

Themes of repression, anguish and revolt for freedom against set religious traditions in “Jogwa”-The Awakening

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Jogwa, a Marathi movie, released in 2009, is based on an age-old religious tradition of compelling young boy and girl to get married to Yellammagoddess and conferred them as Jogta (male) and Jogtin (female) by their parents. Yellamma is hindu goddess worshipped in Karnataka, Maharashtra and Telangana. Even you can find temples of Yellamma in every village of Maharashtra state. The goddess is variously known as Renuka, Yellamma and Yellamaai. If something inauspicious happens in family, people have inclination to visit Yellamma temple to know the goddess' call. Situated in Karnataka's Saundatti mountain, people used to vow goddess by offering their sons as Jogta and daughters as Jogtin in the service of Yellamma. Male Jogta also wears saree and blouse, cowrie shell necklace, bangles and apply turmeric on 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 life of repression, anguish, sexual oppression and starvation. Two innocent souls, who were victims of the superstition and religious tradition beg alms and revolt for freedom from the shackles of discrimination and exploitation. The story is adapted and based on three novels – ‘Chaundak’ and ‘BhandarBhog’ by Dr RajanGavas and ‘Darshan’ by CharutaSagar. ‘Jogwa’ primarily means 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. It was the first movie to have released Internationally in the countries like Italy and Iran.

Jogta and Jogtin do not have right to get married to anyone as they are married to Yellammagoddess. They have to live on the alms offered by the villagers. Male Jogtas 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 start to drink liquor. For female Jogtin the anguish and suffering become worse as they fall prey to false marriage promises. Sometimes, Jogtins get pregnant. They are not treated as human beings, but toys to fulfil people's sexual desires and usually dumped by these villagers. 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, have children or have a life of her own.

The lead roles are played by Suli (Mukta Burve) and Tayappa (Upendra Limaye). Tayappa, a short tempered and straight forward fellow, was worker at handloom factory, situated at Ichalkarangi, Maharashtra. At the age of 21 years, he started bleeding while urinating. He visited all the doctors from Maharashtra to Mumbai but with no result. As family faded up from the illness and decided to visit Yellamma temple. After visiting to the temple, he stops bleeding. As a vow Tayappa's parents offered him to the service of goddess Yellamma. Whereas, Suli was a girl like free bird, she was dreaming to be get married and live life happily. But her dream shatters. One day while her mother was combing her hair, found a knot in her hair. Her mother becomes curious and thinks of it as a kind of omen. When she assisted to a Jogtin, called Shewanta Akka. Shewanta says that it is a call of Yellammai, Suli must be taken to temple situated at the mountain Saundatti, to Akkubai Jogtin. Suli along with her father, mother and few Jogtin visit to Akkubai, the head of Jogtin. Akku Jogtin is mouthpiece of the goddess Yellamma. Villagers approach her for various weird reasons for e.g. hens stop laying eggs, buffalo stops milking or someone's husband is out of control. Akku uses her chanting power and interprets the knot in hair as Yellammai's call. Akku Jogtin told them not to touch Suli's hair and never wash them. Instead apply banyan tree sap and holy turmeric powder. She told them to offer her to the service of Yellammai. She said them to get married Suli to Yellammai 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. This is repression of masculinity, who would have to live life of female. This tradition leads to live a life against natural instincts of human beings.

Subsequently conferred as Jogata, Tayappa was called eunuch by the youngsters of the villagers. He stays in the house as he feels ashamed of wearing saree and blouse. His father asks him to fetch water from nearby well at 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. The tradition represses natural instincts of being masculine. He wore trousers under saree. He has made to accept the fact that though he has born as a male, but he has to lead a life of female. Even as a corpse, he will be draped in saree. Seeing it his father made him to accept that he is born asJogta and has to face his destiny. He is harassed and seduced by the villagers frequently. Some of them approached him to ask to fulfill their sexual desires. This was not only limited to him but every male Jogta has to undergo same circumstances. If Jogtaare in service of goddess Yellamma it is 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 discarded to the stairs of temple of Yellamma by his mother.He was orphan, as his mother eloped with someone. At the age of 10 years he did not know how to wear a saree, was seduced and raped by the youngsters.He says,

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

Yamnya was so used to drinking and these incidents that he has lost the identity of masculinity by living a life of Jogta. He has no feelings of male but female. Tayappa fears that he also has to undergo same situations. Yamnya says, “When I see a man's eyes falling on my wet body, my mind becomes elated. How womanhood seeps in body, you will come to know.Only two things are real, liquor and men.”

He encourages Tayappa to drink liquor to relieve from the pain. He also narrates the plight of Jogtin’s, “We Jogta-Jogtins are like the bells on mountain, anyone can come and ring us. So, I have decided to clap at every forthcoming day.”

These repeated incidents of being seduced and raped, led them believe psychologically the physical importunacy, they have to face. To come over this emotional and physical trauma, they tend to become intoxicated, as this is the only escape they find. Tayappa also being discarded from his family for his repeated revolt against the set traditions. His father tried to restrict and

warn him not to involve in or stand for voice of Jogta and Jogtin. He was beaten and threaten to leave his home by his father. Jogta-Jogtin become burden for their family and parents.

Suli's story is not different than Tayappa's. Suli did 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 accepted 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 against the set 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. Annu 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.

Jogtin fulfill their sexual desires by having company of village people in the fair. One of the such incidents occurs when a Jogtin named Paravva, who has an affair with young man called, Mhartya in the village. Realizing both love each other, a troupe of Jogtin approached the family and request them to accept her. But Mhartya's elder brother beats Paravva brutally. The matter is taken to 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 deity. You enjoy us, use us and when comes the question to get married, you ask for 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 young man. Even social justice does not exist for Jogtin. Jogta-Jogtin are treated as animals. When they die, their body remains unclaimed and sometime may rot for couple of days. As said by More master, “Nama Jogtya was buried unclaimed. Mayappa’s corpse was laying decay for four days at bus stop”.

Ravi master stresses that government should help and take the responsibility of the cult. Yamlya 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”.

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

Ravi 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 Yellama goddess. 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 lock of matted hair will appear as villagers stopped washing hairs and applying banyan tree sap and turmeric in the hairs. Ravi master advised all the villagers to cut or wash matted hair and don’t believe in such superstitions. Tayappa understood the message and resolved to come out of situation. He approached to Suli and washes her hair, removes lock of matted hair. He also undraped his saree and wears kurta and trousers. The cult comes to know

about their transformation from Jogta-Jogtin. All the members of 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 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 Jogtin and villagers assaulted them physically and took Tayappa to graveyard. Suli was fainted. PhulaJogtin 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 pelts stones towards the mob. Tayappa and Suliset themselves free from the religious tradition to constitute Jogta-Jogtin to goddess Yellama.

Such practices devastate human's life. As More master explains the meaning of Yellamma, he says, "Yellaru' mean 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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