



A Constructed Sexuality: Re-Discovering the Jogappas of South and West India

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Abstract: Jogappas are a community of transgenders who are uniquely found in parts of Southern and Western India. Born as a man in the body of a woman, they seek the intervention of the Divine in order to lead a life worth living – a life of respect and dignity. They are considered as earthly avatars of the Goddess Yellamma. Jogappas belong to the lowest of the low strata of society. They are by profession beggars – begging in the name of the goddess is a part and parcel of their lives. Jogappas are the result of a patriarchal society's response to a boy who turns into a girl. These are people who are disowned by parents, shunned by friends, ridiculed by society and abused by the authorities. This transgendered community has looked to the Goddess Yellamma as a refuge since eternity. It is time we accept these transgenders as a part of us, as human beings who desire to live a life of dignity and worth. They are neither ritual mendicants nor sexual ascetics nor dedicated to Goddesses – primarily they are men with a constructed sexuality. These constructed notions of sexuality need to be studied and understood; for them to earn a place for themselves in the society. A study of this community adds a new dimension to Queer Studies and alternate sexualities in India today. My article is a saga of these people and their struggle to acquire a sense of agency in their lives.

Keywords: Queer, Religion, Jogappas, Transgenders, Masculinities, Goddess, Sexualities, Culture

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Introduction

I will never forget the sweet smile that used to light up Sureka's alias Suresh's face whenever she spoke to me. Her hair was piled up behind her head in a sort of top knot; she had a reddish – orangish bindi made out of sindoor on her forehead and her attire was manlike.... a plain shirt and trousers. When I met

her, she was sitting with a young girl on the corner of an alley, packing some white – coloured ash in pieces of paper. On inquiring about it, she told me that it was ash or *angaara*... to be used in the *pujas*. Her name was Suresh Aarvekar and she lived in a house at Mangarvaar Peth, Belbaag, near Mangal Karyaalay, Kolhapur, Maharashtra. Nearby, another *hijara* (eunuch) was washing clothes, eyeing us with suspicious eyes, her eyes kept darting here and there. When I wanted to talk to her, she refused. Parvati alias Paro was draped in the traditional Maharashtrian woman's attire – the nine yard saree and was wearing her hair in a bun, and her face was devoid of make up except a big maroon coloured plastic *bindi*. Suresh called for Parvati to come to talk to us, but she refused blatantly. Suresh went on convincing Paro that we had come to write a report on their lives, we had no intention of taking photographs or flashing them on some news channel, we were not journalists, but it was of no use.

Paro and Sureka are jogappas, a category of transgenders, rather men who marry a Goddess to become women. In case of these gender non-conforming people, association with the Divine accords them a respect that is unheard of. They are considered as earthly avatars of the Goddess Yellamma. Judith Butler says that gender is performative¹; sexuality is not pre-defined, it is constructed. This emphasises the social construction of gender. The jogappas too perform their gender on a daily basis – theirs too is a sexuality that is performative. My paper is an attempt to look into the stories and struggles of this gender-fluid community in an effort to draw out a sense of agency in their lives.

The Jogappas and the Devadasi

An understanding of the cult of the jogappas is incomplete without reference to the concept of dedicated women – i.e Devadasis. The word *devadasi*, as defined by the Encarta dictionary means a Hindu temple dancer, a member of a hereditary class of women dancers in a Hindu temple. Etymologically speaking, the word means slaves of the Gods i.e. *dasis* of the *devas*, or *devadasis*. From time immemorial, the *devadasi* served the Gods (*deva*) and men who assumed Godly status. The *devadasi* shifted through the vicissitudes of temple, court and social life. She could not falter in either of these arenas, her training had to be perfect to acclimatize herself in all the spheres of her existence.²

One finds the earliest reference to the *devadasi* in the *Rig Veda* which mentions the Goddess of Dawn, *Usha* richly clad in revealing embroidered garments; the comparison is to that of a dancing girl. After that, the *Atharva Veda* refers to the *gandharva-grihita* i.e a courtesan as possessed by a *gandharva*. The ancient

Tantric literature mentions different categories of the *veshya* (courtesan) such as:-

- the *raja veshya*, or the king's courtesan;
- *nagari*, a courtesan living with an accomplished citizen ;
- *gupta veshya*, who worked clandestinely ;
- *deva veshya*, one who danced in the temples ; and
- *Brahma veshya*, who visited the holy places ;

The Jogappas and the Goddess

The Goddess *Yellamma* is a very powerful name in the world of the *devadasi*; so deep is the connection between the two that as an expression, 'Yellamma character' suggests a woman of loose character.³ Though she is worshipped by the *devadasis* on all days, Tuesdays and Fridays are considered to be auspicious days for the worship of the Goddess.

Myths abound regarding the legend of *Renuka/Yellamma*. The *Brahma Purana*⁴ says that she is the daughter of *Renuke*, King of *Ikshaku* clan; the *Harioamsha* states that she was born in a lotus flower and taken by the childless King *Renuke* and got his name. However, the *VayuPurana* states that *Renuka* was the daughter of sage *Savana* and she was known by the name *Kamali*. According to the *Mahabharata*, another well-trusted source, *Renuka* married sage *Jamadagni*, who belonged to the *Bruga vamsha* clan. At a very young age, of eight, at the advise of *Agastya* saint, *Renuka* was married to *Jamdagni* (the son of *Ruchik Muni* and *Satyavath*). Together, *Renuka* and *Jamdagni* co-operated in performing various rituals and *poojas* (worship). Every morning *Renuka* would go to the *Malaprabha* river to have a bath. There with complete devotion, she would fill the pot that she used to prepare out of the sand on the bank of the river. One day, when *Renuka* went to the river to have a bath, she came across a *Gandharva* angel called *Chitarta* playing in the river, with his wives. For a moment, she lost her concentration, and imagined herself playing in the river with her husband. When she regained her consciousness, she realised that she couldn't make the pot any more.. Disappointed she returned to *Jamadagni*, empty-handed, at which her husband immediately realised what had happened. Seeing her thus, he cursed her and ordered her sons to kill her. When the first four of them refused, the sage cursed them to become eunuchs. Finally, he had her beheaded by her fifth son, *Parashuram*.⁵ On beheading, her head multiplied by tens and hundreds and moved to different regions. This miracle brought her innumerable followers, including her eunuch sons. As

Parashuram had followed his father's command, he got a boon from his father. He wanted his mother's life back. However, as he was cutting off his mother's head, he also chopped off the head of a lower caste, *matangi* woman. As his mother was being restored to life, he interchanged the heads. In other words, he put his mother's head on the body of the *matangi* woman, and he put the *matangi* woman's head on his mother's body. Ultimately, both of them came to be worshipped – the Brahmin headed woman came to be worshipped as *Renuka* or *Mariamamma* and the low-caste headed woman came to be worshipped as *Yellamma*. *Yellamma* is known by different names such as *Ellavva*, *Renuka*, *Saktimata*, *Jagadamba*, *Elukolladavva*, *Ekavira*, *Hemlamma*.

The Jogappas and the Temple

Saundatti, in Belgaum district neighbouring Kolhapur has acquired the dubious distinction of having the very famous *Renuka Yellamma* and *Parashuram* Temples at *Yellamma Gudda* (*Gudda* means Hill in Kannada). At a distance of five kilometres from the city, there is a big mountain on which the temple is situated. The mountain was earlier known as *Siddhachal Parvat*. The temple is built in the *Chalukyan* and *Rashtrakuta* style and its carvings show glimpses of Jain architecture.

Today, the entire temple complex houses many deities belonging to the Great and Little Traditions – in all around sixty-one Gods and Goddesses are said to have temples on the hillock. Of them, twenty-four are female, and thirty-seven male; ten belong to the Little Tradition and fifty-one to the Great. Interestingly, the temples of *Jamadagni* and *Matangi* too, are outside the *Yellamma* temple enclosure, on the other bank of the rivulet. The adjoining area has three springs which have been made into holy bathing ponds or *Hondagal*. They are *Kumkumada Honda* (pond of vermillion powder), *Enni Honda* (pond of oil) and *Arishinada Honda* (pond of turmeric powder). When *Yellamma* is given a ritual bath, water is used from all three tanks. The names of these tanks coincide with the three essential ingredients necessary for her bath – oil, turmeric and kumkum. Devotees too apply these as ritual holy material on their foreheads to identify themselves. However, of the three, *Enni Honda* is taken to be the holiest, as it is also a perennial one. Near the temple, is the temple of *Renuka Yellamma's* son *Parashuram*. Next to it is the shrine of a *Veerasaiva*⁶ saint, *Ravana Siddheswara*. In the neighbourhood, there are some more temples, those of *Jamadagni*, *Renuka's* husband and that of *Kalabhairava*⁷. The mode of worship in the *Renuka* temple does not follow Sanskritic rituals; though today, efforts are going on to introduce these. However, no special worship or service –

Archana or *Seva* is offered to the Goddess. The priests are allowed into the inner chamber of the temple, and the devotees, irrespective of their caste are required to make their offerings from the door-steps of this inner hall. The Goddess is worshipped twice a day – once in the morning and again in the evening.

Devotees from Maharashtra, Goa and Andhra Pradesh come here especially during the time of *jataras* (fairs) which are held twice in a year. The administration of the *Yellamma* temple is now covered by the provisions of Sri *Renuka Yellamma* Temple Administration Act of 1974, which came into force on the 2nd of October, 1975. On my last visit to the shrine, I saw a hub of jogappas who come to worship the Goddess in many. What is interesting is that each and every work in the *Parashuram* temple near the holy tank, is done by the *devadasis*. They look after the devotees requirements of *puja* ingredients, they tie the holy neem leaves, take them for their ritual bath and then accompany them throughout all the other tasks. Had it not been for these *devadasis* (both eunuchs and women), a large part of the temple activities would have remained incomplete.

As per the ritual calendar of the temple authorities, the ritual year starts from the full-moon day in the month of October-November (*Banada Hummine*); following which every full-moon day is a festival day. However, the full-moon days in the months of October-November and January-February are especially important as they mark the change in the marital status of the deity. All *devadasis* and jogappas are under an obligation to visit the shrine during this period to observe a few rituals and offer their vows since it marks the active state of the deity.⁸ On *Banada Hummine*, in the month of October-November, it is believed that Jamadagni dies – to mark his death, all his wives (initiated *devadasis*, sexually active *devadasis* and retired *devadasis*) converge at the shrine and observe the custom of removing their sacred necklace and bangles to symbolise their widowhood. Three months after this, all the *devadasis* reassemble at the shrine on the full-moon day of *Muthaide Hunnime* to celebrate the resurrection of Jamadagni. This day is a very auspicious one as Jamadagni's wives regain their marital status. New girls or *devadasis* are a part of the offerings to the deity on this day.

Particularly famous is the *Yellamma Devi Fair* (*Yellamma Jatra*) that is held at the temple. Even though the fair is held on many occasions between October and February, the biggest celebration takes place on the full moon day of Margasira.⁹ On this day, the famous *Neeramanavi Yellamma Jatra* is also taken out. It is at this time that the goddess *Yellamma* is worshipped in the manner of *shakti puja*, together with its attendant rituals. During this fair, women are

dedicated as *devadasis* or servants/slaves of god. More than thirty thousand devotees mostly from Karnataka: Raichur, Bellary, Bagalkot, Bijapur, Gulbarga, Bidar, Belgaum and various districts of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Goa participate in this festival. The devotees carry pots, *neem* leaves and cocks; this is also an occasion when womenfolk go into a trance and begin to dance. Not only that, during the annual festival, there was a time when naked women with matted hair used to go around the *Renuka devi* temple. Jogappas flock in plenty to visit the temple at this time of the year.

Though there is absolute silence on the issue of dedication today, yet indications are there that it goes on, if not overtly, very covertly. Even as far back as 2004, in Saundatti, two thousand girls were about to be dedicated to the Goddess *Yellamma*, but the event was nearly ruined due to the timely intervention of the Government. Nevertheless, the temple authorities were not deterred by this; they very quickly and quietly shifted the dedication ceremony to smaller *Yellamma* temples nearby. My visit to the Renuka *Yellamma* temple startled me on many grounds. An interview with a priest at Saundatti¹⁰ revealed great disparities between what I already knew and what he told me. Conflicting accounts of the prevalence of the *devadasi* system prevails in present-day Saundatti. Even today, I saw women, pregnant women, eunuchs, jogappas and even children carrying baskets on their heads with pictures of the goddess on their heads- asking for *Jogwaa* (alms in the name of the goddess). It is a custom among the mendicant ritual functionaries of *Yellamma* who are eunuchs to wear the attire of their opposite sex such as women mendicants wearing the dress of the males and vice versa. Apart from assisting the pilgrims in worshipping the Goddess, they have many other functions such as singing, dancing and playing on a variety of musical instruments. They divide the area amongst themselves and spread the glory of the deity in their allotted area, thereby earning a living through that too. Jogappas too dedicate themselves to the deity; they may be sexually afunctional or functional; married or unmarried. All of them grow long hair and wear religious marks on the body when they go out to propagate the glory of the deity. Some of the men may wear sarees, shave off their moustaches and beards, grow long hair, wear ornaments and jewellery used by women (including the *mangal sutra*) that symbolises their marital status. Women who become religious mendicants carry several ritual objects with them such as a tuft of bear hair (*chowri*) that they use for fanning the deity, metal pot and the image of the face of the deity at the top and an empty basket.

My conversation with a *devadasi* eunuch at the *Parashuram* temple below revealed certain interesting facts - begging has become a means of livelihood

for these *devadasis*; they are very well conversant in English (owing to the huge influx of foreign and Indian tourists who throng the temples); and the problem of HIV/AIDS too has reached alarming proportions among the *devadasi* community, especially among the eunuchs. During the *Sankranti* festival, they have to collect alms from at least five houses each. Moreover, he/she continued, when the *devadasis* become old, and they can no longer work as farm labourers or sex workers, begging is the only alternative left to them.

Ritual Mendicants or Sexual Ascetics?

Jogappas like Paro and Sureka are the devotees of the Goddess *Yogeshwari* (*Yellamma /Renuka*¹¹) who are similar to the *devadasis* as far as the tasks they perform are concerned. They are a transgender community of dedicated men who are supposedly 'touched', 'cursed' or 'possessed' by the Goddess Renuka Yellamma. These transgenders are uniquely found in regions of north Karnataka, south Maharashtra, west Telengana and Andhra Pradesh. In fact, jogappas command much more respect than the traditional *hijaras* or eunuchs. They are also most often not shunned by their families – families have an economic incentive in accepting a family member as a Goddess or her devotee. It is in performing their religious duties that their gender roles get a definite form.

Jogappas have supernatural powers of healing and fortune-telling. It is commonly said that Yellamma chooses her devotee.¹² Divine possession by Yellamma leads to 'incurable' physical ailments like fits, rashes, foul odour or even a dreadlock. All these are considered to be blessings of the Goddess – it serves as a way of life for a transgendered person – for a person who was so long feeling trapped as a man in the body of a woman. Thus the cult of the jogappas is a way of dealing with evolving forms of masculinities in a society that gives weightage to divine cults even today. It is a classic example of the manner in which men assume a gender-fluid existence, compromising yet retaining aspects of their masculinity; all the while performing their tasks that they are destined for.

The only possible way to keep on queering Queer Studies is to make efforts to expand and explore its multifaceted dimensions. The study of this transgender community has immeasurable potential in the field of Queer Studies in so far as this is a community with a dissident sexuality. This community has existed with respect carving out a place for itself in a society that continues to pigeonhole individuals based on their sexualities.¹³ The jogappas are a community that is at odd with the normal, the legitimate and

the dominant. Our society is accepted as a heteronormative one and 'normally so' – jogappas and transgenders are located on its fringes and are considered to be dangerous. Had it not been for the intervention of the Goddess, they would have continued to be degraded on account of their sexual orientations.

Bakshi and Dasgupta believe that one cannot polarise identities as homosexual or heterosexual; there are a whole gamut of desires that defy easy categorisation.¹⁴ The jogappas are one such category. Alternative sexuality isn't a monolith. Each identity category represents an ideology and a way of life that differentiates it to some extent from other categories.¹⁵ The jogappas are a unique category in as far as their lives are governed by their association with the Goddess.

Paro and Sureka were *jogappas of the God Khandoba*. *Jogappas* are generally men (*devadasi* eunuchs) who wear a sari and blouse and grow their hair long. Among other pieces of jewellery, the must-haves are an anklet and a necklace of cowries. They will always apply *bhandara* on their forehead and dance and sing in praise of *Yellamma*. When young, these transvestites (they usually cross-dress) are busy in earning a livelihood. They are called as *Yellamma* and *Yellappa*. But when they grow old, they undergo religious mendicant status and are addressed as *Jogappa* and *Jogavva*. The vermilion mark on their foreheads is very important for them – the men like Sureka shave their faces clean every day, wear feminine attire and go out in group carrying pots on their heads. On the top of the pots (they may be of copper or brass) they put the face image of the deity along with some neem leaves. They also carry a variety of musical instruments along with them – a *Chaundaka/ Chowdiki* and an *Ikanada* – they sing and dance in a particular way in honour of the *Yellamma* deity. As per the legend, these eunuchs or *Jogappas* are the cursed sons of Jamadagni, who had refused to obey their father and kill their mother. Being cursed, they have no ritual roles either towards the deity or the devotees who throng the *Yellamma* temples. Their binding/duty is that they go into the society singing and dancing, and, spreading the glory of their mother, i.e. *Renuka*. However, being the children of *Renuka* and Jamadagni, they are considered to be a part of the divine family - so they do not need anybody's permission or assistance to visit the shrine or holy temples. They also do not have to take any vows or offer material goods to the deity – instead they collect alms and use it to beautify themselves and eke out subsistence. As far as the devotees are concerned, they offer alms generously in the hope of pleasing their mother, i.e. the Goddess *Yellamma*. It is also this group of mendicants who have the sole right to stop devotees and ask for alms as they go on their way to the *Renuka* temple at Saundatti. Today, with the ban

on dedication, the religious mendicants of the shrine, such as the eunuchs are delegated with powers by the local administration and the priests to perform the rite. They conduct the rite from outside the shrine and after reporting the matter, deposit the money collected from the candidates.

Normally, both Paro and Sureka led very busy lives, that very day they did not have any programme to attend to, so we had got a chance to meet them. Sureka said that it was true that the *devadasis* got Rs. 500/- as pension, but it was only after they had left their "*dhandaa*" (business). But, according to Sureka, their *dhandaa* was far more profitable than the governmental pension. When I asked about the help they got from the Government or any NGO, the answer was in the negative. Eunuchs like Sureka also doubled up as homosexuals and prostitutes to augment their income by night-time. The answer to my next question also stunned me, I asked them whether there had been any HIV/AIDS related deaths in their community, to which the answer was "Oh yes, plenty of people among us have died." Here, we are reminded of the words of Rani Bai, a *devadasi* of Belgaum, Karnataka, interviewed by William Dalrymple¹⁶. When asked about the disease of AIDS and their feelings about it she remarked desolately, ... "*there is always fear. We know that even if you persuade all your clients to wear a condom, one broken one can infect us. And once we are infected there is no cure. We will die – if not today, then tomorrow*".

In spite of all the misery in their lives, devotees of *Yellamma* like Sureka feel empowered by the Goddess. Eunuchs, criminals and sex workers too become *Jogappas*. Once they become so, they will be empowered to beg in the name of the Goddess and accordingly, their social status too, will overcome a change, as they will be looked up with respect as representatives of the Goddess. Every year, in the month of December, the *devadasis* go to the temple of *Renuka Yellamma* in Saundatti, Belgaum district of Karnataka. Sureka and Paro too, accompany the innumerable throngs of *devadasis* in this yearly ritual. At *jatara* (annual fair) time, these eunuchs are also treated as deities and they can even spit toddy on anyone's face including that of Brahmins and this is regarded as an auspicious sign. When I asked Sureka the reason behind his dedication, he merely shrugged his shoulders and casually said that if it had not been for the Goddess, who would have taken care of people like him.

Jogappas belonged to the lowest of the low strata of society. They are by profession beggars – begging in the name of the goddess is a part and parcel of their lives. It is customary for the devotees of *Yellamma* like Sureka to go to at least five houses and beg on auspicious days; usually on Tuesdays and Saturdays. As Anagha Tambe¹⁷ mentions, like other entertainer and beggar castes who

are either nomadic or settled in a village as per its requirement, *jogtins* and *jogtas* are condemned as parasites who live by begging. Normally, beggars are looked down upon by the society at large; it is only because they are blessed by the goddess do they acquire such a social standing. *Yellamma* and her various forms are part of the Little Tradition and their devotees are largely rural and unlettered folk whose social standing owes a lot to their magical powers. The most crucial aspect of *Renuka* worship is that there is no intermediary between the village deity and her devotees – Sureka and Paro. This very aspect is a great sense of empowering these low caste people, whose societal status suffer an upward mobility due to the intervention of these goddesses. Rather, mentioned Sureka, they speak to the Goddess as if they were speaking to a human being about their lives, and its joys and sorrows. V. Lalitha¹⁸ confidently asserts that the Scheduled Castes are worshipping *Yellamma* only now, and that too, the Sanskritisation process is largely responsible for it. The Dalits, she claims, have had a relationship with *Yellamma* for a long time. In fact, they do not maintain this kind of relationship with other Gods. This is exactly what, I feel, gives the dalit *devadasis* a sense of authority, a sense of agency.

A Fading Divinity?

Jogappas are the result of a patriarchal society's response to a boy who turns into a girl. These are people who are disowned by parents, shunned by friends, ridiculed by society and abused by the authorities.¹⁹ This transgendered community has looked to the Goddess *Yellamma* as a refuge since eternity – Saundatti has become a foster-home for abandoned kids like Sureka and Paro. These jogappas get emotional security from the Goddess who herself had to reclaim the right of sex and the right of maternity from a reluctant society. An indepth study of this community has vast potential in the domain of Queer Knowledge. The production of knowledge (Michel Foucault) about the LGBTQI is extremely important; it questions what is legitimate and what is illegitimate.

A lot of writing has gone into elaborating on the degraded and wretched lives of these jogappas in Maharashtra today. Rajan Gavas' novel *Bhandarbhog* is the story of a *jogtaa*, his dedication is the cause of his intense pain and humiliation. As a result of his dedication, he is required to adjust to his identity as a cross-dressing and non-masculine *jogtaa*; this creates all the more turbulences in his life.

Ruth Manorama²⁰ rightly mentions that perpetual dedication of jogappas under the guise of religious practices in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are question marks in a society's conscience and civilization and on all tall claims

of equality and justice that we proudly make. In fact, the right economic alternatives are not available that will enable these *devadasis* and *jogins* to come out of their vicious circle. What is of utmost importance is that a *jogin* or a *jogappa* can neither subsist through marriage nor get a proper livelihood option to depend upon. Neither is their labour required for the village economy nor are they remunerated rightfully by the village. They are thus condemned to lead a life akin to beggars, idlers and vagrants living like parasites off the village 'ecosystem'. The sexual labour of these people are thus stigmatised and marginalised within the village economy.

What is of concern here is that over the years, the belief in the divine powers of the Jogappas are fading. A society that is rapidly modernising is witnessing an erosion of the cult of the Jogappas. Under the circumstances, it is time they took up other avenues of livelihood and started to educate themselves. A very noteworthy attempt in this regard has been made by a famous Carnatic Singer of south India T.M.Krishna. He performed a Concert titled "Performing the Periphery" along with five jogappas. It was an epic event – a collaboration between a Carnatic vocalist with a group of transgender folk musicians. It went a long way in questioning caste and gender perceptions of the society. The musical concert signalled a progress in the ways in which society responds to these transgenders. It was a musical conversation – a conversation of multiple sexualities and multiple cultures through multiple music. Initially, the Jogappas were apprehensive about performing before an urban audience. But slowly, as their fears dissipated, they felt encouraged – public performances go a long way in bringing about dignity and trust – things that are lacking in the life of these transgenders.

It is time we accept the transgenders as a part of us, as human beings who desire to live a life of dignity and worth. They are neither ritual mendicants nor sexual ascetics nor dedicated to Goddesses – primarily they are men with conflicting notions of masculinities. These conflicting notions need to be studied and understood; for them to earn a place for themselves in the society. And for us to make further breakthroughs in Queer theory.

Even today, the practice of dedicating men and women to Gods and Goddesses has not abated. Anagha Tambe²¹ too has written that the *devadasi* system is existing till date: the *jogappas* are dedicated to *Yellamma* at Saundatti, Karnataka – they operate on the peripheries of the temple and are engaged in ritual, cultural and sexual labour for the village. In the past, when it was not legally banned, it was like any other vow fulfilled at the shrine and the agent collected a nominal fee to perform the rite. Today, due to the imposed ban on

devadasi dedication, the agents have fixed an unofficial price which ranges from five hundred to five thousand rupees or even more, depending on the urgency and status of the people involved. A major fact is that today, the ritual agents do not publicly accept their involvement in the deal. A handful of them who do accept state that they have to share this income with the senior *devadasis*, or mendicants who have groomed the girls, the temple committee officials, the temple priests, the police etc. who in turn pretend ignorance about the rite.²²

However, inspite of innumerable obstacles, some jogappas and *devadasis* are showing an eagerness to come out of the social stigma in their lives. In their desire to lead an independent and respectable life, they are realising the value of self-esteem. Awareness and social consciousness is indeed helping them to return, though slowly, to the mainstream. Many of them are aware that their children should get proper education; they should be brought up in an entirely different atmosphere and their children should not be subjected to the same fate. The entire system being based on superstition, one has to strike at its very root in order to wipe it out completely.

Notes

1. Judith Butler (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* New York: Routledge.
2. Lakshmi Vishwanathan (2008) *Women Of Pride – The Devadasi Heritage* New Delhi: Lotus Collection, p. 1.
3. Vakulabharanam Lalitha (2011) *Women, Religion and Tradition – The Cult of Jogins, Matangis and Basvis* Bhopal Rawat Publications.
4. A class of sacred Sanskrit writings on Hindu mythology and folklore.
5. He is the sixth avatar of Lord Vishnu and supposed to be one of the Chiranjeevis (or immortal).
6. *Veerashaivism* or *Lingayatism* is a distinct *Shaivite* tradition established in the twelfth century by *Basavanna* – a philosopher, statesman and social reformer. Rejecting the authority of the *Vedas* and the caste system, it propounds monotheism and focuses attention on the worship of the Lord Shiva in the form of *linga*.
7. *Kaalbhairava* or *Kalabhairava* is one of the most important deities of Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Nepal – he is the fierce manifestation of Lord Shiva associated with annihilation. Among the ornaments that adorn him are a range of twisted serpents, which serve as earrings, bracelets, anklets and a sacred thread. Apart from these, he wears a tiger skin and a ritual apron composed of human bones.
8. K.C.Tarachand op. cit, p. 81
9. Margashira masam or Margasira month is the ninth month as per Telegu calendar. Margashira Masam 2010-2011 starts on 6 December 2010 and ends on 4 January 2011.

Margashira month is considered as auspicious month for Telegu people as it is the favourite month for Lord Krishna.

10. Interview conducted on 11th June, 2010.
11. For a detailed history of the Goddess Renuka *Yellamma* see William Dalrymple “The daughters of *Yellamma*” in *Aids Sutra Untold Stories from India* (2008) Random House India pp. 221 – 222.
12. [Thewire.in/gender/jogappas-goddess-gender](http://thewire.in/gender/jogappas-goddess-gender) 01December 2016.
13. Kaustav Bakshi and Rohit K. Dasgupta (2019) *Queer Studies Texts, Contexts, Praxis* Hyderabad Orient Blackswan p. 6-8.
14. Ibid p.15-16.
15. R.Raj Rao (2017) *Criminal Love? Queer Theory, Culture, and Politics in India* New Delhi Sage p.x
16. See William Dalrymple “The daughters of *Yellamma*” in(2008) *Aids Sutra Untold Stories from India* Random House India , pp. 240-241.
17. Anagha Tambe (2009) *Reading Devadasi Practice through Popular Marathi Literature* in Economic and Political Weekly, April25, 2009, Vol. XLIV No. 17, p. 88.
18. Vakulabharanam Lalitha (2011) *Women, Religion and Tradition – The Cult of Jogins, Matangis and Basvis* Bhopal, Rawat Publications, pp. 176.
19. THE HINDU 15th September 2018 *Karnatakaka’s Jogappas can now live a gender-fluid life* rishikesh.desai@thehindu.co.in
20. Ruth Manorama, “Dalit Women in Struggle: Transforming Pain into Power” in Subhadra Mitra Channa and Joan P. Mencher (ed) (2013) *Life as a Dalit Views from the Bottom on Caste in India* New Delhi Sage, p. 258.
21. Anagha Tambe (2009) *Reading Devadasi Practice through Popular Marathi Literature* in Economic and Political Weekly, April 25, 2009, Vol. XLIV No. 17, p. 92.
22. K. C. Tarachand (1991) *Devdasi Custom : Rural Social Structure and Flesh Markets* New Delhi Reliance Publishing House p. 86.