata seen in the case of Rambha, for the most part, shows jata as a respectful religious-based thing. The explanation about the physical features of jata highlights how matted hair affected the physical appearance hence the being that was conscious of its bodily existence. In Heideggerian terms, the current ways of perceiving let "what is at hand and objectively present be 'bodily' encountered with regard to their outward appearance" (1962, p.318). Although the accurate retention of physical features of jata during the emergence can be challenging,

participants shared notable features from their memories. The inability to access the being in retrospect (Heidegger, 1962) makes it challenging to provide the actual accounts. However, in case of jata experience, most of the interpretation remains within the boundaries set by the religious-based discourse.

**Actions/events associated with the emergence of matted hair.** The jata emergence stage involves different actions taken by jata-affected women. There is a typified structure to the actions taken on the emerged hair. The actions are presented in the form of phenomenological events happened with the emerged matted hair. Such actions are important constitutional aspects of da-sein in its dynamic progression for the being of jata-affected women. Udita cut her matted hair during the emergence stage; however, the jata appeared again after a few weeks:

Participant: I....amm....I cut it off.

Researcher: On your own?

Participant: Yes, I cut it off.

Udita's self-decision to cut matted hair is likely to be associated with her spatial position as a middle-aged married woman. The emergence of jata on married women has a particular stigma attached to it. Moreover, Udita's attempt to cut matted hair could be due to her less or no inclination to jata. In Uma's case, the initial attempts to untangle matted hair at her maternal place were failed. However, when she returned to her husband's home, her gendered spatiality was changed due to her position as a daughter-in-law. After looking at Uma's matted hair, her jata-affected sister-in-law tagged matted hair as the deific jata. Due to the culturally valued authority of the person with jata, Uma was obligated to consider her matted hair as jata:

Participant: My sister-in-law. She has god's jata. She told me... We (boldly) said, in this way, it is not a jata. How would we know about it? Then we inquired.... Moreover, it was told that it is jata only... Then, I was told not to comb.... (Pause) Then, I stopped combing.

In Uma's case, she was a passive recipient of processes about her matted hair. The powerful role of language in the religious-based discourse of jata was revealed in Uma's case. When the word 'jata' was imposed on Uma's matted hair, it rapidly shifted the interpretive context to the religious-based discourse of jata and prevented combing her hair. Heidegger (1962) stated, "The question of being demands that the right access to beings be gained and secured in advance with regard to what it interrogates" (p. 5). Uma's experience showed a being trapped between the symptomatic matted hair and the deific jata. The culturally valued status of Uma's sister-in-law and the religious-based signification by her indicates the ontological existence of religious-based entities and their easy access to affected women. The actions taken on or the events that occurred with the emergence of matted hair suggest little or no control of jata-affected women over their body. It is noteworthy that some women tried to cut the initial matted hair privately to control their body features. However, the complexity arose with the reemergence of matted hair that reestablished the social control over women's body. It was obvious from the experience that the self-determination and conviction about jata are least influenced by any non-religious-based discourse about jata or even the primary health education.

**The progression of emerging matted hair.** While the interpretive framework of matted hair remains absorbed by the religious-based discourse, the progression of emerging matted hair goes through different sub-phenomenal processes. For Ragini, her matted hair kept on tangling continuously:

Participant: Then, later, those went on tangling and tangling... Moreover, tangled.

Ragini recalled her experience of tangling in her hair, which showed gradual pattern in tangling with continued grasp. Ragini's expression indicated the gravity of feeling she had while she was witnessing the growth of jata. There is a sense of helplessness derived from the inability to escape oneself from jata at the beginning as seen in Ragini's sharing. Anjani went through a notably different experience with respect to the progression of her matted hair:

Participant: That small one I removed saying that why to keep it when my mind had nothing. I do not follow anything and why unnecessary. Then, that one was removed and after eight days all that became like that (tangled). All hair was amassed at one place. Then it became very complicated.

Anjani cut her initial matted hair with conviction that she did not feel any oracle about matted hair. However, in a week's time it grew rapidly and became challenging to untangle. It is obvious from Anjani's sharing that jata-affected women might look for additional deific confirmation about the emerged jata before they formally tag it as the deific jata. The gradual tangling of hair for Ragini and the rapid reemergence of matted hair for Anjani showed the ontological existence of diverse progressions of matted hair, which needs to be explained by medical science. The nature of awareness about and the presentation of the progression of matted hair indicated jata-affected women's meticulous witnessing of encounter with matted hair and body deformation.

### **Post-Jata Emergence Stage**

During the jata-emergence stage, jata-affected women faced several incidental encounters that provided the ontological nature of processes in a particular social

environment. The post-jata emergence stage is exemplified by experiences that mostly highlight the structural functioning of religious-based patriarchy.

**The purpose of religious-based consultation about matted hair.** In most cases, jata-affected women went for the religious-based consultation. The purpose behind the religious-based consultation for matted hair is an important aspect of the lived experience of jata-affected women. Uma's religious-based consultation illustrates the dominant pathway involved:

Participant: Means, she might have got jata in a similar fashion such as me... She also had jata like me... May be because of that she felt that it was jata. (Shared persuasively) Immediately, mother-in-law inquired about it with the god.

Researcher: With the god...

Participant: Yes... It has happened like this (jata). ... Moreover, is this regular tangled hair or jata? Then it was told that it is jata.

Uma's sister-in-law designated her matted hair as the religious-based jata. This triggered Uma's mother-in-law to go for the religious-based consultation to check if Uma's matted hair are deific. The jata-related interpretive process was influenced by similar experiences of Uma's sister-in-law. On the other hand, Uma's mother-in-law, having witnessed the jata processes in her daughter, took a leading role for her daughter-in-law's jata.

Although triggered by the preliminary religious-based signification by her sister-in-law, the validation of religious-based jata took place only after the formal religious-based consultation by Uma's mother-in-law. The religious-based consultations in jata experiences may have specific queries as seen in Rati's experience:

Participant: I only realized that. (Promptly). Then, I went to ask a priest about its removal as I never wanted it, "When you (the goddess) are (is) there why jata for me? Why a heavy load on my head?"

Rati performed the religious-based consultation promptly as she wanted the removal of matted hair, mainly due to her lack of willingness to maintain the religious-based jata. Rati's religious-based consultation indicated the existence of specific queries reflected in the purposes behind the religious-based consultation. Notably, the ontological existence of consultation avenues is exclusive in terms of religious-based institutions and processes.

**The nature of religious-based consultation about matted hair.** The religious-based consultations performed for matted hair involved different entities: priests, jata-affected relatives, priests in temples, and jata-affected women of the goddess<sup>55</sup>. Sonali, frustrated with the repetitive tangling of her hair during the emergence stage, consulted with a woman of the goddess who carried jata:

Participant: Right in the beginning, it came. It captured me right below (on hair) overnight. Holding from the bottom, it climbed up here in three days. (Shown the area below the top of her head). After six days had passed, I combed it out. It started falling off. After removing some of it, it happened like that (Shown hair). Then, asked about it to the god. Asked for a person who has jata. He said that it was of the goddess *Yellamma*. It is not to be removed; if I remove, it will not be good for me. Then, I did not remove.

Sonali's consultation was triggered by the reemergence of matted hair. It is clear from Sonali's experience that inability to remove matted hair through regular combing motivated the jata-affected women to consider it in terms of deific jata. The immediate availability of religious-based entities for such consultations has a determinative role function in the overall jata experience. The religious-based consultation is imposing in its nature as Sonali was advised not to remove matted hair. The messages received through the religious-based consultation are the instrument that shaped the further experience of jata-affected women.

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<sup>55</sup> Most of the jata-affected women of the goddess are devadasis.

### **Messages received through religious-based consultation about matted hair.**

The messages received during the religious-based consultation are derived from the structural framework of religious-based patriarchy. In the case of Anjani, medicines failed to provide relief from health complaints prior to and during the emergence of matted hair. Failed to get any relief from medical consultation, Anjani went for the religious-based consultation and received ethno-religious messages explicitly subscribing her to the jata-related practice:

Participant: I did medication, still (no relief). I visited *Gadhave* (A surname of a local physician) but no relief. Then when inquiry was done, I was told, "It is of a god. Do not take any medicines."

The messages received by Anjani established the ontological nature of religious-based messages and its obligatory directive nature. As obvious from Anjani's experience, the ethno-religious system, predominantly accessed by jata-affected women, carries distinct oppositional views about modern medicine. Moreover, Anjani's health experience shows the unavailability of proper medical procedures for matted hair and its comorbidity. Anjani's being revealed the ontological existence of facticity in being-a-jata-affected-woman. Along the same lines, Anjani developed her being-in through her factual understanding as being-a-jata-affected woman. As Heidegger contended, "...in the factual disclosedness of world, innerworldly beings are also discovered. This means that the being of these beings is always already understood in a particular way, although not appropriately conceived ontologically" (1962, p.186). In Anjani's case, the messages and the directive structure of language provoked the deific phenomenon of jata. It is notable that Anjani tried to get relief through modern medical treatments for the comorbidity existed with the matting of hair before going for the religious-based consultation.

**The nature of religious-based signification of matted hair.** The religious-based signification of matted hair as jata is the primary experience where affected women formally subscribe to the religious-based patriarchy and its belief system. The religious-based consultation does not necessarily involve religious-based signification of matted hair as jata. The religious-based consultation has various purposes, sometimes the consultation is sought to see if matted hair is deific or not. Sometimes, it is sought to know if the affected woman can remove matted hair right at the emergence stage. Furthermore, the religious-based signification is appropriated by jata-affected women through self-interpretive process and events such as getting into the possessed state. In Seeta's case, she signified her matted hair as jata when she started getting into the possessed state:

Participant: I got possessed<sup>56</sup>. One person in the possessed state told it for the first time "Do not hurt me."

Researcher: You got into the possessed state or anyone else?

Participant: Someone else's. Later, I too started getting into the possessed state.

Researcher: You went to some temple or?

Participant: No. We have a god at our home. (Promptly)

Seeta's experience shows the ontological existence of layered processes in the religious-based signification until it is formally understood and maintained as the deific jata. As widely seen, the ability to get into the possessed state is viewed as divine ability and embedded as a confirmatory symbol in the practices surrounding matting of hair. Savitri underwent the religious-based signification by herself based on her cultural awareness about the religious-based jata and affiliation of her family with the deity. Savitri shared:

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<sup>56</sup> The phenomenon of 'possessed state' is reported globally by almost all societies. It involves "... a replacement of the customary sense of personal identity by a new identity, attributed to the influence of a spirit, power, deity, or other person" (Hanwella et al., 2012). Some researchers from Asia have linked the possession state to the DSM-IV diagnosis of dissociative trance disorder (Gaw, Ding, Levine, & Gaw, 1998).

Researcher: Where did you consult about it that time?

Participant: Not seen at all. We interpreted it by our mind that it was jata.

Researcher: You understood it that it belonged to the god.

Participant: They are there in the worship room, then what to do. One has to understand it.

Savitri's spatial position in the religious-based family structure made her signify her matted hair as jata and assume herself as being-a-jata-affected-woman. In Heideggerian terms, Savitri's unreflective "attunement" led to "falling prey" (Heidegger, 1962, 129) to the religious-based discourse. Savitri derived the religious-based signification based on her family's affiliation to the goddess. The obligatory sense in abiding by the family tradition is striking in Savitri's jata experience. For Anjani, the religious-based signification took place at an informal social level. Anjani added:

Participant: Means, I saw it when it struck to the comb. I showed it to women around. Then, they said it is the jata.

Researcher: You mean women in the neighborhood.

Participant: Yes. When shown to them, they told that it is jata and do not remove. Despite that, I ignored them. I removed. After removing, later it became big. All hair was tangled after removing that small one.

Anjani's experience indicates the social embeddedness of religious-based beliefs about matted hair. The superstitious beliefs had a determinative impact through the religious-based signification of matted hair in non-institutional informal mode for Anjani. The social pathways of religious-based signification apparently constitute a more challenging environment for the jata-affected woman as it creates a social awareness about jata emergence. Furthermore, it triggers vigilance on the jata-affected woman about the religious-based ritual following<sup>57</sup>. In the case of Draupadi, the religious-based signification of matted hair occurred through her former jata-affected mother-in-law.

Draupadi described events that took place:

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<sup>57</sup> The obligatory religious-based ritual following imposed on jata-affected women is explained separately as a sub-theme.

Participant: All family members went there. We went by a hired *trax* (a vehicle). Then, after going there, on Friday, after offering the *Paradi*, leaving that jata of mother-in-law's jata in river returned on Friday. On Friday, I had this little jata formed below here (Shown using hands). When jata was tied in that manner, what I did, I showed it to my mother-in-law that jata has been formed. Mother-in-law said, "let it be, do not tamper." I asked my husband. Then, what I did, I tampered it. After tampering it, my hands and legs were twisted. Then, doctor came to the home. Hands and legs were twisted. When asked to the god, was told not to tamper, not do anything. Then, doctor said blood pressure and all checked and was normal. However, my hands and legs were twisted, just like that. Then, I bowed down in front of the god. I drank the *Bhandara*<sup>58</sup> by mixing it in water. Then, my hands and legs become proper.

Draupadi's spatiality within the preexisting religious-based jata practice showed a generational pattern, as she is the third woman who is having matted hair. The religious-based signification was relatively rapid for Draupadi as she had immediate reference of lived experience of her mother-in-law.

**Messages received through religious-based signification of matted hair.** The messages received through the religious-based signification of matted hair were not much different from the messages in the religious-based consultation. However, considering the formalization of matted hair as jata, the messages received through religious-based signification were more directed toward the ritual following. Anjani was told not to remove her jata when her matted hair was signified. Anjani explained:

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<sup>58</sup> *Bhandara* means the turmeric powder (*curcuma longa*) used for the worship of the goddess. It is a medicinal product and part of daily dietary consumption in most parts of India. Turmeric is useful on skin problems arising due to the negative impact of bodily heat in its traditional medicinal understanding. Jata-affected women consume turmeric powder as a religious-based medication for almost all health problems. Substances such as turmeric powder are an integral part of ritual worship among the indigenous communities in India. A few other gods are worshipped with different substances: *Pandurang* with a black colored substance called *abir* and *Jotiba* with a maroon colored powder called *gulaal*. The medicinal actions of turmeric include "anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, anticarcinogenic, antimutagenic, anticoagulant, antifertility, antidiabetic, antibacterial, antifungal, antiprotozoal, antiviral, antifibrotic, antivenom, antiulcer, hypotensive and hypocholesteremic activities" (Chattopadhyay, Biswas, Bandyopadhyay & Banerjee, 2004, p. 44).

Researcher: After cutting it?

Participant: After removing, for six months. Whom to tell about it as I did a mistake? Then, there, they said, “Why did you remove? It is not to be removed. It is of a god. Why would you remove?”

Researcher: Where was that told, in *Chinchali*?

Participant: In *Chinchali*, by the priest of *Mayakka Chinchali*. . It was told there.... recently, around six months have passed. I have kept the removed jata in a small bag.

The most directive message of religious-based signification is about preventing cutting matted hair. In Anjani’s case, the priestly communication during the process of signification aggravated her feeling of guilt due to cutting the initial matted hair. Anjani’s experience underscored that priests capitalize the fear and guilt of jata-affected women to impose the religious-based discourse. Udita’s experience with the signification of matted hair was frustrating due the messages received. Udita shared:

Researcher: No change means what exactly?

Participant: Change means it was being said that jata would get untangled just like that.... If you would go to god, this will happen that will happen and so on... (Complaining tone)

Researcher: Means if you visit god, jata will get untangled?

Participant: Yes. Later, I did not go to *Saundatti*.

Researcher: You visited temple just to check if it would get untangled?

Participant: Yes.

Researcher: What does it mean by getting untangled tangle by its own?

Automatically goes off?

Participant: It is being said like that...Now, who has seen it? (Laughing)

Udita was told to visit *Saundatti*, which was supposedly portrayed as curative for the matted hair. Udita performed the temple visits in the hope that her jata would get untangled, but it did not happen. Udita, while going for the religious-based signification of her jata, was given misleading messages. While Udita was attuned to the religious-based discourse of jata, she was hoping to get relief from matted hair.

**Attribution of jata.** The attribution of jata to a particular god or goddess is an essential step in establishing the deity affiliation of jata. Furthermore, the attribution is

necessary as it guides the ritual following toward a deity and his/her specified religious-based worship. The process of attribution provides an explicit ontic framework for jata-affected women to establish their religious-based being. Ragini attributed her jata to the goddess *Yellamma* based on her family affiliation with the deity. Ragini shared the events:

Participant: See, season and all that I do not remember. I tell you, jata emerged after I had kids. Jata came after I gave birth to my children. Initially, I had fever..... After the fever... Ammmmm.... I had a fever for around a week. Then, my hair was tangled; the goddess *Yellamma*<sup>59</sup> has been there in our family right from the beginning.

Researcher: God is there at home right from the beginning?

Participant: Yes. God has been there since the beginning. In the maternal home and at the husband's home as well. (Enthusiastically)

Researcher: When you had a fever, you were at home.

Participant: I slept for two days.

Researcher: Slept for two days? Jata emerged at that time?

Participant: Yes. Jata emerged in that (quick) time.... Means ... we did not do anything by our mind or did not apply anything as such (to create the jata). This is goddess *Yellamma's* jata. We have not done it by our mind. It was tangled on its own.

Ragini's jata experience depicts the possibility of rapid signification and attribution of jata when there is prevalent family tradition of worshiping jata-related deity.

Furthermore, Ragini's experience of attribution confirms the possibility of high prevalence of jata among the families who are affiliated with the goddess *Yellamma*. In Sakshi's case, the jata attribution took place through a religious-based experience. Sakshi elaborated:

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<sup>59</sup> *Yellamma* is known by different names: *Yellu Aai*, *Yellavva*, and *Renuka*. *Yellamma* is a composite word where *amma* means the mother.

Researcher: What did you feel yourself? What was in your head as to why jata emerged?

Participant: Means, I went to the temple of god same way I do. Moreover, I put a word to the god<sup>60</sup> for giving me a son. I did not say that there should be a jata on me. Nothing like that. Jata emerged on its accord. As the son started growing in the womb, simultaneously jata started. Means, to tell you, there is *Ganpati* at *Titwala*<sup>61</sup>.

Sakshi attributed her jata to the god to whom she pleaded for giving her a son.

Sakshi's experience highlighted idiosyncratic pathways of attribution of jata.

However, it establishes the ontological existence of the essentiality and importance of attribution. Sakshi's experience shows the process of enrichment of the religious-based discourse by the jata-affected women by justifying it through their sub-phenomenal experiences. The self-interpretive being of Sakshi and her interpretive process along the lines of her life events and the religious-based conventions is notable. Anjani has been going through a complex series of experiences regarding the revelation about the attribution of jata. Anjani described the situation:

Researcher: The revelation has not been possible in eight years.

Participant: That inquiry, I did not do the revelation in anger.

Researcher: Anger?

Participant: Now, how is this, at home, my husband is no more; there is a little kid, and how to do the inquiry? (How is it possible to do the inquiry?)

Researcher: Because you are alone?

Participant: Yes. My hunch was that- "I did not approach you for the load (of jata), whichever you are, the elder one or, the younger one<sup>62</sup>. I did not come to you asking for it. As you have given it, you reveal it. I will not give any money to anyone and will not do any revelation." In this way, I wrapped it up.

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<sup>60</sup> In typical religious-based belief system, if some plea was made to any god, when fulfilled, the gratitude needs to be demonstrated by doing worship or religious-based donations in return.

<sup>61</sup> *Titwala* is a name of a small town near Mumbai famous for a temple of *Ganapati*.

<sup>62</sup> The elder one here is the *Yellamma* of *Saundatti* and the younger one is the *Mayakka* of *Chinchali*, the possible goddesses to whom the jata could be attributed. The process of attribution has a very arbitrary nature; however, the process of religious-based consultation is an essential part for attribution as seen in most cases.

Anjani is waiting for the revelation about her jata's affiliation to a particular deity. For the revelation, she has been performing religious-based consultations and temple visits. The revelation about the attribution of jata commonly involves a religious-based consultation with priests by paying fees. The process of attribution provides the required precision for the jata-affected woman and her family regarding their religious-based ritual following. Anjani initially avoided revelation of jata attribution in anger. Her distress is primarily derived from her family situation. It is notable in Anjani's case that jata and related religious-based process are so intricate with her life's situation, and Anjani has established a relationship with the goddess through her jata. Heidegger (1962) explicated the process behind the science of the phenomenon where "it grasps its objects in such a way that everything about them to be discussed must be directly indicated and directly demonstrated" (p.30).

**Reasons for keeping jata/not removing jata.** The reasons for keeping jata are idiosyncratic; however, it maintains jata and its deific nature. Uma's spatiality within the structural system led to her jata experience for a considerable period. Uma clarified the events in retrospect:

Researcher: You did not think about removing it at that time?

Participant: I did not think... No.

Researcher: Then, which time, were you mentally ready to keep jata?

Participant: Then what... (In a helpless tone)... It (jata) was there... It was told as given by the god.... That time there was nothing about untangling it.

Uma, within her gendered spatial world, was deprived of the essential information needed for well-being. The absence of jata removal actions in within the language of the social environment smudged interpretive process toward jata removal

discourse. In retrospect, Uma kept jata due to the unavailability of jata-related information and discourse about jata removal. The unavailability of a culturally sensitive method for jata removal forced Rati to keep it:

Participant: I used to cover and tie it all. I used to tie a cloth and used to cover it all (head)... Moreover, 2-3 times, I was stretched away from the queue (for jata removal at *Saundatti*)<sup>63</sup>. I used to say, “Mine should not be removed!” (Pause). “No scissor should be used on my (jata).”

Rati’s experience indicated the ontological existence of cultural preferences for jata removal derived from the religious-based belief system. Rati’s resistance for the forced jata removal using scissors highlights the disrespect of her religiosity by the culturally insensitive interventionist approaches. The patriarchal nature of religious-based systems and the jata removal interventions system is obvious in Rati’s experience. The co-existence of such patriarchal systems controlling bodies and human development outlines the dominant value systems and its impact on women’s lives. Ragini’s experience provided a larger picture about the role of macro systemic factors that compel jata-affected women to keep jata:

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<sup>63</sup> The state of Karnataka ran a campaign for jata removal by involving nonprofits. The campaign involved a culturally insensitive method of cutting matted hair with scissors forcibly without the jata-affected woman’s explicit prior consent and counselling.

Researcher: So you did not try to remove it on your own.  
Participant: No. No. A simple combing of my hair used to give much pain. Then how would one remove? (With a notable short sigh)...Moreover, we do not have *Hukum*<sup>64</sup> to remove matted hair. There, (in the local temple (shown by hand)) priests remove jata by keeping a coconut and holy leaves<sup>65</sup>. However, they also need priestly fees for that.  
Researcher: Then you did not go for that kind of removal?  
Participant: I did not have any money. (In a slow tone)... My condition was very poor. I have got this food by begging, Son. I go for the begging daily.  
Researcher: That time your situation was very poor.  
Participant: It was very poor.  
Researcher: Because of that (unfortunate situation), you had to keep the jata.  
Participant: Yes. That is what has happened.

The religious-based jata removal through priests requires priestly fees. The structural constraints, as seen in Ragini's case, underscore poverty as a determinant for jata removal. The victimization and marginalization through cultural practices highlight the instrumental role of poverty as seen in Ragini's experience. Notably, the pathways of poverty-induced marginalization of jata-affected women involved structural role of religious-based entrepreneurship by priestly class. For Ragini, the superimposing structural function of religious-based patriarchy and poverty outlined a particular structure of vulnerability. In Ragini's case, symptomatic health problem such as the pain felt while combing hair was an unaddressed health complaint that led to the continuance of jata. Early intervention and medical help would have made some difference in Ragini's particular problems during the emergence of matted hair. As a jata-affected woman, Ragini assumes that she does not have any authority for jata removal. On one side, such declaration of non-volition outlines the typical religious-based being of jata-affected

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<sup>64</sup> *Hukum* is a Marathi word, which literally means a royal order or an authority.

<sup>65</sup> A ritual-based jata removal at a local temple involves a ritual process prior to jata removal. The coconut and holy leaves are the essential religious-based items used for such ritual worship. The holy leaves refer to the leaves of betel which are used primarily among the Asian cultures for consumption, medicinal applications, and religious-based activities.

Ragini; however, it also asserts that unless there is divine command jata cannot be removed. With such affirmation, Ragini has established her being in relation with the divine through symbolic roles of jata. In summary, Ragini's experience indicated the role of multifarious factors and their interplay in preventing the jata removal in its first stage.

**Passive decision-making role of jata-affected women.** The passive decision-making roles of jata-affected women were explicit in jata experience. Several incidents highlighted jata-affected women's gendered being that had understood passive and recipient roles based on their spatiality. For Uma, who is a daughter-in-law in a patriarchal family, her mother in law looked after the religious-based jata processes:

Researcher: Then what did (your) mother-in-law do?

Participant: She immediately inquired whether it is jata or not. Then, the god said it is his jata only (given by the god) and did not remove it.

The passive decision-making roles of jata-affected women are derived from the larger overlapping structural systems, which assign subordinate status to them. In Uma's case, her mother-in-law was the prominent person to take decisions regarding jata. In typical rural family, elders in the family look after the decision-making process. The passive decision-making roles of jata-affected women are indicative of existing cultural norms and its role in operationalizing the religious-based discourse of jata. Furthermore, it shows the intricate nature of religious-based patriarchy through which the gendered being in patriarchy absorbs the imposed religious-based being as seen in Uma's experience.

**Status of women in religious-based traditions.** Jata-affected women's status is central to the phenomenon of jata. The influence of religious-based patriarchy on the family and social surroundings of jata-affected women determine their resultant subordinate status as seen in Uma's experience:

Researcher: You tried to remove it before 5-6 years.

Participant: Yes.

Researcher: To see if it can be untangled.

Participant: Yes. Later said it could lead to some suffering. Then my mother-in-law was scared and said “No! There are two kids! Some evil may get on them!” Then we stopped the topic altogether...

Under the influence of the structural system of religious-based patriarchy, the vital interests of family overshadow the self-determination of jata-affected woman. As seen Uma’s experience, the collective decision-making of her family was critical and was internalized by Uma as her given reality. The ontological nature of the instrumental access of the religious-patriarchy for the family members of jata-affected women was evident in Uma’s experience. Uma and her mother-in-law are part of the same gendered patriarchal religious-based system and play their part through conformation with the prevalent systemic norms of patriarchy. Furthermore, Uma’s experience highlights the instrumental role of beliefs and women’s role as a carrier of those beliefs effectively perpetuating the larger religious-based oppressive system. The passive decision-making roles of jata-affected women are seen their repression from practicing their religiosity. The imposition of ontic practices such as rituals and obligation to maintain it is an additional strategy of religious-based patriarchy to retain the subordinate status of jata-affected women. Savitri, despite being-a-jata-affected-woman, has not visited *Saundatti* temple yet:

Researcher: You father-in-law used go. Since jata emerged, did you go?

Participant: No. I do not even know about where that god is. No one has taken me there.

Savitri’s jata was signified as the deific jata of the goddess *Yellamma* based on the affiliation of her husband’s family with the deity. However, Savitri has not been able to visit the temple until date. Being a rural farm laborer woman, Savitri needs facilitation

and probably monetary help for the temple visits. Savitri has appropriated her being-a-jata-affected-woman and managing the religious-based practices within the given constraints. The subordinate decision-making positions of jata-affected women can be very intense and stressful as temple visit is considered as an ontic necessity for being-a-jata-affected-woman. The repression of Savitri's religiosity becomes apparent in her experience.

**Religious-based views/connnotations about jata.** The religious-based connnotations ascribed to jata and the semantics around it constructs the power structure of religious-based discourse through a particular language. The embodiment of the cultural practices and underlying values is likely to take place through the resources of language. Seeta emphasized on the wishful entry of the goddess through matted hair:

Researcher: What did they used to feel? Your daughter or son?

Participant: Nothing as such. It emerged. God is there so it would emerge.

She (the goddess) wished for so she came.

Seeta's self-interpretive process established the religious-based discourse on jata. Seeta shared that, along the lines of the widely endorsed jata discourse, her family members accepted the entry of goddess through her jata. Heidegger called such phenomenal process as the "de-distancing" (p.97). In the hermeneutic process, if there is a distance that keeps the being away from the being as understood in the world, the being tries to merge that distance. When the researcher asked a question about the possible jata-related friction in the family, Seeta attempted to negate any existence of such friction in family using de-distancing. The possibility of anti-thesis or alternative explanation about jata and allied practices is possible in the dynamics social environment. In such cases, to establish a comprehensive jata-affected being rooted in the religious-based discourse, it is

likely that jata-affected women perform the de-distancing. Seeta merged the apparent distance when she sensed the alternative dialectical influence on religious-based jata discourse possibly from the researcher's identity as an educated person. The embodiment and endorsement of the operative language derived from the religious-based beliefs were noteworthy in Seeta's experience. The diversity of religious-based beliefs can be seen in Laxmi's experience:

Researcher: Which god?

Participant: To *Yellamma*.

Researcher: Here?

Participant: Not here. I used to go to *Vita*<sup>66</sup>. The whole thing was revealed when I went to the god there. Since then, I started going to *Kokatnur*<sup>67</sup>.

Everything became fine since I started visiting there (*Kokatnur*).

Moreover, jata kept on growing. That is because she gave that as an identity as (to indicate that) "This is my hunt." We do not have the goddess at our home. "I have come with my choice."... (A short pause)...

In my family, there is no following of the goddess. Then, what she said, "Now, I have come, and I will not go away. I will not leave this tree. I have liked this tree." .... God's name... Then, whatever I did to untangle, it was being tangled again. There was a small hair clump, which became a ponytail as it grew along. However, that also was not giving any trouble. (Emphatically)

Laxmi's experience gives stepwise embodiment of the religious-based jata and its signification that directed her becoming of 'being-a-jata-affected-woman' in a gradual manner. In the jata experience, several religious-based connotations emerge through the self-interpretive process. Such linguistic resources become part of the religious-based jata discourse as seen in Laxmi's case.

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<sup>66</sup> A small town located near the participant's village.

<sup>67</sup> The second biggest temple of the goddess *Yellamma* is located in a small village named *Kokatnur*. This temple is around three hours by bus from the *Saundatti* based temple. The spatial locations of temples of the goddess *Yellamma* cover a major population of devotees on the border region of *Maharashtra* and *Karnataka* states in southwestern India.

**Reasons for matting of hair.** Jata-affected women's convictions about reasons behind the matting of hair are the evident source to identify the embodiment of a particular jata discourse. Rati, one of the respected elder motivators for jata removal, shared reasons behind matting of hair:

Researcher: Why do jata happen then? What is your hunch about it?  
Participant: Nothing as such. It is all god's act. What is in our hands?  
Nothing is in our hands. Whatever we try, can it lead to jata? That does not happen.

Rati sweepingly denied possibility of diverse processes behind the jata emergence and attributed it to the divine forces. Furthermore, Rati highlighted the inability in an artificial creation of jata. The traditional notion evidently endorses matting of hair as a deific phenomenon. The jata-affected women such as Rati are the major social entities that establish the discourse in its manifested form. Sakshi's experience showed a life event-related reasoning for the emergence of matted hair:

Researcher: For what reasons you think jata emerged on you?  
Participant: Nothing as such of that sort.  
Researcher: What did you feel yourself? What was in your head as to why jata emerged?  
Participant: Means, I went to the temple of god same way I do. Moreover, I put a word to the god for giving me a son. I did not say that there should be a jata on me. Nothing like that. Jata emerged on its accord. As the son started growing in the womb simultaneously, jata started. Means, to tell you, there is *Ganpati at Titwala*.

The ontological existence of jata-affected woman's tendency to articulate a religious-based historicity in connection with life events and jata was apparent in Sakshi's experience. Sakshi's expression can be viewed in terms of what Heidegger (1962) mentioned as "the existential mode of being of the discourse which is expressed and expressing itself" (p. 157). Furthermore, for Sakshi, the totality of experience indicated a noticeable dynamics with her mother-in-law. Although, Sakshi expressed a religious-

based reasoning behind her jata, the association of birth of her son with jata emergence can be understood in the patriarchal context of the son preference imposed on women<sup>68</sup>. Sakshi presented the ontic necessity of giving birth to a male child and maintaining jata in the conjoined manner using the religious-based jata discourse. The overlap of two imposed ontic priorities merged in Sakshi's experience.

Unless there were burdens to comply with patriarchal ideology of son preference, Sakshi would not have pleaded to the god to give her a son. Sakshi's experience shows the construction of protective roles of deific jata. Moreover, the availability of religious-based avenues for the jata-affected women to surface their grievances about the patriarchal everydayness is revealed from Sakshi's experience. In obvious terms, the use of coercion and/or consent and its intricate pathways that marginalize jata-affected women is evident in Sakshi's experience. The spatiality of jata-affected women and its influence on the self-interpretive position was apparent in Sonali's experience:

Participant: In my family, to me and my mother-in-law.....amm.... The gods cursed my father-in-law. My father-in-law's father had an affair with a cleaner woman. She had a big jata. Our family suffered due to her curse. Now, more than 80 years passed, our family has this.

Sonali shared the generational pattern of jata in her family due to a curse from another jata-affected woman in the past. Sonali presented the curse in a glorified manner. In Heideggerian terms, the historicity indicated by Sonali is associated with her complex spatiality within the larger jata practice and her family's encounter with jata. Sonali's expression highlighted the belief that the jata-affected person is capable of cursing. Uma shared the ambiguity about the sources behind formation of matting of hair:

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<sup>68</sup> It is unclear whether Sakshi was pressurized by her family to give birth to a son or not. However, Sakshi mentioned about her inability to conceive in the early stage during the meeting. Women in India are generally pressurized to give birth to a male child.

Participant: How would one know why it happens? People say it is because of not combing the hair. See, I used to comb two-three times in a day. Despite that, how did jata emerge on me?

Uma's experience refuted absence of hair combing or washing as reasons for matting of hair. Uma's expression underscored the historical ambiguity about reasons behind matting of hair. The most prominent non-religious-based reasons given for matting of hair is a lack of combing and washing. Uma's experience complicated the hygiene alternative explanations given for matting of hair. The phenomenological manifestation of jata in the particular hermeneutic context provides case-specific reasons behind matting of hair. However, the reasons appropriated and presented by the affected women establish individualized historicity derived from the religious-based deific jata discourse. Furthermore, women try to refute the alternative explanations provided for jata emergence by expressly stating such alternative explanations as parallel negatives. The patterns of symbolic use of jata and its effective symbolic utility for affected women in claiming their powerful deific jata-affected being shows women's empowerment needs and intentions.

### **Jata Stage**

In the jata stage, being-a-jata-affected-woman gets existentiality defined through demonstrations of ontic necessities referred from the religious-based discourse of jata. The jata stage can be called as a formal representative stage within the overall jata experience considering the rigorous religious-based everydayness of jata-affected women.

### **Sub-theme: The Religious-Based Everyday Bodies**

**Jata timeline.** The temporal structures in the lived experience of jata are comparatively explicit when it comes to the jata stage. The timelines are mainly about the age of jata, jata removal, and specific ritual performances in the course of jata experience.

Laxmi shared her awareness of time within jata experience:

Researcher: Approximately, for how many years jata remained there?  
Participant: Last year it was removed. Means remained for 12 years, since 2000...

Within Laxmi's temporal awareness, the particular mention of "jata remained" indicates the powerful religious-based connotation where jata is symbolically seen as the goddess who came and stayed for those many years. Ragini viewed the age of jata as some religious-based attainment:

Researcher: Then, what did you do first when you came to know?  
Participant: My hair started aching when I was combing. It is more than 12 years since the jata has emerged.  
Researcher: 12 years passed.  
Participant: 12 years have passed... (A small pause)... It is not any yesterdays (jata).

Ragini's expression shows the ontological existence of high cultural value attached to jata and long-term compliance to it by the affected women. As Ragini has accepted the fellowship of jata, her staunch fellowship is widely seen and appreciated in terms of the long jata phase. Seeta's temporal awareness about jata emergence was associated with the setting of god at her home.

Participant: It was around 20 years since the god was brought to the home. Almost 20-25 years passed and then this jata emerged on me.

As seen in Seeta's case, the temporality is associated with "a developed historiography" (p. 345) marked by the religious-based jata and related rituals. Setting god is a ritual that

involves bringing the religious-based symbols from *Saundatti* and keeping it in the worship place at one's home. The families associated with the goddess are obligated for setting the god. However, setting god is the most imperative ritual for the signification of matted hair as jata. Seeta's experience highlights the role of prevalent affiliation with the goddess and religious-based ritual following in the religious-based interpretations of jata-affected women. It is evident from the temporal awareness that most of the awareness is linked to and derived from the religious-based discourse of jata and its processes.

**Physical characteristics of jata.** The physical characteristic of jata is an important ontic feature of jata-affected women. Moreover, the physical form of jata is linked to other phenomenological components such as health problems; the symbolic, religious-based, and aesthetical meanings; the emotional attachment of the jata-affected person with jata; the religiosity of jata-affected women; and, different kinds of objectivation. Uma, a young married woman, carried considerably large sized jata, which remained for a period of 7-8 years. Uma explained about her jata:

Participant: It was touching the floor. (Animated). It was this long (shown using hand gesture, around 3 foot or more)...yes.

The expressions about the physical characteristics of jata revolve around its length. The large length of Uma's jata was associated with her young age when growth of hair was rapid. The age-related intersectionality can provide different degrees of jata experiences for the affected women mostly due to the weight and length of jata. Sakshi viewed her jata as lengthy but without much weight:

Researcher: Approximately, how long was your jata?

Participant: *Jata* was very long. It was like this (long).

Researcher: Was it heavy?

Participant: No. No. No. There was only one (hair clump) like this. It was like this long only. It was not too big as such.

The sense making about the physical characteristics of jata involved varied interpretations. In most cases, jata was considered as the sense object rooted in the dominant social and religious-based constructions. Sakshi explained the physical characteristic of jata in a dignified manner as reflected in her expression during the meeting. Anjani's experience highlighted her engaged interpretive self with her jata-affected being:

Researcher: Is your jata very thick? How thick is it?

Participant: No. Not much (thick). I have cut it off and kept it in a bag. I kept it in the bag. I did keep it in the bag, but it has the shape of a cobra.

Researcher: Is it?

Participant: Yes. It has become like the face (of cobra).

Anjani's partially cut jata has been kept in a small bag and has formed a shape as the face of the cobra snake. The particular mention of cobra<sup>69</sup> underscores the presence of deific and powerful jata. Among symbolic metaphors used to indicate jata by study participants, the mention of snake is very particular. The physical characteristic of jata indicates body consciousness among women about hair.

The jata phase is illustrated by the everydayness of jata-affected women. Everydayness is "...precisely a kind of being of Da-sein" (p.47). For jata-affected women, the typical everydayness involved numerous activities. Heidegger (1962) contended that the everydayness mostly carries the ontic features of being-there. In Heideggerian terms, the everydayness is essential to understand the ontological structure of the being derived from the ontic everyday activities and hermeneutic circumstances associated with it.

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<sup>69</sup> *Yellamma* is believed to have capacity to handle snakes with her divine powers. The embodiment of established religious-based meanings attached to the physical form of matted hair is evident in the expression. In typical rural societies, snakes are seen as powerful and potent creatures. Anjani used the metaphor of snake to show the extraordinary and deific nature of her jata reflected in the physical shape of jata. In other words, Anjani likely to have advocated the protective role of goddess by using the metaphor of snake for matted hair.

What constitutes the everydayness of jata-affected women can involve a series of explored and unexplored activities. However, different activities shared by jata-affected women have a notable religious-based ontic necessity attached to it.

**Washing jata.** The ontological structure of everydayness with respect to self-care and hygiene during the jata stage was explored during the study. Ragini's experience of jata washing is closely associated with her religious-based everydayness:

Researcher: You used to wash jata.

Participant: Yes. I do wash. (Promptly)

Researcher: Since jata emerged, how have you been washing it?

Participant: I apply *nirma*<sup>70</sup> and wash.

Researcher: Detergent, wasn't there any trouble due to *nirma*?

Participant: No. No. (Rapidly)

Researcher: How many times in a week, you used to wash.

Participant: Twice.

Researcher: When?

Participant: On Tuesdays and Fridays.

Researcher: Only on the days of the goddess?

Participant: Yes. I wash on the holy days. I wash on days of the god.

Ragini has been washing her jata with a detergent meant for washing clothes. The reason behind the use of the cloth detergent seems to be the challenging cost of soaps and shampoos for a homeless elder surviving on beggary. Another possible reason could be a need for strong detergent to wash the compact and dense jata to get a feeling of cleanliness. As being-a-jata-affected-woman, the regular hair washing is changed to the religious-based washing of hair, mainly on the auspicious days of the goddess. Washing jata had some negative implications for Rati:

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<sup>70</sup> The detergent *nirma* is meant for washing clothes. In villages, especially among poor communities, mainly among women, the availability of body soap or a shampoo is scarce. The powdered detergents sold loosely in small retail shops are used for washing clothes as well as for body and hair washing. These detergents contain highly active chemicals hence not advised for its application on human body.

Participant: Even if cleaned (jata), only this much dirt would go (shown using hand indicating a very little filth would be cleaned)... Rest of the (filth) would remain there only (in the head). (Emphatically)

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant: Then, because of that (the remaining filth in the head), there would be a bad odor.

Researcher: Yes

Participant: One would feel it (the bad odor) by oneself only.

Rati, while maintained the religious-based washing of jata, experienced health implications such as bad odor coming from wet hair and inability to clean jata. Notably, there is a form of religious-based control of personal hygiene of jata-affected women as evidential from Rati's experience:

Participant: Suppose there is the death of someone, or there is *Vitaal*<sup>71</sup> ... It (jata) is not to be kept in that (situation of unholy touch), and then it had to be washed.

There is ontic necessity to maintain the sanctity of jata after any unholy touch as seen Rati's expression. The ontic necessity led to the obligatory washing of jata underscoring the ontological existence of control over women's body and personal hygiene through religious-based practices. Jata washing was a laborious experience for Uditā:

Researcher: Was there any smell from jata?

Participant: No. I used to wash it with shampoo. However, washing was quite a painful job.

Researcher: Ok. No one used to help you?

Participant: Who will help? It used to be a lot of work to wash it.

Uditā's lived experience of jata was aggravated due to the absence of help from others in maintaining the care of her religious-based jata. Uditā's experience provides a testimony of the problems faced by jata-affected women in their everydayness due to jata-related

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<sup>71</sup> *Vitaal* is a local term used to indicate an unholy state such as the menstruating phase. It also means an unholy touch of other menstruating women. Being seen as a religious-based symbol, jata obligates the affected woman to maintain its sanctity as guided by the conventional religious-based codes. Rati highlighted internalization of such codes about washing jata, which constituted her everydayness with respect to personal hygiene as a jata-affected woman.

religious-based lifestyle. Apparently, the ontological nature of jata washing illustrates the intensified drudgery for jata-affected woman as compared to the healthy haired women.

**Covering jata.** In gendered patriarchal society, women's appearance is controlled by the established normative rules about their social behavior. Covering the head with a corner of the sari is one such gendered norm keenly observed for women within their gendered spatiality. For jata-affected women, the practice of covering head gained notable utility in Uditā's everydayness:

Researcher: Used to cover hair?

Participant: No. No. No. The corner of the sari used to remain over the head.

Researcher: That time, in the bus or when going to dispensary, how were you used to feel? Was there any problem?

Participant: I never used to feel anything. I used to go. I used to go to attend marriage ceremonies, etc. It was not that problematic. The corner of the sari never used to fall.

The availability of the corner of the sari to cover the head helped Uditā covering her head, thus protecting the visibility of jata. Covering head hence, the jata is linked to an unexplored stigma as evidential in Rati's experience:

Participant: I used to go regardless of anything. I used to go although jata was there. (A small pause) However, I used to cover it and then go.

Researcher: Why to cover (jata)?

Participant: (I used to cover) using the edge of the sari. I used to roam in this manner, covered (Shown by covering her head using the edge of the sari)... What to do then if it has to be protected from being seen from behind?

Researcher: Not allowed to be seen?

Participant: No. Even if one went social who calls by bad names to us? Whoever calls by bad names will remain like that... What would they do to us?

Rati's shared about the jata-related stigma in an indirect manner. Rati attempted to curb the visibility of jata using her sari, which revealed the ontological existence of a stigma and aversive feeling about it among jata-affected women. The visibility of jata and stigma

attached to it affected roaming of the jata-affected women as seen in the everydayness of Uditā and Rati. The helplessness of jata-affected women in avoiding jata-related stigma became explicit from the experience of covering jata. On the contrary, Seeta had a distinct view about the visibility of jata:

Participant: No, I never used to hide it. She has given this. What is the need to hide? Why hide the pot when one has come for begging buttermilk?<sup>72</sup> Moreover, how to conceal it? On the back, there is the corner of the sari. It goes in the air, and, why would hide it then? When one has the god inside, what is the reason to hide or cover it? I used to go for weddings. I used to go for functions. I used to go wherever it was possible. If someone dies I used to go, everywhere. I used to have a bath after coming back.... Only that much... Coming home and bathing.

Seeta valued the ontic necessity of the visibility of jata to demonstrate her being-a-jata-affected-woman. The abstract religiosity is noticeable in Seeta's jata experience where she highlighted the presence of god inside one's body. At the same time, Seeta shared about the difficulties involved in covering jata using the edge of the sari. In Seeta's case, it is likely that intense attempts to hide jata failed in the past and led to a defense mechanism where she displayed her jata as a deific symbol and stopped worrying about its visibility. The problems associated with the visibility of jata and the apprehensions about the social interpretation compel jata-affected women to face gendered social gaze, stigma, and the religious-based ontic necessity as seen in Rambha's experience:

Participant: No... That way, if the corner of the sari falls, people might say there is jata etc.... (A short pause) It is possible that the corner of sari might fall off the head while moving around.

Researcher: When such thing happens by mistake how you used to feel at that time?

Participant: I used to feel nothing as such. I never used to feel anything about it. (Sweepingly) I used to say, "If it belongs to god then let it be there. What is the big deal?"

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<sup>72</sup> An ethnic saying that means one does not need to hide what is obvious and intended.

As seen in Seeta's experience, Rambha faced similar failure in hiding jata. The attitude toward hiding jata was unsurprisingly shaped by the constraints experienced while hiding jata using the sari. In Heideggerian terms, within Rambha's spatiality, the visibility of jata was understood in terms of the everydayness derived from the religious ascription of jata and gendered norms. The ontological structure of everydayness associated with covering jata specifies the inescapable exposure of jata-affected women to the visibility of jata and the resultant stigma. Washing jata, its appearance, and the visibility related experience further outlines the inauthentic mode of being, where being-in-the-world is "completely taken in by the world and the *Mitda-sein*<sup>73</sup> of the others in the they" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 164, emphasis original). Effectively, it was not just the body but almost all its existential aspects were under the gaze and control of the religious-based patriarchy for jata-affected women.

### **Sub-theme: Embodiment of Compromised Religiosity**

The ontological nature of the religiosity<sup>74</sup> of jata-affected women is an important aspect of their jata-affected being-in-the-world. Under the inauthentic mode of being, jata-affected women abide by the ontic necessity of their identity as jata-affected women. In the strife, the actual religiosities as well as the spiritual inclinations of jata-affected women are less respected and allowed to practice. The religious-based everydayness of jata-affected women is a manifestation of their compromised religiosity. During the embodiment of religious-based jata, its impact on the being can be assumed to have

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<sup>73</sup> *Mitda-sein* refers to being-with-others (Sholtz, 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Here, the researcher views religiosity as the devotional inclinations of jata-affected women in addition to symbolic devotional acts performed for jata. The compromised religiosity can be conceptualized as acts and events imposed through particular set of worship practices and rituals. To some extent, jata-affected women might have accepted present rituals as the means of devotional practices to practice their religiosity. However, considering the control of cultural practices, it is hard to claim that women are given freedom of worship practice as they wanted. Hence, the researcher views present ritual worship practices in jata as the compromised religiosity.

reified the actual religiosity of jata-affected women. Importantly, the impact of compromised religiosity can be found on various individually valued aspects of affected women's lives.

**Implications of jata on appearance.** Jata showed impact on affected women's appearance through various ways and forms. Uma shared a stressful experience of marginalization with respect to her appearance:

Participant: Such thing...amm... did not come to my mind. However, people outside used to say "We are having ponytails<sup>75</sup>, and all! You could have same!" When such thing was said, I used to feel bad whenever I went for functions, etc. (Mild tone).... Means, I used to feel that they have ponytail, I should have same. My mind used to feel that...amm...However, there was no solution.... (Pause) I used to feel that way.

Uma's experience highlighted the aesthetical value attached to women's appearance within the gender normative context. While jata is portrayed as the embodiment of auspiciousness, jata-affected women are being exposed to diverse social environments where jata look can be interpreted in a varied manner. Such a dynamic nature of the social environment led to psychological strain for jata-affected women as seen in Uma's encounters in ceremonies. Uma's experience revealed a complex structure of appearance-related stigma associated with jata. The structure of the stigma involves a paradoxical mix of respectful religious-based auspiciousness of jata and deprivation from the attainment of social aesthetical benchmarks through the beautification of hair. Uma's experience provided different forms of marginalization controlling jata-affected women's body.

**Implications of jata on eating.** Mainly oriented as auspiciousness, the religious-based restrictions have the instrumental role within the oppressive cultural practices.

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<sup>75</sup> There are several types of beautifications of hair performed in India mostly through hairstyles such as braiding and weaving flowers within it.

However, the internalization of such restrictions is seen as the ontic necessity for being-a-jata-affected-woman. Seeta's compliance to the religious-based norms affected her eating behavior:

Participant: It was different. That time (before jata), it was fine. Later, when it changed, I stopped eating outside foods. That is what happened. (Softly)

Researcher: Means not eating anything from people outside?

Participant: If it is good, I eat now days too. Girls tell about it. Everyone around here knows about it.

Seeta's expression told her sad feelings about negative implications of jata on eating. The ontological nature of Seeta's religious-based everydayness revealed about the consistent consciousness required to maintain her jata-affected being. Seeta's family members helped her maintaining the religious-based restrictions on eating. The ontological structure of the gendered nature of religious-based socialization is striking in Seeta's experience where the small girls in her family are assisting her in the religious-based ritual following. Ragini, despite surviving on beggary, has embodied and maintained the eating-related restrictions as part of her everyday being:

Participant: What for the goddess...amm.... First, not to eat from a woman who has given birth. No eating food for 12 days at a family where anyone has died. Moreover, monthly women get MC (menstrual cycle) that we have to follow. If that much is followed then there is nothing as such. Not to eat anything as that. Then, only to eat from those private, clean women who are there. That is how it is.

Ragini has to avoid food from a certain type of houses and women undergoing menstrual period. As a person surviving on donated food, Ragini has to maintain that consciousness about what sort of food is given to her. Furthermore, Ragini's experience lays down the ontological nature of marginalization of jata-affected women through the religious-based norms surrounding biological functions of women's natural body. Ragini's interpretation

in terms of private, clean women and menstruating women shows how consciously the biological body of women is controlled in cultural practices. The instrumental role played by jata-affected women in reinforcing the gender-based superstitious norms is explicit in Ragini's everydayness. The self-reinforcement of the religious-based norms about the biological body of women further reveals the ontological nature of control in oppressive cultural practices.

**Implications of jata on work.** For jata-affected woman, their prevalent work burden is the possible avenue to understand the impact of religious-based everydayness on work. As the embodiment of auspiciousness through jata compromised religiosity and changed the typical everydayness to religious-based everydayness to affect the prevalent exceedingly high work burden. Utkarsha's experience highlighted the aggravated burden due to jata:

Researcher: Were you able to work on the farm?

Participant: I used to do the work like that only. What to do?

Researcher: That way means.

Participant: I could not handle the heavy load of that hair; still, I used to work. The weight was becoming heavy on my head.

Although pragmatically assumed, the embodiment of auspiciousness and the religious-based identity did not reduce the work burden of jata-affected women. It is evident that patriarchy and religious-based patriarchy has reciprocal function in oppressing women as seen in jata-affected women's lived experience. Utkarsha's lived experience provided testimony that physical characteristics of jata considerably affect jata-affected women's ability to perform work roles. In Utkarsha's case, her weak physique added drudgery in her everydayness with multiple work roles and led to the feeling of helplessness.

**Implications of jata on survival.** The impact of jata on the survival of jata-affected women shows gendered pathways of oppression. Ragini has been going through the most challenging survival experience due to jata:

Researcher: How did you decide to come here?

Participant: Then what to do? This unholy touch is not allowed. Moreover, now daughters-in-law of my daughter are there. They are quite big now in their family. My son is staying almost around 4 kilometers away from my village, at his wife's village. Then there arose the question of my survival.<sup>76</sup>

Ragini had to leave her home to maintain the jata-related sanctity. Ragini's survival became complicated due to oppressive norms of patriarchy. However, Ragini has been able to survive on beggary near a temple of the goddess relying on the deific value attached to jata. As seen in Ragini's experience, jata acted as a two-fold factor that led to her drudgery, and remained as a source for beggary and survival. The symbolic complexities of jata become more intricate due to functionality of jata as seen in Ragini's case. Draupadi shared a particular experience of jata linked to her survival:

Participant: I do not feel anything of that sort. I do not feel. My husband says that the goddess has come to us; health is good, say it is fine, get this understood in this manner. It is good. We have it all good now. Sometimes, we never used to have anything to eat. When there was nothing to eat, begging jogwa<sup>77</sup> from five homes used to make us survive for two days easily.

For Draupadi and her family, jata has been a source of survival during the spells of poverty. The ritual begging provided food for her family. Draupadi's interpretation comes from her multilayered spatiality such as a young married woman, a daughter-in-

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<sup>76</sup> In a typical Indian family, daughters leave maternal home after their marriage and sons remain as the only source for parents to stay with and depend on for survival. For this participant, daughters have been married into different families and left home. The son, who ideally supposed to stay at the native place, left the home to stay with his wife in her town. In such a scenario, it is very odd for the participant to seek any help from her son. As a result, her survival options were limited and she ended up as a homeless woman.

<sup>77</sup> *Jogwa* is religious-based ritual begging in the name of a certain god or goddess. *Jogwa* involves begging a handful of food grains from odd number of (five, seven, or nine) houses in the neighborhood on the auspicious days of the goddess, Tuesday and Friday.

law, a mother, and a responsible homemaker. The survival-related impact of jata, as seen in the lived experience of Ragini and Draupadi, showed the ontological existence of victimization for jata-affected women through coercion-consent mechanisms of cultural practices surrounding symbolic jata. The absence of survival arrangements for elder such as Ragini and the food insecurity seen in Draupadi's experience demands policy-based actions. The ontological structure of religious patriarchy and its control of the family as a social institution were evident in Draupadi's case. While the survival of the family was imposed on her through patriarchal structures, the religious-based patriarchy provided a religious-based means for survival as an incentive for being a jata-affected woman.

**Implications of jata on mobility/social participation.** Being-a-jata-affected-woman involves living according to the religious-based norms. The ontological structure of the impact of jata on the roaming and social participation is a prominent avenue that shaped jata-affected women's everydayness. Anjani's shared the changes in roaming due to jata:

Participant: The difference means, I cannot go outside much... I cannot roam around a lot when I am outside... No eating anything outside...

Anjani's experience reveals that the restrictions on roaming were associated with the restrictions on eating unholy food. In explicit terms, Anjani could not maintain the food related restrictions when roaming; hence, she had to reduce roaming due to jata. For Utkarsha, the challenging religious-based everydayness led to a sense of helplessness due to restrictions on her roaming:

Participant: Possible or not, if one has to visit places, then one has to carry the load. What to do then? I used go (like that). What to do?

Despite the burden of carrying heavy jata, Utkarsha had to perform some roaming that was not a pleasant experience. While roaming with a heavy jata showed one type of suffering, the religious-based restrictions on food controlled roaming in indicated manner. The interweaving among food and roaming related restrictions show a particular impact of jata on roaming and ontological nature of it.

**Implications of jata on the sexual life/marital relationship.** The most severe form of marginalization due to jata is about the impact on sexual life. Savitri shared her experience of the impact of jata on her sexual life/ marital relationship:

Participant: And it was made to agree that there should not be a contact with males. This also was made to accept... I am telling you this despite the stigma involved in sharing this... (Slowly)

Researcher: What do you mean by not to have contact with males (Not to take the air of males means)?

Participant: Not to have contact with males means no question of males in life at all... (Emphatically)... All that was made to agree. Then only she (the goddess) stopped coming to home in the evening. She used to come at around 12. No one used to recognize that she (the goddess) and I had some conversation.

Savitri's experience reveals the ontological existence of coercive religious-based restrictions and marginalization with respect to the sexual/married life of jata-affected women. Savitri has been facing the stigma for not being able to conceive. The social revelation of jata provided symbolic advantage for Savitri to avoid the cultural stigma of being impotent; however, with a subscription to jata-related cultural practice, she is forced to bear another stigma and suffering. Savitri's lived experience suggests how women are compelled to rely on symbols and avenues made available to them by patriarchy and religious-based patriarchy. The restriction on the sexual relationship with husband shows the entry of the jata-affected women into the lifelong process of marginalization with grave existential implications as seen in the case of Ragini:

Participant: Means, there is a restriction to follow in husband and wife relationships. Then when there is mc (menstrual period) that also has to be followed.

Researcher: Means you cannot have a relationship between you and husband when jata emerges?

Participant: No.

Researcher: That is why you had to leave home?

Participant: Yes... Because of that, I had to leave the home.

Ragini had to leave her home to maintain the religious-based restrictions on the sexual relationship with her partner. The ontic necessity to demonstrate being-a-jata-affected-woman involved the embodiment of coercion and marginalization with such repressive ban on the sexual relationship. The religious-based restrictions on sexual/marital relationship are particularly coercive for married women who experience the emergence of jata.

**Implications of jata symbolism.** The ontic necessity of carrying jata as symbol for being-a-jata-affected-woman leads to a subscription to the semantic realm about symbolic jata and its interpretations. While the nature of symbolism is obscure and idiosyncratic, jata-affected women's dignified interpretations of jata reflected in Laxmi's sharing:

Participant: See, those who are not aware of it say whatever they feel like saying. The one who has the experience of it would not say anything. If a person is swimming in the well, the one who knows actual swimming will better know that person. The one who does not know swimming would say anything such as "She will sink and die this that will happen", It is that way... (A short pause). There are people interested in it. Some are not so interested. Moreover, those would put down the one who has the interest. Some will call it good; some will call it bad. One should not give attention. One should not give any attention.

Laxmi shared the symbolic meanings of jata through a self-interpretive philosophical way. The determined attitude for the demonstration of ontic necessity as being-a-jata-affected-woman is revealed in Laxmi's experience where she profoundly handled the dialectical processes and semantics about jata. The conceptualization and articulation of religiosity were visible in Laxmi's experience through the philosophical construct. The oppositional social views about the symbolic aspects of jata and allied semantics outline the ontological nature of "the worldliness of the surrounding world" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 62) where jata-affected women demonstratively and experientially attain their being-a-jata-affected-woman.

**Impact of jata on the status of affected women.** The nature of religious-based everydayness of jata-affected women takes place through their exposure to social-cognitive world but with their distinguished identity. The interplay of jata and the resultant impact on the status were explored in the phenomenological manner. While there is sexual objectification of jata-affected women, some women came across religious-based respect for being a deific jata-affected woman. Savitri's experience highlighted the religious-based respect due to jata:

Participant: No.No. Nothing as such. On the contrary, they respect me as a woman of the goddess. They say, "She is a person of the god. Do not do this. She is a person of the god. Do not do that." People look after that part I do not say anything as such. Only that water touched by a menstruating woman should not be taken. That much she has made me agree to, and I have followed that until now. (Firmly)

Savitri is experiencing a respectful social treatment for being-a-jata-affected-woman in return to her ontic demonstration of the religious-based following about unholy touch at her workplace. Savitri's experience offered the reciprocal characteristic of respect given to jata-affected women. Affected women are expected to demonstrate their jata-affected

being through religious-based ritual following in their everydayness. The multilayered nature of respect given to jata-affected women was visible in Laxmi's experience:

Participant: Now, I feel it would have been good if I would not have removed it. All people do that (humiliate due to jata removal). God's (jata) was a big thing.... More respect was there. Wherever one goes one had that, used to get respect. People used to invite even if the (jata) person is far from their home. People used to stop by.... Even if there is no *Vara*.... *Vara*<sup>78</sup> and all.... I am not on that as such... Moreover, no... However, wherever one may be, people used to bow down from there. Now also people give respect. However, it is different when that was there (jata) and when that is not there. It is like the god being in the temple, and the god is out of the temple, it is that way.

Laxmi has been experiencing reduced religious-based respect after jata removal.

Moreover, Laxmi's intersubjective awareness highlights the ontological nature of respect given to jata-affected women due to their availability as sexual objects. The sexual objectification due to jata is derived from the devadasi tradition where women are married to the god and are seen as wives of the village. The ontological nature of the extreme forms of respect given to jata-affected women shows the two-fold auspiciousness-coercion structure involved in jata-related practices, controlled by the religious-based patriarchy. The religious-based respect given to jata-affected women, therefore, carries a complicated nature in its phenomenological manifestation. However, it is apparent that the identities of jata-affected women and respect are dynamic and situation-specific hence time-specific.

**Implications of non-compliance to religious-based beliefs.** In addition to the direct forms of marginalization of jata-affected women, there are punitive forms revealed

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<sup>78</sup> "*Vara*" means the wind. In local language, the participant mentioned, "Not to take the air of the male". The 'air of man' indicates sexual contact with a man. The religious-based entities have used jata-affected devadasi for sex. In such realms, having sex with men is dignified as taking air. It could have been used largely to remove the immorality attached with the act of exploitative sex. In its original symbolic meaning, 'taking air' is the royal way to feel comfortable by taking air from the fans operated by servants. In another semantic sense, 'taking air of men' is a power statement by the jata-affected woman claiming her sole right over her body hence the sexual satisfaction of body with any man of her choice.

in some interpretive structures of their religious-based everydayness. The negative implications of non-compliance to the religious-based restrictions carry punitive nature as viewed by Laxmi:

Participant: No complaints after the removal. There were no complaints even when jata was there...The only thing is that when I had jata, if I eat some unholy food, I used to get cysts on the head. This big (cyst). Moreover, if I do not eat (anything unholy), then nothing as such. If I eat the unholy food, I used to feel burning sensations on the body. Used to get cysts on the body.

As interpreted by Laxmi, the non-compliance to religious-based restrictions led to health problems. The explicit punitive construct around health problems of jata-affected women shows different forms of reification of health problems through the religious-based beliefs. The interpretation of health problems within the framework of ethno-religious belief systems led to the marginalization by restricting access to health treatment.

Laxmi's experience outlined the ethno-religious hermeneutic structure available for jata-affected women to interpret their religious-based body and its affairs. The health problems and the underlying suffering mentioned by Laxmi is likely to reinforce and maintain the consciousness about the religious-based being among jata-affected women.

Anjani experienced similar health problems for the violation of religious-based codes:

Participant: Now, those (jata) have been cut off and kept aside. Because of that, I am still having some or other suffering going on about health.

Anjani cut matted hair partially without religious-based consent. She believes that it has led to health problems. As seen in Anjani's experience, the understanding of health problems as punitive action for the non-compliance to religious-based restrictions is indicative of the "inauthentic everydayness" of da-sein (Heidegger, 1962, p. 167). The analysis of health problems using the ethno-religious discourse demonstrated the

“plunge” which “remains concealed from it by the way things have been publicly interpreted so that it is interpreted as "getting ahead" and "living concretely"” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 167). Moreover, the ontological existence of punitive interpretations of health problems illustrates the mode of being with “fear as an attunement” among jata-affected women (Heidegger, 1962, p.174). The fear about punitive action in terms of health issue controlled the behavior of jata-affected women, mainly about eating and sexual relationship. The additional marginalization took place when the health problems during the jata stage were reified and viewed as the impact on non-compliance to religious-based restrictions.

**Health problems due to jata.** The lived experience of jata involves facing health problems due to the embodiment of compromised religiosity in the name of cultural practice. There are no proper explanations about the etiopathogenesis behind the emergence of matted hair. However, the symptomatic health problems faced by jata-affected women and the ontological structure of their health experience are useful in understanding the health-related drudgery due to jata. Ragini shared about neck pain and its links with jata:

Researcher: Do you feel anything different about jata in any season? In rains etc., after getting wet?

Participant: If it gets wet in the rain, it becomes cumbersome. It feels heavy after that.

Researcher: Is there any other suffering then?

Participant: Then. There it gives trouble to the neck.

Ragini’s neck pain is associated with wet matted hair, and it reveals her season-specific suffering due to jata. Ragini has been staying in a shanty, which is not a proper shelter to protect her from rain; no surprise the seasonal drudgery came to her mind promptly. As revealed in Ragini’s health experience, for some health problems, matted hair might not

be the direct cause of health problem with identifiable pathological links. Being homeless is one macro factor in Ragini's experience, which is exposing her to situations that are leading to health problems. Uditā shared about the heaviness in head, lice, and wounds she faced during her jata phase:

Participant: My head used to feel heavily loaded. There were some warts started appearing on the head. Then, I removed it (jata). (In a calm tone)

Researcher: Wounds, etc. happened?

Participant: Wounds appeared. Lice started. (Low voice)

Uditā faced the most widely seen health problems directly associated with matted hair. It is notable that Uditā removed her jata due to intense health problems. The ontological structure of health problems shows links of women's exposure to their gendered everydayness as notable trigger to make them vulnerable for illness due to jata. Lice are a stigmatizing experience for jata-affected woman due to its contagious nature. The stigma mainly comes from other women in the family and the neighborhood. The pathways of health problems due to jata are noteworthy in Utkarsha's experience:

Participant: Trouble means... I used to get headaches due to the weight (of jata). I used to have a recurring headache. The water never used to get drained off the hair. I used to get cold frequently. That is why I removed it.

Utkarsha's health problems show that the exposure of jata to rain led to the cold. The inability of jata-affected women to skip their gendered work roles is obvious. The weather-related health problems due to jata are prominent as seen in the case of Sonali who stays in the region with high temperature:

Participant: I used to feel intensely sickening. Sometimes, I was like something has grabbed me tight.

Researcher: In which season?

Participant: During rains, winter. When there is heat, I used to feel troubled.

Researcher: How?

Participant: Like *Chut Chut Chut*<sup>79</sup> I used to feel desperate like-Should I cut it off or crush it off? Because of the sun blisters.

Researcher: What you used to do then?

Participant: What to do? I used to pour cold water on the head frequently. It was irritating that way. “What should I do now? Should I cut it with a scissor?” This was the feeling. I am telling you the truth. That time, there was suffering.

In Sonali’s case, the physical health problems due to jata had an impact on her mood and psychological health. The intensity and occurrence of health problems due to jata was very high for Sonali in summer. As far as the ontological structure goes, the spatiality of women derived from the prevalent gendered health environment takes a determinative role in the health problems faced by jata-affected women. The phenomenological nature of health problems due to jata reveals ontological nature of the pathways of getting illness from matting of hair. While the etiopathogenesis for the emergence of matting of hair is complicated and unclear, further complexity is added by the reification of health problems intensified by the gendered health environment controlled by the religious-based patriarchy.

**Treatment-seeking behavior.** The treatment-seeking behavior of jata-affected women shows different beliefs and treatment regimes. The distinct form of treatment seeking of jata-affected women is seen in Laxmi’s experience:

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<sup>79</sup> It is Sonali’s way of explaining the irritation caused by the burning and itching due to sun blisters during summer. As jata is a moist environment, the feeling must have been intense as compared to the sun blisters among normal-haired women. The words used are in local language with a particular phonetics indicating a desperate and intense feeling due to itching.

Participant: Diseases means, that way, I never had even a single injection in last 12 years, not even a single tablet. (Emphatically)... Now, sometimes, I get the injection... (A small pause)... When there was jata, if I take any injection, it used to aggravate my illness. Even if I take *Bhandara* that would hide (cure) my (health problem)... Moreover, I used to eat *Margo* leaves<sup>80</sup>. Rest, no medicines, no tablets, nothing as such, did not eat for 12 years. (Emphatically loud)

The self-interpretive position of Laxmi demonstrating her religious-based divine body is the core ontological feature that decided her treatment-seeking behavior.

Consequentially, the ontological nature of treatment-seeking behavior of jata-affected woman revealed a dominant preference to the ethno-religious medicine practices.

Laxmi's view that modern medicines aggravated her illness highlighted the belief about the goddess protected divine body of a jata-affected woman and the lack of substantial knowledge base about jata-affected women's health problems in the modern medical system. The reliance on the religious-based suggestions for health problems became obvious from Sonali's experience:

Participant: This head became as if *Vaz Vaz Vaz Vaz* (heavy-heavy)<sup>81</sup>. Then, what I did as the Guru told, had lemon and *Bhandara* mixed with urine of a cow and put it on the head then it became okay<sup>82</sup>.

Researcher: To apply on that (jata)?

Participant: Yes. Apply on the head. Then, the urine of a cow, lemon, and *Bhandara* both applied (on the head).

Researcher: When you used to apply it?

Participant: On Fridays, Tuesdays.

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<sup>80</sup> *Margo* or *neem* leaves have rich medicinal value in the traditional medicinal practices in India (Biswas, Chattopadhyay, Banerjee, & Bandyopadhyay, 2002). The consumption of *Margo* leaves is prevalent in India. *Margo* leaves have religious-based importance in the worship of the goddess. It is believed that jata-affected women eat *neem* leaves to reduce body heat-related issues as well as for calming and soothing the body.

<sup>81</sup> The word "Vaz" literally means a heavy load on the head. The repetitive use of the word indicates intensity of the problem felt by the participant.

<sup>82</sup> In traditional home remedy knowledge base, Lemon and Turmeric have high medicinal values and several applications. Cow's urine is considered as a strong antibiotic and disinfectant (Jarald, Edwin, Tiwari, Garg, & Toppo, 2008) and has numerous traditional knowledge-based health applications (Pathak & Kumar, 2003).

Sonali's health problems and treatment seeking indicated traditional medicinal applications on auspicious days highlighting the overlap of traditional health practices with ethno-religious beliefs. The treatment-seeking behaviors of jata-affected women show the ontological existence of characteristic "de-distancing" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 97). The de-distancing took place where the health problems and its cure were seen within the ethno-religious system without any subscription to formal institutional health care or its beliefs. The marginalization of women can be largely due to the exclusive availability of ethno-religious system and lack of informed self-determination about one's health problems. However, the lack of health education and minuscule outreach of health services to the jata-affected women could be a major underlying problem. In addition, women's proclamation of their right on their body also becomes apparent when it comes to the health problem. The ontological nature of such expressions about volition of jata-affected women can be seen in terms of their expressions calling their body as 'divine' where medicines cannot work unless the goddess wishes.

### **Sub-theme: Religious-Based Ritual Following**

During the jata stage, the religious-based ritual following was an essential constituent of the everydayness of jata-affected women. Among all religious-based activities, ritual practice was necessary to demonstrate the ontic necessity of da-sein. There are different religious-based ritual followings performed by jata-affected women while establishing their being-a-jata-affected-woman.

**Unholy touch.** The unholy touch exemplifies jata-affected women's conscious efforts to maintain the sanctity of jata and their jata-affected divine body. Rati explained her experience with the unholy touch:

Participant: If one goes on the farm if some woman has some problem, then, she will not give water to me. She will not touch the water pot. One has to give it to her. She will not touch it by hands. Women followed this *Palnuk*<sup>83</sup>. Even if one goes to anyone's (farm).

The social awareness about the unholy touch was apparent in Rati's lived experience. The social respect and compliance to the religious-based ritual following about the unholy touch show the particular "environmentality" of the surrounding world (Heidegger, 1962, p.62). The ontological constitution of unholy touch implies an important role and function of the social world in maintaining the religious-based discourse. For Rati, her everydayness as a farm laborer means mixing with several other women. However, once the social environment of jata-affected women is aware of jata, the unholy touch related conventions are strictly abided. Nevertheless, such ritual following needs a degree of consciousness from the jata-affected woman to comply with the ontic necessities derived from her jata-affected identity.

**Ritual begging.** There are various forms of ritual begging performed across communities and regions. Sonali explained her everydayness about ritual begging:

Participant: Doing five homes in sequence with a gap. During *Dasara*<sup>84</sup> festival, for nine days.

Researcher: Hair washing must have been given time.

Participant: I used to wash in the morning.

Researcher: Worship, etc. would take time?

Participant: I used to worship, wash hair. I used to get up early, early at 5:30 am. The worship was manageable only if I get up early. At around 9 am jogwa at five homes was manageable. Then used to work from 10 am. I used to give a 'lot' of cigarette rolls. I used to do everything.

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<sup>83</sup> *Palnuk* means obligatory compliance (to religious-based restrictions). Etymologically, the word '*Palnuk*' is derived from the verb '*Palane*' (to comply). Jata-affected women have to follow several religious-based restrictions, which fall under this conceptual category. The word '*Palnuk*' is widely understood with a common interpretation, which highlights the obligatory compliance to the religious-based restrictions.

<sup>84</sup> *Dasara* is a traditional festival of the goddess when most of the jata-affected women perform ritual begging for continuous nine days.

Sonali's everydayness indicates the increased work burden on her prevalent gendered work schedule due to ritual begging and other rituals. However, Sonali seems to have accepted the work burden due to the ontic necessities of jata-affected women to follow rituals. Sonali followed the weekly ritual begging on auspicious days. On the other hand, Rati performed ritual begging only for one month in a year:

Participant: No.... No. Only that much (in *Shrawan*<sup>85</sup>)

Researcher: Were you begging that when there was no jata or was it after the jata emerged?

Participant: After the emergence of jata ... (Promptly)

Researcher: Started begging after (jata) happened.

Participant: Hmm. (Notable pause) Beg for only one month. Not after that.

Researcher: What do you do with *jogwa*?

Participant: I used to prepare *Dhapati*<sup>86</sup>.

Researcher: And?

Participant: Used to offer it to the god, and eat....

Researcher: Ok.

Participant: Nothing of that should be given to anyone outside anywhere. If eaten by anyone at home is fine. However, not to be given outside. Not to be fed to animals. If fed to the cow, it is fine.

Rati belongs to upper caste farming family where her work commitments keep her busy.

The ontological nature of ritual begging outlines the impact of intersectionality on the religious-based beings of jata-affected women within their caste-gender intersectionality.

It is logical to say that similar intersectionality affects the suffering of jata-affected women due to caste-based occupational structures. Rati shared about several religious-based considerations involved in the preparation of ritual food from the grains collected during the ritual begging. The religious-based codes and treatment of collected grains highlights the embodiment of cultural practices and its demonstration through conscious performance by jata-affected women. Although jata-affected women perform ritual

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<sup>85</sup> *Shrawan* is a Marathi calendar month considered very auspicious for religious-based rituals and worship.

<sup>86</sup> *Dhapati* is delicious flat bread made from multigrain collected through ritual begging.

begging differently across castes and regions, it remains as an essential ritual following for them.

**Fasting.** Fasting is a religious-based ritual performed on the auspicious days and seen as an obligatory part of jata-affected women's religious-based ritual following.

Laxmi mentioned the fasts she has been doing:

Participant: Oh, fasting. The fasting is there. Tuesdays are there. The full moon is there. I go and worship then eat for the fast. Only that much. Nothing else as such.

Researcher: All fasting was started after jata emerged? Were you not doing all that before?

Participant: Before that, I never used to do Tuesdays, Full moon, etc. Then the rest is there. *Ekadas* is there. *Sankashti* is there. Sundays are there. *Navratra* is there. All those fasts are there .....However, Tuesdays and Full moon started (after jata emergence), since then that I follow even until today.<sup>87</sup>

Laxmi, as a gendered being within the patriarchal society, follows fasting on multiple auspicious days. After the emergence of jata, Laxmi started new fasting on Tuesdays and Full Moon as part of her other religious-based obligation for jata. Fasting involves eating auspicious food in moderate quantity. Various fasts involve eating auspicious foods and worships as part of religious-based rituals. It is clear from Laxmi's experience that her prevalent-gendered religious-based being was easy entry for additional fasting after her jata emergence and kept her busy.

**Temple visits.** Within the umbrella of different religious-based rituals performed for jata, temple visits are seen as obligatory for families who have the jata goddess as a family deity. For jata-affected women, the temple visits and rituals have a significant place among all religious-based rituals. Seeta shared her experience with temple visits:

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<sup>87</sup> Generally, the fasting and worship is performed on the assigned days of the gods and goddesses. Women do fasting more as compared to men. The fasting mentioned here are *Sankashti* (once in month for *Ganesh*), *Ekadas* (once in a month for *Vitthal*), *Navratra* (a series of consecutive nine day fast to honor of the goddess *Durga* once in a year.)

Researcher: Each year you had to go to *Saundatti*?  
 Participant: Yes. Every year I go.  
 Researcher: One day in the year?  
 Participant: I stay there for 2-3 days.  
 Researcher: What all things to do there?  
 Participant: There, I do *Limb nesane*<sup>88</sup>. First to go to the *Jogubai*<sup>89</sup> and wear the *limb* there. Stay there for one night. Doing the *Paradi* there, and then, the next morning, after getting up, climbing the hill (a short pause). When reached the hill, changing the *Paradi* and getting a new *Paradi*.  
 Researcher: And what to do after coming back to home?  
 Participant: Nothing as such... Then worshipping the goddess the way we worship our family deity (at home)... By offering a coconut and worshipping a god... What is there? Then eating the holy food. Nothing as such to do.

Seeta has the god set at her home, which obligates her to have annual visits to the temple of goddess and perform assigned worships. In conventional ritual understanding, jata-affected women have to do visits to the temple of the deity to which their jata is attributed. As obvious from Seeta's experience, it involves rigorous ritual following and travel. In Sakshi's case, her jata was attributed to a deity from a different town; however, Sakshi seems to have compromised her temple visits by worshipping a male deity in the temple around. Sakshi shared:

Researcher: How do you worship *Mahadev*<sup>90</sup>?  
 Participant: See, daily five circles...means on Mondays. Moreover, offering holy powders, incense sticks lighting, *Kapur*, coconut, and the *bel*<sup>91</sup> leaves for him to offer. No other things  
 Researcher: So when you had jata you used to do same?  
 Participant: Yes. I used to do same. (Calmly)

Sakshi used to worship weekly in a local temple on the auspicious day of the god. It should be noted that the male deity worshipped by Sakshi is her family deity from

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<sup>88</sup> *Limb* or *Limb nesane* is a religious-based ritual where jata-affected women worship the goddess by wearing leaves of Margo tree on their body. Jata-affected women and almost all devadasis perform this type of worship at *Saundatti* and other places of deity.

<sup>89</sup> *Jogubai* is another goddess whose temple is located below the hill at *Saundatti*. The ritual worship generally begins from *Jogubai* and culminates on the top of hill at the goddess *Yellamma*.

<sup>90</sup> *Mahadev* is the family deity of the study participant from her maternal side.

<sup>91</sup> Leaves of a tree considered auspicious and obligatory in the worship of *Mahadev*.

maternal home. In patriarchal context, married women are supposed to worship the family deity of their husband's clan. Sakshi's experience highlights a symbolic protest against the patriarchal conventions through her jata. Notably, Sakshi's jata was associated with her stressful exposure to son preference related cultural norms, and she feels that her jata emerged as soon as the god fulfilled her plea for giving her a son. The symbolic role of jata in the lived experience of Sakshi indicates various forms symbolic relationships and meanings attached to jata and women's spatio-temporal life worlds.

**Ritual worship.** The everydayness of jata-affected women involved ritual worship at home as an obligatory ontic feature to demonstrate being-a-jata-affected-woman. However, the daily ritual worship appeared to conflict with the prevalent gendered work burden making the religious-based rituals a source of coercion for jata-affected women. Anjani shared her experience about the ritual worship:

Participant: Yes. The worship of the goddess happens, sometimes, on Tuesdays and Fridays only. I do not worship daily at home. It is not possible for me because of this work (village council job) ....And I say, "Even though you have given me this load; it is with my power that your worship will happen, is it not just about your worship." I said this much, I say nothing more. If I get time off from the work, then only worship, otherwise not... (In a firm tone)

Anjani's experience shows the ontological structure of religious-based rituals where the prevalent work roles create a stressful scenario for the jata-affected woman. As a result, to keep up with the religious-based ritual worship brings psychological stress due to their inability to demonstrate their jata-affected being. The gender-caste intersectionality takes a notable shape in Anjani's case. Anjani comes from a formerly untouchable caste and performs cleaning, widely considered as the work of untouchables. As a widowed single mother with such work commitments, Anjani has been unable to perform the worship

leading an implicit form of her coercion as a jata-affected woman. The stigma attached to the non-compliance to ontic necessities such as worship was apparent in Anjani's expression, and there was some amount of self-blame observable in her drift.

**Setting the god.** Among the different religious-based ritual practices, setting the god at home is a prominent ritual and in many cases the initiation of religious-based jata fellowship. On a practical note, the religious-based signification of jata is formalized when the god is set at home as visible in Rati's experience:

Researcher: Then... jata emerged, and you decided to keep it after talking to the priestess. After that, what all rituals did you start for the god?

Participant: We set the god<sup>92</sup> after that ...

Researcher: God was set.

Participant: (God was) Set.

Researcher: What was the process to set the god? What did you do for that?

Participant: We did nothing as such. We brought the god just like that and set at home.

Researcher: From where did you bring it?

Participant: From *Saundatti*.

Rati promptly set the god at home as soon as her jata emerged. However, she did not perform much costly ritual as she comes from a low-income farming family. The religious-based jata processes involve an unreflective engagement and practice of religious-based rituals by jata-affected women and their families. Due to the unreflective engagement with established conventions of cultural practices, the religiosity of jata-affected women remains implicit or repressed.

**Religious-based ritual expenses.** Few religious-based rituals involve expenses for its performance. The religious-based expenses are viewed as the essential devotional

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<sup>92</sup> Setting the god is a ceremonial establishment of the idols at one's house. This ritual involves visiting the temple of deity and conducting ritual worship. Afterwards, by accepting the fellowship of the goddess, jata-affected women take several idols and religious-based things to their home. By setting the god at home, the jata-affected person designates herself as a devotee bound to the code of that deity and strictly abides by it in their everyday lives.

expenditure by most of the jata-affected women regardless of their economic capacity.

Seeta mentioned the ritual expenses she has to bear:

Participant: Yes. Now even if one takes 2500 Rupees for a single person it is not sufficient. I returned from a visit in past *Shrawan* month. There are too many expenses for the *Jogatis*<sup>93</sup> and ritual worship. Once you start the ceremony for the god you have to give money for music, worship and the *Jogatis*. There are rooms. Take that on rent. That costs only 50 Rupees though. The government now controls that.

Researcher: Could you afford it?

Participant: Yes. I do not hesitate to spend on matters of the god. (a short pause) I will do whatever I can, but I will surely go. I will spend.

Seeta annually spends substantial money on the annual temple visit. Despite jata removal, she is inclined to follow the religious-based rituals. The determination to earn the money for religious-based rituals regardless of the challenges was revealed in Seeta's experience. As the religious-based ritual expenses involve financial decision-making in patriarchal families, jata-affected women go through typical gendered experience as seen in Anjani's lived experience:

Participant: Means. "Other women are telling that jata has come to your mother. This happened. That happened. (Your) mother goes to the goddess." ...I feel like going to the goddess. She is taking me there then what should I do? If I do not, even do not desire to go, not go anywhere. Even then, I get money from somewhere and I go. Even if I decide not to go for some reasons, if I do not have any money at all, still, suddenly, I get money and I come back visiting there (the temple). I do not even feel anything about that loan. I do not even realize how and when that loan becomes nil. Moreover, only 500 Rupees for *Chinchali*<sup>94</sup>. I travel by train. I do not go by bus. I get the train at *Hatkanangale*<sup>95</sup> direct to *Chinchali*. From there, 10 Rupees for private vehicle and that is it.

Anjani's son has problematized the religious-based ritual expenses and rituals for jata.

Anjani has been experiencing coercion due to her spatiality within a patriarchal society

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<sup>93</sup> *Jogatis* are important priestly groups of the goddess.

<sup>94</sup> *Chinchali* is a small town in *Karnataka* known for the temple of *Mayakka*. The goddess *Mayakka* is seen as the younger sister of *Yellamma* and is associated with jata tradition.

<sup>95</sup> The nearest town with a railway station from participant's village.

where women have less of no decision-making power over religious-based following and expenses. Anjani's experience as a jata-affected woman shows the ontological existence of negotiations with the patriarchal norms for maintaining the ontic necessities as a jata-affected woman. The suppression of jata-affected women's right to self-determination over their financial decisions is striking during the jata stage. It is notable that Anjani has been trying to reduce the cost of temple visits by using cheap modes of transport. Furthermore, Anjani's economic scenario is not lucrative; however, she has been able to get money somehow on time. Anjani feels that the goddess calls her for the visit indicating the symbolic meaning attached to jata and a relationship with the goddess. Furthermore, Anjani can be seen using the call from goddess for a visit to frame her freedom to follow her religiosity.

### **Sub-theme: Structural Vulnerability**

The structural vulnerability of jata-affected women is a distinct form of spatiality that determines the course of their jata experience. Being-a-jata-affected-woman is a complicated journey through the amalgamated structural systems of patriarchy and religious-based patriarchy.

**Patriarchal structure.** The control of religious-based patriarchy is deeply embedded in its patriarchal offshoot. Uma experienced patriarchal conventions derived from such larger integration of patriarchal structural systems:

Researcher: How did your people at maternal home thought about jata?  
Participant: Nothing as such. There was nothing as such from the maternal side. They used to say, "It is of their god (husband's family). What do we have with it?"

In Uma's case, her maternal family did not take any responsibility related to the jata emergence. There is a patriarchal convention that when a woman is married into another

family, she has an obligation to follow the religious-based rituals of her husband's family. Uma's maternal family abided by that convention. The nature of spatiality, hence, the structural vulnerability, was detrimental in Uma's case, as either of the families did not endorse her right to self-determination. Consequently, Uma went through the jata experience. It is notable that Uma's maternal family assumed and endorsed the controlling role of her husband's family in jata-related matters broadly establishing the patriarchal control of women's body.

**Policy-based assistance for jata-affected women.** The prevalent structural vulnerability of women in a gendered society complicates their ontological security in further life stages. As a result, being-a-jata-affected-woman takes the affected women through the intense experience of vulnerability and exposure to the most insecure existential circumstances. Ragini, who stays alone in a shanty near a temple, shared her experience of unsecured living in her old age:

Researcher: Do they come to see you?

Participant: They do come. Last year they did not come.

Researcher: They come once in a year?

Participant: Yes. They (her daughters) come once in a year. This year only they did not come.<sup>96</sup>

Researcher: Is that sufficient for you? Coming only once in a year to see you?

Participant: Then what to do? Their wish... (A short pause)

Researcher: What if you get sick, who will take care?

Participant: Now, there is nothing as such to me. (No sickness). Now what? Now my body is working well. I do not have anything.

Researcher: But in the future, suppose, have you arranged for yourself?<sup>97</sup>

Participant: Have you kept anything for yourself in old age?

Participant: No. No (Pause)... Now what to keep. (Sigh)

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<sup>96</sup> This participant depends on her daughters and hopes that they will help her in old age. However, in patriarchal Indian society, daughters and their wishes are largely subject to an agreement from their husbands. Thus, the structural vulnerability due to the gendered context prevails even though participant's daughters are willing to help their jata-affected homeless mother.

<sup>97</sup> There is no legal obligation on children in India to look after their parents. Neither there are sufficiently helpful social safety nets for elders.

The jata stage was a culmination and a real manifestation of survival crisis for Ragini. Staying alone, Ragini is going through a phase of insecurity and lack of care. Ragini's future trajectory highlights gradual impact of intense structural vulnerability for an elderly single woman. The lack of policy-based interventions for elders, as well as jata-affected women, is explicit in Ragini's lived experience. The ontological constitution of lived experience, thus underscores the interplay of macro factors such as poverty that determine the survival and quality of living for jata-affected women. Furthermore, despite the appealing evidence about the situation of devadasis and social movement for the pension scheme for devadasis, there are no satisfactory actions from the government.

#### **Sub-theme: Gendered Discourse**

The gendered discourse surrounding jata shows particular semantic structure and language. The religious-based discourse of jata is expressed in a linguistic structure, which can be seen in all expressions. However, some expressions are particularly important to understand the powerful gendered discourse. As Heidegger (1962) noted, "The way in which discourse gets expressed is language" (p. 151). Regardless of the suffering, jata-affected women consistently tried to demonstrate *da-sein* in terms of the divine ascription of jata.

**Sharing about jata.** The ontological nature of gendered discourse can be sourced from gendered expressions shared by jata-affected women as Seeta viewed jata as the protector:

Participant: Nothing as such (promptly). She has not troubled me at all. Others might have it (trouble). Not to me. I have survived only because of her power. I used to remain ill frequently, but due to her (mercy), I have survived (a short pause). She does not give me any suffering as such.<sup>98</sup>

Seeta's expression indicated that she carried an implicit apprehension due to her jata removal. Seeta's anxiety was reflected in her sharing such as: "She does not give me any suffering as such" which was expressed after a pause. Seeta's apprehension is derived from the religious-based discourse about jata. The ontological nature of fear as the fundamental mood is notable in being-a-jata-affected-woman regardless of their jata status. Relying on Heideggerian terminology, as fear is central to the inauthentic mode of being; it remains with jata-affected women despite jata removal. Seeta's being during the interview revealed her fear as core to the attunement as a religious-based gendered being.

Jata-affected women's expressions about the stigma associated with jata are an important avenue for understanding the ontological nature of gendered discourse derived from their particular structure of experience. Surviving with the stigma of being-a-jata-affected-woman and the implicative everydayness of lived experience, Laxmi showed a sense of denial:

Participant: No one has insulted me as such. I never used to tell anyone that you did this (insulted me)... Not to anyone as such... Whoever laughs will get its punishment... Only this much I know... (In a calm tone)

For jata-affected Laxmi, the embodiment of jata involved an embodiment of the stigma associated with it. The sense of denial and helplessness in Laxmi's language while sharing about the insult for being-a-jata-affected-woman highlighted her gendered

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<sup>98</sup> During the meeting, Seeta reiterated that jata did not and would not give her any suffering. Here, Seeta referred the goddess with the word "She". The repetitive rejection of the possible suffering from the goddess needs to be understood in the context of Seeta's momentous decision to remove jata as a reaction to the early death of her young son. Although she has removed jata through the religious-based method, it is difficult to say whether there was sufficiently strong spirited attitude toward jata removal. In case of weak psychological determination for jata removal, there could be recurrent fears about the fatalistic implications after jata removal.

spatiality and vulnerability to such stigma. While Laxmi denied experiencing events of insults in the first sentence, immediately in the second sentence, she shared that she did not reply to any insult. Laxmi's experience underscores the availability of ethno-religious avenues and dialect instead of a rights-based discourse for the jata-affected women to deal with the stigma they face. The ontological existence of the stigma associated with jata is difficult to explore for its detailed nature; however, its existence is obvious even within the reluctant gendered sharing of jata-affected women.

The characteristic feature of the gendered discourse is the self-blame among jata-affected women. The self-blame was mainly for their rebellious acts about jata, which were apparently not in consensual agreement with the dominant patriarchal religious-based discourse. For Anjani, the language-power structure became apparent during religious-based consultation:

Participant: After removing, for six months. Whom to tell about it as I did a mistake? Then, there, they said, "Why did you remove? It is not to be removed. It is of a god. Why would you remove?"

In Anjani's case, she experienced inability to share about her decision of cutting jata. As these volitional acts are prohibited by the religious-based discourse of jata, she was left with no space for sharing. The control of jata-affected women's behavior through commanding religious-based language is evident in the messages received by Anjani. Notably, the religious-based messages given to Anjani prevented her jata removal and reinforced the religious-based jata.

The powerful role of gendered discourse can be seen in the sexual objectification of jata-affected women and its ontological nature within the patriarchal environment. Udita shared the sexual objectification of women due to jata in indirect manner:

Researcher: How about others? Means how was the view of males while looking at woman with jata?

Participant: Hmm...(Promptly, appeared less inclined on sharing)

Researcher: When you used to go out, how you used feel about how you were being seen? In our society, women have a different restriction to follow.

Participant: Yes.

Researcher: Then, how was it when you had jata?

Participant: Nothing like that. We were not doing anything as such about the god. We were not giving any attention to that god and all that.

Udita's understanding and inter-subjective awareness with respect to the sexual objectification<sup>99</sup> of jata-affected women were evident. Udita's particular modality of being-a-jata-affected-woman and less intense religious-based exhibition protected her from the intense sexual objectification due to jata. On the other hand, Udita highlighted the ontological existence of sexual objectification of jata-affected women who are associated with rigorous jata symbolism and grossly exhibiting religious-based rituals. The unavailability of semantic and linguistic resources to exemplify the sexual objectification of jata-affected women was visible in Udita's expression. Moreover, sharing on a sensitive topic of sexual objectification with a male researcher might have restricted detailed explanation. Within the available semantic and linguistic resources, Udita tried to clarify that she was able to avoid the sexual objectification. However, the restriction on sharing explicitly about the sexual objectification in matting of hair is associated with the prevalent gendered being in a patriarchal culture where women are not vocal about gender-based violence.

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<sup>99</sup> The sexual objectification refers to victimization of jata-affected women based on their jata. Jata-related practices are primarily associated with the so-called lower caste communities. Jata-affected women from such communities are highly vulnerable to sexual victimization due to their twofold vulnerability derived from caste and gender. Udita's expression highlighted the locale of such intense jata symbolism, hence sexual objectification of jata-affected women. Udita, being a so-called upper caste women restricted her participation with jata-affected women's groups having large number of women from so-called lower castes. Within such groups, the jata symbolism hence the possibility of sexual objectification and exploitation is very high.

**Gendered health expressions.** The instrumental role of language in maintaining the jata discourse was exhibited in affected women's gendered health expressions. The being of a jata-affected woman assumes a mode of da-sein where the prevalent gendered expressions about health proliferate under the control of religious-based patriarchy as viewed in Sakshi's experience:

Researcher: When you had jata, there were wounds?

Participant: Yes. I had a spot here (Shown by hands on the left side of the head). Means, if one takes a bath daily one remains clean. I used to bath on alternate days, so it appeared. That spot was huge.

Researcher: What problems did you have due to that?

Participant: Nothing as such. There was no trouble as such (because of that).

Researcher: Only skin was damaged?

Participant: Yes, the skin only was damaged.

The self-blame about one's health problems was explicit in Sakshi's experience. Sakshi self-interpreted and termed the health problems as self-induced and avoided blaming jata for her health problems<sup>100</sup>. It should be noted that average women in Indian society avoid sharing explicitly about unhygienic behavior, whereas Sakshi shared about bathing on alternate days with the male researcher. The ontological existence of a tendency among jata-affected women to self-blame for health problems associated with jata was revealed through Sakshi's experience. Similar tendencies exemplify the intricacies involved in

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<sup>100</sup> Sakshi suffered due to a skin problem where she had a white spot on her skin. This was linked to jata by her mother-in-law. There is sufficient ground to accept her mother-in-law's assessment of the health problem as the white spot on skin was gone after jata removal and proper medication. It should be noted that jata-affected women avoid medicines for health problems due to the belief that there is goddess in her body, which does not need any mundane medicine. There are beliefs that highlight inefficacy of medicines on a divine body. Notably, Sakshi was able to undergo medical treatment for her skin problem after her jata removal. Sakshi's jata was attributed to *Ganapati*. Most of the women associated with the *Yellamma* temple use traditional medicinal substances such as turmeric, urine of cow, and Margo leaves for managing their health problems during jata phase. Sakshi, being an upper caste woman, did not subscribe to such ethno-religious medication. The caste intersectionality and its impact on jata-affected woman were visible in Sakshi's case.

conceptualizing and comprehensively documenting health problems and experiences of jata-affected women.

Among the other gender expressions about health, the self-portrayal as a powerful being that is ready for any amount of work burden was seen in Savitri's experience:

Researcher: Was there any other problem due to jata?

Participant: No. No. Nothing as such.

Researcher: Headache, etc.?

Participant: She. Nothing as such. Nothing happens to me. However much I work; nothing happens to me. Even if it becomes serious then, it would only be health problems such as cold, etc. Only once, I had a serious trouble. Four thousand rupees were spent. Since then nothing as such. I do not even eat a single tablet.

In Savitri's gendered health expression, she presented a self-portrayal as a healthy person.

In a sweeping denial of health problems, Savitri diluted the intensity of her health problems<sup>101</sup>. With such kind of self-portrayal, the possibilities of concealment of the different health problems and its actual intensity are obvious. Rati's experience indicated layers of gendered health perspective and behavior:

Researcher: Then you never used to go to dispensary with any complaints?

Participant: Never at all... (Slowly with a short pause)

Researcher: Was there any reason as such to not to go to the dispensary?

Participant: Means, the pain was not that severe, you know. What is the reason for me to go (to dispensary)? (Promptly)

Researcher: Means there was no feeling as such to go to the dispensary.

Participant: Never... Never... (Short pause) Means... "My neck is paining, or something is happening"-It was nothing of that sort for me. In that regard, I never went anywhere.

Rati, in her gendered health expression, exemplified the ontological nature of gendered health situation where she viewed her health problem (neck pain) as insignificant.

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<sup>101</sup> Savitri assumed cold-like health problems as less intense where medication is not required. The dilution of intensity of health problem refers to attempts of jata-affected women to present their health problems as insignificant. Moreover, most of the women within a gendered health environment, consider health problems as serious issue only if it needs a treatment. Notably, the treatment seeking for women's health problems is idiosyncratic and largely determined by the patriarchal entities and environment. Here, the objective intensity of the health problem is clearly suspended.

Moreover, Rati termed accessing health services as a demeaning act. The self-imposed restrictions on access to health services exemplified the dominant pattern of health behavior and the thought process behind it. Sonali's experience revealed another form of gendered expressions about health:

Researcher: How was sleep?

Participant: Good. Used to get good sleep.

Researcher: Any trouble due to jata?

Participant: No trouble as such.

Researcher: You used to sleep well?

Participant: I used to sleep properly like this. I used to sleep keeping jata below the head. What to do then?

Sonali faced problems in sleeping due to her jata. However, she shared about it only when asked in a direct question and probed in detail. The predisposition to hide jata-related health problems outlined the ontological existence of a tendency to overvalue the religious-based jata through the embodiment of auspiciousness and illness. The prevalent gendered health discourse and its impact on jata-related health problems show the “buried over” nature of women's health discourse (Heidegger, 1962, p. 32). There is no pre-established empowering health discourse for women regardless of their jata status<sup>102</sup>. Consequently, the prevalent gendered health behavior of women takes a more concealing form where health complaints are articulated using the religious-based discourse.

The jata stage continues to progress along the lines of prevalent religious-based discourse for jata-affected women. Women who have undergone jata removal followed distinct pathways elaborated in themes described below. Out of 13 study participants, four participants are carrying jata whereas seven participants have undergone jata

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<sup>102</sup> Historically, men in India have controlled the health system. During old times of kingdoms, there was equivalent status given to the chief priests and chief physicians. Notably, in the event of differences, the chief priest was valued over the chief physician (Mondal, 1996). The influence of religious-based priests over the conduct of state and its health governance is obvious in traditional society. Within such patriarchal history, the possibility of women-centric health discourse and effective formal health system remains bleak.

removal through activist-led interventions. One participant has undergone religious-based jata removal at the *Saundatti* temple. For another exceptional form of religious-based jata removal, the jata on the participant fell off after fourteen years as told to her by a priestess.

### **Pre-Jata Removal Stage**

The lived experience of jata underlined the demonstration of attainment of being of a jata-affected woman in its totality as stipulated by the religious-based discourse. The pre-jata removal stage exemplified the ontological nature of the journey toward the jata removal discourse.

**Feelings due to jata implications.** It is pragmatic to assume that feelings due to jata implications have bearing on the decisions about keeping or removing matted hair. Moreover, feelings about jata implications have evidential value, as it is likely to reveal the coercion and marginalization of jata-affected women. Ragini shared her feelings due to jata implications:

Researcher: Right in the beginning, how did you feel when the jata emerged? Good hair and suddenly this happened?

Participant: There is no solution in such matters.

Researcher: But that time, as a woman, how did your mind feel?

Participant: The mind feels sorry. (Emphatically). Means, when it (hair) was open I used to feel good. Now, when tangled in this manner, I feel very awkward.

Ragini voiced the negative feeling and helplessness due to the impact of jata on her hair during the emergence stage. The temporal structure through which Ragini shared about her feelings goes back to the emergence stage. Ragini has continued keeping jata for more than 12 years now. Ragini has been contemplating about religious-based jata

removal at the temple of the deity. Anjani has been going through the experience of humiliation due to the sudden jata emergence on a widowed woman:

Participant: They used to invite. They would surely invite. Someone who does not feel good (about me) would discuss things behind my back, afterwards.

Researcher: About what?

Participant: Means, they would say it was not there before; it was not since the beginning, and now, why has it suddenly (Jata) emerged unexpectedly?

Researcher: *Jata*?

Participant: Hmm... (A short pause)... That sudden emergence of (jata), only god knows. How would I know why it has emerged? Those who discuss (negatively) would face the consequences for it. One should not give attention to them. What is the need of giving attention? Whose load is there (the goddess) would look at those who discuss? (In a helpless and cursing tone)

Researcher: But, it was coming to you that people do discuss it?

Participant: Yes. Means, it was not to my face. Later, someone used to tell that it was being said about you. Let them say. I give back to it and go forward. Why should one be indulged into it? Have I gone deliberately to ask for jata saying that I want it? (Angry tone)

The humiliation experienced by Anjani shows a sense of denial and the inability to do anything about the jata emergence and her consequent identity as a jata-affected woman.

The anger shared by Anjani revealed the gravity of implications and emotional distress faced by her for being-a-jata-affected-woman. While some study participants see the impact of jata in a negative light, Draupadi shared her positive feeling about jata emergence on her:

Participant: I can tell you anytime. Like for two-two days in a month, twice-twice in weeks' time, at 2 am in the night used to go to the dispensary. Now, 5-6 months, even if I get a cough and cold, I do not go to the dispensary. I use the *Bhandara* of the god, drink it and it is reduced for me. Only that... I have the goddess behind me... goddess is there....  
(Slow voice)

Draupadi's positive feelings about jata emergence are early stage as her jata is barely seven months old. Most of the health problems and suffering becomes intense and

explicit when jata becomes large after several months or even years. Being-a-jata-affected-woman, Draupadi has changed her treatment-seeking behavior from modern medicine to ethno-religious medicinal practices. Draupadi's positive feelings about jata are not based on her longitudinal understanding of lived experience of jata. Notably, her husband and formerly jata-affected mother-in-law have given her the positive discourse about jata. Ragini, Anjani, and Draupadi, still carry jata despite their varied feelings and facing implications on different aspects of their lives. Rati used to get intense feeling for removing jata:

Participant: More means if we get wet... one gets wet in farm..., jata gets wet when one goes to the farm.... Then, the water does not drain out (of jata)... That time there is a bad odor coming out (of jata).

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant: That I used to feel that it should be removed (emphatically)... better to remove.

Researcher: Hmm.

Participant: I used to say this to my mind that there should not be trouble for her or me. From somewhere, she only called me. From somewhere outside, the information came that there are people who remove (jata) like this.

Rati's feeling for removing jata was associated with a bad odor coming from her jata during the rainy season<sup>103</sup>. However, Rati was not able to voice out her feelings about jata publically and used to keep it in her mind.

While there are negative as well as positive views about the impact of jata, jata-affected women undergo various experiences through their interactions with several entities in the environment that shape their journeys toward jata removal or jata keeping. The immediate surrounding world of jata-affected women involves their children, spouse,

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<sup>103</sup> Rural livelihood mostly involves agricultural activities in monsoon with frequent possibility of getting wet. The issues presented by the participant have demographic nature as some women from non-agricultural occupations and belonging to semi-urban and urban areas might not report such seasonal issues due to jata.

and other family members. In its direct spatial structure, the phenomenon of matting of hair has the jata-affected individual and their family members. Moreover, jata-affected women within the patriarchal society live through different gendered relationship roles such as daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. Such a variety of roles and functions provides a mix of relationship contexts and role-specific spatial situatedness.

**Attitude of Children.** Jata-affected women's children, considering the generation gap, are more likely to have distinct perspectives about jata derived from their socialization. Considering the mother-child relationship in typical patriarchal context, the position of children has a considerable role in women's jata experience. Seeta's children complied with their mother's religious-based jata and rituals. Seeta's children were cooperative:

Participant: Nothing as such. They also used to accompany me. Children used to come. The temple is not close that I could go alone. Now, the fare for one person has become like 200 Rupees.

Seeta's experience outlined the impact of socialization of affected person's children within a religious-based environment. Moreover, in religious patriarchy, males are considered responsible for taking forward the family tradition and the obligatory worship of the clan deity. Seeta, being a mother, had this duty to expose her children to the religious-based rituals. In Seeta's experience, her family appears as a harmonious religious-based unit upholding the religious-based practice of jata. The ontological nature of religious-based socialization is revealed in Seeta's experience. On the contrary, Rati's children opposed her religious-based ritual following:

Participant: Yes. Then, (my) sons and daughter-in-laws were not ready (for setting the god). They said, "Why we need this god when *Khandoba* (A male family deity) is there?"

Rati's young family members opposed conducting jata-related religious-based following. The resistance experienced by Rati shows a typical patriarchal environment where the aging mother lost control over decision-making in family. There could be aesthetical differences with her modernizing family members about jata. Furthermore, the family of the jata-affected woman also share a part of the stigma attached to jata. Rati's experience exemplified the violation of her fundamental human rights with respect to the lack of freedom to worship due to the prevalent patriarchal conventions and power inequities. Rati's negotiations with patriarchy have a significant context. Her husband's family deity is *Khandoba* (a male deity) and, after jata emergence, Rati wanted to set the goddess *Yellamma* as her worship deity. Rati's experience indicated little or no consideration given to the religiosity of jata-affected women within the patriarchal environment. While the resistance of Rati's children carries patriarchal nature, it cannot be denied that her young children might have some element of worry due to jata-related stigma.

**Attitude of spouses.** Within the patriarchal family, the husband is the significant decision-making authority. The approach of the husband toward his wife's jata, its signification, and the religious-based rituals becomes substantial considering the religious-based restrictions on affected women's sexual relationship with their husband. Differences in the religious-based understanding of jata emergence led to a conflict between Udit and her husband:

Researcher: Kids used to fight with you about the jata?  
Participant: Our fighting, at home only. My husband used to fight. Kids never used to fight. We both used to quarrel.  
Researcher: About what?  
Participant: “You have this god’s thing came on you and all that.” It used to go on... (Smilingly)  
Researcher: He used to think that it was of a god?  
Participant: No.  
Researcher: His view was it was not (of the god). I used to say it is of a god.  
Participant: It is of a god. That was the primary trigger for quarreling.  
Researcher: Then, how it used to end, the quarrel?  
Participant: How would it lead to a final judgment... (Laughing)... It was decided to remove and then removed. That girl was told to call Sir; Sir visited once before to check if we wanted to remove. He (her husband) said, “I want to remove. We wish to remove.” Then, they said they would come on a certain date, and then we removed it.

The quarrel between Udita and her husband was about the acceptance of religious-based signification of matted hair as jata. However, Udita’s experience indicated that she carried jata for a substantial period until her husband took the initiative for jata removal. Udita reported negative views of her children about jata. Udita has undergone jata experience in a non-cooperative familial environment. The various ways through which jata-affected women’s partners react to jata informs the structure of patriarchy and the familial environments through which they undergo lived experience of jata and its removal, if performed. In Uma’s case, her husband was not very vocal about jata emergence and did not resist anything:

Researcher: How was your husband’s thinking when jata emerged?  
Participant: Nothing as such... Nothing from him...

In Uma’s family, her mother-in-law looked after the religious-based treatment of jata. In the typical patriarchal family, the mother-in-law is considered powerful, and the daughter-in-law is subordinate. The power allocations have a generational structure as the present daughter-in-law, when she becomes a mother-in-law, gains equivalent power

presently held by her mother-in-law. Apparently, the controlling and powerful position of the mother-in-law remains within the boundaries marked by patriarchal conventions. In summary, the power given to women with their various roles is merely an executive obligatory power to maintain the cultural system of patriarchy. In Uma's case, she and her husband, being young individuals with minimal decisive power in the typical rural agrarian upper caste family, went through the jata experience together. It is notable that Uma expressed the passive role of her husband in curt words. In typical patriarchal culture, saying negative words about husband is found offending, and it can lead to conflict.

**Attitude of family members.** As seen in the experience of few participants, family members of jata-affected women play a significant role. The spatiality of jata-affected woman within a patriarchal family provides a particular context as seen in Laxmi's experience:

Researcher: How did your family look at you when jata emerged? Means, there was no jata before, and suddenly jata came, then, others must have felt a bit different. How were your feelings at that time?

Participant: Nothing in particular felt as such in my family. Absolutely nothing as such in terms of feeling. (Low voice)

Laxmi is an elder woman from an upper caste family. However, she experienced no empathy from family members in favor of her religious-based ritual following. Among orthodox upper caste families, the attitudes of family members determine the course of religious-based practices and rituals of women. Although the inability to conduct the ritual worship has an adverse psychological impact on the jata-affected woman, Laxmi had to go through that repression of her religiosity. The ontic necessity assumed for being-a-jata-affected-woman was insufficient due to her subordinate position in the

family and resistance from her family members. The ontological structure of marginalization of jata-affected women involves the repression of religiosity and worship freedom as seen in Laxmi's case. For Laxmi, her family members decided a course of jata removal without her appropriate consent. In another form of negligence by family members, Anjani found the expected religious-based conduct of jata challenging:

Participant: There is no proper attention. No one from my family gives attention. Moreover, my husband is no more so who will give attention (?) I have a son. Now, I have to do all the inquiry, who else will do it?  
(Desperation in her voice)

Anjani, as a widowed single mother, carries a vulnerability due to very little or no support from entities in her familial or social environment. Moreover, neighbors and community members have stigmatized Anjani's sudden jata emergence after the death of her husband. To aggravate Anjani's situation, her son is liquor-addicted and has been opposing mother's religious-based rituals.

While worship of jata-attributed deity is an ontic necessity for jata-affected women, the revelation about the deific jata affiliation becomes the first necessary through the religious-based consultation. In a typical patriarchal society, the husband's family or the maternal family is the resorts available for women to seek help for such revelation.

However, Anjani is left on her own to conduct the revelation ritual as she shared:

Participant: Then that relatives (to go to), they are all same. My maternal home has no one then who will attend. Until sometimes before, the brother was there. He used to look after me. He was 20-25-year-old. He passed away a year before, then, who will give attention now? (A short pause). I have been doing all the inquiry (about jata) on my own. If I remove it without doing proper inquiry and if things become worse, what to do then?

Anjani has a feeling of resignation about seeking help from relatives, which could be due to possible boycott from relatives for sudden jata emergence and her son's liquor addiction as both are highly stigmatized in the cultural context.

**Attitude of relatives.** The attitude of relatives of the jata-affected woman forms a spatial context for jata-affected woman as seen in Rati's experience:

Participant: Relatives came to know about it. That way I did not feel any different. They also did not do anything to make me feel bad.

The awareness among Rati's relatives about her jata emergence provided an enlarged spatial dimension as compared to the village. Quite vividly, the knowledge of jata emergence can expand its geographical and spatial boundary only through the relatives of the jata-affected woman. Moreover, jata-affected women are likely to have defense mechanisms for the local-based stigma; however, the possible stigma through the knowledge of relatives could be difficult to deal. As seen in Rati's case, her relatives did not do anything to make her feel bad as a jata-affected woman. The ontological nature of attitude of relatives is similar to that of community members in typical patriarchal context when it comes to jata.

**Attitude of community members.** The attitude of community members takes different spatial characteristics based on the patterns of mobility of the jata-affected woman. Rati noticed fear among the male community members in her surroundings:

Participant: They are a bit alarmed.... Males... Because a jata-affected woman is around. They feel how they should talk. Males are scared that way.

Researcher: What kind of fear is that?

Participant: Mean.... It is god's person... How should one talk.....? That way they remain scared about certain matters.

The fear due to the religious-based ascription of jata and jata-affected person has arbitrary ontological nature. Additionally, the fear among males in the community may be due to the stigma derived from the sexual objectification of jata-affected women. Interactions with jata-affected women are likely to stigmatize the male members. The fear among male community members provides a context of symbolic utility of jata where women can choose to have jata as a protective deific symbol. As evident from Rati's experience, the attitude of community members was nothing different from what is understood as typical social attitude toward jata-affected women. Savitri experienced a cooperative role from community members in her jata experience. When Savitri's initial jata fell off by itself, her female homeowner helped her in the necessary ritual immersion in a pond at the temple of the goddess. Savitri explained:

Researcher: Then, after how many days it came, again?

Participant: Then, again, it immediately started matting rapidly. We gave all the offerings and the jata to the homeowner of ours here who goes to the goddess...

The help from a female homeowner indicated the ontological existence of helping networks among women. In an ideal scenario, Savitri was expected to visit the temple personally and carry out several rituals as a demonstration of being-a-jata-affected-woman.

**Attitude of physicians.** Jata-affected women's institutional encounters with physicians are an important aspect of the jata experience considering the health problems associated with jata. Due to the dominant beliefs about the divine body, jata-affected women found to avoid institutional health services and rely on the ethno-religious medicinal practices. The approach of physicians, as experienced by the jata-affected women, reflects the deterministic impact of the social environment surrounding jata-

affected women on physicians. Rati shared her inter-subjective awareness about physicians' attitude toward jata:

Researcher: Are doctors scared of treating?

Participant: They are not scared as such, at least not in our area.

In another expression, Rati indicated the ontological existence of fear among physicians while treating jata-affected women; however, she clarified that in her locality, physicians do not have any such fears. The attitude of physicians is primarily exemplified by fear about treating jata-affected women as experienced by Laxmi:

Researcher: Means doctors are scared or what?

Participant: Yes. He said "First your jata has to be removed. It is of god's. What if something happens during the surgery?" .... The woman who has jata, that woman will not get any injection or surgery. The goddess will not allow it to be done (the treatment).

Laxmi's experience revealed the formal institutional environment available for jata-affected women to deal with their health problems. Physicians were scared of conducting surgery and unintended tampering to jata. The fear among physicians is likely to be derived from the cultural belief system. It is obvious from Laxmi's health experience that the cultural sensitivity within the health system is insufficient. Laxmi's expression highlights the religious-based belief, which exemplifies the deific body of jata-affected women and its protection by the divine forces. Symbolically, the emphatic mention of divine body by jata-affected women can be a declaration of their unique rights on their body under the divine blessing with jata.

**Motivations/ Reasons for the removal of jata.** Within the given cultural context and the existence of powerful jata-related discourse, the trajectories about jata removal and actual removal are apparently challenging. Notably, some jata-affected women have been able to remove their jata despite the orthodox cultural context. The motivations for

keeping jata were primarily rooted within the religious-based signification and unavailability of jata removal discourse. However, the characteristic motivations for jata removal provided notable conviction-oriented structure of experience among jata-affected women. In Utkarsha's case, her intention for jata removal was linked to her concern for ontological security, mainly about the maintenance of her large jata in old age:

Participant: I realized it myself, and that is why (I) removed it later. There was no need to keep that. When I become old who will look after me? Hair was too big. I was unable to carry the load.

There was a self-interpretive process to reach a decision for jata removal in Utkarsha's experience. Utkarsha highlighted the possible problems with jata in old age. At the same time, she expressed her awareness about the quality of care possible in old age for women in her cultural context. In some cases, the motivation for jata removal is associated with health problems as seen in Ragini's experience:

Researcher: For what precise reasons have you decided to remove now? Are there any other reasons as such?

Participant: No, means, jata gets wet during the rains. Lice may grow. I feel scared. That is why planning to remove. No other reason as such. The neck gets pain then. What if it gets heavy? Hair becomes heavy after getting wet in rains. For healthy hair, they are separate hair. Now this jata has grown, all hair is tangled. This happens.

Ragini's contemplation about jata removal is associated with the ongoing health problems due to jata. However, it should be noted that Ragini still carries jata and contemplating a religious-based jata removal soon. Seeta removed her jata by her decision:

Participant: I got a wish for it. She (the goddess) gave me a wish and the thought, the mother. I was fed up. I had a son of 28 who died. It is three years. Since the *Sankranti*,<sup>104</sup> it started the fourth year. My wish I kept. That is why she gave me a thought about removal. I never thought I would suffer, or she would give me any suffering. Nothing as such... (a long pause) I removed it.

Seeta's intent for jata removal was based on her self-interpretive process. The ontological nature of Seeta's thought processes indicates a long-term relationship bond formed with the goddess through jata. However, the early death of her young son triggered jata removal. The relationship established by Seeta with the goddess assumed reciprocity. The ontic establishment of religious-based ritual following by the jata-affected woman is to protect the jata-affected woman and her family. The death of her young son indicated the failure of the goddess to protect Seeta's family. To some extent, Seeta's decision to remove jata involved a sense of protest against the violation of her faith-based expectations. The momentous decision of jata removal highlights anger in Seeta due to the death of her young son.

The ontological nature of motivations for jata removal shows various conviction-based as well as esoteric thought processes among jata-affected women. Essentially, the pre-jata removal stage carries a particular disposition among the jata-affected women, and it is available for phenomenological exploration but with limited disclosure. Based on the experience sharing in this study, jata-affected women showed a definite thought process behind their intent for jata removal.

**Referral for jata removal.** This study explored experiences of seven jata-affected women who have undergone jata removal through activist-led interventions. Regardless of the method chosen or imposed for jata removal, the process of jata removal

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<sup>104</sup> A local festival celebrated in the month of January.

goes through several stages beginning from the referral to the activists. Uma approached the activists for jata removal through her social network:

Participant: My husband and I, two of us went there. (We) Showed it to Sir (the activist). Then later, here, Mrs. Rati's jata was untangled. Do not remember how information about me was there (with the activists). Later, I was called there. They (the other jata-affected woman) informed, "There is a woman. Young girl. Her jata is also wished to be removed." Then, I was called. Then, it was untangled there. That day, I was away to a different town. I was out of the station so could not meet on that day. Then, they (activists) are there on Saturday and Sunday, on holidays. On the past, Sunday, her jata was untangled, and, on next Sunday, mine were untangled.

The referral for Uma's jata removal came from another jata-affected woman who had undergone jata removal through activists. Uma went through a pre-jata removal consultation with activists. The language used by Uma to share the events involved in the referral show her passive being attempting to dissociate herself from the referral process. The ontological existence of powerful religious-based discourse of jata and Uma's spatial position within a similar structure is notable even after her jata removal. The way Uma shared her referral for jata removal ("I was called") underscored that her being-a-jata-removed-woman has re-subscribed her to the gendered religious-based patriarchy. It should be noted that Uma's jata removal was delayed during the early stage due to the fear of fatalistic implications on her children. For Rambha, the referral came from a school-going female relative:

Participant: Then, those girls told Sir that in our neighborhood.....that girl got married now... (That girl) said, "Aunty, we would remove jata. There are those young people around who untangle." I said, "That is fine, untangle." Then she told about it in the school.

Rambha's experience indicated how she interpreted possibilities of jata removal with the help of her school-going female relative. Rambha's experience exemplified how the self-

interpretive process as being-a-jata-affected-woman got oriented to the ontological possibility of being-a-jata-removed-woman through her introduction to an alternative discourse on jata. In Rambha's case, her school-going female relative fulfilled the need for an enabling environment and provided the necessary ontological interpretation for being-a-jata-removed-woman.

The pre-jata removal stage involved several reflective, unreflective, and momentous thought processes among jata-affected women, which led to the continuance with jata or jata removal through a particular method. For jata-affected women still keeping jata, the pre-jata removal stage showed a particular intentionality and trajectory as being-a-jata-affected-woman mostly dominated by the religious-based discourse. For jata-affected women who have undergone for jata removal through activist-led interventions, there was ontological existence of jata-removal discourse at some stage of their jata experience.

### **Jata Removal Stage**

The jata removal stage involved a variety of processes within an array of methods adopted for removal.

**Removal rituals.** Primarily, the jata removal stage goes through the necessary ontic demonstration of religious-based rituals for jata removal. The context of jata removal shows existence of religious-based processes having a determinative association in shaping the motivation for jata removal. The stepwise religious-based process followed by Uma's family involved getting permission from the goddess for jata removal:

Participant: Then... was told that there is permission for untangling jata...

Then (all) said, "Let us untangle!"

Researcher: How did you realize that there is permission?

Participant: Mother-in-law asked (about). (Short pause) (We) were told not to use scissors (while untangling).

Researcher: Not to use scissors?

Participant: Hmm

Researcher: Why so?

Participant: Means... it belongs to the god. "Do not use scissors"....

"Should be untangled using hands".... They did not use scissors at all...

Sir (the activist) uses a razor blade. However, even the razor blade was not needed (for jata removal).

Uma's mother-in-law took the lead in getting the religious-based permission for jata removal. Uma's sharing highlighted subordinate position in decision-making about her jata. The religious-based preference for not using scissors has symbolic meanings rooted in the typical cultural jata practice. As jata is valued as a deific thing and the manifestation of the goddess, cutting jata is seen as harsh and defaming of the religious-based symbol. It is being observed that most of the temple-based jata removals are done using scissors; however, when priests are consulted for jata removal permission, they restrict the use of scissors on the deific jata. The priestly restriction on the use of scissors is more about the medical cutting of matted hair. As seen in the experience other jata-affected women, the religious-based discourse on jata tried to keep women away from the medical consultation and treatment. Uma felt the ontic necessity to ensure that jata removal would take place along the lines of religious-based beliefs and suggestions. Before jata removal, Uma was provided with further messages about the religious-based immersion of jata:

Participant: “You follow her command!” I was told. “When you untangle her jata, leave that in her gathering.<sup>105</sup>”

Researcher: Ok.

Participant: Then ...amm...after untangling it, in next week, I went to *Saundatti* and left it there.

There are some suggestions about religious-based immersion of removed matted hair.

The words used by Uma to share the removal permission and immersion related

religious-based suggestions indicate her abidance to the religious-based discourse of jata

even after the removal. The ontological existence of cultural preference for the religious-

based ritual permission for jata removal was explicit in Rati’s sharing:

Participant: We can simply remove it promptly. One can comb it to take it out. However, even if one removes, it will emerge again that night.... (a short pause).... If there were her suggestion (to remove) then why would we keep it?

Rati, who is a motivator for other jata-affected women, contended the ontic necessity of permission from the goddess for jata removal. Rati highlighted the reemergence of jata as a punitive action if jata removal is performed without a religious-based permission. The fear and apprehensions are integral to the conduct of religious-based following of jata and maintained by the socio-religious environment as seen in Anjani’s experience:

Participant: Yes, in signing groups, etc. I do not go in that. Only that the god has given the load (of jata). Moreover, to remove that (I am scared), what if something goes wrong? For that, we are trying for the *Fod* (revelation)<sup>106</sup>. Once the revelation happens, I will see how to move ahead.

Anjani has remained being-a-jata-affected-woman due to the pending revelation about the attribution of jata. The stewardship of religious-based conduct of jata taken up by Anjani indicates her interpretive world with the obligatory feeling toward the ontic-ontological

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<sup>105</sup> The gathering refers to the holy commune at the temple of goddess.

<sup>106</sup> *Fod* means to crack or to reveal. The revelation is about the affiliation of jata to a certain god or goddess. If the revelation does not take place locally, the jata-affected person is referred to the higher temples at *Saundatti* or *Chinchali* or *Kokatmur* to consult and check if jata belongs to those deities.

necessity as a jata-affected woman. In Heideggerian terms, the fear is seen as “a mode of attunement” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 133). Fear has been the most dominant mood and the mode of attunement in the phenomenon of matting of hair. Heidegger contends, “Mood has always already disclosed being-in-the-world as a whole and first makes it possible directing oneself toward something” (1962, p. 129). The integral nature of fear in the phenomenon of matting of hair can be found in its ontological structure where jata-affected women appear cognitively trapped through the religious-based belief system. The ontological existence cultural preferences such as religious-based permission for jata removal, use of scissors, ritual immersion of removed jata, and no removal unless the appropriate religious-based conduct is visible in jata-affected women’s experience. Thus, the jata removal discourse is linked with the prevalent religious-based jata discourse. Such overlapping ontological nature of both discourses suggests its pragmatic consideration while devising jata removal interventions.

**Cultural beliefs/preferences about jata removal.** The cultural beliefs about jata removal were mostly about the religious-based permission from the goddess and further conduct along the religious-based lines. There were a few additional cultural beliefs emerged from the study regarding jata removal. Seeta held a particular belief about jata removal:

Participant: Hmm. I had no trouble or never used to feel anything heavy as such. Nothing else as such. Now, even after untangling it, I do not have any trouble. When I removed it by my wish why would she trouble me?  
(Emphatically)

Seeta believed that a volitional intent for jata removal protects the jata-affected woman from suffering due to jata removal. Utkarsha shared her belief about jata removal:

Researcher: You kept it for 20 years.

Participant: I kept for 20 years. (In a low tone)

Researcher: Then how did it come to your mind suddenly?

Participant: It came to my mind. God only gives the idea you know. How would it come to mind? I had developed the wish for removal. As I am getting older who would serve me then? One has to do one's things. Do other people help people?<sup>107</sup>

Utkarsha believed that the goddess seeded the thought for jata removal. The arbitrary nature of the cultural beliefs about jata removal indicated a delicate relationship of jata-affected women with the goddess. The same relationship further determined the subjective justifications of jata-affected women for their different actions on their jata. The cultural preferences for jata removal are the ontological reality that should be integral to any consideration about jata. The esoteric nature of beliefs about jata removal indicates women's symbolic communication attempting to highlight their right on their bodies.

**Psychological composition about jata removal.** The religious-based control of jata removal is an important aspect of the structure of the experience of jata-affected women. However, at the level of a jata-affected woman, the psychological composition and its characteristic nature has the deterministic role in jata removal and its future trajectories. Uma had unwavering mental preparedness about her jata removal due to the ritual-based permission obtained by her family:

Researcher: When you decided to remove jata, that time, how was your mental preparedness?

Participant: It was good...

Researcher: What all fears were there? Did you discuss with anyone that you are feeling so and so and how will it go?

Participant: No... Nothing as such... Since it was asked to the god, and god permitted for jata removal, then felt nothing as such.

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<sup>107</sup> The religious-based restrictions can be burdensome for an elder unless the family is equally dedicated and spirited toward keeping jata. The participant seemed more worried about the possibilities of her care with the heavy bunch of jata in her old age.

In ontological terms, Uma's psychological preparedness for jata removal was derived from the necessary ontic demonstration of the compliance to religious-based processes for jata removal. The psychological composition for jata removal was arbitrary in

Laxmi's experience:

Researcher: Was there any fear in mind about jata removal?

Participant: Absolutely nothing. I felt nothing as such.

Researcher: How was your mental preparedness?

Participant: Nothing as such. See my policy is like -You say go, so let us go. Thoughts such that -'What will happen to me' were not in my mind. (She) will save or kill.

In Laxmi's case, the absence of self-determination for jata removal was obvious. The sense of denial and resignation about jata removal informs about the psychological preparedness of Laxmi before her jata removal. Laxmi's experience of jata removal demonstrated the role of the prevalent gendered structural system on jata processes where the powerful actors do not value the consent of the jata-affected woman. Laxmi highlighted her dispirited mental preparedness in an indirect manner. Rambha, who kept jata considering that it might belong to the god, later, removed it with an apparently unreflective psychological composition. Rambha explained the events:

Researcher: That time, you never felt that it is of god?

Participant: Nothing as such.

Researcher: Means, before that you used to think that it could be of god, etc., and you did not remove it.

Participant: Did not remove.

Researcher: That time, how was your mental preparation?

Participant: I said, "Now, I would remove it." I was like "Let it be of any god or not. I would remove it now. Let whatever happens." I said so and removed it.

The mental saturation experienced by Rambha as being-a-jata-affected-woman was notable in her psychological composition for jata removal. The ontological structure of

fear and its impact on the jata-affected woman were explicit in Rambha's experience. In Rambha's case, when the jata removal discourse was oriented, she overcame the previous discourse and developed psychological strengths through the hermeneutic process derived from the jata removal discourse. The ontological nature of psychological composition among jata-affected women with respect to their jata removal specifics further exploration regarding various psychological factors and their interplay involved.

**Pathways of jata removal.** Not all options available for jata removal are consistent with the cultural beliefs about jata removal. Before finally removing jata through activist-led intervention, Rati went through some distressful experiences regarding her jata removal:

Participant: I used to feel a lot (for removing jata). We did not hear about (the avenues for jata removal) it. See, there were people very casually removing it in *Saundatti*.

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant: I used to cover and tie it all. I used tie a cloth and used to cover it all (head).... Moreover, 2-3 times, I was stretched away from the queue (for jata removal at *Saundatti*). I used to say, "Mine should not be removed!" (Pause). "No scissor should be used on my (jata)."

The culturally insensitive method of jata removal at *Saundatti*, started by the state government, has been outrageous<sup>108</sup>. Many women have gone through the worst experiences at *Saundatti* due to the coercive approach used for jata removal. The coercive form of jata removal indicates the violation of women's religiosity and freedom. Rati had to cover jata to protect it from the forced removal. Among other preferential jata removal options, Seeta chose to remove her jata through priestly intervention at the temple of goddess in *Saundatti*:

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<sup>108</sup> The *Saundatti*-based jata removal campaign ran by the Karnataka state government involved police and nonprofit workers. These campaigns involved forced jata removal where jata-affected women were forcibly taken away from the queue for the worship of the goddess at the *Saundatti* temple.

Participant: Nothing as such. I had men and women with me. I said, “Aunty my jat has to be removed.” (She said) “If your mind says so, she has given thought to you, the mother, then remove it.”

Researcher: Tell me how was it at *Saundatti*?

Participant: There is a holy water tank below the *Jogubai, Parshuram’s* water tank<sup>109</sup>. I went into that water tank. There are people who remove jata. I went there, took coconut, betel nut, and green leaves for the worship. I said, “I have a wish to remove. My jata is to be removed.” Then they cut the jata with scissors.

Researcher: Cut with scissor? You accepted cutting it with the scissors?

Participant: That is a too big thing. How to remove it? Is it a thing to crack and remove? (Emphatically) (a short pause). They cut it with scissors then near that water tank... amm... I washed the head using lemon, buttermilk, and milk. There, near her, at that holy water tank only. Done bath. After that, I gave 101 Rupees. Then came here. The room was taken on rent.

Seeta preferred a public jata removal at the temple of the goddess with the help of priests.

The dominant cultural belief of not using scissors was not problematic for Seeta. The existence of religious-based jata removal option at *Saundatti* and women’s preference to it makes it an important intervention. Among the other forms of religious-based jata removals, there is an exceptional form of religious-based jata falling as seen in the experience of Sonali. Sonali’s jata fell off on its own, 14 years after its emergence as indicated in the religious-based consultation during the emergence stage. Sonali elaborated:

Participant: Before it fell off, I did not even think about it in dreams that it would go off like that. I slept. By the time I got up in the morning, it was gone. I was feeling that, fourteen years are done, when the child, *Prashant* became 14, jata is going to fall off now. Then, these small-small sized matted hair locks fell off. The one large clump remained here. I thought that this would fall off someday. Then that big jata was gone. A significant (a section of jata) was remained at bottom, came this long here, that one did not fall off. After the completion of 14 years, that one fell off at last. It took three months to fall off entirely.

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<sup>109</sup> *Parshuram* is son of *Yellamma*. There is a temple of *Parshuram* at *Saundatti*.

Sonali's experience demonstrated her temporal awareness associated with the birth of her grandson and emergence of jata. Moreover, Sonali's experience is a significant testimony for the religious-based jata discourse where she has drawn a clear-cut religious-based historicity about her jata experience.

The characteristic preferences for jata removal within the greater realms of cultural beliefs epitomize the religious-based being of jata-affected women within its multifarious trajectories of being. Unless women's priorities for religious-based ontic demonstration such as the religious-based ritual permission are assured, they are less likely to undergo jata removal.

**Jata removal approach followed by activists.** The strategies used by activists for jata removal have bearing on the cultural acceptance of the activist-led interventions. Rati had a weak psychological composition about jata removal that led to a debilitating phase right before her jata removal. While the source of weak psychological composition was the implicit religious-based fear, activists could employ a culturally sensitive approach. Rati explained the events in meticulous manner:

Participant: Then, that girl informed and came here with Sir. On the day, when it was scheduled to be removed, that day also, I was made to fall on the floor (got sick).

Researcher: Ok.

Participant: Then Sir came and made me stand up. Sir said "Stand up! What is happening to you?" Then I said "Nothing as such. I am just debilitating a bit."

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant: He (the activist) said "Stand up! Go in front of the god!" I went in front of the god, burned the *Kapur* (an inflammable substance used for worship). (He) said "Keep a coconut if you wish!" I went and kept a coconut (Coconut is an auspicious offering to the god), burned *Kapur*...

Researcher: Hmmm.

Participant: They (activists) took the snaps of gods. "Come now." He said. Then, I gave him milk (her husband). Then, I was taken there to a chair.

When activists asked Rati to worship the goddess and get permission for jata removal, she overcame the debilitation and go ahead with jata removal. Valuing the religious-based being of jata-affected women and understanding the cultural preferences were the primary constituents of the culturally sensitive strategy adopted by activists. Vividly, the approach used by activists was equivalent to the religious-based ritual permission for jata removal. During Uditā's experience of activist-led jata removal, she was provided with a perspective portraying jata practice as a superstition and health issue. Uditā explained:

Participant: It was talked about health. Then, later they said, what is of god and all? It is superstition, this, and that. Like this, it was going on. Then Sir (an activist) came. Then, he removed it.

Uditā's jata removal took place when she had wounds on her scalp. Activists developed a self-care and a health-related attitude in Uditā using her illness experience. The individualization approach used by activists showed the rigor in the intervention. The orientation of jata as a superstition assumed to implicate the religious-based trajectory of jata-affected women after jata removal. The activist-led approaches highlight how individual strategies can be very motivating for jata-affected women to undergo jata removal as seen in Utkarsha's experience. Utkarsha added:

Participant: If get wet in the rain, then, it used to bring colder... ( a short pause) That is why I removed it by my mind. I was shown the album in the *Wada* (Village). I and *Shali* (name of a woman) went for the grinding. That one shown was removed of a woman of 70 and 2<sup>110</sup>. That album was brought there. That man, that doctor, Mr. *Kanse*, is from my caste. When that album was shown, (I) said I would do soon (the removal).

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<sup>110</sup> To inform and educate, jata removal activists keep photo albums that has pictorial presentation of previous jata removal. The participant saw photos from a jata removal of an elder woman of age 72. That motivated the participant to go for jata removal.

Utkarsha was motivated by the photo-reflexive orientation of previous jata removal.

Sakshi's jata removal experience indicated how jata removal activists made sure about less painful jata removal experience. Sakshi elaborated:

Participant: There was nothing of that sort as such. They said do not have a bath for 2-3, ....5.....5 days (Confirmed with mother-in-law). I said that is fine I will not go for a bath for five days. You know hair remain wet inside due to bath. So I was told not to bathe for five days. Then said hair should remain separated, or it will pain. Do not bathe at all.

The consultation and capacity building for jata removal was witnessed in Sakshi's jata removal experience. The role played by volunteers holds immense importance in activist-led jata removal. Rambha's jata removal experience was smooth due to the large number of female volunteers who untangled her jata properly:

Researcher: What did you feel when girls were untangling jata?

Participant: I did not feel anything. They separated every single hair.

Researcher: Fever, etc. was there after removal?

Participant: No. Nothing as such. Absolutely not. (promptly)

The gender dimension of jata removal process is apparent in Rambha's case as trained female volunteers were found to be more effective and gender sensitive in untangling jata. The minor health problems such as cold or fever are possible after jata removal; however, Rambha did not face any such health problems.

**Issues involved in the activist-led jata removal.** While the activist-led jata-removal is seen as reformatory due to the outreach and health education of jata-affected women, there are a few problems, which surfaced from the experience of jata-affected women. Utkarsha, who has undergone jata removal through activist-led intervention, came across health problems immediately after her jata removal. Utkarsha added:

Participant: Nothing of that sort. Nothing as such... (A short pause) I felt like removing it, so I removed. I do not listen to anyone that way. I felt for removing it, so I removed. I did not listen to anyone...ammm... Later, on

that evening, there was fever, after jata removal. To tell you, around 20 boys, and girls from college came. Would they remove it properly? My whole head was like swollen due to the awkward stretching by all those. I had a fever because of that (impact on head due to the removal process). There was fatigue as well. Kids stretched hair like anything. Kids from college, (around) 20. One by one, they used to remove hair with force.

A mixed group of male and female volunteers was involved in Utkarsha's jata removal.

The health problems she faced after her jata removal are possible due to the significant size of jata and the insensitive stretching of jata by volunteers. Apart from the drawbacks of the method and human resource training in jata removal by activists, several other issues surfaced in the jata-affected women's experience. Sonali experienced a culturally insensitive attitude of a jata removal activist in her locality:

Researcher: How to do that? You did what they said?

Participant: Yes. (They used to say) -They have done by using hands. They have done it using groundnut oil and all that. It is not like that of god and all. Said to me-Cut it off. Why are you keeping that?

Researcher: Who said that?

Participant: People said so. A member's wife told so<sup>111</sup>. She said so, and you know her face got warts all over. You know \*\*\*\*\*? ....His wife said so to me. Her daughter could not get married yet. Her elder daughter is mute. No ceremony happened at their place until now. She spoke to me with a strong sense of rejection. Come, I cut off your jata at our place- she said she was a member of something. She said- Come aunty, I cut it off" Then, I said -Get off. Who are you to cut it? I said-I am not so fervent. She came, so I kept her. I serve her, and she gives me the fruits of it. What is this way to beg and eat? (She said so) During the *Dasara*, when I went for the *jogwa*. I said-I am not hungry for your little bit of flour and eleven rupees (donation). My goddess has given me a lot. Who are you to remove my jata? Until today, she has fallen down, and she could not progress much. Now she acknowledges that she did a mistake.

A lack of respect to the religiosity of jata-affected women, the social humiliation of the jata-affected woman for their religious-based ritual practices, and use of abusive language

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<sup>111</sup> One jata removal activist from her town verbally abused Sonali. There are several voluntary activist groups, which conduct jata removal. As there is no federation of such activists, there is no exchange of ideas and common value base. Of late, there have been many physician and local politician led groups, which are not aware of culturally sensitive approaches for jata removal.

by the activist was apparent in Sonali's experience. While the jata-affected women follow religious-based practices under a more or less unified umbrella of religious-based beliefs derived from the larger jata practice, the activist groups have diverse values and methods for jata removal. Some activist groups appear less sensitive to the human rights of jata-affected women and their religiosity. There are activist's groups, which tend to use scissors or who shave the jata-affected women's head completely. However, such methods are not accepted by jata-affected women and found to create psychological complications<sup>112</sup>. The insensitivity shown by some activist groups toward the religiosity of jata-affected women and the use of culturally insensitive approaches shows their patriarchal characteristics. Furthermore, the caste-intersectionality might be playing a role in such abusive jata removals. The upper-case activists are less aware of the cultural values of indigenous women, and such lack of values can reflect in the intervention. The impact of occupational composition of activists can reflect in the jata removal intervention as some activist groups dominated by medical professionals found to use scissors.

### **Post-Jata Removal Stage**

Undergoing jata removal is a complex plight for jata-affected women due to their staunch ontic and ontological religious-based conduct for a substantial period in their past. In this regard, the modifications in a body feature and loss of the religious-based symbol can lead to some adaptation issues after jata removal.

**Feeling after jata removal.** The feeling after jata removal is a significant avenue for understanding the perceptual change process among the jata-removed women.

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<sup>112</sup> Dr. Sudhir Kumbhar, a well-known expert on jata removal, was invited to guide on the psychological complications developed in a jata-affected woman after jata removal that involved shaving of head.

Sakshi's experience after jata removal indicated how she saw the change in her body feature:

Participant: Means.... like empty. Means, there was a heaviness on the head. When it was removed, it was lighter. Moreover, my hair was not so thick since beginning. Then, when hair was removed, it became less thick. That made it feel so light. This was what happened.

Sakshi's feeling indicated her awareness about natural hair and the changes that occurred after jata removal. As Sakshi's hair was less thick, she felt light after jata removal. In some cases, jata removal could result in a particular feeling rooted in religious-based discourse. Laxmi shared feeling of regret after her jata removal:

Participant: Now, I feel it would have been good if I would not have removed it. All people do that (humiliate due to jata removal). God's (jata) was a big thing.... More respect was there. Wherever one goes one had that, used to get respect. People used to invite even if the (jata) person is far from their home. People used to stop by... Even if there is no *Vara*.... *Vara* and all.... I am not on that as such... Moreover, no... However, wherever one may be, people used to bow down from there. Now also people give respect. However, it is different when that was there (jata) and when that is not there. It is like the god being in the temple, and the god is out of the temple, it is that way.

Laxmi's feeling justified her lack of self-motivation for jata removal. The feeling of loss of respect after jata removal, as shared by Laxmi, indicated the religious-based symbolic value attached to jata within her environment. The ontological existence of regret about jata removal in Laxmi's case is associated with the possible forced jata removal and lack of volition. Furthermore, the lack of body satisfaction in Laxmi about her changed look implicates questions about the different processes in activist-led intervention.

**Health status after jata removal/falling off.** The impact of jata removal on the health of jata-affected women is presumably the best avenue to identify the efficacy of

jata removal process. Udita sweepingly denied any existence of health problems after jata removal:

Researcher: After removal, any other complaint?

Participant: No. No. Nothing as such. (Sweepingly)

Udita sweepingly denied complaints after her jata removal. Udita's expression might be derived from the typical gendered health context where women tend to deny health problems or dilute its intensity. Notably, Udita's major health problems such as lice and wounds on her scalp did not reappear after jata removal. Rati provided an elaborate view of the positive changes after jata removal:

Participant: The daily work activities as such, I used to do for the whole day, but in the evening, sleep will not be there. Then, from this side to that side and from that side to this side (changing sides as no sleep). I used to feel so. Now, since it was removed, there is no problem as such.

Udita's sleeplessness due to heavy jata was gone after her jata removal. Rati faced problems in sleeping due to jata that were completely gone after jata removal. While, in some cases, the health problems were reduced or vanished after jata removal, for Sonali there is the opposite experience. Sonali shared in detail:

Researcher: Then, since you are back, anything else for you?

Participant: No. No. No problems as such. I did not suffer. Since the jata has gone, I am frequently getting sick.

Researcher: Do you get proper appetite?

Participant: I do not feel hungry. That time, I used to eat well, drink well, and work well. Now, I often fall ill *Hundadun Hundadun Hundadun Hundadun*<sup>113</sup>, since jata has gone.

Researcher: Do you get excess of sleep?

Participant: I do not get excess sleep now days. Now these knees... I was admitted recently.

Researcher: What happened?

Participant: This waist and hands-legs paining frequently. I was admitted.

Researcher: You feel that more since it has gone...

Participant: More often getting sickness. When it was there only sometimes, I used to feel sick.

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<sup>113</sup> A local word used to convey that the participant has been facing sickness frequently and unexpectedly.

Sonali's jata fell off on its own less than a year before when the interview took place. Sonali's was inclined to the ethno-religious system during her jata stage. Sonali feels that there is increased the frequency of sickness after jata falling off. With the loss of religious-based symbol of jata, the protection from illness has gone. Notably, Sonali is in her sixties when some health complaints are part of the age group for an elder person with a particular background of multiple work roles. Sonali's expressions are derived from the religious-based jata discourse that has been valued and maintained even after her jata fell off.

**The impact of jata removal/ falling off on the appearance.** Jata-affected women have a characteristic consciousness about their appearance during the jata stage and after jata removal. The impact of jata removal on their appearance is an important aspect of the experience of jata-removed women. Rambha shared about the growth of healthy hair after jata removal:

Researcher: You are feeling different after the removal.

Participant: There is a difference. My hair has grown a bit.

Researcher: It did not happen again?

Participant: It did not happen again. Absolutely not (sweepingly).

Rambha's expression is rooted in her awareness about the growth of healthy hair and her vigilant watch on the reemergence of matted hair. Laxmi shared an entirely different view about the impact of jata removal on her appearance:

Participant: Nothing at all. It is as if I have lost my look since jata was removed... (a short pause)...After that... All started shouting at me, "Why you removed it? It does not look good." ... Moreover, now also they say, "You do not look good."

Researcher: Means, you used to look good when there was jata?

Participant: Yes. It does not look any good now (low tone).

Laxmi felt a loss of beauty after jata removal as she valued her religious-based appearance with jata. Laxmi highlighted the appreciative social environment as being-a-jata-affected-woman. Laxmi indicated that she had not encountered similar respect and appreciation after jata removal. Laxmi's expression showed her problematization of primary gendered identity as a normal haired woman. Laxmi's expression highlights the symbolic value of jata as a deific thing and its preference as a body feature by the jata-affected women.

**Religious-based ritual following after jata removal.** The obligatory feeling for the religious-based ritual following showed a complex structure of experience after jata removal. Seeta, who removed her jata with the help of priests in *Saundatti*, has continued the religious-based ritual following. As Seeta shared, since the god is set at her home, she has an obligation for the ritual following, regardless of her jata status:

Participant: What else. This only-not eating at pregnant woman's (home), and not eating from the menstruating one, for five weeks, not to eat at the home of a pregnant woman. Yes, I do not eat such food even now. We have a god at our home. (Emphatically)

The religious-based following highlighted by Seeta is indicative of her interpretive approach along the lines of gendered expectations from women to abide by the religious-based ritual following. The food-related following will be gradually challenging for Seeta as she is getting older. Moreover, the agricultural work she performs demands sufficient nutrition to perform the tasks. The ontological existence of the religious-based ritual following after jata removal showed a substantial amount of religious-based everydayness maintained by women who have undergone jata removal through religious-based interventions. Udita, who used to visit the temple when she had jata, stopped visiting after jata removal:

Researcher: Then, used to go annually for the temple visit?

Participant: I went only for two years. I did not go on the third year.

(Sweepingly)

Researcher: For what reasons did you stop that?

Participant: I did not go since the jata removal. I went there only when there was jata. Since it has been removed... It was removed in the third year... Then I did not go.

Udita stopped the religious-based following when activists removed her jata and oriented jata as a superstition. The religious-based ritual following exemplified the religious-based outlook of jata-affected women after jata removal probably rooted in their religiosity.

**Impact of jata removal on the individual outlook.** There is an assumption that the jata-affected women will have a scientific outlook about jata problem after their jata removal. Uma shared her views about jata tradition after undergoing the jata experience and removal by activists:

Researcher: Neck pain did not reappear?

Participant: No....

Researcher: Then, you think that the neck pain was due to jata only?

Participant: Yes due to jata only... (firmly)

Researcher: Then, how do you see all this now? Jata happen among women, how do you feel about reasons behind it? What action should be taken? What do you feel?

Participant: Truly speaking, people should untangle it. It is being called as divine and all, but..... Isn't that a distress? (A small pause) .... Now, my sister-in-law has it. We have been telling her to untangle it by taking permission from the god...

Uma emphatically mentioned jata as the reason behind her neck pain. Uma's assertiveness in putting jata as a problem and jata removal as a necessary action indicated her changed outlook after jata removal. Uma's outlook showed her experiential understanding of jata problem and the marginalization she experienced due to jata. Uma's post-jata removal outlook showed that she has subscribed to changed identity as being-a-jata-removed-woman and actively explored her new being and identity. It is notable in

Uma's case that the person who signified her matted hair as jata, her sister-in-law, still carries jata while Uma is advocating for jata removal. Laxmi's views suggested a different structure of experience regarding the religious-based outlook after jata removal:

Researcher: Then what does your self-study say? Why do jata happen?  
Participant: Nothing. You see, it happens due to the service to the god. I have no study as such. We get awe-struck by the god. We worship any god saying that I have no other passion but this god only. Now also, I have this passion for the god. People practice much spirituality, If not in a significant way I do follow little-little at the home. If ten stones are thrown in the water, at least one god is likely to help. Somewhere one has to do some worship. All gods are same for us. I do not feel scared. Nothing as such. (Calmly)

Laxmi, even after jata removal, views jata as the respected and valued religious-based symbol. Laxmi affirmed her religious-based philosophy and faith in the goddess. Laxmi's expression showed her particular position where she believed that having faith on various deities' gives her feeling of security. Laxmi, in a way, tried to advocate her out of box following of *Yellamma* against her husband's family deities. The religiosity outlined by Laxmi informs a religious-based outlook with historicity of being-a-jata-affected-woman. Laxmi lacked self-motivation for her jata removal, which indicated that she probably wanted jata for its religious-based symbolic utility.

**Social outlook after jata removal.** The social outlook after jata removal refers to the environment within which jata-removed women perform their everydayness with a new identity as being-a-jata-removed-woman. Uma came across mixed views from community members about her appearance after jata removal:

Participant: Nothing as such. (People) used to say, "It looks good after jata removal." Few said, "When you had jata you used to look good." (They) used to say like that.

Uma's experience showed the ontological existence of oppositional reactions from community members about her appearance after jata removal. It is challenging to understand the characteristics of sub-groups within the community, which provided varied feedback about Uma's appearance after jata removal. However, the ontological existence of such sub-groups, and the nature and impact of their feedback on jata-removed person needs consideration to identify the exact nature of social assimilation process. Uditā's experience indicated a supportive role from her husband while the community members were blaming her for jata removal:

Participant: It (discrimination) happens. When jata was untangled, people started saying, "Why removed? It could be of god and all." My husband never used to find it true about jata being attributed to the god. He said, "What happens if it is of a god? What about the god and all that."

Uditā, although experienced blame for jata removal from community members, her husband was supportive. The ontological existence of social blaming for the removal of deific jata is a prominent feature of the experience of women who have undergone jata removal. The social ontology about the jata-related beliefs and practices has a static view reflected in the post-jata removal experience of Uma and Uditā. The ontological nature of the social environment and jata-affected women's inclination to it is exemplified in Sonali's post-jata fell off experience. Sonali persuasively clarified:

Participant: No. No. No discrimination as such. Now, they discriminate. That time never used to do. That time used to talk well. If I do not talk, they used to talk. They used say- “Come, Sit.” Now, since the jata has gone, no one talks. Let it be, what to do about it now. (Frustration visible in the tone)

Researcher: Why so?

Participant: That time there was a high value. Now there is less value.

Researcher: More value when there is jata?

Participant: Much value is given. I am telling based on my experience. My experience. “Come, sit woman” - People used to call in such manner.

They used to offer holy powders. Now... even if I pass by them, they do not even talk. Don't even look at me. May it be relatives, may it be outsiders, and may it is neighbors, they do not talk much. Let them not talk. I am doing her worship. That is it. She (the goddess) is there you know. It is like this about the people...

Sonali's has been experiencing reduced interactions from community members since her jata fell off. Sonali's experience highlights a form of social discrimination possible with women who have undergone jata removal. The symbolic religious-based value attached to jata by community members play effective role after jata removal. The ontic necessity of having a physical jata felt by the jata-affected women is reflected in experiences of Sonali and Laxmi. The ontological nature of social attitude toward jata-removed women indicated a staunch gendered spatiality regardless of their jata status.

## Chapter Five: Implications and Recommendations

This study was designed to explore and document the phenomenon of matting of hair among women in Southwestern India. Within its broader research agenda, the study was aimed at documenting the marginalization of jata-affected women. The findings of this study are reported within the context of global and national policies and legislation with respect to the health and human rights of jata-affected women and their marginalization due to cultural practices. In this study, jata-affected women reported their lived experience during different stages of their jata experience. The lived experiences of jata-affected women are the evidential testimonies for social work practitioners and researchers, activists, health care providers, educators, policy makers, politicians, religious institutions, and citizens to act on the required institutional and policy changes.

### Summary of Findings

Seven broader thematic temporal stages emerged from the lived experience of jata-affected women. One thematic stage had five sub-thematic areas, which explored the specific experience within a broader theme. Each stage is summarized below to present a precise account of the phenomenon of matting of hair.

**Pre-jata emergence stage.** The spatio-temporal being of jata-affected women prior to the emergence of matted hair showed the gendered 'being-a-woman' within the patriarchal social and familial structures. Before the appearance of jata, the situation of jata-affected women was exemplified by their absorption within the gendered world involving full compliance with gendered roles. Jata-affected women reported a few characteristic gendered scenarios such as the prevalence of jata among relatives, different degrees of awareness about jata and their preoccupation with labor demands. The major

categories of affected women's gendered roles were reproductive, parental, and caregiver roles. Before jata emergence, one participant was pregnant; three were lactating mothers; one participant was looking after a small child as a widowed single mother; one was doing post-birth nursing of a grandson, and one participant was suffering from stigma about her infertility. The correlative association between improper maternal care and the concomitant emergence of matted hair was revealed from jata-affected women's experiences. While motherhood and reproductive roles are gendered biological functions valued by the patriarchal society, there is insufficient attention given to non-reproductive health problems of women. It is vivid from the narratives that the preoccupation of most affected women with gendered everydayness did not provide adequate time for self-care.

During the jata-pre emergence stage, seven study participants reported the occurrence of physical and/or psychological health problems. The physical illnesses reported during the jata-pre emergence stage were high fever, bedridden and unconscious state, sleeplessness, intense pain while combing one's hair, headaches, pain in hands and legs, high frequency of illness, and involuntary twisting of hands and legs. The psychological problems reported included delusionary experiences such as a goddess coming close and talking at odd hours, mad person-like wandering, and lack of focus on work, and crying. The prevalent and concomitant morbidity reported by jata-affected women highlighted the inappropriate attention given to the health problems of women in rural India.

The psychological distress that occurred during the pre-jata emergence stage is consistent with the historical diagnostic focus on neuropathic morbidity as observed by Le Page (1884). However, the later diagnostic approaches toward matted hair have an

esoteric nature with less attention given to matting of hair in its holistic manifestation in the form of physical and psychological illness. Women's mental health in India has been one of the most neglected areas in health care (Davar, 1995). The presentation of psychological issues during or prior to the emergence of jata by the affected women was characteristically idiosyncratic and involved use of ethno-religious discourse. The psychiatric comorbidity reported by women was along the line of similar clinical reports of physicians (e.g., Bansal & Kuldeep, 1992; Forstl & Elliger, 1995; Khare, 1985; Pavithran, 1990). While the prevalence of jata indicated existence among females of all ages and particular physical forms, it was unclear if they were aware of the suffering due to health problems associated with matted hair in the early stage of emergence.

**Jata emergence stage.** Out of 13 study participants, 11 said self-realization about the emergence of matted hair. The pathways of self-realization of jata emergence involved recognition of matted hair during regular activities such as bathing, hair combing, and detecting a visible formation of a lump in one's hair. Four study participants reported a lack of inclination for jata during the emergence stage. The frustration due to the negative impact on hair and inability to remove matted hair despite frequent combing was noticeable during the jata emergence stage. Despite the visible lack of inclination for jata, it emerged that entities such as family members and religious-based entities and the environment did not consider affected women's aversion. As a result, affected women underwent jata experience for a considerable period. The unavailability of choice or consent for keeping matted hair reflected the marginalization of fundamental human rights of affected women. Furthermore, the imposition of religious-based interpretations on matted hair violated the rights of affected women

especially in relation to the availability, acceptability, accessibility and quality of health care (United Nations, 2000).

Two levels of disclosure about jata emergence were prominent in the study participants, the primary disclosure with family members, and secondary disclosure with social and institutional members. The disclosure modalities had a determinative bearing over the course of matted hair when it was termed as the religious-based jata. As most of the jata-affected women tend to disclose their jata to other women, they are more vulnerable to reification (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) of their matted hair due to the commonly shared gendered universe of knowledge. The physical characteristics of jata during the emergence stage highlighted various physical features and memories about the nature of its capture over the head due to matting of hair.

Seven participants tried to remove jata by cutting or untangling the hair through combing, either by oneself or with the help of others. Two participants stopped combing their hair, whereas the initial jata fell off on its own for one participant. Primarily, three types of actions materialized in response to the emerged matted hair that showed striking attempts of women to get rid of their matted hair. However, due to the religious-based mandates, two women stopped combing their hair, which prevented the scarce possibility of removal of matted hair in its early stage. Notably, none of those activities was sufficiently capable of relieving any of them from the consequent long-term jata experience. Reemergence of matted hair and a repetitive tangling of hair despite efforts to remove it were the most remarkable features of the progression of matted hair. Eventually, the matted hair grew with different speeds and patterns of growth. The frustrating reemergence and repetitive tangling of hair indicated the inefficacy of the

informal methods adopted by jata-affected women. The abnormal features seen in the repetitive tangling and reemergence of matted hair suggest the possibility of symptomatic medical conditions and the consequent need for medical consultation. However, there were no interpretations of matted hair along the lines of a disease, neither any recognition of the need for medical consultation among the jata-affected women or their families.

**Post-jata emergence stage.** The prevalent gendered being of jata-affected women subscribed to the religious-based discourse of jata in the post-jata emergence stage. The religious-based consultations were performed to uncover the religious-based ascription of matted hair, to learn the possibilities of religious-based permission for jata removal, and to check the attribution of jata with a particular deity. The objectives behind the religious-based consultations provided the nature of religious-based interpretations signifying the matted hair as the deific jata. Ten participants reported religious-based consultations sought by themselves or family members with religious-based entities such as priests or priestesses in the local temple, another jata-affected person, a woman of the god, a priest in the possessed state at the ritual, and a co-traveler devotee woman. Family members of jata-affected women mostly preferred religious-based consultation for matted hair rather than other means.

Through religious-based consultations, jata-affected women received messages that reinforced the deific jata and prevented its removal by imposing a ban on combing or use of other means for jata removal. Among the other messages given, a ban on taking medicine and properly abiding by the religious-based codes were determinative in forcing a religious-based lifestyle. Remarkably, the latest legislation to prevent superstitions entitled as Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other

Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013 (Appendix F) contains legal actions for such practices that prevent intake of medicines for religious-based superstitions.

The process of religious-based signification of matted hair as jata took place through entities such as the relatives with jata experience, community members, priests, and religious-based people in the possessed state. Jata-affected women's ability to get into the possessed state and formal acceptance of religious-based fellowship were the other forms of religious-based signification of jata. The messages received during the religious-based signification of matted hair were prescriptive and mainly highlighted the religious-based ban on removing matted hair by any means (five study participants) and abiding by the religious-based rituals such as visiting the temple of the goddess and performing ritual begging (four study participants). The nature of religious-based signification of matted hair as deific jata involved a distortion of psychological health problems of jata-affected women.

In the post-jata emergence stage, jata was attributed to various deities such as the goddess *Yellamma* of *Saundatti* (four participants), and one participant each attributed jata to the goddess *Yellamma* of *Kokatnur*, the water goddess *Saati Asara*, and the god *Ganapati*. One participant has been undergoing religious-based consultations to identify the attribution of jata. The attribution of jata to a particular deity carries an obligatory sense among the jata-affected women and their families. Therefore, a formal priestly consultation becomes imperative due to the culturally assigned value to the religious-based authority.

The reasons for keeping jata included the religious ascription of jata (six participants), absence of jata removal related information (one participant), unavailability of culturally sensitive methods for jata removal (two participants), illness when considering removal (one participant), and fear about fatalistic implications of jata removal (one participant). The impact of superstitions and their propagation through the cultivated fear among jata-affected women was evident in narratives. The instrumentality of superstitious beliefs showed a discursive control of jata-affected women that kept them within the circumference drawn by the dominant religious-based patriarchy and the jata discourse.

The passive decision-making roles of jata-affected women were apparent as husbands, mothers-in-law, and other relatives made most of the decisions about religious-based processes regarding jata. Moreover, jata-affected women had no autonomy in the religious-based traditions. A preliminary examination of the decision-making process with respect to jata indicated an active role of family members; however, the religious-based institutions and actors effectively controlled the family level decision-making. Jata-affected women had no say about keeping or removing jata. The lack of volition with respect to jata was mostly due to the authority of female elders in the family regarding religious-based matters. The self-determination of jata-affected women was viewed in terms of the larger interests of family.

The religious-based views and connotations about jata highlighted jata as a deific phenomenon, protector from illness, or as an ornament. The jata-affected person as a servant and tree liked by the goddess were some of the connotations used to describe the jata-affected person. Among other reported religious-based connotations, jata-affected

women underscored that a defamation or insult of jata and its religious-based following leads to fatalistic implications such as health problems. While the majority of the connotations emphasize and propagate the deific nature of jata, the connotations signifying jata as a protector from illness established a particular anthropological health belief. Historically, Hebra and Kaposi (1874) came across similar beliefs in European regions that termed matted hair as beneficial and necessary for mental or bodily recovery.

Jata-affected women emphasized the dominant notion that the jata is god given. Among other sources behind jata emergence were the plea made to god for giving a son, the blocked ability to get into the possessed state, service of the goddess, curse by another jata-affected woman on the family, and the neglect toward worship of the goddess in the family. Notably, three participants rejected the dominant non-religious theory behind jata that stated unhygienic practices such as lack of hair combing or cleaning as a reason for jata. Historically, Hebra and Kaposi (1874) reported a case of an interventionist teacher who reduced matting of hair by promoting personal hygiene.

**Jata stage.** The jata stage is the most remarkable stage with rigorous religious-based ritual following about jata where jata-affected women established and maintained their religious-based being. The formation of religious-based bodies was exemplified by processes such as expressions about temporality associated with jata, the physical characteristics of jata, washing related aspects such as frequency, materials used, feeling after washing, the overall washing experience, and the religious-based significance of washing jata. The practices used for covering jata, purpose behind covering, attitude toward hiding jata, and the reasons for visibility of jata were the primary experiences that

revealed the ontological nature of religious-based everyday bodies of jata-affected women.

Among the participants who have undergone jata removal, the shortest jata phase reported was 3-4 years and the longest was around 20-25 years. For participants who had undergone jata removal through religious-based interventions, the minimum time with jata was 14 years and the longest time reported was 20-25 years. For participants who are still carrying jata, the most recent jata was around seven months old, and the longest reported jata was more than 12 years old. The physical characteristics of jata were described highlighting varied forms and sizes; however, length seemed to be the most striking factor in the testimonies of study participants. Jata-affected women used the characteristic physical form of jata to explain the health problems and impact on their mobility and work roles.

The washing of jata was performed mainly on the auspicious days of the goddess such as Tuesdays, Fridays, and full moon (five participants). Apart from the auspicious days, jata washing was performed on need basis such as when feeling lazy. One participant reported washing jata almost daily. The materials used for washing jata involved soaps, shampoos, oil, detergent, local herbal and natural items such as *Shikakai* (*Acacia Concinna*), lemon, cow's urine, and turmeric powder. Most of the traditional substances such as cow's urine and turmeric carried an ethno-religious justification and convention behind its application. One participant shared a good feeling and lightness after washing jata. Some study participants reported a laborious experience of washing jata, and they did so without any help from family members. The experience of washing jata was problematic due to the inability to drain water, which further led to a bad smell

coming from the wet jata. However, one participant shared no significant difficulties in washing jata emphasizing its religious-based importance. The religious-based obligation for washing jata was associated with maintaining the sanctity of jata after the unholy touch. Having a bath was considered obligatory for jata-affected women when they visited a dead person's home or attended the cremation.

Almost all study participants reported the use of the corner of their sari for covering their jata. Two participants used to cover their jata using a cloth. The different purposes behind covering jata were mainly aimed to curb its visibility to others from behind, to avoid jata being seen by others, to avoid embarrassment, and to avoid being identified as a jata-affected woman. The additional cover of jata using a cloth was performed to avoid it being seen by the police at *Saundatti*<sup>114</sup>, and to protect from becoming wet due to rain. Some participants reported no inclination to hide the jata due to its divine ascription and shared positive views about one's identity as a religious-based woman. In some cases, the large size of jata and the uncontrollable factors such as wind removing the sari was responsible for the visibility of jata. While most of the jata-affected women emphasized concealing jata, their inability to keep the jata covered led to frequent visibility and exposed them to the symbolic semiotics and stigma associated with jata. In effect, the previous emphasis on hiding jata gradually acquired less importance due to its inevitable visibility caused by uncontrollable factors. However, the

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<sup>114</sup> At *Saundatti* temple, police used to identify jata-affected women in the queue by observing their hair. Women who were not willing to remove jata tried to hide their matted hair by covering their head. Such jata removal was promoted by the state and the state police was primarily involved to provide security considering the opposition to forced jata removal by devotees.

exhaustive ontological nature of stigma associated with the visibility of jata is challenging to capture<sup>115</sup>.

The jata stage was exemplified by the embodiment of compromised religiosity. Jata-affected women faced religious-based restrictions on eating, work, survival, mobility, social participation, marital and sexual life, and their familial, social, and religious-based status. Moreover, jata-affected women believed that they suffered punitive consequences for their non-compliance to religious-based beliefs. The punitive impact was in the form of health problems for which they sought ethno-religious treatments. The implications of jata on jata-affected women's appearance was undesirable as they reported marginalization from hair beautification, feeling of shyness, altered body feature, unwanted identification as a jata woman, psychological strain, obsessive thinking about social evaluation of one's appearance, and negative remarks about their strange appearance. However, jata-affected women who came across an appreciative religious-based social environment found their religious-based appearance with jata less problematic.

The restrictions on eating prevented jata-affected women from eating outside food, eating meat on auspicious days (Tuesday, Friday, full moon, and no moon), and eating food that carries an unholy touch. The implications of jata on work included adverse health impacts, stressful work experience due to troublesome compliance to unholy touch related religious-based conventions, fear of social blaming for improper

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<sup>115</sup> Jata-affected women are less likely to share about the stigma in details. This could be largely because of the superstitions about sharing on the deific jata. The superstitions imply that any negative talk against jata leads to fatalistic outcomes for jata-affected women and their families. Moreover, the sexual-objectification and the consequent stigma associated with the jata identity have an implicit nature. Jata-affected women do not make it available for phenomenological exploration, primarily due to the gendered cultural contexts and norms imposed on them. Such gendered restriction is evident in terms of the absence of language for women to express their intricate feelings and self-experiential issues.

treatment to jata during work activities, and the religious-based behaviors of co-workers at the workplace. However, when asked directly, seven participants denied any impact of jata on their work. As jata-affected women were not exempted from their usual work roles<sup>116</sup>, they continued working regardless of implications. In some cases, jata adversely affected women's health due to performing work roles with the heavy jata. The religious-based restrictions affected survival of one participant, as she had to leave her home. On the contrary, one study participant shared positive impact of jata on survival of her family as she could feed her family through ritual begging during the episodes of food unavailability.

Jata-affected women experienced problems such as difficulty in carrying the heavy jata during travel and ceremonies, psychological strain due to jata identity, and difficulties in religious-based following of unholy touch during travel. Various symbolic meanings and the physical features of jata adversely affected the mobility and social participation of women. Two participants stopped sexual contact with their partners after the emergence of jata. The pattern of such marginalization of jata-affected women due to restrictions on their sexual life and marital relationship assumed existential implications for one participant. The religious-based control of sexuality of jata-affected women was evident through various practices and religious-based beliefs<sup>117</sup>.

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<sup>116</sup> Being a divine person by carrying deific jata was assumed to exempt jata-affected women from the burden of multiple work roles. However, the researcher found that when it came to the assigned gendered work roles, jata-affected women performed all their assigned duties. Such pattern of experience informs the larger incentive structures associated with the religious-based jata. The respect given to jata-affected women aggravates the social expectations from them to demonstrate the onto-ontological being as a jata-affected woman. At the same time, it does not relieve them from their assigned work roles.

<sup>117</sup> At the end of one interview, the husband of a young jata-carrying study participant shared his beliefs about sexual relationships with jata-affected women. He spoke informally with the researcher in a small hotel. The husband shared his beliefs, which indicated that having sex with a jata-affected woman (his wife) leads to health problems for the man. He reported having health problems after he had sex with his jata-affected wife. He abstained for few months from having sex but ended up having a sexual contact with

The implications of jata symbolism included social embarrassment due to the jata identity, social humiliation and blame for lack of self-care, stigmatization for the jata emergence after marriage, invasion of privacy and individuality due to persistent social nagging, sexual objectification during travel, and humiliating allegations about the artificial creation of jata. One jata-affected participant has been surviving on beggary depending on the religious-based value assigned to jata. Four participants experienced social respect for being-a-jata-affected-woman through its divine ascription. Different symbolic meanings attached to jata were mostly derived from the extra-subjective contexts. The contradictory nature of jata symbolism indicated a religious-based respect given to jata-affected women whereas some women faced sexual objectification due to jata<sup>118</sup>. While four participants highlighted the religious-based respect due to jata, one participant denied any impact on her social status. A few jata-affected women positively endorsed the religious-based status given to jata-affected women.

Jata-affected women reported health problems due to their actions such as non-compliance with unholy touch related conventions, decisions to tamper with or cut jata, and avoiding ritual begging. The health problems occurred due to non-compliance with religious-based beliefs involved burning sensations and big cysts on the head, vomiting and stomachache, lice, and other illnesses. One participant shared about distress in her family as an impact of non-compliance with the religious-based ritual following. There

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his jata-affected wife and since then he has been suffering with a health problem. To substantiate his arguments, he shared that his father died in pain soon after his mother faced the emergence of jata. The husband believed that his father died because of sexual relationship with a jata-affected woman, which is prohibited. The religious-based belief highlighted in this conversation emphasized the presence of a goddess in the body of a jata-affected woman where the mortal beings (men) are expected to maintain sanctity by avoiding sexual contact with their jata-affected partner.

<sup>118</sup> Sexual objectification is rampant in the patriarchal cultures in India. Women's compliance with the gender normative behavior is less assuring of their safety from sexual objectification and its impact. The sexual objectification carries various forms based on the prevalent gendered beliefs about women's appearance, roles, caste, class, and the intersectional status.

was noteworthy reification of health problems of jata-affected women.<sup>119</sup> The physical health problems reported by jata-affected women involved a pinching jata; neck pain and difficulty in neck movement; sleeping-related problems such as bad sleeping postures, inability to sleep on one's back, and failure to fall asleep on time; a feeling of heaviness on the head or side of the head; a degradation of the body; fermenting smell from the wet jata; cysts on the head and the body; burning sensations on body; lice; several types of pain including pain in the waist and backbone; wounds on the scalp; different types of headaches; backache; skin problems; cold; a tight feeling on the head; sun blisters; fever; chills; swelling on the body; and pain on the scalp.

The psychological problems involved indifferent feelings, possessed state, the sick feeling during summer months, irritable mood in the summer, intense fears about jata, feeling of being handicapped, and lack of focus on work. The nature of psychological health problems showed abstract symptomatic features.

The treatment-seeking behavior of jata-affected women was comprised of little or no utilization of health services, priority given to ethno-religious consultations and treatments, reliance on religious-based persons, and self-medication using substances from the local markets. The treatment-seeking behavior of jata-affected women had few detrimental health behaviors such as tolerance of mild health complaints, less inclination to modern treatments, medical treatments only when there was unbearable pain, and casual treatments such as tablets from a local physician.

The religious-based ritual following by jata-affected women included abiding by the unholy touch-related conventions, ritual begging, fasting on auspicious days, setting

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<sup>119</sup> Reification means “the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, in non-human or possibly superhuman terms” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 36).

the god at home, annual ritual worship, daily worship at home, local temple visits, and obligatory annual temple visits. Unholy touch related convention suggested avoiding contact by menstruating women as well as women who have given birth and avoiding houses where a death has taken place. Jata-affected women were expected to maintain the sanctity of their divine body by avoiding the unholy touch as directed by the religious-based discourse. However, jata-affected women found it difficult to stand to the expectations about unholy touch at workplaces.

Ritual begging was performed on auspicious days, weekly or for a full month once a year. The grains collected through ritual begging were used for consumption by making ritual meals and offering it to the deity. One jata-affected woman shared that she got health problems when skipped the ritual begging. The fasting performed by jata-affected women primarily involved eating spiritual foods on auspicious days of the goddess, i.e. Tuesdays and Fridays. However, the jata-affected women observed additional fasting as part of their typical religious-based living. The families affiliated with the jata goddesses followed the obligatory annual temple visits regardless of jata status. However, jata-affected women who come from families that are not affiliated with the goddess but whose jata are attributed to the goddess visited the temple annually. One participant has been visiting the temple of goddess regularly to check the attribution of her jata as guided by a local priest.

Jata-affected women shared about setting the god at home, which involved a more formalized accepting of the fellowship of the goddess and set the idols in the worship place at home. The ritual worship practices were mainly of two types: the annual ritual worship and the regular worship at home. The failure to carry out the ritual worship due

to the overburden of work roles led to feeling of stress for jata-affected women. Despite the high expenses for rituals and temple visits, jata-affected women tend to comply with the religious-based conventions by taking loans.

The structural vulnerability of jata-affected women was due to their spatial position within oppressive social and religious-based structures. The patriarchal structures were visible in affected women's dependency on family members for religious-based ritual following, restricted mobility due to gendered norms, agricultural and livelihood preoccupation leading to limited mobility and improper self-care. One jata-affected woman was trying to seek some monetary assistance through a government scheme for devadasi<sup>120</sup> although she had removed jata. One elder devadasi was homeless and was found in need of health care and support from the state; however, there was no such help available.

The gendered discourse was noticeable when asked direct questions about the adverse impacts of jata. The study participants denied difficulties in fasting or ritual following, discrimination, encounters with physicians, heavy feeling on the head, suffering, health problems, adverse impact on appearance, reduced sleep, and restricted social participation. Furthermore, the gendered discourse was characteristically seen in hesitant, reluctant and abrupt sharing about the impact of jata on mobility, work roles, body, distressful social embarrassment, overall jata experience, and religious-based ritual following. The power structure of language was evident within the gendered discourse as women lacked sufficient linguistic and semantic resources to express their feelings and problems. The gendered expressions about health showed dilution of the intensity of

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<sup>120</sup> There is a monthly pension scheme for old devadasis by the state government. However, getting money through such schemes is challenging for rural and illiterate women due to stringent processes and documentation. Moreover, the monetary assistance provided by such schemes is not sufficient for survival.

health problems (five participants)<sup>121</sup>, sweeping denial health problems due to jata (four participants), and self-portrayal as a healthy person (five participants). The gendered health expressions were influenced by social constructs where complaining about health problems were seen as a demeaning trait.

**Pre-jata removal stage.** The jata experience involved a range of adverse feelings such as helplessness due to the impact on one's hair, restricted travelling, and abnormal posture while sleeping. Other feelings shared by jata-affected women included depression about the course of life after jata emergence; bad feelings due to the disrespect of one's faith by family members and society; distress due to defaming social talk; apprehension about getting cooperation from social members; anger due to the distressful family situation; and desperate feeling for jata removal due to the foul smell and incidental health problems.

Some study participants shared view of their children in terms of bad feelings among children about their jata, children yelling at them for keeping jata, negligence from children, and children's resistance to the religious-based ritual practices. Except for the frequent quarrels with husband for keeping jata for one participant, the spouses of jata-affected women mostly played supportive and facilitating roles. The supportive roles played by spouses were mainly regarding the jata-related religious-based following, illness of jata-affected women, and jata removal. The attitude of the husband toward jata-

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<sup>121</sup> The researcher, based on the expressions of jata-affected women, interpreted the dilution of the intensity of health problems. While it is totally up to the physicians to decide the severity and intensity of health problems, the researcher concluded the sub-phenomenon as 'dilution of intensity'. This was mostly due to the attempts of affected women to deny health problems sweepingly. Moreover, the researcher's interpretation was based on the extrapolation with other gendered health expressions where women emphatically rejected their health problems and portrayed themselves as healthy persons despite having illness. Notably, the portrayal of oneself as a healthy person was associated with avoiding health treatment and thus creating fewer nuisances for their families. Altogether, the gendered health expressions provided a semantic structure for interpretations of health problems and the researcher relied on such hermeneutics to reach this conclusion.

affected wife led to the desecration of one jata-affected woman. The attitude of family members toward jata-affected women highlighted a supportive role in the religious-based ritual following for some participants. For jata-affected women who were in the subordinate roles such as a daughter-in-law, their mothers-in-law were the most active decision-making authorities on the religious-based conduct and control of their jata experience. Most jata-affected women did not share about attitude of their relatives in explicit manner.

The community members played a positive role for untangling matted hair during the emergence stage and later provided cooperation for the religious-based ritual following by offering required assistance and monetary donations. The negative roles played by community members were detrimental and mainly involved overwhelming religious-based suggestions, stigmatization, sexual objectification, and suspicious attitudes toward the marital alliance with children of jata-affected women. A pattern of gender-based helping behaviors was seen in the experiences of three participants where women from the neighborhood provided support. The attitude of health care providers toward the jata-affected women indicated a fearful mindset while providing treatments. Furthermore, denial of medical treatment, improper treatment, and a casual approach in treating jata-affected woman constituted the attitude of physicians. A lack of cultural sensitivity among health care providers underscored ethical deficit within the health care system.

Among the motivations for jata removal, the availability of culturally sensitive method of untangling, suggestions from family members for removal, and an empowering message from a young female relative were the primary factors. Among

other motivating factors, absence of jata tradition in the family and a conviction from the futile feeling about the heaviness on one's head due to jata, led to jata removal. In some cases, the health problems, ontological security-related issues such as an inability to carry a heavy load on the head, and apprehensions about care in old age motivated jata-affected women to undergo jata removal. For one participant, the distress due to her son's early death led to jata removal. Her jata removal further exemplified a termination of the relationship with the goddess and a protest against the inability of the goddess to provide expected security<sup>122</sup>. The motivations for jata removal were arbitrary in nature due to individualized processes and subjectively derived psychological standpoints. However, a tangential existence of external stimulus was noticeable in most cases, mainly from the activists and volunteers.

The jata removal referrals came from various sources such as community members, former-jata affected women who removed jata through activists, female student volunteers, young student relatives, and village-based physicians. Female volunteers played a significant role in motivating jata-affected women to go for jata removal.

**Jata removal stage.** Jata-affected women and their family members emphasized on religious-based permission of deities for jata removal and an immersion of removed jata along the lines of religious-based conventions. A positive impact of religious-based permission was seen on the psychological composition of jata-affected women. Activists used the ritual permission from the deity in efficient manner to avoid psychological complications among jata-affected women who chose to undergo removal.

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<sup>122</sup> The participant did not share this directly. However, the words used by the participant and her emotional disposition during the expression guided the inference.

The cultural beliefs and preferences for jata removal included untangling by hands, no use of scissors, avoiding public exposure, jata removal at the temple, jata removal through religious-based procedures, importance to the volitional removal by jata-affected woman. One participant who had undergone a religious-based jata removal preferred public removal of jata at the temple of the deity, whereas another participant who had undergone jata removal through activists preferred privacy. The prominent beliefs that restricted jata removal were the fear of fatalistic implications on family members, apprehensions about suffering, and religious-based restriction on jata removal without knowing its attribution. The fear cultivated through superstitious beliefs was a major controlling factor in all jata processes.

The psychological composition of jata-affected women showed less explicit expressions about motivations for removal and presence of fears and apprehensions. For most participants, jata removal involved an empowered feeling due to the ritual-based permission from the goddess or a substantial self-motivation for jata removal. For some participants, there was a visible dispirited attitude toward jata removal and a lack of self-motivation; such factors indicated a possibility of forced jata removal. The lack of self-motivation is likely to have ended in a negative attitude and self-blame in jata-affected women after jata removal. The participant who suspected to have undergone a forced jata removal without proper capacity building prior to the removal shared a sense of regret about her jata removal.

The pathways for jata removal included a culturally insensitive jata removal at *Saundatti* by the government, a ritual-based jata removal at *Saundatti* or a local temple, jata falling off on its own, partial cutting of jata by self-decision, and the activist-led jata

removal. Most jata-affected women viewed the culturally insensitive jata removal at Saundatti conducted by the government negatively. The main features of the activist-led jata removal were the untangling by hand, respecting jata-affected women's preference for privacy, photo-reflexive orientation<sup>123</sup>, pre-jata removal health education, and post-operative monitoring, and easy availability for consultation. Jata-affected women found untangling of jata by hand as the most culturally sensitive approach, hence preferred activists groups that used such methods. However, the activist-led jata removal included some issues such as forceful stretching of hair during the untangling, insensitive communication with jata-affected women, lack of proper training of volunteers, time-consuming jata removal process, and health problems immediately after the jata removal. The insensitive communication from activists involved accusations of artificial creation of jata and disrespect for the religiosity of the jata-affected women<sup>124</sup>.

**Post-jata removal stage.** After jata removal, women reported a feeling of lightness. Two participants regretted the loss of their religious-based status after jata removal. One participant who has undergone jata removal through activists shared regret about jata removal and found to have undergone a forced jata removal<sup>125</sup>. Another study participant, whose jata fell off after 14 years, emphatically shared about the loss of religious-based respect and termed it as a form of social discrimination. Nine study participants reported absence of health problems or any suffering after jata removal.

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<sup>123</sup> The activist-led jata removal interventions involve motivating the jata-affected woman for removal by showing the photo documentation of previous jata removal events. Such photo-reflexive orientations trigger a non-threatening communication between the motivator and the jata-affected woman.

<sup>124</sup> The activist mentioned is a local council representative who accused the study participant of artificial creation of jata. The activist used to yell at the jata-affected woman for ritual begging and used to threaten her saying she would cut her jata off.

<sup>125</sup> It is challenging to assess whether the jata removal was forced or consensual. In case of the participant referred here, the event description by jata removal activist and testimony of participant suggested a forced jata removal.

Except for one participant, six participants who had undergone activist-led jata removal reported positive health status after jata removal. The participant who has undergone a partial removal of jata blamed herself for jata cutting, as she believed that her act had led to health problems.

The impact of jata removal or falling off showed the healthy growth of hair, improved hair care, no reemergence of matted hair, and some social appreciation of the changed look. One participant registered a sense of loss of beauty after her jata removal. The participant who reported the feeling of loss of beauty after jata removal shared about the social appreciation of her religious-based jata look within her cultural environment.

After jata removal, the patterns of religious-based ritual following showed continued abidance mainly among jata-affected women whose families are affiliated with the deity. Some participants have continued fasting and unholy touch related religious-based following after jata removal. Only one participant stopped the religious-based temple visits and the fasting after jata removal. A high religious-based makeup seemed associated with religious-based ritual following regardless of jata status as seen in two participants. The change in the individual outlook after jata removal was characterized by views that put jata as a health problem and jata removal as a necessary action. One participant who had a feeling of regret about jata removal maintained a staunch religious-based jata outlook. The social outlook experienced by jata-removed women was comprised of oppositional views about jata removal. The mixed social views involved miniscule appreciation, blame put on the jata-affected woman for removal, reinforcement of superstitious fears about fatalistic implications, less respectful treatment, reduced involvement in social talking, and fewer invitations to social gatherings.

## Limitations of Study

There are few limitations to this phenomenological study essential to be acknowledged. For this study, participants were females of different ages who have undergone or were undergoing the jata experience and the researcher was a male. Such gender polarity formed the gendered context of the research process. While the researcher was explicit in his fore structure and reported biases, there could still be some amount of influence coming from the gendered environment constructed by the cultural context, study participants, and the researcher. The researcher cannot be considered fully capable of controlling such biases. The methodological implications of such possible implicit bias can be derived from what Heidegger (1982) warned:

In more precise language, phenomenological investigation is explicit effort applied to the method of ontology. However, such endeavors, their success or failure, depend primarily on how far phenomenology has assured for itself the object of philosophy-how far, in correspondence with its own principle, it is unbiased enough in the face of what the things themselves demand. (p. 328)

The hermeneutic interpretive processes in phenomenology assume an emic position of the researcher in understanding the experiences of jata-affected women. However, there are no standardized indicators to assess the quality of the emic position of the researcher except detailed research report and declaration of biases.

The major limitation of this study was the high rejection rate. The researcher was exceedingly constrained by patriarchal and cultural factors as family members declined to allow some women to participate in the study. Almost all interviews required permission from their family members. Among religious-based factors, the prevalent superstitions<sup>126</sup> influenced and shaped the particular hermeneutic context of this study. The instances of

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<sup>126</sup> Saying anything negative about jata or sharing with disrespect to jata in any non-religious context can lead to fatalistic implications for the jata-affected person and her family.

restrictive sharing about jata due to superstitions are viewed as an ontological aspect of the phenomenon within the Heideggerian interpretive phenomenology.

Within the study sample, the researcher failed to recruit a sufficient number of devadasi participants due to religious-based constraints. More jata-affected devadasi women could have provided comprehensive phenomenological structure of jata experience for their sub-group within the larger sample. It should be noted that phenomenology does not emphasize on the representation of sub-groups within the sample. The researcher was constrained by the unavailability of credible information about jata-affected women with temples, government offices, and activists, which hampered the flow of data collection.

In view of linguistic competencies of the researcher, the recruitment of participants was kept limited to the Marathi speaking population. The restricted linguistic context of the study affected the semantic and sociolinguistic perspectives from the neighboring state where the temples of jata-related goddesses are located<sup>127</sup>. Due to the researcher's limited linguistic competency to only one local language, the folklore and literature in other regional languages was not referred which might have hampered the ethno methodological rigor in the data analysis. Participants mentioned several local connotations in the course of data collection for which an etymological exploration was sought by the researcher to understand the meanings. However, there was no evaluation of the meanings interpreted by the researcher beyond few experts.

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<sup>127</sup> The three major temples associated with jata practice are the *Yellamma* temples located at *Saundatti* and *Kokatnur*, and the *Mayakka* temple located at *Chinchali*. All three places are located in the state of *Karnataka* where the local language is *Kannada*. The folklore available in *Kannada* could have been a great ethno-methodological source for the present study.

Among the participants who have undergone jata removal through activist-led interventions, there was no diversity in terms of removal by different activist groups in the study context. The primary reason for this lacuna was the lack of cooperation from the representatives of different activist groups approached by the researcher.

The researcher attempted to incorporate the diversity among study participants based on his theoretical understanding and the perceptible characteristic diversity witnessed during the research process. However, there could be many implicit factors in the phenomenon that are in uncovered state, therefore, might have not been incorporated in the study sample (e.g. the sexual projections of jata-affected women). While such factors could have provided the much-needed diversity among the study participants, it should be noted that due to the gendered research setting and consequent limitations, some private aspects of jata-affected women's lives were not explored or probed beyond certain acceptable cultural limits. Furthermore, the inclusion-exclusion criteria controlled the selection of participants, which might have affected the diversity among the participants.

The presence of family members, spouse, relatives, and facilitators during some interviews was unexpected and uncontrollable. However, study participants were consented about the presence of such entities prior to the interview<sup>128</sup>. It might appear that such unexpected factors during the interviews might have limited the rigor of inquiry. However, as the ontological nature of context was revealing throughout the data collection process, such unexpected events were beyond any a priori theoretical considerations.

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<sup>128</sup> Most participants emphasized on the presence of family members during the interview. It was mostly because of the rigid patriarchal system where talking with stranger males about sensitive religious-based matters is prohibited for women.

Due to the high work burden on some study participants, their interviews were kept short based on the researcher's judgment during the interview process. In some instances, the study participants requested the researcher to keep the interview short considering their work obligations. The reduced length of the interview might have affected the depth of exploration on some aspects of jata-affected women's experiences. Another constricting factor for the short interviews was the superstitions about the fatalistic impact of sharing on matted hair beyond the religious-based discourses. However, the researcher did not consider such factors as influential objective factors limiting the inquiry. On the contrary, the researcher used such intricate hermeneutic experiences to conceptualize the context for interpretation and the constitutive phenomenological value of it.

Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology is explicit about the epistemological limitations in attaining understanding about the whole being. Heidegger (1962) contended, "Not only has the hermeneutical situation given us no assurance of "having" the whole being up to now; it is even questionable whether the whole being is attainable at all, and whether a primordial, ontological interpretation of Da-sein must not get stranded-on the kind of being of the thematic being itself" (p. 215). Within its hermeneutic existence, the being of jata-affected women carries dynamic interpretive nature. Therefore, the thematic analysis presented by the researcher should not be considered as *the ultimate being* of jata-affected women.

The exclusive reliance on the lived experiences of jata-affected women might have excluded comprehensive accounts of their family members and other entities from the social environment such as priests, relatives, shamans, and significant others. This

Heideggerian hermeneutic study is not generalizable overall due to its context and cultural practice specific nature and findings. However, conceptual generalizations of certain patterns and interpretations are possible, particularly for the global population affected by the problems of matting of hair and harmful cultural practices.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Based on this study, there are numerous implications and recommendations for different stakeholders associated with the problem of matting of hair.

**Jata-affected women.** The researcher has explored and conceptually presented the complex social environment around jata-affected women, their religiosity, and the religious-based ritual practices. The symbolic meanings attached to matted hair signify matted hair as the deific and religious-based jata. The researcher feels a need of reevaluation of deific connotations of matted hair in conjunction with the physical and psychological health problems associated with it. The spiritual disposition among jata-affected women and their narratives of religiosity were not coherent with their non-reflective engagement with the religious-based ritual practices about jata. Therefore, the early stage thinking on matting hair and its implications is likely to determine what within the cultural practices can stand up to the humanist scrutiny hence should be encouraged. Jata-affected women, on their part, should go for such thought processes and self-advocate for the thinking space.

Although jata-affected women believed that jata is a deific phenomenon, there is no mythological or spiritual literature that directly establishes the symptomatic illness manifestation as a divine phenomenon. On the other hand, it was apparent that jata-affected women internalized beliefs from their surrounding or as imposed on them by the

larger patriarchal politico-religious structures. In this context of matting of hair, the researcher recommends a value-based and open-minded examination of one's religiosity, spiritual values, and its impact on one's physical and psychological well-being.

The treatment-seeking behavior of jata-affected women showed tendencies toward avoiding formal modern medical treatments and reliance on the ethno-religious solutions for their health problems. In this respect, the study showed that accessing medical services as a jata-affected woman or jata-removed woman is less likely to compromise religiosity. In fact, a few jata-affected women had successfully sought help from health services for severe health problems during their jata stage. The ethno-religious entities mostly controlled the use traditional medicines. In this regard, the researcher believes accessing herbalist services from specialists for jata-affected women's health problems would be effective and culturally relevant. In this respect, the researcher recommends empowering jata-affected women for self-advocacy in their right for a better access to appropriate health care.

The substantial lack of knowledge among jata-affected women about the global prevalence of matting of hair was evident. Women who have undergone jata removal can consider gathering scientific information and disseminating it through their assertive voluntary contributions in jata removal actions. Matting of hair shows the control of women's body by the patriarchal system that has subordinated women's right on their body and health. Jata-affected women were found to advocate right on their body in a symbolic manner. Such process involved putting jata as deific thing where the affected woman has the sole right over the jata process. The researcher feels it is essential for women to speak and advocate their right on body and health without relying on the

religious-based discourses of jata. Seeking help from empowering social work services on gender-related issues can surely help coming forward to practice rights for all females.

**Family members of jata-affected women.** The implicit and explicit patterns of ill-treatment of jata-affected women by their family members were revealed in the study. The family members of jata-affected women have a humanist obligation to identify their problematic behaviors that victimize and marginalize the jata-affected women. In some instances, the family members found to have actively aided the religious-based signification of matted hair as jata and left no opportunity for the consent of the jata-affected woman. On the other hand, family members who protested against the religious-based signification of matted hair as jata did not follow a culturally sensitive approach for educating the jata-affected woman. Therefore, the role of family members becomes crucial in the jata practice. Furthermore, to some extent, the stigma associated with jata is borne by the family members of jata-affected women. Therefore, it is recommended that families should go for a rational collective thinking and judgment about compliance with the oppressive jata practice.

The dissociated manner of thinking among family members putting the jata-affected woman as a victim or a carrier of their family's religious-based obligation of jata was evident in some narratives. Such attitudes of family members devalued the fundamental human rights of jata-affected women. On the other hand, the supportive and facilitative roles of family members were found helpful for jata-affected women in keeping their religiosity intact. In this respect, providing enabling and supportive environment for women to have an informed decision about their body and religiosity is a humanist and a legislative responsibility of jata-affected women's family members. The

emergence of jata in a situation of prevalent physical and psychological illness highlighted negligence of women's health. In this respect, family members are equally accountable for the emergence of jata and degradation of women's health.

**Religious-based entities.** The role of religious-based entities that provide religious-based advice and services to jata-affected women and their family members is important in the physical and psychological well-being of jata-affected women. The Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013 (Appendix F) stipulated several clauses, which view actions such as preventing a person from seeking medical treatment, and carrying out or encouraging inhumane activities in quest for some bounty or rewards as punishable crime. The messages from religious-based entities directed a jata-affected woman to stop taking medication and maintaining personal hygiene in the name of religious-based conventions. Such unlawful acts are liable for legal actions.

The researcher suggests legally mandatory public disclosure of information about the practices of temples pertaining to matting of hair. It is in the best interest of devotees if independent committees are set by the government to monitor such activities simultaneously. The priestly fees for the temple-based jata removal were unbearable for some jata-affected women. In this respect, the temple administration should respect the cultural preferences of jata-affected women to undergo religious-based jata removal at the temple and exempt such fees.

**Policymakers.** There is an indefensible gap in the legal framework in India when it comes to the problem of matting of hair. While the devadasi practice is legally banned in India, the religious-based practices derived from it such as the jata practice, are still

being followed. Based on the evidential testimonies and patterns of victimization identified in the study, the researcher recommends a constitutional ban explicitly articulated in the legal framework and executed widely. Along the same lines, comprehensive legal education and awareness program is implied. Such program should be carried out as a flagship program by the state.

The culturally insensitive forced jata removal campaigns are detrimental to the human rights of jata-affected women. Considering the negative feelings among women about the forced jata removal, a policy-based prohibition is suggested by this study. The symbolic role of jata in attracting the religious-based donations can act as a trigger for keeping jata, particularly for poor women from lower economic strata who face stressful livelihood situations. An adequate provision of livelihood opportunities and food security through enabling economic environment for women from lower economic strata is recommended to reduce the religious-based beggary through jata.

The use of harmful substances for washing jata, the improper access and availability of health services and necessary basic infrastructure was explicit in the experiences of jata-affected women. In this respect, policy-based steps to ensure necessary support and services for rural women to uphold their health and human rights are acclaimed by the researcher. The particular problems of elder jata-affected women show unavailability of health services, homelessness, poverty, and beggary. It implies the need for the state to create policy-based measures for elder persons.

**Social work practitioners.** Social work is a discipline with a knowledge base, professional standards, values, ethics, licensure and certification, and a structured social work education (Cnaan & Dichter, 2008). In view of the characteristic features of jata-

affected women as revealed in this study (e.g., little or no education, degraded social and religious status, and little or no informed choice), social work practitioners are obligated to create culturally sensitive platforms for jata-affected women.

There are no formal, institutional, and knowledge-based social work interventions to address the problems associated with matting of hair. In such scenario, social work practitioners can integrate the problem of matting of hair in other social work interventions. In any case, the need for developing effective social intervention program for the problem of matting of hair is imperative and ethically obliged for social workers. The problem of jata is closely associated with the spatial locations of temples of jata-related deities where the prevalence of jata is comparatively high. The social work practitioners in such regions are advised to create and implement targeted awareness programs for communities about the ill effects of matting of hair. Furthermore, institutional social workers can affiliate themselves with activist groups in jata removal movement and provide referrals for jata removal.

The politico-religious structures uncovered in the study showed significant structural vulnerability of jata-affected women and their family members. The specialized social work interventionists such as feminist social workers are suggested to work on cultural practices surrounding matting of hair through their sub-disciplinary policy practice for rights-based empowerment. Moreover, the intricate patterns of violence associated with jata practice are one of the most neglected social problems. The researcher recommends feminist social workers to document such forms of violence and advocate legal services for the vulnerable and suffering population groups.

Health social work involves multidisciplinary professional engagements with medical practitioners, nurses, and in some cases, legal institutions. In the light of the paucity of evidence on matting of hair in medical science, health social workers have a challenging scenario while developing evidence-based advocacy on matted hair and health problems faced by jata-affected women. In this respect, the substantial phenomenological evidence on health issues of jata-affected women and the nature of etiopathogenesis can inform policy practice on the jata issue. Social work focuses on social policy as a guiding instrument for affecting the well-being of vulnerable participants (Dickens, 2009; NASW, 1999); hence, social work practitioners have a professional and ethical obligation to advocate and participate in policy implementation and change (Wyers, 1991) on matting of hair.

The problems faced by jata-affected elders range from health, housing, and poverty. Considering the lack of geriatric social work interventions for rural women in India, social work practitioners are recommended to extend their services to elderly and advocate for more support services. Similarly, another vulnerable category of jata-affected women who are single mothers was seen facing gender-based violence. Social work practitioners are advised to consider such vulnerable women and their contexts of vulnerability to intervene as well as advocate for change. The need for policy advocacy on gender issues at all levels of practice such as “at the macro level, through fenders and state legislation and in the executive branches of government; at mezzo levels, in communities and organizations; and at micro levels in direct practice with individual, families and groups” (Reichert, 2003, p. 67) remains obligatory for social workers in the context of harmful cultural practices about matting of hair.

**Global social work education.** The preamble of the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) has outlined the role of scientific inquiry and teaching of professional skills to provide effective and ethical social work services (Reamer, 2001). Social work practice on matting of hair demands rigorous understanding of global human rights issues and legislation. The cultural competency required for social workers to address the oppressive global cultural practices such as genital mutilation in Africa can benefit from the findings of this study considering similar religious-based context and gender issues.

Sewpaul and Jones (2004) have recommended a holistic framework for social work training to increase efficacy of social work interventions in diverse gender, social, and cultural contexts. The global standard for social work education and training requires an incorporation of cultural and ethnic diversity and gender inclusiveness with a broader agenda such as “promoting sensitivity to, and increasing knowledge about, cultural and ethnic diversity, and gender analysis” (Sewpaul & Jones, 2004, p. 11). The caste, class, culture, demography, and religion-related diversity and intersectionality among jata-affected women provide complex interplay of gender intersectionality. Ethics education is a major component of social work education and professional growth (Reamer, 2001). The professional ability to decipher between the religiosity and superstition is informed by this study. Therefore, it can be useful in guiding the pedagogical process of ethics education in social work.

**Social work education in India.** Sir Dorabji Tata trust in Bombay (Mumbai) established the first social work education institute in India in 1936 under the leadership of an American missionary Sir Clifford Manshardt (Mandal, 1989). The gender

sensitization is integral to social work education in India (Anand, 2009) has been done through gender awareness and equity (Anand, 2009; Gandhi, 1998, 2001). Anand (2009) advocated the reconceptualization of social issues using feminist perspectives through questioning gendered beliefs internalized from the socialization process and further augmented in the social work practice. In this context, this first comprehensive exploratory study on the issue of matting of hair, qualifies as a foundational evidence-based resource that can guide social work practice.

In India, social work education institutions remained saturated within urban areas and underserved rural India (Kumar, 1993). The dominant rural prevalence of matting of hair revealed in this study can remain ignored due to the demographic inequity in social work education. There is a need to restructure the institutional inequity to ensure proper redress of matting of hair.

Social work education in India has been facing several issues: lack of relevant social work textbooks that consider the Indian context correctly (Nagpaul, 1993), inappropriateness of existing social work models (Bose, 1992) and improper system to understand diversity and empowerment related scenarios (Mohan, 1993). The comprehensive ethno methodological, anthropological and ethno-religious understanding of matting of hair provided in this study can be a useful guide to developing further knowledge on similar issues of rural and indigenous population in India.

Mahtani (2004) emphasized the need of developing social work practice models based on qualitative methodologies to reduce the distance between research and practice. This study has documented the phenomenological nature of matting of hair and the politico-religious complexity involved in it. Hence, this qualitative study can be a

valuable qualitative guide for development of social work intervention models on matting of hair. Furthermore, this study can act as a useful resource for social work intervention research as it demonstrates the utility of Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology in social work knowledge production and intervention development.

In view of the health and human rights marginalization of jata-affected women, the phenomenon of matting of hair requires formal incorporation in curriculums of disciplines such as social work and gender studies across the country. As a large number of women from the oppressed social groups are victimized through the cultural practices surrounding matting of hair, it is essential to conduct research on various aspects of the problem. Developing field action projects and designing pilot studies on the possible social work intervention appears to be the most feasible approach to intervening on the problem of matting of hair.

**International social work.** The matting of hair among women in India as well as various other manifestations of the same problem across the globe is a relevant international social work issue that needs attention from the global social work community. As the international social work focuses on issues of “international concerns” which can be worked “at either international or domestic levels” and “may involve international exchanges” (Gray & Fook, 2004, p. 630), the phenomenon of matting of hair convincingly appears relevant. The complex patterns of marginalization of jata-affected women in India makes it imperative for the international social work to act as it considers “any social work activity anywhere in the world, directed toward global social justice and human rights, in which local practice is dialectically linked to the global context” (Haug, 2005, p. 133). The historical progression of matting of hair as

a neglected health problem highlights the challenges involved in revealing many other similar global issues that are waiting for social justice and endorsement of human rights. The international social work community would be an active actor for the oppressed population groups across the globe.

The advanced cultural frameworks operationalized through international social work are an effective tool to advocate new health and human rights paradigm. The victimization of jata-affected women by imposition of cultural practices makes it a concern for global social work due to the common cornerstone values of social work as documented by Healy (2007):

Belief in the worth and dignity of each person; commitment to non-discrimination and equality; acceptance of the rights of persons to self-determination and to confidentiality in their dealings with social workers; and recognition that social workers have multiple ethical responsibilities to those served, to the profession, to employing institutions, to fellow professionals and to society at large.(p. 16)

**Social work research.** The lived experience of jata-affected women throws light on the various aspects of women's health, and human rights experience across the family, society, and various institutions. The revelation of the ontological nature of gender issues such as the sexual objectification, control of jata-affected women's body and sexuality, stigma, and cultural reproduction of oppressive practices, the oppressive religious-based patriarchy informs theory proliferations (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001) in prevalent gender-related theoretical conceptualizations in social work.

The limitations of disciplinary epistemologies such as social work, medicine, and psychology in knowledge production on the complex problems such as matting of hair among women are evident. Hence, the researcher suggests multidisciplinary collaborations where the epistemological limitations of disciplines engaged in research on

the matting of hair counterbalance each other. Notably, the phenomenological explanations of matting of hair as a health problem suggest the need of collaborative knowledge production between social work and medical science. Such collaboration should help to avoid the methodological hyper-specialization leading to a hierarchy among disciplines (Béhague, Gonçalves, & Victora, 2008) further affecting the health and human rights of jata-affected women. This study on jata-affected women's health experience underscores the scientific disciplinary stature of social work research in the complex multidisciplinary context of health issues.

Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology showed its exploratory ability as a social work research method in this study, particularly on the social work practice research and health social work. The hermeneutic context of matting of hair documented in this study provides culturally informed evidence for the critical questioning to existing understanding about women's health and adequately informs the translational science (Brekke, Ell, & Palinkas, 2007). The utility of Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology in social work research was established in terms of its ability to generate experienter-based scientific evidence from narratives.

The ethical requirements for social work studies can take a turn toward a more dynamic understanding of context-specific ethics in multi-cultural contexts. The evolving nature of the ethical requirement for social work research due to the impact of unexplored diversity in the research contexts questioned the predefined theoretical trajectory of research ethics. It is a major social work research problem identified by the researcher during this study. The conceptual integration of the dynamic ethical requirement derived from the process of data collection must advance the epistemological investigation for

sufficiency of ethical requirements in social work research. Nonetheless, the researcher recommended further consideration of the ontological existence of such active research ethics paradigm to augment the ethical requirements of social work research.

**Activists.** The cultural insensitivity among various activist groups in their communication with jata-affected women and their families, as well as the approaches used for jata removal, are detrimental to the ethical principles of human services. Furthermore, the cultural preferences of jata-affected women indicated almost non-negotiable emphasis on avoiding scissors and a prior religious-based ritual permission for jata removal. In this regard, the researcher recommends development of an evidence-based culturally sensitive jata removal model by different activist groups keeping in mind the preferences of jata-affected women.

The scientism in the portrayal of jata removal interventions, as reflected in the communication with jata-affected women, was insufficiently informed about the nature of gender issues, patriarchal structures, and the lack of empowering structural spaces for women. In such context, jata removal activists need to develop the utmost possible cultural competency that endorses human rights of jata-affected women. The diversity within jata removal interventions indicated existence of diverse values and approaches. The researcher suggests federating among different activist groups to develop a unified understanding on the basic values such as respect of the human rights of jata-affected women and their religiosity.

The role played by school-going female relatives in providing referral for jata removal, motivation, facilitation, and the actual untangling of matted hair in a sensitive manner, was effective and appreciated by the jata-removed women. In this regard,

maintaining a database of trained jata removal volunteers to utilize their expertise for training new volunteers would be useful. Moreover, training of volunteers on an extensive scale and professional management of volunteers could be helpful for jata removal activities.

Jata-affected women experienced forcible stretching of hair during jata removal. Keeping in mind the problems faced by jata-affected women, the researcher recommends development of health education modules and code of ethics for different stakeholders associated with jata removal activities. Designing and organizing periodic training for volunteers and activists to upgrade them with latest knowledge and intervention skills would be useful toward structuring and professionalizing jata removal interventions.

The inadequate self-motivation among some jata-affected women who have undergone jata removal is a matter of great concern for the ethical framework of social work. Considering the possibilities of unethical jata removal without appropriate consent of jata-affected women due to pressure from family members, the researcher suggests separate consent processes for jata-affected women and their families. Furthermore, the consent process is suggested to include documentation of prevalent health problems so that a customized jata removal process can be designed with proper professional consultation with physicians. Moreover, for jata-affected women who have some prevalent medical conditions, there should be medical help arranged prior to the jata removal.

**Human rights advocates.** Matting of hair is a historically neglected and reified health problem mostly seen among vulnerable population groups. While health is seen as a global human right, the religious-based sentiments attached to matted hair add a great

deal of confusion about its consideration. This study identified inexplicit and insufficient consent and implicit forms of coercion of women for subscribing to the cultural practices about matting of hair through religious-based beliefs. In any context of cultural relativism about human rights, it is a clear violation of jata-affected women's fundamental human rights. In this context, the researcher suggests consideration of matting of hair as a harmful cultural practice and human rights violation. The symbolic imposition in matting of hair assumes a structural victimization of women, hence an obvious violation of their human rights. In other words, the religious-based value assigned to matting of hair has been an instrument of victimization of women as revealed by this study. Furthermore, the negative health impacts of matting of hair and the life cycle based deprivation of affected women from health and human development violates their fundamental human right to health and quality of living within the existing constitutional framework in India. In such case, human rights advocates need to use evidence-based approaches for advocating on behalf of jata-affected women while respecting their religious freedom. All human rights advocacy initiatives should be based on the existing anthropological and ethno-methodological knowledge base on indigenous traditions while dealing with the issue of matting of hair.

**Health care providers.** The health problems directly associated with jata or caused due to the compliance with religious-based jata practices have been improperly addressed by the institutional health care. Moreover, the lack of cultural competency among health care providers in communication, health education, and treatment provision for jata-affected women has aggravated marginalization. Such lack of ethical professional standards in the service professions such as medicine is detrimental to the health and

human rights of jata-affected women. Therefore, the researcher recommends incorporation of a comprehensive cultural competency component in the medical education and training. Such actions can enable physicians to devise appropriate medical intervention strategies and active institutional outreach. Considering the fear among physicians while treating jata-affected women, the researcher suggests revision in the present medical education system in India to ensure adequate training to deal with culturally complex health problems.

The incorporation of medico-legal aspects associated with the harmful cultural practices is the primary action needed to empower the medical field to address issues caused by cultural practices such as jata. Considering the incremental health implications of jata, referral of jata-affected women to the jata removal activists is essential for the government and private health care providers. The importance of such referrals in reducing the prevalence of matted hair is paramount. Therefore, the researcher recommends an institutional mechanism for such referral process as a legal obligation on the health care providers. Considering the prevalence of jata among young mothers and female children, jata should be considered as integral part of health education on maternal care.

The data collection process and testimonies of jata-affected women uncovered the absence of statistical data on the prevalence of the jata problem probably due to the lack of institutional reporting. The government and private health care providers are the best entry points to register the scale of jata-affected status in the community considering the likelihood of jata-affected women's institutional encounter with medical services. Therefore, the researcher suggests a multidisciplinary committee for the development of

such guidelines on documenting jata practices and prevalence. A similar data-keeping protocol is needed for the village councils. School-based health monitoring of hair problems related disorders can help in early detection of matting of hair.

The possible institutional mechanism that can deal with the issue of matted hair should necessarily involve activists, health care providers, educational institutions, village councils, political and bureaucratic representatives, parents 'and family associations. In light of guidelines by global policy institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO), and several global and regional human rights declarations, medical education should integrate the rights-based approach and it should be translated into the actual institutional mechanism and service delivery.

**Institutional review boards.** The data collection process of this study informed the ethical requirement of privacy of research participants. The a priori consideration of privacy, in its present conceptualization, assumed objective isolation of study participants from their intersubjective contexts of everydayness. Furthermore, some study participants viewed their lived experience of matting of hair as a collective experience with their families. Thus, the ontological structure of privacy carried a particular context-specific structure and implied similar consideration. The ontological variability attached to the ethical requirement of privacy suggests consideration of research ethics within the dynamic research process of the study rather than taking it as a standalone ethical requirement. Furthermore, there was a possibility of harm to study participants due to their maintaining of privacy for the interview in rigid patriarchal context. In view of such experience during the study, the researcher suggests reasonable incorporation of dynamic and emerging ethical requirements in the IRB protocols.

## **Future Research**

In view of the findings of this study, there are several disciplinary and multidisciplinary areas for future research. There are vast arrays of sub-phenomenon associated with matting of hair that carry the disciplinary importance for social work and implicate baseline research on matting of hair. The diversity of methods followed by the activists and religious-based institutions need a comparative analysis to understand its effectiveness with respect to cultural sensitivity, soundness, relevance, and acceptance by affected women and their families. Substantial social work practice research is needed on the role of volunteers in activist-led jata removals. The research on volunteers must focus on their personal characteristics, skills, impact of gender of volunteers, and more importantly, their community-based function in jata removal.

Historically, social work in India has not intervened on the issue of matting of hair in efficient manner. Several studies are needed on the negligence of matting of hair as a women's health issue by social work, feminists, and medicine. Such studies can throw light on the structural characteristics of these disciplines and their intervention systems. Furthermore, such research will be able to enhance the efficacy of existing institutions and their approaches. In view of the inefficacy of existing legislation in India, additional research is suggested on the ratification of global health and human rights conventions and its policy incorporation with respect to the religious-based harmful cultural practices such as matting of hair.

Social work provides a scientifically produced knowledge base for practitioners (Cnaan & Dichter, 2008). In this regard, for identifying gender-sensitive health communication methods and best practices on matting of hair, focused exploratory

survey studies are needed. However, such studies should be based on qualitative understanding of the actual phenomenological factors and their interplay. Thus, the multilayered design should involve detailed qualitative analysis of the health communication process through approaches such as participatory action research, narrative analysis, and Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology. Further, the conceptualization of variables for the quantitative survey research should necessarily be based on the findings of qualitative studies.

In addition to jata-affected women, the co-construction of lived experience of jata with family members and other possible entities can provide supplementary ontological understanding about the phenomenon of matting of hair. The role and function of family members of jata-affected women need to be analyzed with respect to their awareness about social and familial determinants of women's health and the human rights.

The gendered health context of jata-affected women has a comprehensive conjoined gender-health discourse. A focused documentation of different health problems and indigenous medicinal applications by jata-affected women could inform the competent and culturally sensitive health care provision for jata-affected women. There is a need of a comprehensive survey on the perceptions of health care providers about jata as a cultural practice and a health problem. The existence of fear among physicians while treating jata-affected women demands further exploration on its all-inclusive ontological nature and its impact on medical practice. In this respect, another Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenological study to identify the phenomenon of fear among physicians would be useful.

The sub-phenomena such as the perceived reasons behind matting of hair, the etiopathogenesis, and taxonomy of different types of matted hair are the major areas that need focused knowledge base to guide the preventive, curative, and promotive approaches. In this respect, a broad research agenda is implicated for relevant disciplines such as social work, nursing, public health, dermatology, and medicine to explore on important aspects of matting of hair.

The symbolic meanings attached to jata highlighting it as a protector from illness or a factor causing reduction in health problems indicated a particular health psychology among jata-affected women. A wide-ranging understanding about the health psychology behind the health conceptions and resultant health behavior of jata-affected women can be produced through multidisciplinary teams using qualitative approaches such as the case study, ethnography, and ethnomethodology.

The existence of sexual objectification of jata-affected women leading to a stigma can be considered for detailed documentation about the nature and impact of stigma on women's body perceptions and self-esteem. Such research demands a specialized design that could involve in-depth explorations through extended case study, narrative analysis, and phenomenology. The visual anthropology of matted hair can address the diverse perceptual processes and semantics surrounding the symbolic interpretations of jata.

The control of women's sexuality through instrumental religious-based practices, and the role of religious-based patriarchy show the ontological existence of different entities and processes. A comprehensive understanding about the sexual life and trajectories of jata-affected women as well as its association with the symbolic meanings of deific jata, would inform the existing symbolic understanding on jata. Further, it is

likely to outline the structural dynamics behind the sexuality and sexual politics involved in the issue of matting of hair. Therefore, a comprehensive exploration through qualitative methods is suggested.

### **Conclusion**

This Heideggerian interpretive phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of women affected with matting of hair in southwestern India. It revealed the ontological nature of multifaceted marginalization of health and human rights of affected women. The everydayness of jata-affected women showed the reification of an apparent health problem through imposition of a religious-based discourse. Furthermore, the study outlined the role of complex structural forms of politico-religious patriarchy in coercion of women through cultural practices surrounding matting of hair. The evidential narratives of affected women exemplified the pressing need for urgent redress of health and human rights marginalization of women due to matting of hair. The instrumental role of religious-based patriarchy and underlying patriarchal beliefs emerged in this hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. Until such patriarchal cultural belief systems are dismantled, along with the harmful traditional practices, women's health will remain at risk. This study implies concerted efforts from the local and global institutions and communities toward deconstructing patriarchal cultural belief systems and their impact on women's health and well-being through harmful cultural practices.

## **Appendix A Recruitment Letter**

Dear Research Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study examining lived experience of matting of hair. You are selected since you have experienced / have been experiencing matting of hair in southwestern region of Maharashtra. Based on my previous study about matting of hair I feel the need to document the lived experience of matting of hair. I would like to learn more about this issue and your experience. To explore and understand the intricacies of your experience, I would like to ask you for a permission to interview you at your convenience and willingness.

I have received research training from faculty from the School of Social Work, Indiana University on how to conduct research and protect your privacy and confidentiality. This research study is happening under the guidance of expert researchers from IUPUI.

Your sharing of the lived experience is very important and will provide invaluable information to the knowledge base on women matted hair affected. Your views expressed during the interviews will be kept completely confidential and no individual information will be identified.

Your participation is voluntary. You also have the right to not participate in this study. If you choose to participate in this voluntary study, you do not have to answer any question that you do not want to. Refusing to participate in this study will not lead to any negative or harmful consequences.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Govind Dhaske at (Phone No and Email) or Dr. Margaret Adamek (Phone No and Email).

We look forward to your participation and thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

Govind Dhaske  
PhD Student, Indiana University School of Social Work

Supervisor: Dr. Margaret Adamek (Professor, Indiana University School of Social Work)

## Appendix B Consent Form

This is Govind Dhaske, Doctoral Candidate at Indiana University School of Social Work and researcher for this study. I am conducting this research to explore the lived experience of women affected by matted hair in southwestern parts of Maharashtra state. This qualitative study is aimed at exploring and understanding the multiple aspects of the lived experiences of women affected by matted hair. This study is pragmatically assumed helpful to build a knowledge base about matting of hair, which in effect will help the larger world to know the realities of the issue. For the purpose of this research, you are invited for a face-to-face interview with the researcher. Your sharing of experiences is considered as an invaluable information about the cultural practices surrounding matted hair and its impact on women. I am grateful to you for your voluntary participation. Please feel assured that your expressed views would be kept completely confidential. No individual besides the researcher will connect your identity with your question-and-answer information to maintain your confidentiality.

**Participant:** I acknowledge that the research procedures have been explained to me and I understand the purpose of the research. Any answers that I provide are based on my knowledge and are given voluntarily. I know that I may ask questions about the procedures of the research now and in the future. I have been assured that information about me will be kept confidential and that no information that discloses my personal identity will be released or published.

I agree that my individual interview interactions will be audiotaped and later transcribed for the purpose of research. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I can withdraw my participation from the research at any time without fear of consequences. I am aware that I have the right to speak confidentially the record and/or to have part or all of a recorded interview erased. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

I agree to be tape-recorded during interviews:

I have read the information, and agree to participate in this study:

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact details of the participant:

Researcher: I have clearly explained the purpose and the procedures of the research. To the best of my knowledge, I certify that the participant understands the benefits and risks involved with participating in this research.

Name of the researcher: Govind Dhaske

PhD Student, Indiana University School of Social Work

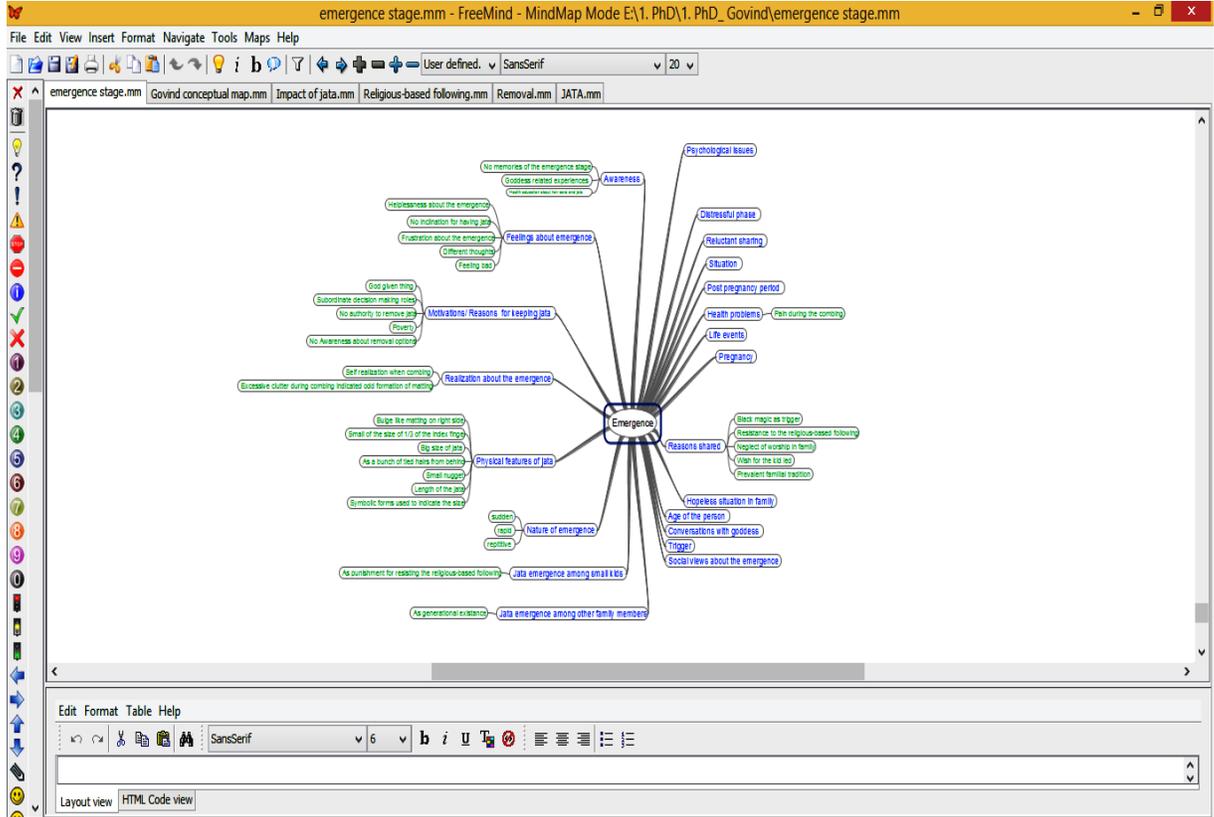
Supervisor: Dr. Margaret Adamek (Professor, Indiana University School of Social Work)

**Appendix C**  
**Pre-research Consultation**

Prof. Rajendra Kumbhar	Academician and activist	M N Roy Institute for Non formal Education and Research, Kolhapur District
Prof. Vitthal Banne	Former academician and activist for devadasi rights	Ex. Chairman, Akhil Bhartiya Devdasi Mukti Sanghatana, Gadhinglaj Kolhapur District
Prof. Rajan Gavas	Well-known author, academician, and activist	Mouni Vidyappeth, Gargoti, Kolhapur District
Gaurabai Salavade	Senior activist and a former devadasi	Gadhinglaj Kolhapur District
Prof. Seema Zadbuke	Academician and activist	Siber College Kolhapur District
Kanchan Parulekar	Social worker	Swayamsidha organization for Women Kolhapur District
Prashant Potdar	Social worker	ANS Satara District
Prof. Sudhir Kumbhar	Academician and activist	M N Roy Institute for Non formal Education and Research Satara District

# Appendix D

## Conceptual Mapping for Jata Processes



## Appendix E Themes

1. Pre-jata emergence stage		Situation during the emergence of jata
		Illness during/ prior to the emergence of jata
		Prevalence of jata
2. Jata emergence stage		Realization about the emergence of matted hair
		Feelings about jata during the emergence stage
		The disclosure of emergence
		Physical characteristics of jata during the emergence stage
		Actions/events associated with the emergence of matted hair
		The progression of emerging matted hair
3. Post-jata emergence stage		The purpose of religious-based consultation about matted hair
		The nature of religious-based consultation about matted hair
		Messages received through religious-based consultation about matted hair
		The nature of religious-based signification of matted hair
		Messages received through religious-based signification of matted hair
		Attribution of jata
		Reasons for keeping jata/not removing jata
		Passive decision-making role of jata- affected person
		Status of women in religious-based traditions
		Religious-based views/connotations about jata
		Reasons for matting of hair
4. Jata stage	4.1 The religious-based everyday bodies	Jata timeline
		Physical characteristics of jata
		Frequency of washing jata
		Materials used for washing jata
		Feeling after washing jata
		Experience of washing jata
		Religious-based significance of washing jata
		Ways of covering jata
		Purpose behind covering jata
		Attitude toward hiding jata
		Reasons for visibility of jata
	4.2 Embodiment of compromised religiosity	Implications of jata on appearance
		Implications of jata on eating
		Implications of jata on work (household/agricultural/labor)
		Implications of jata on survival
		Implications of jata on mobility/social participation
		Implications of jata on the sexual life/ marital relationship
		Implications of jata symbolism
		Impact of jata on the status of affected women
		Implications of non-compliance to religious-based beliefs
		Health problems due to jata
	Treatment seeking behavior	
	4.3 Religious- based ritual following	Religious-based ritual following: Unholy touch
		Religious-based ritual following: Ritual begging
		Religious-based ritual following: Fasting
		Religious-based ritual following: Temple visits

		Religious-based ritual following: Ritual worship
		Religious-based ritual following: Setting the God
		Religious-based ritual expenses
	4.4 Structural vulnerability	Patriarchal structure
		Policy-based assistance for jata-affected women
	4.5 Gendered discourse	Sharing about jata
		Gendered health expressions
5. Pre-jata removal stage		Feelings due to jata implications
		Attitude of children
		Attitude of spouses
		Attitude of family member
		Attitude of relatives
		Attitude of community members
		Attitude of physicians
		Motivations/ Reasons for the removal of jata
	Referral for jata removal	
6. Jata removal stage		Religious-based ritual following: Removal rituals
		Cultural beliefs/preferences about jata removal
		Psychological composition about jata removal
		Pathways of jata removal
		Jata removal approach followed by activists
		Issues involved in the activist-led jata removal
7. Post-jata removal stage		Feeling after jata removal
		Health status after jata removal/falling off
		The impact of jata removal/ falling off on appearance
		Religious-based ritual following after jata removal
		Impact of jata removal on the individual outlook
		Social outlook after jata removal

## Appendix F

# The Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013

RNI.No.MAHENG/2009/35528  
Reg. No. MH/MR/South-344/2011-13



## महाराष्ट्र शासन राजपत्र

### असाधारण भाग आठ

वर्ष ५, अंक ४८(४)]

शुक्रवार, डिसेंबर २०, २०१३/अग्रहायण २९, शके १९३५

[पृष्ठे ७, किंमत : रुपये १८.००

असाधारण क्रमांक ८७.

प्राधिकृत प्रकाशन

महाराष्ट्र विधानमंडळाचे अधिनियम व राज्यपालांनी प्रख्यापित केलेले अध्यादेश व केलेले विनियम आणि विधी व न्याय विभागाकडून आलेली विधेयके (इंग्रजी अनुवाद).

In pursuance of clause (3) of Article 348 of the Constitution of India, the following translation in English of the Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013 (Mah. Act No. XXX of 2013), is hereby published under the authority of the Governor.

By order and in the name of the Governor of Maharashtra,

H. B. PATEL,  
Principal Secretary to Government,  
Law and Judiciary Department.

### MAHARASHTRA ACT No. XXX OF 2013.

(First published, after having received the assent of the Governor in the "Maharashtra Government Gazette", on the 20th December 2013).

An Act to bring social awakening and awareness in the society and to create a healthy and safe social environment with a view to protect the common people in the society against the evil and sinister practices thriving on ignorance, and to combat and eradicate human sacrifice and other inhuman, evil, sinister and aghori practices propagated in the name of so called supernatural or magical powers or evil spirits commonly known as black magic by conmen with sinister motive of exploiting the common people in the society and thereby destroying the very social fibre of the society; and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

WHEREAS alarming number of incidences of exploitation of the common people in the society because of human sacrifice and other inhuman, evil, sinister and aghori practices and practices of black magic and evil spirits at the hands of conmen, continuously had come to light;

भाग आठ—८७—१.  
एखी - २५२७-१.

(१)

AND WHEREAS under the circumstance it became absolutely necessary for the Government to take appropriate and stringent social and legal measures to effectively prevent such evil effects and spread of these harmful practices, usages, black magic and such other inhuman, evil, sinister and *aghori* practices and to save the common people from falling prey to the sinister designs of the black magicians and conmen, whose false claims of possessing magical or miraculous remedies or powers and anti-social and harmful activities were threatening to damage the very social fibre and the beliefs of the common people in the authentic and scientific medical remedies and cures ; and driving them, on account of ignorance, to take recourse to such black magicians and conmen ;

AND WHEREAS both Houses of the State Legislature were not in session ;

AND WHEREAS the Governor of Maharashtra was satisfied that circumstances existed which rendered it necessary for him to take immediate action to make a law for the purposes aforesaid ; and, therefore, promulgated the Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and *Aghori* Practices and Black Magic Ordinance, 2013, on the 26th August 2013 ;

Mah.  
Ord.  
XIV of  
2013.

AND WHEREAS it is expedient to replace the said Ordinance by an Act of the State Legislature ; it is hereby enacted in the Sixty-fourth Year of the Republic of India as follows :-

Short title,  
extent and  
commencement.

1. (1) This Act may be called the Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and *Aghori* Practices and Black Magic Act, 2013.

(2) It extends to the whole of the State of Maharashtra.

(3) It shall be deemed to have come into force on the 26th August 2013.

Definitions.

2. (1) In this Act, unless the context requires otherwise,—

(a) "Code" means the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 ;

2 of  
1974.

(b) "human sacrifice and other inhuman, evil and *aghori* practices and black magic" means the commission of any act, mentioned or described in the Schedule appended to this Act, by any person by himself or caused to be committed through or by instigating any other person ;

(c) "prescribed" means prescribed by rules made under this Act ;

(d) "propagate" means issuance or publication of advertisement, literature, article or book relating to or about human sacrifice and other inhuman, evil and *aghori* practices and black magic and includes any form of direct or indirect help, abatement, participation or co-operation with regard to human sacrifice and other inhuman, evil and *aghori* practices and black magic ;

(e) "rules" means the rules made under this Act.

(2) Words and expressions used but not defined herein, shall have respective meanings as assigned to them in the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act, 1954 and the Code.

21 of  
1954.

3. (1) No person shall either himself or through any other person commit, promote, propagate or practice or cause to promote, propagate or practice human sacrifice and other inhuman, evil and *aghori* practices and black magic mentioned or described in the Schedule appended to this Act.

Prevention and eradication of human sacrifice and other inhuman, evil and *aghori* practices and black magic.

(2) From the date of coming into force of this Act, commission of any act of human sacrifice and other inhuman, evil and *aghori* practices and black magic and any advertisement, practice, propagation or promotion of human sacrifice and other inhuman, evil and *aghori* practices and black magic, in violation of the provisions of this Act, by any person by himself or through any other person shall constitute an offence under the provisions of this Act, and the person guilty of such offence shall, on conviction, be punished with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than six months but which may extend to seven years and with fine which shall not be less than five thousand rupees but which may extend to fifty thousand rupees.

(3) Whoever abets the commission of, or attempts the commission of any act or offence punishable under sub-section (2) shall be deemed to have committed that offence and shall, on conviction, be punished with the same punishment for such offences in sub-section (2).

(4) The offence punishable under sub-section (2) shall be cognizable and non-bailable.

4. No Court inferior to that of a Metropolitan Magistrate or a Judicial Magistrate of First Class shall try any offence punishable under section 3.

Jurisdiction to try offences.

5. (1) The State Government may, by notification in the *Official Gazette*, and subject to such terms and conditions as may be specified in the notification, appoint for any one or more police stations, as may be specified in the notification, one or more police officers to be known as the Vigilance Officer :

Vigilance Officer.

Provided that, such officer shall not be below the rank of an Inspector of Police.

(2) It shall be the duty of the Vigilance Officer,—

(i) to detect and prevent the contravention or violation of the provisions of this Act and the rules made thereunder, in the area of his jurisdiction and report such cases to the nearest police station within the area of his jurisdiction ; and upon filing of complaint to the police station by any victim or any member of his family, to ensure due and speedy action thereon and to give necessary advice, guidance and help to the concerned police station ;

(ii) to collect evidence for the effective prosecution of persons contravening the provisions of this Act ; and to report the same to the police station of the area in which such contravention has been or is being committed ;

(iii) to discharge such other functions as may be assigned to him, from time to time, by the State Government, by general or special order issued in this behalf.

(3) Any person who obstructs the discharge of the official duties or the work of the Vigilance Officer, appointed under sub-section (1), shall, on conviction, be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three months or with fine, which may extend to five thousand rupees or with both.

(4) The Vigilance Officer shall be deemed to be a public servant within the meaning of section 21 of the Indian Penal Code.

Powers of entry, search, etc.

6. (1) Subject to the general or special orders issued in this behalf by the State Government, from time to time, the Vigilance Officer may, within the local limits of the area of his jurisdiction, with the assistance of the police officer of his area,—

45 of 1860.

(i) enter and search, at all reasonable times, with such assistance, if any, as he considers necessary, any place in which he has reason to believe that an offence under this Act has been or is being committed ;

(ii) seize any material, instrument or advertisement which, he has reason to believe that the same has been or is being used for any act or thing which is in contravention of the provisions of this Act ;

(iii) examine any record, document or material object found in any place mentioned in clause (i) and seize the same if he has reason to believe that it may furnish evidence of the commission of an offence punishable under this Act.

(2) The provisions of the Code shall, so far as may be, apply to any search or seizure made under this Act as they apply to such search or seizure made under the authority of a warrant issued under section 94 of the Code.

(3) Where any person seizes anything under clause (ii) or (iii) of sub-section (1), he shall, as soon as may be, inform the Magistrate and take his orders as to the custody thereof.

Application of provisions of sections 159 and 160 of Maharashtra Police Act.

7. The provision of sections 159 and 160 of the Maharashtra Police Act, shall apply to acts done in good faith by the Vigilance Officer under this Act, as if the Vigilance Officer is a Police Officer within the meaning of that Act.

XXII of 1951.

Application of provisions of Code.

8. The provisions of the Code shall apply to the investigation and trial of offences under this Act.

Act to be in addition to and not in derogation of any other law.

9. The provisions of this Act shall be in addition to and not in derogation of any other law for the time being in force.

Publication of fact of conviction.

10. (1) Where any person is convicted of any offence punishable under this Act, it shall be competent for the Court convicting such offender to cause the name and place of residence of such person to be published by the police in the local newspaper where such offence had taken place, together with the fact that such offender had been convicted of the offence under this Act and such other particulars as the Court may deem fit and appropriate, to be allowed to be published.

(2) No such publication under sub-section (1) shall be made until the appeal, if any, filed against such order is finally disposed of.

11. (1) The State Government may, by notification in the *Official Gazette*, and subject to the condition of previous publication, make rules to carry out the purposes of this Act. Rules.

(2) Every rule made under this Act shall be laid, as soon as may be, after it is made, before each House of the State Legislature while it is in session for a total period of thirty days, which may be comprised in one session or in two or more successive sessions, and if, before the expiry of the session in which it is so laid or the session or sessions immediately following, both Houses agree in making any modification in the rule or both Houses agree that the rule should not be made and notify their decision to that effect in the *Official Gazette*, the rule shall, from the date of publication of such decision in the *Official Gazette*, have effect only in such modified form or be of no effect, as the case may be; so, however, that any such modification or annulment shall be without prejudice to the validity of anything previously done or omitted to be done under that rule.

12. (1) For the removal of doubt, it is hereby declared that nothing in this Act shall apply in respect of the following, namely :- Savings.

(1) The form of worship such as *pradakshina*, *yatra*, *parikarma* performed at any religious or spiritual places, as also *Varis* of *Varkari* sect and other *Varis*.

(2) *Haripath*, *Kirtan*, *Pravachan*, *Bhajan*, teaching of ancient and traditional learnings and arts, practice, propagation, circulation thereof.

(3) To state about the miracles of deceased saints, propagation, publicity and circulation of the same and the propagation, publicity, and distribution of the literature about the miracles of the religious preachers which do not cause physical injury or financial loss.

(4) The performance of prayers, *Upasana*, and all religious rites at the places such as home, temple, *dargah*, *gurudwara*, pagoda, church or other religious places which do not cause physical injury or financial loss.

(5) All religious celebrations, festivals, prayers, procession and any other act relating thereto, invoking the spirit, *Kadakhshmi*, *Vratvaikalye*, *Upavas*, calling of *Nawas*, calling of *Mannat*, *Moharram* procession and all other religious rituals.

(6) Piercing of ears and nose of children in accordance with religious rituals, performance of religious rituals such as *Keshlochan* by the Jains.

(7) The advice in regard to *vastushastra*, advice by *Joshi-Jyotishi*, *Nandibailwale Jyotishi* and other astrologers and in regard to source of groundwater.

(8) Any traditional religious rites, and acts except those mentioned above, which the State Government may, by notification in the *Official Gazette*, notify.

(2) Every notification issued in pursuance of entry (8) of sub-section (1) shall be laid, as soon as may be, before each House of the State Legislature.

Mah. Ord. XIV of 2013. 13. (1) The Maharashtra Prevention and Eradication of Human Sacrifice and other Inhuman, Evil and Aghori Practices and Black Magic Ordinance, 2013, is hereby repealed. Repeal of Mah. Ord. XIV of 2013 and saving.

(2) Notwithstanding such repeal, anything done or any action taken (including any notification or order issued) under the corresponding provisions of the said Ordinance, shall be deemed to have been done, taken or issued, as the case may be, under the corresponding provisions of this Act.

## SCHEDULE

( See section 2(1)(b) )

(1) Under the pretext of expelling the ghost, assaulting by tying a person with rope or chain, beating by stick or whip, to make the person drink footwear soaked water, giving chili smoke, hanging a person to roof, fixing him with rope or by hair or plucking his hair, causing pain by way of touching heated object to organs or body of a person, forcing a person to perform sexual act in the open, practicing inhuman acts, putting urine or human excreta forcibly in the mouth of a person or practicing any such acts.

(2) Display of so-called miracles by a person and thereby earning money; and to deceive, defraud and terrorize people by propagation and circulation of so-called miracles.

(3) With a view to receive blessings of supernatural power, to follow the inhuman, evil and *ghori* practices which cause danger to life or grievous hurt; to instigate, encourage or compel others to follow such practices.

(4) Doing any inhuman, evil and *ghori* act and black magic in search of precious things, bounty, and water resources or for similar reasons in the name of *karni*, *bhanamati* and making or trying to make human sacrifice in the name of *jaran-maran* or the like, or to advice, instigate or encourage committing such inhuman acts.

(5) To create an impression by declaring that a power inapprehensible by senses has influenced one's body or that a person has possessed such power and thereby create fear in the mind of others or to threaten others of evil consequences for not following the advice of such person or deceive, defraud and deter him.

(6) By making the persons believe that a particular person practices *karni*, black magic or brings under the influence of ghost or diminishes the milching capacity of a cattle by *mantra-tantra* or similarly accusing a particular person that he brings misfortune to others, or is a cause for spread of diseases and thereby making the living of such person miserable, troublesome or difficult; to declare a person as *saitan* or incarnation of *saitan*.

(7) In the name of *jaran-maran*, *karni* or *chetuk*, assaulting any person, parading him naked or put a ban on his daily activities.

(8) To create a panic in the mind of public in general by way of invoking ghost or *mantras*, or threaten to invoke ghost, creating an impression that there is ghostly or wrath of a power inapprehensible by senses causing physical injuries and preventing a person from taking medical treatment and instead diverting him to practice inhuman, evil and *ghori* acts or treatment, threatening a person with death or causing physical pains or causing financial harm by practicing or tend to practice black magic or inhuman act.

(9) Prohibiting and preventing a person from taking medical treatment in case of dog, snake or scorpion bite and instead giving him treatment like *mantra-tantra*, *ganda-dora* or such other things.

(10) Claiming to perform surgery by fingers, or claiming to change the sex of a foetus in womb of a woman.

(11) (a) To create an impression that special supernatural powers are present in himself, incarnation of another person or holy spirit or that the devotee was his wife, husband or paramour in the past birth, thereby indulging into sexual activity with such person;

(b) To keep sexual relations with a woman, who is unable to conceive, assuring her of motherhood through supernatural power;

(12) To create an impression that a mentally retarded person as having inhuman powers and thereby rob the others.

## Appendix G

### The Bombay Devadasis Protection Act, 1934

[THE BOMBAY DEVADASIS PROTECTION ACT, 1934.]†

[15th October 1934]

Adapted and modified by the Adaptation of Indian Laws Order in Council.

Adapted and modified by the Adaptation of Laws Order, 1950.

Amended by Bom. 20 of 1950.

Adapted and modified by the Bombay Adaptation of Laws (State and Concurrent Subjects) Order, 1956.

Amended by Bom. 34 of 1958.

Adapted and modified by the Maharashtra Adaptation of Laws (State and Concurrent Subjects) Order, 1960.

**An Act to protect devadasis and to prevent the dedication of women to Hindu deities, idols, objects of worship, temples and religious institutions in the <sup>2</sup>[State of Bombay]**

WHEREAS the practice of dedicating women as devadasis to Hindu deities, idols, objects of worship, temples or other religious institutions exists in the <sup>2</sup>[State of Bombay] ;

AND WHEREAS such practice, however ancient and pure, its origin, now leads such women to a life of prostitution ;

AND WHEREAS it is now desirable and expedient to end such practice, wherever it exists, in the <sup>2</sup>[State of Bombay] ;

AND WHEREAS the previous sanction of the Governor-General required by section 80A (3) and of the Governor required by section 80C of the Government of India Act have been obtained for the passing of this Act ; It is hereby enacted as follows:—

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1. (1) This Act may be called the Bombay Devadasis Protection Act, 1934. Short title and extent.  
<sup>2</sup>(2) It extends to the whole of the <sup>4</sup>[State of Maharashtra].
2. In this Act, unless there is something repugnant in the subject or context,— **Definitions.**  
<sup>5</sup>[(aa) "Collector" includes a Deputy Commissioner;]  
(a) "devadasi" means any unmarried woman who is dedicated to any Hindu deity, idol, object of worship, temple or other religious institution ;  
(b) "temple" means a place by whatever designation known, dedicated to, or used by, the Hindu community, or any section thereof, as a place of religious worship ; and  
(c) "woman" means a female human being of any age.

<sup>1</sup>For Statement of Objects and Reasons, see *Bombay Government Gazette*, 1933, Pt. V, pp. 1029-1031 ; for Report of the Select Committee, see *ibid.*, 1934 Pt. V, pp. 62-65 ; and for Proceedings in Council, see *Bombay Legislative Council Debates*, 1933 and 1934, Vols. XXXVIII, XXXIX and XL.

†The Act was extended to that part of the State of Bombay to which, immediately before the commencement of Bom. 34 of 1958, it did not extend (*Vide* Bom. 34 of 1958, s. 2.).

<sup>2</sup>These words were substituted for the words "Bombay Presidency" by Bom. 34 of 1958, s. 3 (1).

<sup>3</sup>This sub-section was substituted for the original, *ibid.*, s. 3 (2).

<sup>4</sup>These words were substituted for the words "State" of Bombay" by the Maharashtra Adaptation of Laws (State and Concurrent Subjects) Order, 1960.

<sup>5</sup>This clause was inserted, *ibid.*, s.3 (3)

**3.** The performance of any ceremony <sup>1</sup>[or act] intended to dedicate or having the effect of dedicating a woman as a devadasi, whether such woman has or has not consented to the performance of such ceremony <sup>2</sup>[or act] is hereby declared unlawful and to be of no effect, any custom or rule of Hindu Law to the contrary notwithstanding.

**4.** No marriage contracted by a woman shall be invalid and no issue of such marriage shall be illegitimate by reason of such woman being a devadasi, any custom or rule of Hindu Law to the contrary notwithstanding.

**5.** Whoever, other than the woman to be dedicated, performs, permits, takes part in or abets, the performance of, any ceremony <sup>2</sup>[or act] referred to in section 3, shall, on conviction, be punishable with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine or with both.

**5A.** The offence punishable under section 5 shall be cognisable.

**5B.** No suit, prosecution or other legal proceeding shall lie against any person for anything which is in good faith done or intended to be done under this Act.]

**6. (1)** Notwithstanding any adjudication or settlement made under the Bombay Rent-free Estates Act, 1852, the Exemptions from Land-revenue (No. 1) Act, 1863, and the Exemptions from Land-revenue (No. 2) Act, 1863, or rules made thereunder <sup>4</sup>[or under any law for the time being in force], or the terms of any grant made or sanad issued by <sup>5</sup>[or on behalf of the <sup>6</sup>[Government] ], when lands are assigned as emoluments for the performance by a devadasi of any services as such, the Collector shall, after holding such inquiry as may be prescribed, by order in writing, direct that the land shall be released from liability for performance of such services and that there shall be paid by the holder of such land in lieu of such services such rent as the Collector shall determine in the prescribed manner :

Provided that if a woman who is a devadasi at the time when this Act comes into force is the holder of such land or performs services as a devadasi for which such land is assigned and appears at such enquiry or gives notice in the prescribed manner and objects to the release of the land and the payment of rent under the provisions of this section, the Collector shall pass orders directing that the land shall not be released and rent shall not be payable under this section during the lifetime of such devadasi.

(2) Rent directed to be paid under sub-section (i) shall, when the performance of such services is for the benefit of a Hindu deity, idol, object of worship, temple or other religious institution, be payable by the holder to or on account of such deity, idol, object of worship, temple or other religious institution and in other cases to <sup>7</sup>[the State Government].

<sup>1</sup>These words were inserted by Bom. 20 of 1950, s. 2.

<sup>2</sup>These words were inserted, *ibid.*, s. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Sections 5A and 5B were inserted, *ibid.*, s. 4.

<sup>4</sup>These words were inserted by Bom. 34 of 1958, s. 3 (4) (a).

<sup>5</sup>The words "for on behalf of the Crown" were substituted for the word "Government" by the Adaptation of Indian Laws Order in Council.

<sup>6</sup>The word "Government" was substituted for the word "Crown" by the Adaptation of Laws Order, 1950.

<sup>7</sup>These words were substituted for the words "the Crown for the purposes of the province" *ibid.*

XI of  
1852.

Bom.  
II and  
VII of  
1863.

<sup>1</sup>[Explanation.—“ Land ” includes benefits to arise out of the land and things attached to the earth or permanently fastened to anything attached to the earth, and also shares in, or charges on the revenue or rent of villages, or other defined portion of territory.]

7. (1) <sup>2</sup>[The <sup>3</sup>[State] Government] may make rules generally for the purpose of carrying out the provisions of this Act and in particular for the manner in which the Collector shall hold an inquiry and determine the rent under section 6 and the manner in which notice of objection shall be given under the said section. <sup>4</sup>Power to make rules.

(2) The rules to be made under this section shall be subject to the condition of previous publication.

(3) Rules made under this section shall be laid <sup>4</sup>[before each of the <sup>5</sup>[Houses] of the <sup>3</sup>[State] Legislature] at the session <sup>6</sup>[thereof] next following and shall be liable to be modified or rescinded by a resolution <sup>7</sup>[in which both the <sup>5</sup>[Houses] concur], and such rule shall, after notification in the <sup>8</sup>[*Official Gazette*,] be deemed to have been modified or rescinded accordingly.

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<sup>1</sup>This Explanation was substituted for the original by Bom. 34 of 1958, s. 3 (4) (b).

<sup>2</sup>The words “ The Provincial Government ” were substituted for the word “ Government ” by the Adaptation of Indian Laws Order in Council.

<sup>3</sup>The word “ State ” was substituted for the word “ Provincial ” by the Adaptation of Laws Order, 1950.

<sup>4</sup>The words “ before each of the Chambers of the Provincial Legislature ” were substituted for the words “ upon the table of the Bombay Legislative Council ” by the Adaptation of Indian Laws Order in Council.

<sup>5</sup>This word was substituted for the word “ Chambers ” by the Adaptation of Laws Order, 1950.

<sup>6</sup>This word was substituted for the words “ of the said Council ” by the Adaptation of Indian Laws Order in Council.

<sup>7</sup>The words “ in which both the Chambers concur ” were substituted for the words “ of the said Council ”, *ibid*.

<sup>8</sup>These words were substituted for the words “ *Bombay Government Gazette* ”, *ibid*.

<sup>9</sup>The proviso was omitted by the Maharashtra Adaptation of Laws (State and Concurrent Subjects) Order, 1960.

## **Appendix H**

### **Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (Part 3)**

#### **Adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna on 25 June 1993**

#### 3. The equal status and human rights of women

36. The World Conference on Human Rights urges the full and equal enjoyment by women of all human rights and that this be a priority for Governments and for the United Nations. The World Conference on Human Rights also underlines the importance of the integration and full participation of women as both agents and beneficiaries in the development process, and reiterates the objectives established on global action for women towards sustainable and equitable development set forth in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and chapter 24 of Agenda 21, adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992).

37. The equal status of women and the human rights of women should be integrated into the mainstream of United Nations system-wide activity. These issues should be regularly and systematically addressed throughout relevant United Nations bodies and mechanisms. In particular, steps should be taken to increase cooperation and promote further integration of objectives and goals between the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Human Rights, the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations agencies. In this context, cooperation and coordination should be strengthened between the Centre for Human Rights and the Division for the Advancement of Women.

38. In particular, the World Conference on Human Rights stresses the importance of working towards the elimination of violence against women in public and private life, the elimination of all forms of sexual harassment, exploitation and trafficking in women, the elimination of gender bias in the administration of justice and the eradication of any conflicts which may arise between the rights of women and the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices and religious extremism. The World Conference on Human Rights calls upon the General Assembly to adopt the draft declaration on violence against women and urges States to combat violence against women in accordance with its provisions. Violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict are violations of the fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law. All violations of this kind, including in particular murder, systematic rape, sexual slavery, and forced pregnancy, require a particularly effective response.

39. The World Conference on Human Rights urges the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women, both hidden and overt. The United Nations should encourage the goal of universal ratification by all States of the Convention on the

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by the year 2000. Ways and means of addressing the particularly large number of reservations to the Convention should be encouraged. Inter alia, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women should continue its review of reservations to the Convention. States are urged to withdraw reservations that are contrary to the object and purpose of the Convention or which are otherwise incompatible with international treaty law.

40. Treaty monitoring bodies should disseminate necessary information to enable women to make more effective use of existing implementation procedures in their pursuit of full and equal enjoyment of human rights and non-discrimination. New procedures should also be adopted to strengthen implementation of the commitment to women's equality and the human rights of women. The Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women should quickly examine the possibility of introducing the right of petition through the preparation of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The World Conference on Human Rights welcomes the decision of the Commission on Human Rights to consider the appointment of a special rapporteur on violence against women at its fiftieth session.

41. The World Conference on Human Rights recognizes the importance of the enjoyment by women of the highest standard of physical and mental health throughout their life span. In the context of the World Conference on Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as the Proclamation of Tehran of 1968, the World Conference on Human Rights reaffirms, on the basis of equality between women and men, a woman's right to accessible and adequate health care and the widest range of family planning services, as well as equal access to education at all levels.

42. Treaty monitoring bodies should include the status of women and the human rights of women in their deliberations and findings, making use of gender-specific data. States should be encouraged to supply information on the situation of women de jure and de facto in their reports to treaty monitoring bodies. The World Conference on Human Rights notes with satisfaction that the Commission on Human Rights adopted at its forty-ninth session resolution 1993/46 of 8 March 1993 stating that rapporteurs and working groups in the field of human rights should also be encouraged to do so. Steps should also be taken by the Division for the Advancement of Women in cooperation with other United Nations bodies, specifically the Centre for Human Rights, to ensure that the human rights activities of the United Nations regularly address violations of women's human rights, including gender-specific abuses. Training for United Nations human rights and humanitarian relief personnel to assist them to recognize and deal with human rights abuses particular to women and to carry out their work without gender bias should be encouraged.

43. The World Conference on Human Rights urges Governments and regional and international organizations to facilitate the access of women to decision-making posts and their greater participation in the decision-making process. It encourages further steps

within the United Nations Secretariat to appoint and promote women staff members in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, and encourages other principal and subsidiary organs of the United Nations to guarantee the participation of women under conditions of equality.

44. The World Conference on Human Rights welcomes the World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in 1995 and urges that human rights of women should play an important role in its deliberations, in accordance with the priority themes of the World Conference on Women of equality, development and peace.

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## **Curriculum Vitae**

**Govind Ganpati Dhaske**

### **EDUCATION**

**Doctor of Philosophy** (August 2009 - November 2014)

Indiana University

Dissertation: The lived experience of women affected with matted hair in southwestern India

Chair: Margaret Adamek

**Master of Arts (Social Work) (Equivalent to MSW)** (June 2004 - May 2006)

Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India

Concentration: Medical and Psychiatric Social Work

**Bachelor of Science** (July 2000 - April 2003)

Y.C. College of Science, Shivaji University, India

Specialization: Statistics

### **Certificate Course**

Sophia Center for Women's Studies and Development (February 2004)

Certificate Course for Social Workers Focusing on Women's Issues

### **RECOGNITION**

#### **Awards**

Nomination for ACOSA Emerging Scholar Award 2014

#### **Fellowships/Scholarship**

##### **Indiana University:**

Dissertation Fellowship (Spring 2014)

Service Learning Assistant Scholar (Spring 2013)

Graduate Assistantship (Fall 2009 - Spring 2011)

Educational Enhancement Grant (EEG) by GPSG (Spring 2011)

**Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India**

Tata Memorial Departmental Scholarship during M. A. (Social Work) (2004 - 06)

**YC College of Science, Karad, India**

Teachers Trust Prize during B.Sc. (April 2003)

**Middle School Scholarship, Kadegaon, India**

District Level 18th Rank during High School (August 1993)

**TEACHING**

**Traditional:**

Adjunct Instructor

Fall 2012: S 623 Practice Research Integrative Seminar Instructor (MSW)

Fall 2012: S 401 Integrative Practicum Seminar Instructor (BSW)

Summer 2012: S 300 Statistical Reasoning in Social Work (BSW)

**Online:**

Specific Module Developed and Presented for Online Courses

Summer 2012: D 501 Professional Social Work: An Immersion (Online) (MSW)

Spring 2010: S 400 Global Issues of Human Rights and Cultural Competent Practice  
(BSW)

## **PRESENTATIONS**

### **Conferences**

**Dhaske, G.** (2014, May). The translational utility of Heideggerian phenomenology: Insights from social work study. Paper presented at *Tenth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry*, Urbana-Champaign, IL.

**Dhaske, G.** (2012, March). The Urban Middle Class and the 'Consumer Citizenship' Identity: The Case of Exclusionary Demographic Transition. Paper presented at *National Seminar on Demographic Transition and Inclusive Development*, International Institute of Population Sciences in collaboration with Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, India.

**Dhaske, G.** (2012, January). The Rise of Urban Middle Class: A Critical Look. Paper presented at *National Seminar on Contested Cities: Voices of the Margins*, Centre for Advanced Studies, Dept of Sociology, Pune, India.

Kumbhar, R., & **Dhaske, G.** (2012, January). Information Technology in Higher Education in India: Some Critical Challenges and the Need of Paradigm Shift. Paper presented at *National Conference on Advanced Techniques of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, VN & BNM, Shivaji University, Kolhapur, India.

**Dhaske, G.** (2011, November). Exploration of representation of public mood in civil society and pathways of policy making in the constitutional democracy: India's changing politico-economic structures and emerging patterns of civil society activism. Paper presented at *South Asia in Transition Oxford Sociology Conference*, Oxford, United Kingdom.

**Dhaske, G., & Anand, A.** (2011, July). Role of collaborative ethnography in mapping Gender and Conflict with its interplay within intersectionality of gender. Paper presented at

*LOVA's 2nd International Conference: Ethnographies of Gender and Conflict*,  
Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Kumbahr, R., Kumbar, S., & **Dhaske, G.** (2009, March). Generational assessment of degradation in quality of environment & natural resources in hilly habitats: Exploring the integrated livelihood, well-being and conservation issues. Paper presented at *UGC Sponsored National Conference on the Development of Hilly Regions: Problems and Potentials*, Perid, (Kolhapur), MH, India.

**Dhaske, G.** (2008, October). What happened to the unorganized agricultural laborers in Vidarbha? An exploration of 'adversely incorporated' farm labor force in deepening agrarian distress. Paper presented at *International Conference on Eradicating Chronic Poverty in India: Policy Issues and Challenges*, Chronic Poverty Research Centre and Centre for the Study of Social Systems School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.

**Dhaske, G.** (2007, December). Marketing Rural Products through Rural-Urban Self Help Group Linkages: From Inclusive Growth to Sustainability. Paper presented at *Seminar on Rural Marketing in the era of Globalization: Problems and Prospects*, Sardar Patel Institute of Public Administration & the State Institute for Rural Development, Ahmadabad, and Gujarat.

**Dhaske, G.** & Nhavakar, S. (2007, November). Documenting Socio-Cultural Expressions of Rural Communities for Religious Harmony: A Learning Avenue for Multicultural Global Citizenship. Paper presented at *CMS Symbols: Symposia on Communication and Development*, Centre for Media Studies, New Delhi and Central University, Hyderabad, India.

**Dhaske, G.** (2006, December). The Spread of HIV-Aids in Rural Area: Pathways and Measures. Paper presented at *National Seminar on Issues Related to Planning Sustainable Livelihood Settlement for HIV/AIDS Affected People in Rural Areas*, National Institute for Rural Development (NIRD), Hyderabad, India.

**Accepted for Presentation**

**Dhaske, G.** (2014, July). The politico-religious co-production of the symbolic system around health problems of women: Ethnographic insights about the issue of matting of hair among women in India. Accepted for presentation, *LOVA International Conference on Ethnographies of Gender and the Body*, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

**Dhaske, G., & Shukla, S.** (2013). The exclusionary impact of social media: Exploring the detrimental urban middle-class dominance in a civil society mobilization in India. Paper accepted for *the Southwestern Social Science Association Annual Meeting*, New Orleans, LA.

**Dhaske, G.** (2010, August). The feminist standpoint as an epistemological lens for empirical account of the field: Exploring the cognitive clarity about 'gender' in the research process. Paper accepted for presentation *11th EASA Biennial Conference*, Maynooth, Ireland.

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#### **In Preparation**

Measuring implicit curriculum in Social Work (Co-authored)

Health care providers' perception about matting of hair in India

Conceptualizing a multi-theoretical model to understand the policy epistemology for the health problem of matting of hair among women in India

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