



## THEMES OF REPRESSION, ANGUISH AND REVOLT FOR FREEDOM AGAINST SET RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS IN “JOGWA”

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### Abstract

“Jogwa” is a story of two lovers, who break the shackles of orthodox religious tradition, ignorance and blind faith to offer men and women to get married to goddess Yellamma. The male who marries goddess Yellamma is called ‘Jogta’ and female is called ‘Jogtin’. The movie also depicts their struggle, humiliation and revolt against society and family. Though the tradition has been banned by the government, today also thousands of innocent men and women fall prey to the set religious tradition and live their life in total darkness. Jogta and Jogtin are deprived to live prosperous and peaceful life by their parents. They are easily targeted by village goons and assaulted sexually and physically. They cannot get married to any other men or women they like. They have to surrender their lives to goddess Yellamma and therefor have to create their livelihood by begging, singing songs at fare and in temples. They cannot do jobs, work or services as normal human beings do. Thus, this leads them to involve in prostitution or sexual abuses. The village goons use Jogta and Jogatin for their sexual gratification. Sometimes, Jogtin also fell to false promises of marriage and commit suicides.

**Keywords:** Jogwa, Jogta, Jogtin, religious tradition, repression, anguish, Yellamma.

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‘Jogwa’, a movie in Marathi language, was released in 2009. The movie is based on an age-old religious tradition of compelling young boys and girls to get married to goddess Yellamma and conferred them as Jogtas (male) and Jogtins (female) by their parents. Yellamma is the Hindu goddess worshipped in Karnataka, Maharashtra and Telangana. Even you can find temples of Yellamma in many villages of Maharashtra state. The goddess is variously known as Renuka, Yellamma and Yellamaai. If something inauspicious happens in family, people are inclined to visit Yellamma temple to know the goddess’ call. The temple is Situated in Karnataka’s Saundatti

mountain, people used to vow goddess by offering their son as Jogta and daughter as Jogtin in the service of goddess Yellamma. Male Jogta also wears saree and blouse, cowrie shell necklace, bangles and apply turmeric on the forehead as a female Jogtin. Both, Jogta-Jogtin have to beg alms in the name of the goddess Yellamma. Though, it has been banned by the government, the malpractice still goes on in Maharashtra, Karnataka and some other states of India. Today also, thousands of such victims live a life of repression, anguish, sexual oppression and starvation. The movie depicts a picture of two innocent souls, who are victims of such religious

tradition. They demand freedom from the shackles of discrimination and exploitation. The story is adapted from three novels – ‘Chaundak’ and ‘Bhandar Bhog’ by Dr Rajan Gavas and ‘Darshan’ by Charuta Sagar. ‘Jogwa’ primarily means to beg alms in the name of god or goddess. It is also a form of folk dance performed by Jogta and Jogtin while singing the prayers of goddess Yellamma. The movie won 5 awards at National Films Awards in 2008 and about 30 other awards at various levels before its release. It was the first Marathi movie to have released Internationally in the countries like Italy and Iran.

Jogta and Jogtin do not have a right to get married to anyone as they are married to goddess Yellamma. They have to live on the alms offered by the nearby villagers. Male Jogta are usually seduced and assaulted sexually by village young men. Their life becomes full of anguish as they are repeatedly assaulted physically and sexually. A Jogta must give up the fact of being a man and suppress all his desires. To seek relief from this anguish and exploitation they consume liquor. For female Jogtin the anguish and suffering become worse as they fall prey to false marriage promises. Sometimes, Jogtin get pregnant. They are not treated as human beings, but commodities fulfil people’s sexual desires and usually dumped by these people. Later, such victims become prostitutes or commit suicide. A Jogtin is expected to give up herself in the service of the goddess. She cannot get married or cannot live with her parents.

The lead roles are played by Suli (Mukta Burve) and Tayappa (Upendra Limaye). Tayappa, a short tempered and straight forward fellow, was a worker at handloom factory, situated at Ichalkarangi, Maharashtra. At the age of 21 years, he starts bleeding while urinating. He visited all the doctors from Maharashtra to Mumbai, but with no result. As family fades up from the illness, his parents visited goddess Yellamma’s temple. After visiting the temple, he stops bleeding. As a vow Tayappa’s parents offered him in the service of goddess Yellamma. Whereas, Suli was a girl like a free bird, she was dreaming to get married and to live life happily. But her dream shatters. One day, while her mother was combing her hairs, found a

knot in her hairs. Her mother becomes curious and thinks of it as a kind of omen. When she consults to a Jogtin, called Shewanta Akka, Shewanta says that it is a call of Yellamma, Suli must be taken to Akkubai Jogtin. Suli along with her parents and few Jogtins visit to Akkubai, the head of Jogtin. Akku Jogtin is considered to be the mouthpiece of the goddess Yellamma. Villagers approached her for various weird reasons, for example, hens stop laying eggs, cow stops to give milk, or someone’s husband is out of control. Akku Jogtin uses her chanting power and interprets the knot in hair as Yellammai’s call. Akku Jogtinn advises them not to touch Suli’s hair and never wash them. Instead, apply banyan tree sap and holy turmeric powder. She insists to offer her in the service of Yellammaai. She said them that Suli must be getting married to Yellammaai next full moon. On the full moon, Suli and Tayappa get married to the goddess Yellamma. They now onwards will be wives of goddess Yellamma.

Subsequently conferred as Jogata, Tayappa is called eunuch by the youngsters of the village. He confines himself in the house as he feels ashamed of wearing saree and blouse in public. His father asks him to fetch water from a nearby well in the village. While going to fetch the water villagers pass vulgar comments on him. He does not wish to drape the saree around the waist but wish to wear trousers. He wants to be a man and live like a man. The tradition compels to live a life against the natural instincts of human beings. He wears trousers under saree. He is made to accept the fact that though he has born as a male, he has to lead a life of a female. Even after his death, his corpse will be draped in a saree. His father has made him to accept that he is born as Jogta and has to face his fate. He is harassed and seduced by the villagers frequently. Some of them approached to him and seduced to fulfill their sexual desires. This is not only limited to him, but every male Jogta has to undergo the same sufferings. If Jogtas and Jogtins are in service of goddess Yellamma, it is a responsibility of the society to keep their piety and sanctity throughout the life. The Jogta has to suppress all his sexual desires and emotions as he no longer remains a man. The condition even becomes more pathetic when a Jogta, named Yamnya reveals his own story. Yamnya

was abandoned to the stairs of the temple of goddess Yellamma by his mother, when he was an infant. He was orphan, as his mother eloped with someone. At the age of 10 years he was conferred Jogta. He did not know how to wear a saree at that age but was seduced and raped by the youngsters. He says,

“When I was young, men around me used to feed me something and take me away, undrape my saree and do it. Later, I started to like it.”

Yamnya was so used to drinking and these incidents that he has lost the identity of being masculine. He has no feelings of male, but of female. Tayappa fears that he also has to undergo the same suffering and anguish. Yamnya says,

“When I see a man's eye falling on my wet body, my mind becomes elated. How womanhood seeps in the body, you will come to know. Only two things are real, liquor and men.”

He encourages Tayappa to drink liquor to relief from the pain. Yamnya also narrates the plight of Jogtins,

“Jogtins are like the bells on the mountain, anyone can come and ring us.”

These repeated incidents of being seduced and raped, led them to believe psychologically the physical impotency they have to face. To overcome this emotional and physical trauma, they tend to become intoxicated, as this is the only escape they find. Tayappa is also neglected by his family for his repeated revolts against the set traditions. His father tried to restrict and warn him not to involve in or stand for the voice of Jogta and Jogtin. He was beaten and threaten to leave his home by his father. Jogta-Jogtin are prone to become a burden for their family and parents. When Tayappa was thrown away from his house by his father, his anguish becomes more pathetic, as he says to Suli,

“My father threw me out of the house. My life is ruined. I feel I have lost everything. My life has been ruined when I drape saree. Neither I can live as a man, nor as a woman. Will I also end up like Yamnya? Do I will have to live life draping a saree

and begging for the alms throughout the life? Who am I? Tell me, who am I?”

Suli's story is not different than Tayappa's. Suli does not understand how to react to this situation. She meekly accepts whatever comes to her way. But her revolt starts earlier than Tayappa's. She always dreamed to live free and independent life. She goes against her parent's wish, when she announced that she should be a part of Tanuakka's troupe of Jogtin, who perform dance at fair and sing stories of goddess Yellamma. Her parents reject her request to join them; as these Jogtin have no respect and it is disrespectful to dance before people. But she joins the troupe and permanently closes the doors of support and care of her family. When asked by Tayappa, Suli says,

“My parents will not leave me alive, if I go home. I am born to lead the life of Jogtin.”

Soon Tayappa and Suli do accept the fate befallen on them and get adjusted to the lifestyle of Jogta-Jogtin. Tayappa started to sing in the name of the Goddess and earns for his living at fair. Suli learns to dance to please the Goddess. In the troupe she falls in love with one of the fellows called Annu. Here, she dreams to fly away and get married to him. She gets pregnant. But realizing that she loves him and wants to get married, Annu dumps her and runs away. She becomes frustrated and thinks to commit suicide. The cult was worried as no Jogtin should get pregnant. She decides to give birth to the child. But as it was set against the religious rules of their cult, along with her mother, they forcefully aborted the child she was bearing in her womb. Suli says to Tayappa,

“My life is devastated. Anne deserted me. I feel like committing suicide”.

This incident emphasizes on how Jogtin has to not only suppress her sexual desires but must forcefully abort. Here the question of motherhood is being questioned. Motherhood is one of the precious gifts gifted to women. Tayappa supports her emotionally and psychologically. They fall in love with each other.

Jogtins fulfill their sexual desires by having the company of village people in the fair. One of the

such incidents occurs when a Jogtin named Paravva, who has an affair with a young man called, Mhartya in the village. Realizing both love each other, a troupe of Jogtin approached the family and requests them to accept her. But Mhartya's elder brother beats Paravva brutally. The matter is taken to village Panchayat. In the village Panchayat Mhartya denies the fact that he was in relation with her. He also denies accepting her as a wife. Tani Jogtin says in village Panchayat,

"You seek blessings because we are blessed by the deity. You enjoy us, use us and when comes the question to get married, you ask for the man's opinion. How can you behave like this with the ones blessed by the god?"

Paravva could not bear this humiliation and cheating. She commits suicide. It is quite natural to dream a young lady to the young man. Even social justice does not exist for Jogtins.

Jogta-Jogtins are treated as animals. When they die, their body remains unclaimed and sometime may decay for a couple of days. As said by a social activist, famously known as More master,

"Nama Jogtya was buried unclaimed. Mayappa's corpse was laying decay for four days at bus stop".

More master stresses that government should help and take the responsibility of the cult. Yamnya made meaningful remarks as he says,

"When I wore saree, where was the government? When my mother abandoned me at the temple, where was the government? When people took me away and every passerby in the field forcibly enjoyed me, where was the government?"

This humiliation leads Suli to think of insecurity and anguish faced by them and their cult. She says,

"All humiliate me as Jogtin. How does one live a life this way? If I listen to Fula, then I will be labeled as a whore. If I choose to live a life of Paravva, then there are many outside to cheat me".

More master creates awareness in the village about the superstition, how the lock of matted hair has nothing to do with giving away girls in the service

of goddess Yellamma. He says to villagers that Shewanta and Akku Jogtin are growing their cult by misguiding villagers. They are passing rumors that matted hair is sign that Yelluaai wants that girl in her service. It is completely foolish to believe, as a lock of matted hair will appear as villagers stopped washing hairs and applying banyan tree sap and turmeric in the hairs. More master advised all the villagers to cut or wash matted hair and don't believe in such superstitions. Tayappa understands the message and resolved to come out of situation. He approaches to Suli and washes her hair, removes the lock of matted hair. He also undrapes his saree and wears shirt and trouser. The cult comes to know about their transformation from Jogta-Jogtin. All the members of the cult with villagers try to convince them that this is against the tradition and saying of their forefathers. It is against the rules of cult as no Jogta-Jogtin can get married and live a family life. They are the wives of the goddess Yellamma. If they do it, Yellamma's curse will befall on them and it may lead to the extinction of their cult. But Shewanta and Akkubai failed to convince Suli and Tayappa.

All Jogtins and villagers assaulted them physically and took Tayappa to the graveyard. Suli was fainted. Phula Jogtin brings her to consciousness and takes her to the place, where Jogtin were forcefully draping saree to Tayappa and were trying to remarry goddess Yellamma. Somehow Tayappa manages to escape from the clutches of the mob and runs away. He and Suli pelt stones towards the mob. Tayappa picks up sickle and runs over the mob to kill them. The mob fears and runs away. Tayappa and Suli set themselves free from the religious tradition to constitute Jogta-Jogtin to goddess Yellamma.

Such practices devastate a human's life. More master explains the meaning of Yellamma, he says,

"Yellaru' means everyone's and 'amma' means mother, Yellamma is everyone's mother".

Mother never thinks that her sons and daughters should beg and suffer for lifetime. The movie awakes people not to practice such tradition. It also motivates the sufferers to revolt against it. There are many religious sects in India, which

practice such age-old traditions to humiliate and suffer the innocent in the name of god. No religion ever says that people should be treated as slaves. Every individual has a right to live his life freely. Such religious traditions humiliate and ruin the life of so many innocent people.

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