

**Ritual and Power : A Study of Yellamma Myth in India Based on
Catherine Bell's Ritual Theory**

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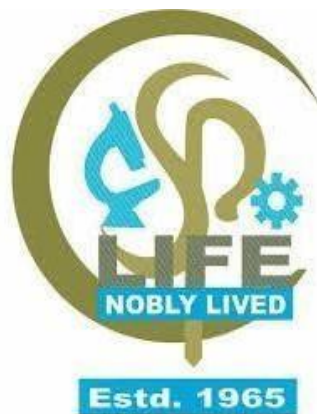
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Declaration

I do hereby declare that the project **Ritual and Power: A Study Of Yellamma Myth in India through Catherine Bell's Ritual Theory** is the record of genuine research work done me under the guidance of Ms.Deepa , Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Paul's College, Kalamassery.

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Certificate

This is certify that the project work **Ritual and Power: A Study of Yellamma Myth in India Through Catherine Bell's Ritual Theory** Is the record of original work carried out by Saranya P. J under the supervision and guidance of Ms. Deepa George, Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Paul's College, Kalamassery.

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Introduction

Myth can be defined in two ways; first it is a sacred idea that is inherited over generations. Second, it is an absurd, irrational, and fantastic concept about the world that appeal to unsophisticated minds. The two meanings are two sides of the same coin. Depending on one's point of view, a story, an image or a custom can be sacred or stupid. If one believes that only rational ideas are real than sacred ideas are bound to be unreal, because the concept of sacredness and by extension, divinity, defines logic.

Myth is all about communication. It is a special kind of communication that establishes a relationship between the macrocosm (universe), mesocosm (society) and microcosm (humans). Communication is established through three avenues. Narratives, symbols and rituals. Narratives, symbols and rituals that express myth may be seen as the vocabulary of a religion, they construct the communal belief that binds a people. Thus the narrative of nativity and resurrection, the symbol of the shepherd and the crucifix and the ritual of baptism, communication and confession bind all Christians. Likewise the narrative of Buddha's enlightenment, the symbol of the lotus, the atheistic world view and the ritual chanting of the hymn through which the aspirant surrenders himself to the Buddhist way binds Buddhists all over the world. For the communication to be an expression of myth. It must be viewed as sacred by both the communicator and his or her audience. The communication must appeal not to a person but to a people. And it must be made in a ritually prescribed manner, for example, the epic, the *Ramayana*. This narrative is reduced to literature unless the reader reveres the narrative and seeks spiritual guidance in it. Its status as a sacred tale comes from the way it is revered by a large number of Hindus, not just one or two devotees and finally, the theatrical enactment of the epic in North India known as Ramalila may entertain millions, but it attains mythical status because it is performed only a

a particular time of the year during the annual commemoration of Rama's victory over his foes.

The sacred narrative, an expression of a myth becomes sacred when it is of anonymous origin, a revelation or a communication from a nonhuman source. No one knows who first composed the story of Brahma, who drew the first swastika, who planned the first Yanga or vedic fire sacrifice. This gives myth a sense of timelessness and transforms it into a natural phenomenon perceived by wise, rather than an artificial construct of humans. Though the sacred ideas may have evolved originally over years, satisfying different needs at different times and capturing within it various layers of meaning, the believer usually doesn't attribute historically to any expression of myth. Historically it is often achieved by attributing the scripture or ritual or symbol to God. In tantric scriptures one often finds a guru describing chance, charms and rituals to his disciple, insisting that he learned them from a line of teachers who learned them from Agasthya, a legendary sage, who learned it from Nandi, a forest spirit who in turn overheard a secret conversation between Siva and Sakti (tantric visualization of God and Goddess). Likewise a devotee of the Koran insists that it is of non human origin because it is a record of the word Allah expressed to the prophet Muhammad, through the angel Gabriel. Thus a scripture becomes a historical document of an ahistorical truth and hence sacred. In Judeo-Christian, Islamic traditions narratives become sacred because they are historical. No one is allowed to doubt the history of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. But their existence is not seen simply as a consequence of sociocultural events, rather, it is the fulfillment of the timeless prophecy. Had there be no Eden, no original sin, no fall from grace, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad would not have mythic status. Hindus also attribute historicity to mythic narrative. The epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are traditionally considered histories or itihisas. Valmiki, who wrote the *Ramayana*, gives refuge

to Sita in the forest. Vyasa, who wrote the *Mahabharata*, is the grandfather of the protagonists Pandavas.

Religion in India is characterized by a diversity of religious beliefs and practices. The Indian subcontinent is the birthplace of four of the world's major religions, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Hinduism has been called the oldest religion in the world and some practitioners and scholars refer to it as "Sanatana Dharma," "the eternal tradition", or "the eternal way", beyond human history. Scholars regard Hinduism as a fusion or synthesis of various Indian cultures and traditions, with diverse roots and no founder. This "Hindu synthesis" started to develop between 500 CE and 300 CE, after the end of the Vedic period (1500 to 500 BC) and flourished in the medieval period with the decline of Buddhism in India.

Although Hinduism contains a broad range of philosophers, it is linked by shared concepts, recognisable rituals, cosmology, shared textual resources, and pilgrimage to sacred sites. The Hindu texts are classified into Sruthi (heard) and Smriti (remembered). These texts discuss theology, philosophy, mythology, Vedic Yanja, Yooga, agamic rituals and temple building among other topics. Major scriptures include the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Aganas*. Sources of authority and eternal truths in its texts play an important role, but there is also a strong Hindu tradition of questioning authority in order to deepen the understanding of these truths and further develop the tradition.

Prominent themes in Hindu beliefs include the four Purusharthas, the proper goals or aims of human life, namely Dharma (ethics or duties), Artha (prosperity or work) Kama (desires or passion) and Moksha (liberation or freedom from the cycle of death and rebirth) and various youg as (paths or practices to attain moksha). Hindu practices include rituals

such as puja and (worship) and recitation, japa, meditation, family oriented rites of passage, annual festivals and occasional pilgrimages. Hinduism is the third largest religion and Hinduism is the most widely professed faith in India.

Rituals reinforce beliefs, behaviour and values whether the rituals are religious or not, and they include conformity, structure and a sense of belonging. They can also reinforce a certain form of thought as well.

Catherine Bell in her book *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* gives a critical reading of how the notion of ritual has been used in the study of religion, society and culture and an approach to ritual activities that is less encumbered by assumptions about thinking and acting and more disclosing of the strategies by which rituals do what they do (22). In Hinduism many myths and rituals are present. The Devadasi system is one of the main practices in Hinduism. In south India, a devadasi is a woman who is dedicated to worship and serve a deity or a temple for the rest of her life. The dedication takes place in a 'pottukattu' ceremony that is somewhat similar to a marriage ceremony. In addition to taking care of the temple and performing rituals these women also learn and practice classical Indian artistic traditions such as Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi and Odissi dances.

After becoming Devadasis young women would spend their time learning religious rites, rituals and dances. They sometimes had children with high officials on the priest who instructed them in music and dancing. In the Southern Indian state of Karnataka the Devadasi system was practised from 10th century onwards. Chief among them was the Yellamma Cult. There are many stories about the origin of the Yellamma Cult. The most popular story indicates that Renuka was the daughter of the Brahmin, married the sage Jamadagni and was the mother of five sons. She used to bring water from the Malaprabha river for the sage's worship and rituals. One day at the river she saw a group of youths engaged in water sports

and forgot to return home in time for her husband's worship of rituals, which made Jamadagni question her chastity. He ordered his sons one by one to punish their mother but four of them refused on one pretext or the other. The sage cursed them to become eunuchs and had Renuka beheaded by her fifth son, Parashuram. To everybody's astonishment, Renuka's head multiplied by term and hundreds and moved to different regions. This miracle inspired her four eunuch sons as well as others to become her followers and worship her head.

The Yellamma Cult is followed by many people in many places in India. Those who are committed are known as Jogamma and Jogappa. Jogamma is the woman who is dedicated to the Yellamma devi and Jogappa, is a man who marries the goddess Yellamma. The Jogappas are one of the least known transgender community in south India. Jogappa occupies a respected, priestly position with in society. People seek their blessings and Yellamma appears through them. They are directly linked between the society and the divine.

Chapter 1

Constructing Rituals: The Yellamma Myth of India

A theoretical description of ritual generally regard it as an action and thus automatically distinguishes it from the conceptual aspects of religion, such as beliefs symbols and myths. In some cases added qualifications may soften the distinction, but rarely do such descriptions question this immediate differentiation or the usefulness of distinguishing what is thought from what is done. Likewise, belief, creed, symbols and myth emerged as forms of mental content or conceptual blue prints, they directly inspire or promote activity, but they themselves are not activities. Ritual, like action will act out, express or perform these conceptual orientation.

In many traditions Renuka and Yellamma are taken to be two names for the same Goddess. However there is also an oral tradition that distinguishes between the two. According to this tale, when Renuka fled to a low caste community her son Parasurama tried to kill her. He found and beheaded her, along with a low cast woman who had tried to protect her, whom he later brought them back to life. He mistakenly attached the women's head to Renuka's body, and vice versa. Jamadagni accepted the former as his wife Renuka, while the latter was worshipped by the lower castes as Yellamma, the mother of all. Matangi, Renuka, and Yellamma are all names of the same goddess.

There are many versions of the story of goddess Yellmma and the ritual of dedication associated with her. Yellamma is also the goddess of the Devadasis who are women generally from the oppressed castes. They were traditionally singers and dancers of the temple, who often engaged in sex works. However Yellamma's devotees are not confined to the Jogappa and Devadasi traditions. Most of them also worship other gods or goddesses.

People dedicate themselves or others from the family to the goddess. While some boys dedicated to Yellamma are considered to be 'sacred women' as they choose the goddess.

Yellamma (mother of all) is to be found in her chief representation, on her own hill (Yellamma gudda) overlooking the Malprapha river, five kilo meters outside the small town of Saundatti in the Belgaum district of north Karnataka. Saundatti Yellamma constitutes one of the largest pilgrimage centres in south India, attracting some two to three million pilgrims per year. Most of them come from southern Maharashtra and from the northern and coastal districts of Karnataka. Yellamma is also to be found at the centre of other smaller scale pilgrimage sites in the region. Although not usually a village guardian deity (grama devatha), Yellamma is represented somewhere in the pantheon of most villages in this region. In addition she acts as a "house deity" (mane-devaru), in effect a lineage deity, in a large number of house holds from all castes in the social hierarchy (including Brahmana and untouchables).

Most Kannadigas loosely equate Yellamma with Parvathi, the consort of Siva. All the prominent female deities of the region (such as Dyamavva, Durgavva, Kalavva, Karivva and Uduत्tamma) are considered her younger sisters and the prominent male deities of the region (such as Virama and Mylarappa but not Badavanna or Siva), are her older brothers. Yellamma is identified with and indeed named Renuka, mother of Parasurama, an avathar of Vishnu, whose exploits are related in the classical literature of Hinduism. Panditta attached to the Saundatti Yellamma temple have published several Kannada versions of the Sanskrit Renukamahatmye, normally regarded as an appendix to Vedavyasa's Skanda Purana.

Yellamma was born in Yellappagoudar's house in the village of Haralakatti. Her parents wanted her to marry a man in her own caste, but she chose an ascetic called Jamadagni, who lived in an ashram on the hill outside Saundatti.

Every morning Yellamma went to fetch fresh water for her husband from the Malprabha River, so that he could carry out his daily rituals. Yellamma had miraculous powers. She could make a fresh water pot every day out of riverbed sand for her head cushion and she would make a coil out a live cobra.

One morning she came across a man playing naked in the river with his wife. Yellamma was aroused and she wished she had listened to her parents then she too could have had fun with her husband. However, realizing that she was the wife of a sage (rishi pathni) and could therefore not lead such a life, she set about her usual tasks. But having such thoughts in her mind she could not make the pot of sand she needed to carry water to her husband, nor could she catch the snake for her head coil.

The omniscient Jamadagni already knew what had happened. By the time Yellamma, bedraggled and shame faced, returned to the ashram without water. Jamadagni was furious. The goddess of wrath was in him and the heat from his glaring eyes turned Yellamma's body into that of a leper.

Yellamma was forced to leave the ashram she went far and wide, until one day she came across two yogis, Ekayya and Jogayya. With their guidance and with the help of the sacred waters of Jugal bhavi, Yellamma was cured of her leprosy. She returned to her husband's ashram, but Jamadagni was even more angered by such affrontary. He ordered their three sons to cut off her head. They refused, where upon Jamadagni cursed them and they became impotent.

Then Jamadagni called the fifth son Parasurama, who was meditating at Siva's side in heaven. Parasurama armed with an axe (parasu) given to him by Ganesha proceeded to cut off his mother's head. As reward for his obedience his father granted his wish that his mother

should be brought back to life, his brothers to normality and that the goddess of wrath inside his father should be sent away.

Yellamma is one of a group of goddesses in north Karnataka associated with sickness. Dyamavva, a sister of Yellamma, is the most commonly found village guardian deity in the region. Where Dyamavva is found Durgavva remains as the caste deity of an untouchable caste of tanners. Such goddesses are regarded as ugra-fierce and hot and they normally reside on the perimeter of or just outside the village settlement. The goddesses are there to protect villages against attack from outside, but being themselves of the outside, they may also turn against their protégés if they feel they have been neglected or polluted by them. Some bodily disorders are regarded as being caused by attack from the outside, especially in the form of winds. Information is expressed through phrases like “a ghost (devva) has attacked me” and “a wind (gali) has entered my body”. Various diseases and disorders are also attributed to bad winds, winds that are too hot or too cold or that carry insects (krimi). The Ugra Goddess in particular is capable of giving off hot winds and of sending krimi in the wind.

Although Yellamma is one of a family of ferocious goddesses, her iconographic representation differs from that of the other goddesses on the outside, who are depicted as standing over or riding an animal and carrying weapons. In a temple, Yellamma typically takes the form of a bust or a head placed on a gaddige, a flat rectangular tomb of the sort erected over the graves of ascetic and other god like humans. Sometimes she takes the form of a rock or natural ball of earth out in the open.

In fact, thousands flock to Saundatti temple starting from November 30 until December 29 during the Margasira month of the Hindu Kannada calendar for the Yellamma jatre. This jatre which literally translates to festival, in an annual celebration for jogappas in

Karnataka that's much akin to the Koothamadavar temple festival in Koovagan for Aravanis (a community of transgender women) in Tamil Nadu. At the height of the festivities, Jogappas blend in with other transgender communities like hijras (a particular community of transgender women) even though they don't fit into the stereotypes of boisterous attitude or jezebel behaviour. The followers of Yellamma, who are mostly poor and illiterate, take a vow to dedicate themselves, their spouses, or their children in the service of goddess Yellamma. When they are unable to face the hardship of life, the typical situations include life-threatening diseases, infertility, and dire financial trouble. These are the people who are primarily responsible for propagating goddess Yellamma's virtues and achievements and glorify the goddess.

An elaborate ceremony is held in order to initiate the Jogathis (female) and Jogappa (male) volunteers in the service of goddess Yellamma. New followers have to bathe in three holy ponds and proceed to the head priest accompanied by community elder and other members of the family. The priest gives them a long sermon on what they have to do to please Yellamma. They have to identify themselves with the very poor and unfortunate ones and serve the society. At least twice a year they have to visit the Yellamma shrine on full moon days to express and confirm their obedience.

During the semi-annual ritual they have to observe preferably total nudity. If not they have to cover their bodies with neem foliage or somty cloths. Such rituals especially in the last decade, have become heavily publicized events due to the over sexed youngsters and to tourist who gather around such pilgrimage centres to have glimpses of made and semi-made human bodies. The devotees of Yellamma decorate their forehead by smearing turmeric (Haldi) and vermilion (kum kum). Usually they do not go in for expensive ornaments. Crowns, earrings and necklaces are made out of cowries. Some of them do not wear any

ornaments at all. The male devotees dress like men, but many Jogappas prefer to dress like Jogathis (symbolic of the sons of Renuka who became impotent), although it is extremely difficult for them to hide their male characteristics. They sometimes engage in female sexual gestures. Most of the time, the Jogathis carry a metal vessel or a bamboo basket on their head which stays stationary without any support. Hence it looks like its part of their body. The followers of the cult believe that it is their deity's blessing that made it possible. The basket or the vessel is meant to carry a brass bust of Yellamma. It is very artificially decorated with a great variety of flowers. Some Jogathis use different coloured clothes for the same purpose. It is a sight to see them dance carrying the icon on their heads. They dance rhythmically in a predetermined pattern. One or two Jogappas play drums.

Although ancient texts like Vedas, Upanishads do not mention Devadasis (servants of god) institutionalized worship idols in temple during the early centuries of Christian era led to the practice of dedicating women to temple as laid down in the Puranas. Thus some Puranas (Agni Purana and Bhavishya Purana) specifically state that the best way for a man to obtain suryaloka (heaven of sun god) was to dedicate a group of girls to the temple of the sun. For many rich merchants it was the most affordable way to earn merit.

Over a period of time all the pampered family deities of kings and nobles started getting pretty and talented servants for different rituals performed for the deity (befitting a great king or deity) like bathing, dressing, offering flowers, music and dance. Their main job was to dance and sing and play musical instruments, while the priest of the temple offered sixteen kinds of service.

The various state Governments have since banned the nude parade of worshippers of Yellamma, after violent debate in the society about their rights and wrongs. The ban has resulted in resentment among the followers of Yellamma.

Chapter 2

Ritual, Belief and Ideology: Yellamma Cult and Divine Prostitution

Ritual has generally been thought to express belief in symbolic ways for the purpose of their continual reaffirmation and inculcation. This relationship is particularly prominent in theories of ritual as a form of social control.(182)

Religious beliefs have been understood in a variety of ways as pseudoscientific explanations, rationalization of customary behaviour, personal or communal ideologies or highly structured doctrinal formulations whose content has little import on behaviour. When defined in terms of the mental states of individuals, belief has been deemed beyond the reach of social analysis. Yet belief has also been described as irreducibly social in nature, a matter of collectively significant activities rather than personality held concept or attitudes. More frequently, beliefs system are understood to be a matter of cultural world views or communally constructed ideological system, quite beyond what a particular person may or may not hold to be true.(182)

The traditional association of belief and ritual is also challenged by growing evidence that most symbolic action, even the basic symbols of a community's ritual life and be every unclear to participants or interpreted by them in very dissimilar ways.(183)

As with ritual, most attempt to analyze how symbols do what they do also assume that the purpose of symbolism in sociocultural solidarity by means of the naturalization of political and ideological values.(184)

Hinduism for Hindus is not a coherent beliefs system but first and for most a collection of practices. It is the collection of practices as such that needs to be explored further in order to understand their sense of religious action.

Ritual does not necessarily cultivate or inculcate shared beliefs for the sake of solidarity and social control, although this is a common understanding of Ritual. Even without invoking the issue of specific beliefs or belief system many have seen to activities and effects of ritual in term of some type of ideological conditioning. This perspective is based of course, on a fairly simplistic understanding of ideology (as was the case with belief) and the persistent notion that social society is the goal of any and all ritual mechanism. Religion and religious beliefs have been a historically consistent starting point for the study of ideology.(186)

When used to describe a single embracing and unarticulated worldview, the term ideology have been effective in highlighting three processes. First, the cultural construction of reality as intrinsic to social integration and cohesion. Second, socialization (either through in articulate form or fully objectified institutions) as the means by which values and norms are assumed without questions, and third the “structuring “ processes of cultural reproduction displayed in the realm of ideas, beliefs and values as well as the realms of economic or politics. Thus, ideology as worldview has nuanced the notion of ‘culture ’to suggest something less benign passive, or epiphenomenal.(188)

Followers of many religions in India as other civilizations worship many gods and goddesses as a part of their culture. These gods and goddesses are mostly worshipped by a group of people who are gathered in a place by building an abode such as temple, shrines beneath any free or above any plat form with or without roof. These people consider the deity

of the concerned place as their own guardian deity or the one who protects the village from illness and who helps them in their prosperity and goodness of their place.

The famous temple of Yellamma is Soundatti at Belgum district in Karnataka deals with this Cult and Devadasi system. According to history, Soundatti is a place ruled by a king belonged to Jaina sects. Before their rule this was under the local chiefs where worshipping Yellamma as their mother goddess and their virgin women were appointed as the priests. Later by 8th Century, when Jaina kingdom took over the rule, they started enrolling men to do rituals in this temple. But in 9th Century, when this kingdom lost its power and power in the religion too. The Saktas took over the shrine of Yellamma once again. In 10th and 11th Century Saiva kings belonged to Kapalika sect got control over this area. During this time, female priest were replaced by male priests who also belonged to Kapalika sect. They started indulging and using earlier women priests of the shrine for sex. In 12th Century when Virasaivism become dominant and these priests were replaced by Jangama priests. When Virasaivas got the power over here, they banned all the ill practices and introduced more refined ritual and belief system.

During the late 12th Century, Virasaivism started declining owing to religious revolt in it. Politically also soundatti area come under the Vijayanagara rulers who were basically vaisnavities. They again converted this shrine in a Vaisnava one by appointing Brahmana priest there. These priests installed the idols of vaisnava gods such as Jamadagni, Dattatreya and Parasurama. Various myth were developed both to support their faith and to weaken the earlier deity and tradition also. However till the end of 15th Century they continued the administration of the temple and responsibilities towards the devotees. At the beginning of 16th Century, once again this shrine came under the local rulers and they slowly started appointing the person of lower castes as the priests of the temple. They were also known as

Jogayya and Jogamma, who were the worshippers of goddess Bhavani. They made donations and offered protection to the shrine. It was during that period, attempts were made by Braminical priests to take over the temple from non Brahminical priests. But as already noted, they just succeeded in installing and doing offerings to the ideal of Parasurama, Dattatraya. They even installed Lakshmi too. During this time Yellamma's names changed as Renuka. It is also notable that many local myth are similar to Renuka's myth as narrative in the Puranas. The myths were incorporated with the minor or local myth of Yellamma to make the Yellamma as same as Renuka itself.

There are some hints about the connection of prostitution with Yellamma Cult. But a careful analysis is needful to fine out the fact. Yellamma became free from skin disease because of serving Ekayya and Jogayya. She also became a person having the same value as those holy persons. She also took a few women into her service, who had vowed to serve her by spreading her glory and collecting people to serve them. After Yellamma's death many be she to became holy person and all believed that any vows taken in her names can solve the problems including diseases on humans there are several type of mendicant attached to the shrine of Yellamma. They are male, female and both young and old ones. They are known to be Yellappa or Yallavva. Their main job is to spread the glory of Yellamma. They carry with them a few objects such as Chowri(bunch of hair), metal pot, basket, image of the deity etc. Also take many vows which can be called as custom and not a tradition. Vows mainly contains three elements. They are praying to the deity to avoid or overcome difficulties or to grant a boon, promising the deity to offer something in return and fulfillment of vows. These vows can be again divided in to two types, those involving offering or gifts and these involving, offering or gifts those involving the punishment of deity. The former in again

devided in to two those having permanent nature and having temporary nature. In this type of offering any gifts, offering girls to the deity also is include.

By doing a vow to Yellamma the imitation of dedication starts. Sometimes parents of an unborn child also decided to offer the body to Yellamma after birth, if that baby is female child as a divine prostitute. When one girl is decided to the shrine of Yellamma after many religious ritual, she is sent to a man who waiting for her in the shrine of the temple for union. It is believed that from that day the family which has gifted the girl to the deity stars getting the grace of the deity and prosperity. Few girls live with that man as 'wife ' for life and others live together for a short duration, ranging from one night to a week and at the most one month. Like this is life of the dedicated women called as divine prostitute continues. But the condition put for word is that women has to observe mourning while she drops a man or is dropped by a man every time. According to the tradition, widowhood is being followed by her till she gets another man has her 'husband '. The thing is that for every rites, right from the initiation after dedication for every religious action or things done by this women. The place of Sthanika is must. Since their faith is unwavering, they observe these rites strictly and is the meantime. The priest and the Sthanika at the temple get their share of income also.

Divine prostitution is classified in to different types. The main identity of the divine prostitution is the necklace of beads they wear. Gatti Muttu, Sule Muttu, and Jagati Muttu are the three types. These represent three sections of prostitutes dedicated virgin, active living with a sigh and enjoying sexually pleasures and retired inactive sexually and active ritually. There is yet another type of classification is of this type. Those wearing Gatti Muttu type, by rule remain virgin offering their virginity to the deity, those women are both sexually functional sometimes. These groups sometimes after the vowed. Period undergo another

ritual and go as sex partners of man who help them perform to the shrine and consummation rites and make payments to the shrine and the priest. Those who go as commercial prostitutes, undergo the imitation rite of the order of wearing sale Muttu type. The dedication rites and offering to the deity are the same in both cases. In the case those wearing the Jogathi Muttu, are religious mendicants. They constitute several type of men and women who are sexually and functional are also directly initiated into the service of the deity as religious mendicant functionaries. In addition to these categories there are also few men and women who belong to this tradition transact, wear the dress of opposite sex, that is men wearing the women's dress. They are also called as Yellavva and Yellappa. Perhaps this may be started when the female priest were replaced by the male priest and due to pressure of the local, this practice was followed by the male priest to influence the local devotees. As every Dasas these people also spread the glory of Yellamma by dancing and singing various traditional and folk songs related to Yellamma or Renuka and thus collecting money for running their life.

In other thing to be noted here is the prostitution came to be called as a divine one and it even become a religious practice. Through this was practiced a religious one. Later this became a custom among the Devadasi group who were mostly from Mahar, Mang Dowani and Chambhar caste groups. This thus become a way of income for many families. The families trapped by poverty often depended on this income supplied by their daughters. Girls dedicated to the goddess not only due to the request or command of rich people but due to number of reasons such as lack of male children in a family increase number of daughters, mother being in the same profession, elder sister or any other member of the family often being a Devadasi, manifestation of 'sings' such as jata, dry hair, white patch, leprosy and even mental problems have been traditionally interpreted as sign of the call of the goddess

Yellamma to join her. It is also told that some families for gaining religious sanction for their need of desire of profit from their daughters earning as a prostitute make these signs artificially. The above mentioned dedication ceremony is financed by a wealthy man and after attainment of puberty the same man has the right to take that dedicated girl. This man pays a lump sum of money to the girl's family as long as she continues her work as Devadasi. A family of one Devadasi also receives gifts, presents and cash on those days, which are especially dedicated to Yellamma from those who worship this goddess. There is another practice known as Jogin system in which girls before puberty are married to the goddess and enter prostitution when they reach puberty. In the Basavi system the girls are dedicated at pre-puberty age to a number of deities. But these girls after attaining puberty, do not immediately enter into life careers as prostitutes and according to tradition by using a begging basket should beg for money and other things to serve Yellamma at least twice a week. Basavis usually turn to prostitution as begging does not usually generate sufficient income to them.

The social need was of the emergence of the decadent Devadasi cult, a week remains of the young girl termed as Matangi, those were dedicated to the king, as the human god and were believed to be endowed with miraculous power. These girls now dedicated to the goddesses got Yellamma as their goal and prototype. The goddess having head only and the goddess having body is identified with Renuka. On the basis of the popular myth of the latter served head, the Devadasi softly came to be associated with Renuka. The girls dedicated to Yellamma carried in their baskets the image of Parasurama and Renuka too. This shows how Renuka got to be associated with the customs which were originally observed for the southern goddess Yellamma. A social custom was thus transformed into divine in nature and even a religious practice of several communities which has to be done strictly. The

prostitution here is changed in to 'divine 'and thus become a practice having divinity in it. This system has existed throughout several place in recorded in the history of south Indian culture. This system of divine prostitution can be said larger than the Devadasi system because this king of custom was functioning with in the structure of a region and as a temple ritual. Even though this tradition has lost it's socioeconomic base the concept and thus the need of divine prostitute is still very much alive. The identification of Yellamma with Renuka can be formed in all these instance. The association of practices in connection with Yellamma to Renuka was naturally the next step. But we gave also myth originally in respect of Yellamma inserted into Renuka. Thus it can be concluded that Renuka whose glories are mentioned in Mahabharata and many Puranas changed her identity into many goddesses is started by these local goddesses and her identity is shared by these local goddesses for their influence among the locals. It is also possible but by incorporating Renuka's myth various minor myth of local deities, the myth makers made use of than to establish Renuka's myth through the local divinities of a particular region.

Chapter 3

The Power of Ritualization: Treatment of Gender in Yellamma Myth

Ritualization is first and foremost a strategy for the construction of a certain type of power relationship effective within particular social argument. Catherine Bell begins with the a discussion of the term power, which is understood as influence or as force, the former “inherent, nonspecific and inherent” and the latter “intentional, specific and threatening” (197).

The distinction between symbolic and secular power is also made. The former is related to ritual and ideology and the latter to institutions. Ritualization is about placing different limits and using different culturally specific strategies to differentiate activities that are ritualized, from activities that are not. Ritualization entails the acting out of power relations, whose limits are defined by context. Bell explains two dimensions of ritualization. The first is “the dynamics of social body, its projection and embodiment of a structured environment” that happens “below the level of discourse” and which goes on without agents recognizing their participation. The second is a level at which those who appear to be disempowered are actually empowered by ritualization through “consent, resistance and negotiated appropriation” (182).

In the cult of Yellamma the person who marries the Yellamma Devi becomes the Devadasi. It is not only followed by females, it is also followed by males. Kadata is usually the mode of transition whereby an ordinary person become a “carrier of Yellamma.” The latter are called Jogappa (male) or Jogamma (female, sometimes also called simply Yellamma). Jogamma and Jogappa are not normally housebound, but peripatetic, at least for part of the year.

Let us start with the most striking characteristics of the “carriers of the Yellamma” The Jogappa, or female men. These are transformed men, men who have become women, or to put it more precisely, ordinary male men who have become sacred female men. When these men change from male to female their mode of dress changes from that of the white dhoti to the colourful, usually red sari and their names change from male to female. Like women they tattoo themselves and wear their hair long in plaits or buns. When they work in their house or village, they do the work of women alongside women-grinding millet, weeding crops and so on. Outside the house, acts requiring some privacy are carried out by Jogappa in places apart from those used by ordinary men and women.

Unlike ordinary men, Jogappa never shave and they have a special instrument (darshan) for placing out their facial hair. People say, when asked why Jogappa never marry humans (during their initiation they are “married” to Jamadagni, Yellamma’s husband), “how can we touch them, they are deities Unlike Hindu women, these female men flaunt their female sexuality is public. Those that are not yet past it dress themselves in beautiful saris and jewelry that devotees give them. Like women, they leave their hair uncut, although they plait and tie their hair, they are not so demure as to cover their head with the ends of their saris.

Most Jogappas appear to be sexually abnormal, but there is no evidence of ritual castration being carried out here, as it in some parts of India. Some Jogappas are initiated at a very young age, before any sign of a lack of masculine sexuality could have manifested itself. However, any physical sign of a loss of masculinity is taken to mean that Yellamma has caught you. Problems of sexual identity are usually not spoken of at all when Jogappas describe how they became Jogappas. Such problems are alluded to as just one aspect of many Kadata-straightening of limbs, dizziness, and so on.

The Jogappas play musical instruments (surari and chauoliki) and sing the myth of Yellamma. On their heads they carry a copper water pot (koda). Men carry water pots on the shoulder – around the neck of which is fastened a brass or silver image of Yellamma. These pots are always filled with water from which Jogappa sometimes flick over excited onlookers who drop coins in to the pots. With these pots impeccably balanced on their heads, the Jogappa dance erotically and passionately “for the goddess.”

It is considered the duty of all Jogappas to carry the ritual copper water pot (which is treated rather like a noble shrine) and to dance and sing in the appropriate manner. Women devotees (Jogammas) who usually carry an image of Yellamma in a round flat basket (jaga), do not dance. Many do not go beyond their immediate locality, where they will perform as dancers and or singers usually on Tuesdays in return for alms. They are also likely to be invited to attend those auspicious domestic rites, like puberty, marriage and pregnancy, which require the presents of muttaid (mature, married women). Some Jogappas are to be found as the temple priests of village temples inhabited by Yellamma or by one of her sister deities. During the extended pilgrimage season (roughly January to May), many Jogappas travel far and wide, visiting the major sacred centres associated with Yellamma.

The Jogappas to be will then be ritually presented with some red and white beads and other special paraphernalia. The ritual change of dress is also likely to take place (at the same time, or later) on Yellamma’s Hill. The final stage of initiation takes place in a Leather workers quarter near the Jogappa’s home.

Very few parties of pilgrims come to Saundatti without any “carrier of Yellamma” in their midst, for this is a time to pay special attention to Yellamma’s people. For instance, a high point of the sojourn on the hill is the big festival meal on full-moon day. This meal, the centrepiece of which is a sweet dish, is prepared in its entirety on the sacred hill itself. It will

be consumed back at the groups camp after every one has taken a ritual bath at Onigunda (a spiritual “oil not far from the Yellamma temple”), has received the darshana (seeing) of the goddess and has offered her gifts of food and cloth. A necessary preliminary to the festival meal involves Jogappa or Jogamma in the rite of Padalagitumsodu, “the filling of padalgi”. A padalgi is a shallow round basket used exclusively in ritual and in the collection of alms by those who carry Yellamma. Within this container and sometimes tied to it, will be found Parasurama in the form of a miniature basket of same shape. During padalgitumsodu the padalgi is filled by devotees with a combination of any of the following raw items - betel nut, turmeric root, eggplant, sugarcane, spring onion. These are worshipped with ‘arati’ the Jogappa and Jogamma singing songs about Yellamma. Any Jogappa and Jogamma present are then given festival food, before the man of the group is served. The carrier of Yellamma might also receive a new padalgi or jaga, the old ones would be left to disintegrate on the hill.

The largest gathering of Jogappa at Saundatti is to be found at Jogalbhavi, the point of entry to the sacred hill and the site of sacred reservoir where it is said that Yellamma was washed clean of her leprosy. Here the Jogappa set up temporary shelters and assist pilgrims in their performance of huttagi donning a ritual dress of branches of the margosa tree which pilgrims wear while carrying out a rite of circumambulation. It is usually only done by those who have vowed to perform the rite in return for help in times of trouble. Many more women than men perform huttagi. There are two kinds of ritual attire, either one goes naked except for the leaf dress, or one wears a single string of margosa twing over new cloth, which in the case of women will usually be white in colour and worn like sari. All those undergoing the rite clench a twing of margosa crosswise in their mouth and clasp another twig to the top of their heads. Having first taken a ritual bath, these pilgrims are regaled in the proscribed manner, with the help of some Jogappa, who will also have provided the twing and dressers

of margosa. The Jogappa, playing their music and singing songs about Yellamma, then head the circumambulation of the Satyamma temple, usually five rounds in an auspicious, right side to the goddess mode. The final circumambulation ends at the rear of the temple, where the pilgrims divert themselves of their margosa dressers and put on new cloths. Some will remain in ritual dress, however and continue, sometimes prostrate up the hill to Yellamma. Here too they will circumambulate the goddess, before divesting themselves taking a ritual bath and finally donning new cloths. This is also the proper procedure for a Jogappa when he changes from male to female dress.

Conclusion

The culture of India refers collectively to the thousands of distinct and unique culture of all religious communities present in India. India's languages, religions, dance, music, architecture, food and customs differ from place to place within the country. Indian culture often labeled as an amalgamation of several cultures, spans across the Indian subcontinent and has been influenced by a history that is several millennia old. Many elements of India's diverse, culture, such as, Indian religious philosophy, cuisine, languages, dance, music, and movies have a profound impact across the indosphere, Greater India and the world.

India is the birth place of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism etc. They are collectively known as Indian religions. Today Hinduism and Buddhism are the world's third and fourth largest religions respectively, with over two billion followers altogether and possibly as many as 2.5 or 2.6 billion followers.

India is one of the most religiously and ethnically diverse nations in the world, with some of the most deeply religious societies and cultures. Religion plays a central and definitive role in the life of many of its people. Although India is a secular Hindu -majority country. Three great epics of India are the Srimad Bhagavatam, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It is said that to understand India. Certainly, all three epics have exercised a profound influence upon India.

Hindu dharma is Monotheism in the disguise of Polytheism. Even through there exists many gods and goddesses throughout the history of Hindu dharma, they all were believed to be forms of eternal power which protect humanity in this universe and at the same time can overturn. One such female incarnation of supreme divine power is Goddess Renuka Devi. From thousands of years ago there lived many people who are born as a result of many Holy

Fire Ritual who later spent their life in the most divine way and attained salvation. Supernatural powers they attained through intense meditation and penance were used by them for final goal of Hindu Dharma “Shishhta Rakshana and Dhushta Shikshana.” Sometimes they become saviour of many innocent people. So they were treated with utmost respect and believed to be an incarnation of invisible eternal Divine thing. No one is born with eternal and unsurmountable power it is their character that leads them in their path.

Today many different types of cults are present in our nation. It is formed by the influence of our myths and Puranas. In our society for interpretation of Indian culture, women play an important role. Some of our cultural practices pertaining to women’s nobility, control of sexuality, for example, child marriage, sati, the social death of widows suppress women.

There is literature that focuses on women’s suffering in Puranas and myths. But some rituals and myths are followed by men and third genders. Yellamma cult is a good example for it. Yellamma, a form of the Hindu goddess Renuka found in several pilgrimage centres in northern Karnataka, South India, and in the village pantheons and household shrines of the people of the region. Among the human agent of Yellamma particular consideration is given to the “transgenderites”- female, erotic men (jogappas) and male ascetic women (jogammas). The nature and significance of ritual transgerism is explored through a structural transgerism and a structural analysis of the system of thought and practice which defines the Yellamma cult.

For many contemporary Indians, a religious ritual is simply a part of daily life. On the other hand, many don’t want to be caught performing a ritual. An impression that rituals are entirely redundant, optional extras at best, is a pervasive feature of modernist consciousness that treats them as vestiges of a pre modern, archaic past, to be left behind as

we become more educated and rational. This is partially because of the association of rituals with religion, also because of the belief that they can't survive the test of reason -they are meaningless, empty of content, needlessly repetitive and time consuming.

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