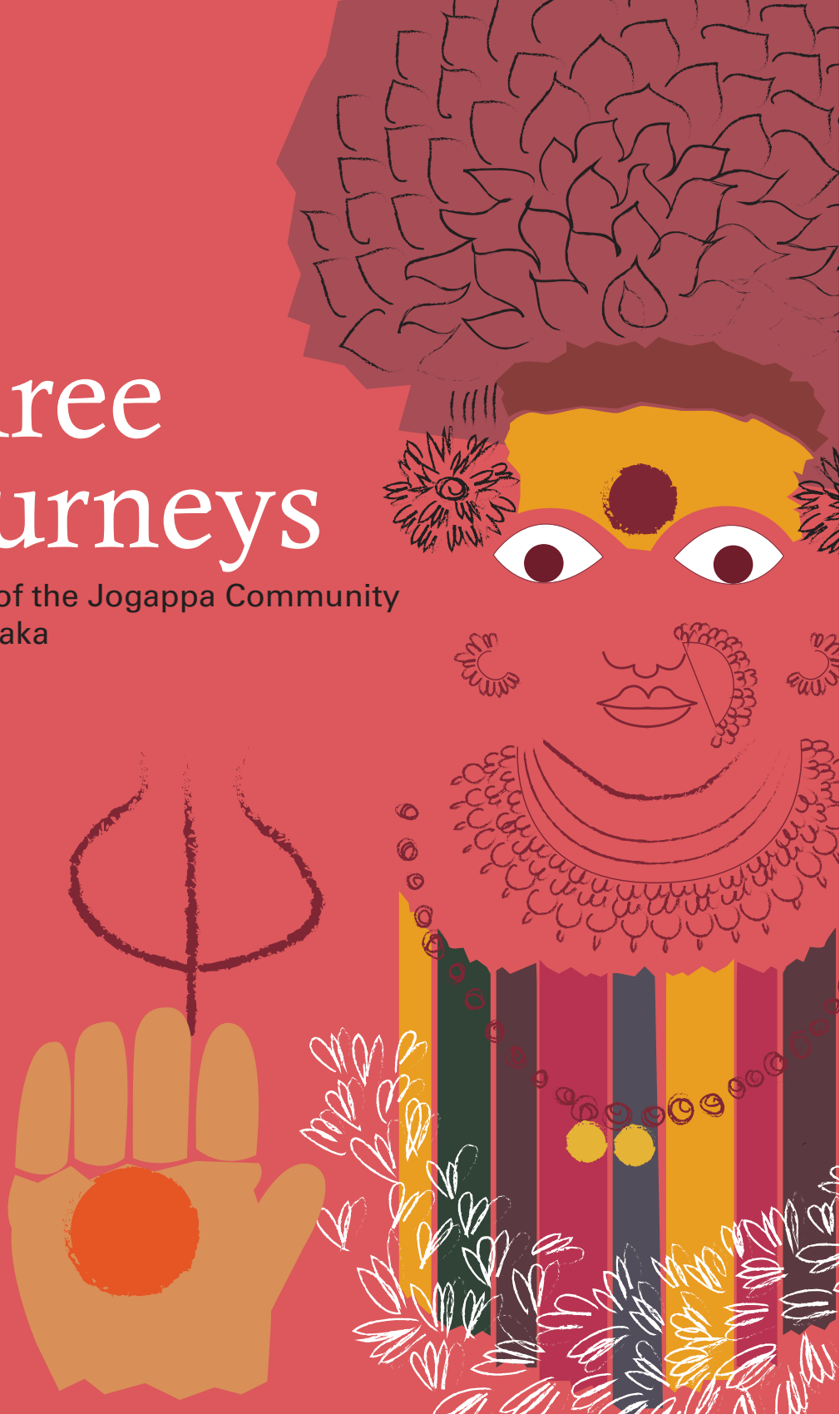


Three Journeys

Cameos of the Jogappa Community
in Karnataka



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*The names of the Jogappas whose stories form the base for this book have been changed.
References to key places in the sacred geography of the Jogappa community or prominent
public personalities in the community have been retained.*

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Meera Pillai designed the dialogue framework and conducted the interviews. She also edited the transcripts of the conversations, reorganising them for themes and insights to emerge clearly, while keeping true to the voices of the participating Jogappas.

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Foreword to a Prelude

These brief life narratives are a foretaste, a pilot for a larger project that Aneka hopes will materialise soon, to extensively and intensively collect oral histories from the jogappa community. As a beginning, three jogappas kindly shared their life stories and reflections on their communities, and these were audio and video recorded. However, these do not purport to be 'complete' in any fashion, primarily because each story was shared in one or two sessions over the course of a day. Clearly, the insights and confidences that would come from prolonged engagement would require more time. For instance, at least one of the Jogappas who shared her story is living with HIV; she was willing to share this on a public platform to advocate for greater rights and entitlements for the community, but did not bring it up during the life story sessions.

The stories have been presented with limited thematic editing, pulling together aspects that occurred at disparate points in the narrative, but which belonged together thematically. The grammar is not perfect, and is not meant to be; the effort has been to try and capture the rhythms and idioms of the participants' stories. The stories are presented with the internal contradictions that they came with. For instance, at one point, a participant may have said that her life and decisions were completely accepted by her family, and at another, that various members of her family reject this life and its decisions. These are treated as part of the process by which all human beings try to bring coherence to their complex experiences, and therefore worthy of presentation; without irony, with acceptance.

What is very clear, though, even from these brief vignettes, is that this is a community in transition. Their perceptions of themselves and society's perceptions of them are changing rapidly. From a way of life that appears to have remained largely unchanged for ages, the past decade and a half have created different conditions, to further fracture and contest and problematise realities that already fractured and contested, and were fractured and contested, in mainstream society. The global movement for the recognition of the spectrum of human sexualities, and the rights of sexual minority communities, also has a vital Indian

face. The manner in which the HIV pandemic forced conservative mainstream society in India to engage with sexuality more publicly and more institutionally has also forced the change. These life narratives clearly show that it is no longer possible to speak of a subaltern Other, the Other has Others, we are all each other's others. Equally, we are all each other's. And to understand, these narrated lives are a resource and a gift, these lives have to be listened and accounted to.

Aneka

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Rajesh/Ranjini

*“You might say I have three
categories”*

“You might say I have three categories”: Ranjini Jogappa

My name is Rajesh. As a Jogappa, my name is Ranjini... and with the Hijra community too, I am known as Ranjini. When I'm in pant-shirt, as I am now, I become Rajesh.

I'm from a township in Bidar called Dubalgundi. My parents, after they got married, they moved to Gulbarga. All of us were born and brought up in Gulbarga; but our grandfather, grandmother, our uncles, all of them still live in Dubalgundi. We only go there if there's a programme or a function or something, for one or two days we stay there.

At home, I lived with my father, my mother, my older brother, my aunt. I am the youngest of all the siblings. I had two older brothers and three older sisters. My father worked, my mother stayed home.

I used to play with the girls in neighbouring houses... I never played boys' games much, but with them I played khokho¹, all of these things. I remember this. When I was weak, I just didn't have it in me to play with the boys, and they wouldn't allow me to join in their games anyway. They never used to include me. I wasn't able to... Well, I used to be as a girl, I wanted to be like a girl in everything I did... Even the clothes I wore were ladies dresses; so when I was weak, they'd say “Look, he's too weak, he won't be able to play”.

My parents were not equipped to handle this situation back then. They did not know of such phenomenon... they were not aware that the feelings of a person could manifest this way.

And then...What happened is, I was simply not comfortable, madam... When I was six to seven years old, I had great discomfort; what I mean by that is, there were aches and pains in me that used to come and go, that sort of discomfort.

At first... I had a sort of burning, a fever. That burning, various doctors identified it as typhoid, malaria... I was treated for all of it. From that time I became unwell, my parents took me to hospitals here and there... I was unable to sit, I was unable to stand, and they used to carry me around

1 A tag game that girls play more often than boys.

with them. At the age of nine-ten too they used to carry me around... Then we did not have easy access to autos. Rickshaws too were difficult, because they would ask for a lot of money to travel around... Because, our home was located beyond the market area of the town, from where it was very difficult to come into town.

Even with all these treatments the burning did not die down. And then, despite the burning inside me, I used to feel chills. In the night, while sleeping, I used to shiver with cold; I used to be frightfully cold. Then, neem leaves would fall on me... The cot I slept on, on the cot these things used to come. And I wouldn't know how. But when I woke on the cot were kumkum², neem leaves, all these would be there. All these things happened at night. Seeing all of this, we felt a God must have done this, or someone must have caused it, because if something bad happens, then we believe that someone is cursing us; that's the fear we had, the fear of my parents.

People told me that there was something wrong with me... no one else has such problems; there must be something wrong inside me, that's what they said. So my mother and father, to try to find a solution, took me to see many people here and there, bought medicine for me, went through a lot of trouble.

For four-five years that's what they did... They kept taking me for such consultations, till I was between eight-ten years old. Now, I have an uncle who lives in Mumbai. He came to visit us, and when we met him, he came to know about my condition...that no matter what they did, I was not comfortable, and no one I met was able to help me. My parents said to him, none of us knew what to do anymore, if there is a hospital in Bombay that can help, maybe I should be admitted there...that's what. My uncle said that all these doctors and hospitals I've been taken to, something must have happened somewhere, maybe someone somewhere has done something, maybe it is a God's touch, or a Goddess' touch...there must be something.

In our home, before me, there was no one who was in the tradition; I did not know of it, my parents did not know of it. But among people like me, people of the tradition, their experience of this sort of thing is very common.

2 A red pigment used for social and religious purposes and is considered auspicious.

So finally, when my parents took me there to the Gurus, all of this was explained.

There is a town called Gundugurthy, where Jogappas work as women with the Devi Bhava. They're very famous...They're famous in some twenty-thirty villages in the surrounding area. So when my uncle and my parents decided that something had happened, they took me there...We found that the Jogappas were aware of the conversations that my parents had had about my condition, that we had been speaking about my problems like this, what we'd said and so on. That was their reach... maybe they had some sort of power, I don't know, even now I don't know. But what they (parents and uncle) did was to take me to them.

Then we were told that there is a god 'behind' me, that I've been touched by the presence of a god...They said there's nothing you've done wrong, the tradition demands that you experience this...It is the 'touch' of the goddess that is affecting you, so you must dedicate yourself to this goddess. You dedicate yourself to her...if you feel better after this, then you become her follower; if you don't become comfortable, then you can leave because that means the goddess has not 'touched' you, that's what they told me.

After telling me this, right then and there, they marked me with ashes... After that, after a few days, I started feeling fine. After I became comfortable, what they did was, the person who had marked me, she became my guru, and tied the patta (band for the forehead) for me, first... she took me to Bijapur, and... I was eleven years old when the patta³ was tied for me.

What happened was that, rice, bandara⁴, kumkum, bananas, limes, necklaces, bangles, new clothes, all of these were collected, and the Goddess's symbol is drawn, the mandala is drawn. After that mandala is drawn, everything is placed in it, deepas (oil lamps) are lit, twenty-one of them. The deepas are lit, and placed on the head, and it is balanced this way. After that, the Devi's paradi, essence, you know it? The Devi's paradi, the necklace and garlands, all of this is gathered; the Guru then instructs me in the tradition. That is, she reads me the rites and rituals, and the mantras that her guru told her... Then the guru instructed me in various things like, if there's a death, during the mourning period, we must not eat anything; while eating, if someone arrives to the house, we must not eat;

3 Part of the induction of the novice jogappa into the culture

4 A sort of powder-dye used for religious purposes, saffron in colour

if the deepa goes out, we must not eat; if someone whistles, we must not eat; if anyone's leg touches you) we must not eat; if there's any sound from outside, we must not eat; all of these are instructions, which she relates. Next, if there's a death in our area, then until the death rituals are finished, we cannot do anything; we must stay still (What she says can be literally translated into "We must remain like that"). All these rules she explained.

The guru who tied the patta for me had a Devi gudi⁵ (shrine for the goddess). My guru intended to keep me there, but my parents made a request that I not be left there. So my Guru sent me elsewhere to learn the vidya kala, the rules of the tradition, she sent me to her own guru. Near Hyderabad, I don't remember the town's name. For the next two years I studied, I remember what I studied, but I cannot speak about it.

By the time I became fourteen, I started doing nivarthana⁶ here. I used to do pujas even then... After tying the patta, I did pujas, rituals... people coming and going, all of this became normal.

I also went to school. By the time I tied the patta, I was in the 10th grade... before that, they used to laugh at me for having taken a girl's name; they used to jeer at me, whistle at me, shoot teasing looks at me, even fight with me. I used to go home and complain about what they were doing to me, say that I wouldn't go back there... Such was life back then. So my parents met with my teacher at school, requested that he ask the other kids to stop harassing me. He came to class, told them to stop, but it didn't work; as soon as I would leave the school, the kids would begin their harassment.

After tying the patta, dedicating myself to the Goddess, I went to school with ease, in comfort. Everything, I used to eat, read, go to school, I used to do everything. Only after tying the patta, I was well.

After I dedicated myself to the god, all of this... that is, having observed others who wear saris, we were afraid. Because of this fear, what my parents did is, because they did not know what would happen if I dressed like that outside, they asked me to practice all of this inside the house only. My siblings were good, they were fine; one brother was in Bijapur, working as a driver. My other brother was also working... they had no worries. They only used to visit once in fifteen days or so, madam. They'd stay for four-five days and leave, so they never had any objects to how I

5 Shrine

6 The ritual of getting rid of the effects of the 'evil eye'

was. Everyone was married, no one else was home. Just my father, my mother, and me.

In all my activities, I was as a boy, but if I saw other boys, I would have desire for them... Yes, I was a boy... But when I was around other boys, I was attracted to them. But back then I did not know about all of this. I was afraid. To talk to them, to speak with them of such things, regarding that I used to be afraid. I used to wonder “Why do I have such feelings?” Those sorts of thoughts I had. I realised how I was only when I reached PUC. When I was still studying SSLC, then I had those troubles with the boys, with them jeering, whistling, teasing me, harassing me, and using bad language such as “Chakka”⁷... But I fought with them about it. Then, when I came to the 2nd year of PUC, I realised how I was; I came to know about all these concepts, homosexuality and such. My college life finished, but I still had such thoughts.

There is a Kalyana Mantapa⁸ here...I didn’t know back then that homosexual activities took place at this Mantapa. I was walking by one time, and I noticed that there were many people gathered. I realised I was alone, and started to wonder if they would attack me based on how I looked. I only went by that time... The next few times after that, I realised that a lot of people there were like me. I thought I was alone, but seeing them, I realised that I wanted to speak to them, to get to know them, to become friends with them... This desire I had.

So I got to know this fellow called Chandu... He works at a convenience store; he wears pant-shirts, but he’s a Kothi.⁹ I got to know him, spoke with him; he didn’t ask me anything about myself; he only seemed interested in sex. But I was not so interested in sex; I wished to speak with him, ask him questions about all these feelings I had. But he only had one interest; so I stopped speaking to him all together, left him behind.

So after that, I went a few more times; there’s this Petrol Pump near the Kalyana Mantapa, do you know it? There’s a chai (tea) stall there. I was drinking tea there this one time, and this old lady saw me. She asked me why I was there, warned me of the type of people who hang around there, and so on. As we spoke I realised that more people like me hang out here,

7 A derogatory/abusive word for transgender

8 The place, usually a hall, where marriages take place

9 Feminine homosexual/bisexual men, usually from economically disadvantaged background.

and I still had this huge desire to meet them. So whenever I had even a little time to spare, I would go there... That's how it went...

That's how I found a community, yes. I stopped feeling afraid; I no longer feared that I was alone, that I would be rejected by all others because of how I was. I realised that I am just like many other people; I no longer felt that I HAD to live like a boy, that I COULDN'T be attracted to other boys. I lost such fears.

After the patta was tied, my mother and father were afraid; whether I would get married or not, why did the god mark me, what can be done now, those sorts of troubles they had. During all of this, I finished my PUC, after which they had me married. My parents decided that if I am married to a girl from outside, what will happen, there was the fear that something bad would happen. So they got me married to my cousin, my aunt's daughter. When she was asked to marry me, she agreed. Within the first year of marriage, a daughter was born; before the second year, a boy was born; and then, after four years of marriage, another boy was born.

We married. We're happy, we're free... Now, Jogappas come home, and she is a good host to them... gives them tea, speaks with them, all of that. Girl, boy, she doesn't think like that... It was she who gave you tea. This is because at home, I don't have to hide who I am. People come to see me, my disciples come to see me, men come, women come, and she treats them all like my children. Now, even if she brought a boy home, I would not cast negative aspersions on him, nor would I behave badly with him. I get to fulfil my desires outside.

For about one year I worked as a peer counsellor in a targeted intervention, madam. Before that, in the Shabad-Wadi-Chittapura area I worked as an Outreach Worker for three years. After that, again in Gulbarga I worked as an ORW. Then when a new project, the Pehchan Project was brought here, and someone I had worked with became the Project Manager, I again became a counsellor.

I am very happy doing such work. But for my people, work is a problematic topic; beyond that, there is concern about HIV, disagreements with Gurus on what tradition to follow. There are family matters: if the married ones like me contract HIV, how can we deal with it; how should we behave

at home and in public; how must one behave with one's children... Counselling people on these issues is an important job... Obviously we're not all the same, we don't have the same issues; the magnitude of problems also differs from one person to the next, but then, they need information, they need to know about condom usage, CD4 counts, such things.

Now, my daughter and son are both in the ninth grade, they both joined together; my other son is in the fourth grade now. My priority is the future of my children. Now, I didn't get exactly what I wanted from life; the Goddess has marked me, I've become like this, I've tied the patta, and I perform the duties expected of me by other people. But I do this so that my children do not face the same hardships; they should have a more peaceful time, an easier time than I had. That I am determined about.

By the time I became fourteen, I started doing nivarthana¹⁰ here.

I sing maybe one, two, three, four songs; after this, I fall under her spell. After that, I offer aarthi¹¹ for the Devi, Tuljapur Amba Bhavani, recite a few prayers, give akshatha to her, and end it. Every single time, I give akshatha¹² to her, and end it there. Nothing else, nothing new... For the people, I don't really do anything else. I have not sought any other instruction, have not learned to perform any other rites, and I have not simply done something because I have seen that others do it.

People come to me and tell me their problems all the time. I hear them out, and ask them to return on Tuesday evening or Friday evening, depending on the time of the week. Come to me then, come to the Goddess; tell her your problems then.

How we are conversing with each other right now, that's how the people and I speak, to begin with. And there are so many people! Who they are, where they're from, even I do not usually know, but they all come to me with their problems.

They ask the Goddess when she possesses me. Yes, they ask. But what exactly they ask, I don't know. And what advice they receive, I don't know. I don't know anything that happens. Those who ask, they inform me about the kind of advice they receive. They tell me what advice the

10 Ritual to remove the 'evil eye' that may be cast by others

11 Ritual of offering a lit lamp or camphor to the deity

12 Rice coloured with turmeric that used as a blessing

Goddess gave them through me, what they did, what all they have to do to become comfortable... They tell me everything. I tell them “Once you are comfortable, bring a sari for me.”

They usually say “This is what I must do; this is what needs to happen.” They say that the Goddess advised them to do a certain puja; how, when, and where to do it. All of these “suggestions” they accept. So I tell them, now that they have received the advice, they must start on the next day for the Goddess. I am not a Goddess. But whatever the Goddess has said through me, I tell them to pursue, and once they have performed the advised aashirvada¹³, they’ll be comfortable. That’s what I tell them. After they’ve performed the puja, and their matters are sorted, they come to me and ask me what else needs to be done. So I tell them to make me an offering of a sari. I don’t tell them to do something else; to bring me anything; to perform more pujas... I am not avaricious this way.

I do not point them specifically to Tuljapur... There’s no need to go that far, spend all that much money. If your spirit is sincere, then the Goddess will accept you if you do the puja at home. I speak with the Goddess, and tell her “You came to me, so please listen. This person came here, spoke to you, asked you for advice. Look after her, accept her offering. I do not know what you will give me, and I will not ask you for anything: if you look after her, that is enough for me.”

They can do the puja in their own homes. A few might have trouble with shani¹⁴: one might have too much shani, while another might suffer from a lack of it. So the Goddess might tell them to perform a ritual at the

Hanuman temple. To offer salt, to tie twenty-one suthu¹⁵, she might have told them all these things. All we show them is the path to take; whether they take it or not is up to them. We do not hold their hands and walk with them along the road; we simply point them towards it. Nothing more.

About two months ago, there was an incident. My sister dropped by for a visit, and the Goddess called to her. The Goddess told her “There is a dangerous snake near your home. Be wary of it. It intends to harm a

13 Blessing

14 The god shani is one of the nine celestial beings, who according to Indian astrology is supposed to make people suffer when influence his falls on them

15 A thread is tied around the goddess’s idol

young child.” This is what the Goddess told her.

Now, my sister told the family near her home, the family that had a child; she told them what the Goddess had said. But they ignored it, and went about their work. They used to leave the child at home and go to work, and the child used to run around on his own. So this one time, they left him at home as usual; he played around for a while, and then fell asleep. The snake bit him. He woke up, screamed, and ran around. The snake slithered away. By the time the child was taken to the hospital, he had died.

My sister said later “The Goddess had told me this would happen if we continued to leave the child by himself. But still we did not listen.”

These kinds of things happen, too.

Only three months have passed since the boy died. He was nine years old. Then, later, they had come to seek the Goddess’ advice, and she told them “I warned you this would happen, and you did nothing.” So people there have to now carry this pain with them. And it is painful for me too. The advice came from my mouth, and it still wasn’t enough to save the child.

I do have another wonderful story...in the neighbourhood there was this girl, madam. The last child of her mother... And she was a very awkward looking girl. All her brothers and sisters had already been married off, but they were unable to secure a groom for her. She was... that is, she did not seem to be able to do much work, did not seem to be able to wear a sari even, that’s how she was. They were wondering what could be done about her... So her mother brought the girl to seek my consultation. The mother said “As long as I am alive, I can look after her. What will become of her after I die?” So when they consulted the Goddess, she said “Within four months I will bring her good fortune.” In four months.

People in her household were worried; they thought “She is not good looking, she is old, who will marry her?” This is what both her family and other people thought. Now, there was a man in Raichur whose wife had recently died. There was no one to look after his children, to help him run his household. Somehow, he was linked up with this girl’s family, and he came by to see her. Not even eight days had passed since the Goddess’ declaration. Now, he was in a bad position; he needed someone to help

look after his children. So he agreed to marry her, and the marriage took place within two months. I think this is a wonderful story, because this girl... The way she was, looking at her one would think she is a man. And still this girl got married.

Now, only a few days ago there was a situation. There was a pregnancy, but the child died within her womb. But the family did not know about it; by the time they took her to the hospital for a check-up, two to three months had already passed. So when she got pregnant again, the hospital informed the family that it was a delicate situation, and that the next child could only be delivered safely through caesarean. So they brought the girl to us, we told them "There's nothing to worry about, all will be fine. Do as the doctor has advised you to do." Now, just this past Friday the girl had a boy child, through caesarean. That was the only problem. But the boy child was born, and he is fine.

Then, there are these "Komatti" people, "Komatti", you might know about them? Among such people, the women do not get married even after they are fifty. Why this is, I don't know; but it is difficult for them to find grooms, they are asked to pay too much dowry, give a big house, do such things. Now, they're not very good looking, the girls. Now, those Komatti who have come to us have gotten married even after they have turned forty, fifty, through the Devi's blessing.

There is a vidya¹⁶... One can easily tell who has learned the vidya by simply speaking with them, as we are doing right now. There's a certain vidya... power. It is a certain shakti¹⁷, nothing more: the Goddess only advises on

problems, all other claims about what she does are generally fibs. All we are capable of giving is bandara. That's the only thing... that gives comfort, that contains the power. The Goddess doesn't indulge those who entreat her for anything else. What she bestows is a specific bhavane, a power.

Yes, it is the Devi's blessing, but what happens in such situations even I don't know. That's all I can say about it.

16 Knowledge or wisdom

17 Power

Even after I became a Jogappa I never did joga. Because I do not like it. Now, I've worn saris and gone for basthi¹⁸ with others, maybe two or three times. After I started working, I haven't done it again, because it isn't in my interest. During the nine days of Dashera and the Devi Puja that happens then, I do joga; that is the only time I go for joga. I wear the ritual dress, the red sari. I go with five other people to various households, where they greet us with dakshina¹⁹, offer us rice, oil... I gather them up. That's what I usually do. Otherwise, I perform pujas, do aarthi...that's all.

Also, somewhere nearby, if there is a marriage, during the evening they have a gondhala²⁰ programme for which I go. During the gondhala programme, which happens before the laghna, the actual wedding, the bridegroom's family keeps a god's idol by their home, to which they tie flowers and offer food, and then perform worship the next morning. This is called a gondhala programme. Further, if there's any particular ritual for a god or goddess, I go. But joga, I don't do. Others do it, of course... But I don't.

So I had had kids, I'd made a life, after which I had no idea about the God, madam; I did not have any special knowledge, I didn't have any special interest; how the Goddess comes even now... If I'm to tell the truth, I am still confused about this. You've seen it yourself; I have a bath, I wear work clothes, I work, I sing songs, that much I've learned how to do. After that what happens and what I do, I don't know.

As a Jogappa, my name is Ranjini... and with the Hijra community too, I am known as Ranjini.

The guru who tied the patta for me, her name was Sharnaya Swami. She was a Jogappa too. I did not get to know her very well, madam. She died so soon... I really did not learn much about her. In the Jogappa tradition, my Guru is Radha. You know this. My Guru recently passed away. When I take on my Jogappa form, I am known everywhere as "Radha's daughter, Ranjini." Radha's daughter, they call me. See, if I have to have a 'child' in this tradition, a disciple, the rule is that I would have to tie the patta for

18 Begging

19 Offering

20 Similar to the badhai tradition of hijras

her and only then accept her. This is in the Jogappa tradition.

In the Hijra tradition, there is something called a “Dayar”²¹. If I wanted to have a disciple, a chela²², I would have to go to the dayar with my Guru; donate five rupees in her name, clap my hands three times; then taking my name, my guru would then make someone my chela. With my name, the chela would then be of my tradition. Now, supposing some hijras come across me in a train. They clap their hands at me and ask me, “You, which town’s chela are you?” - They speak to me this way. Within this tradition, as a Hijra, I am the disciple of Balachandra. We have certain rules, we have established a certain reeth, ritual or methodology. If someone goes into a basthi all dressed up, other Hijras would catch a hold of her, and ask her whose chela she is. If she then says “I have not gotten anything done yet”, they’d all hold her, take away any tokens she might have, strip her of her saree, and throw her out.... This is how this²³ tradition works. This is why, if asked about it, I’d tell them, “I’m Balachandra’s disciple.” So I have one identity for this tradition, and one for the other, Jogappa, tradition. They don’t conflict, and I fit into both equally well.

There is no such rule that says one has to have only one identity. There are a few people who know nothing about Hijra-panthi, or about any other tradition: they might do Devi-darshana every now and then, but they don’t understand their own urges, so they stay at home. They see us, and they are afraid. There are so many people like that. They see us in saris and worry that we might perhaps do something to them. Such people are not part of any tradition, don’t have a Guru. Me, I have travelled around, I’m familiar with every tradition, and know how and what to say when interacting with any of them...

It isn’t a question of advantages. I don’t benefit from either. I’m a Jogappa, I’m a Hijra, and among my people I have this name... No one must cast an evil eye on me; that is all I ask. That is, wherever I go, I’m related to the people; so no one can catch hold of me, beat me up, strip me of my sari. That authority they don’t possess. Shouldn’t possess. For this reason I’m part of both traditions.

There are many different kinds of Jogappas. Parashuram Jogappas are

21 The commune formed under an established guru.

22 Disciple

23 Hijra

different. You see this muttu, madam? They only wear a bili muttu. For us, we have both bili muttu and kempu muttu. Because of this, we can wear both saris and pant-shirts. We have no objection. But they only wear the bili muttu, and so they are called “chowdikiya²⁴”. He holds the chowdiki, wears pant-shirts, that’s how he is. Among Jogappas, there are those who wear pant-shirts, sarees: there are people of every nature.

Actually, almost half the people in the Jogappa tradition are also in the Hijra tradition. They don’t have any problem with it. Now, there are people of our community in Pune, right? They go to Pune, get muttu tied... From Bijapur, Bagalkote, from everywhere, all of them first tie the muttu and then opt for reeth. Some of those who have opted for reeth have also undergone nirvan²⁵. Those who have already undergone nirvan cannot become a Jogappa. No one will even take them as a disciple. They are “binadanga”²⁶. They get nothing. They cannot even get anything from joga. They are binadanga. They make use of their status as Hijras, clap their hands, and earn.

There is no trouble being part of both traditions. They’re both the same... as a Jogappa, we tie the muttu, and as a Hijra, we have the reeth. Here, we tie patta to make children, and there, we do reeth. For reeth we take our Guru, donate five rupees in her name, use our Guru’s name and our family names, clap our hands... That is reeth. Those important Hijras there, the caretakers or owners of temples, they’re the ones we go to in order to have reeth done. That’s how it is.

My wife knows that I’m part of the Jogappa tradition. But she doesn’t know I’m a part of a Hijra tradition. As part of the Jogappa tradition, we tie saris for the Goddess; we also tie saris as Hijras. But I do that outside the house, not at home. As of now, I am part of the Jogappa tradition, and I have made my life this way. She is aware of this. That’s all is needed. She doesn’t need to be told about my other tradition.

The Hijra-pan - I have become part of it willingly. Because I wanted to. But through tradition I became Jogappa. I cannot let go of this [being a

24 One who plays the *chowdiki*, a traditional musical instrument used by Jogappas

25 Castration.

26 Those without tradition

Jogappa]; this is something I have done for everyone, while that I do for myself alone. You might say I have three categories. I might certainly drop the Hijra identity, but I cannot leave the Jogappa one. Wherever I am, I need a place that I can call home, so I became part of the Hijra tradition; but it is not of utmost importance of me to continue with it. It is a role that I perform, and one that has become a habit.

To be recognised as a 'third' gender is an important requirement. As part of the Jogappa tradition, I wear a sari. But who do I look like? Hijras. I keep this inside me; I do not announce in public that I am a Jogappa. When I wear a sari, everyone assumes I'm a Hijra. Only within my culture, my community, I am recognised as a Jogappa. Given that, when I go out, if I have to use a bathroom, it is a huge issue. It doesn't matter if I'm a Hijra or a Jogappa, it is always big problem.

There has to be a third category! When I go out, I don't want to be identified as Rajesh. I wish to be known as Ranjini, madam. This is my desire. So they must do this. Because with my family, my mind is in one circuit; when, with which community, inside my home...everywhere my identity is slightly different. That's how it is.

To the society, I was born a boy, so I have to play that part; the other part is that I wear a sari and I act like a Jogappa out in public. But I have to be strong in the face of this; I have to be able to act both parts, and remember what I am. In my family, if I'm happy, if I look after everyone, I will have my pride; in public, I will get respect from everyone. The way I live now, people look at me a certain way, and I don't like it. I will go for pujas, I will sing, I will dance, I will do all of that, but once I come home, I will be how I want.

I wear shirt-pant because I have a son. He is still young, so I am careful around him. It isn't that I'm afraid to wear what I want. But my choice of what to wear is my choice alone. See, I've been educated, I've learned well, and I seek to educate four more people in our ways. I advise those who come to me for help. But if I abandon the path, then who will follow it? I have no problem wearing a sari, but I have my son to think about, his future to consider. I'm being careful around him, that is all.

I have informed my Guru that I will dress this way. I told her "If there is a problem with me being this way, I will not tie the muttu. Only with your

blessing I will continue.” This is how I bargained with her, and gained her approval.

I make a real effort for my family, for my children. I wear pant-shirt when I go out because I don’t want them to face any problems. I fulfil all my responsibilities to them. I hold in so many of my desires because of my responsibilities to my family. But if they don’t recognise this, if they oppose my way of living, at some point I could even consider leaving.

Before sending me to learn the vidya kala, my Guru said to me, “Whatever you learn, whatever you do, you must teach four others. Now, everyone who goes to learn like this is initially afraid, because they do not know what awaits them, what is there and what isn’t. But you need the experience; you need to have the knowledge of the tradition of our people; and this you must share with four other people. Only after you receive instruction, after you properly understand, must you do this.” After giving me this ashirvada, she sent me to the ashram. Because of her ashirvada, I do this. Since I became fourteen, I started doing nivarthana here. But here, doing this nivarthana, no one has taken up the tradition. Everyone who comes to me has the same troubles; their children show signs, so they come to me for puja. They’ve taken them to hospitals, got them treated, but despite doing all of this it provides no respite, so they bring their children to me. But none of those children have taken up the tradition.



Ahmed Saab/Reshambee

*“It is my life, why should anyone
have a problem”*

“It is my life, why should anyone have a problem?”: Ahmed Saab/Reshmabee

My name is Ahmed Saab, but they call me Reshmabee.

I am from a village near Bijapur. I was born and brought up there. I worked there. There is a place called Ranganapura, that is where I was born. I am the eldest at home out of four siblings. They are all married now. My parents stay with me separately.

I used to play with other children when I was a child; I used to play with both girls and boys. I played games like hide and seek and hopscotch. In my childhood I always liked talking to girls. I wore half pants. I dressed like a boy. But since my childhood, I always felt like a woman. Even then I was of the same feeling.

I would keep roaming around, here and there. I hardly went to school. I went till standard 5 or 6. I did all kinds of work along with my mother. I used to take care of the cattle, take them to graze and also worked in the fields, weeding. I used to do everything. I always went to work along with my mother.

But after I got the desire to wear a sari, I decided to become jogappa. I told my parents that I want to become a jogappa. I told them that I didn't want to get married. My parents didn't object much, my mother did tell me a little bit. But I told them that I can't, this is what I want to be, this who I am. I want to be a jogappa.

People around me were asking why are you behaving like this and why do you want to wear a sari. My neighbours and relatives, everyone questioned me, why I want to wear a sari. I told them that the goddess is on me and I have to wear a sari.

Nobody from my house objected, I asked them and then wore a sari. I went to the market, bought myself a sari and wore it. I got a few jogappas home, I called five of them home who were like me at that time. They came and spoke to my parents saying that look your son has come to join us, he says he wants us to make him like us. I arranged for food and other things for the five jogappas and tied Yellamma muthu and wore a sari. They were my Gurus.

Back in those days, there weren't so many problems, I started wearing sari long ago, 30 years back. I started wearing sari when I was 19 or 20 years old. I am now 50 years old. I have been wearing sari for the past 30 years. Now the new laws are questioning our dressing. Earlier nobody questioned us about our attire. It is the law now which asks why are you wearing a sari and all.

About me as a Muslim having a Hindu Goddess on me too, at that time nobody used to ask. Nobody said anything; it is my life, why should anyone have a problem? These days people are questioning, now they question us. I say that I will worship the Hindu god. It was my wish and I continued it. They used to ask me, but I told that I wished to do so; I answered them in that manner. What has society got to do with what I want to do? I answered them that way; I will do what I please.

People used to question me, they told me that you shouldn't do this and you shouldn't do that. In my case, I was born a male but feel like a woman. What about that? Even then they will object. I answered them saying that this is my fate, if I feel like a woman; I will live like a woman. I will do what I please. From the very beginning, I felt like a woman. I had the desire to live like a woman. Interact with people like a woman. That is when I started wearing sari.

I used to dream about the goddess every night. In the dream, people went past my house taking the koda²⁷ on their heads to visit the goddess in her temple. She once woke me up from my sleep, I saw her in the form of an old woman, she was asking me to light the lamp in my house, I woke up as it appeared so real in front of my eyes. When I looked around there was nobody. Then I decided that I would start lighting a lamp in my house and worship her. My parents told me that we don't practice such things. I told them, yes, maybe you don't, but from now on I will. And then I started worshipping the goddess like that.

My siblings were really young, they did not know everything. I was the eldest, I told them things and I mostly gave instructions. They did not ask me anything at that time, now they do, but those days they were too young to know anything about all this.

27 A pot generally used to hold water, but is also used in ritualistic ceremonies

I have kept a space separately to worship the goddess in a separate room. My parents stay in the other room. I have a bath, change the water in the kalasha²⁸, offer flowers, and light the lamp and incense sticks and offer my prayers to the goddess every day.

There are lots of jogappas who worship the goddess religiously; there are also jogappas who don't worship. There are both kinds. However, there are people like us, who worship the goddess without fail. We do puja at home also, in front of a photo offer her flowers and fruits, light a lamp and worship. I am not bothered about what others think of me.

We do joga... we go from house to house sing and dance and earn money. Or we go to the village fairs and earn money by singing and dancing. We also take the Yellamadevi koda on our head and perform in the temples; like this we earn some money.

No one teaches us how to sing and dance, we learn after we start wearing saris, within 2 years to a maximum of five years, we learn everything, we watch and learn. The practices were followed by our gurus, we have learnt these from them.

Every day I go to some village, I go to jathres²⁹, village and temple fairs. I sing and dance. If someone calls me here and there I go. Worship the goddess and come back. We play different instruments, we sing and dance. We go to different villages, we sing in front of people's house, they offer us some money or some food.

Sometimes we get invited to sing at some function. We go to sing, and we stay there overnight. We perform plays and sing songs of Yellammadevi. They give us Rs 2000- 3000. We are a team of five people. By the time we start it is late in the night. The performance goes on till early morning. We apply colours on our face and we play each character. One is Jamadagni, one is goddess Yellammadevi, and another person will play Renuka Raja and so on.

We remove the bangles once in a year; we wear white clothes once in a year and again wear colour clothes. We go to Saundatti and then stay there for two days, we visit the Jamadagni and Matangi and the Parushurama temple over there.

28 A small pot used of ritualistic ceremonies

29 Festivals that include a fair

A few jogappas do fortune-telling, I don't do that. I don't believe in that. If there is a problem, we should pray to the goddess and seek her blessings, what will one get out of all this fortune-telling. I don't get the devi on me, I saw her regularly in my dreams for three months long ago. It was after that that I draped a sari and started worshipping her. Now I worship her sincerely at home and outside. I go on my own to temples worship the goddess, earn my living.

I cover my head when I hear the azaan.³⁰ I was born in a Muslim family; I pay my respects to Allah also. But Hindu Jogappas do this too. For us, everything is one. There are people from all the castes among jogappas, there are people who are Kulkarnis, Gowdas, SC community...But once they become a jogappa, we are all one. No one is allowed to talk about caste; we don't talk about caste or religion.

At the masjid, they tell me to stop wearing a sari and wear pant and shirt. They told me that they will all raise contributions for me and send me to some foreign land, Dubai and Arabia. They will find me a job, not only the people from the masjid, also people from my basthi told me. They told me to take off my bindi³¹. I tell them that I am not interested, I can't do all that. I told them if wear pant and shirt, nobody is going to give me a single rupee, I am not interested in doing all that.

After my time, my family will not worship the goddess. I'll give the goddess away to the temple or one of the younger jogappas.

I work for an NGO that works on sexual health as a peer educator. I take the responsibility of bringing in people for check-ups. Once in 3 months I have to bring them for check ups. If people are positive, they will be given dates, they need to collect their medicines every month. Some of them will not take their medicines regularly, they will skip a month. At that time, I get information from the hospital that they have not collected their medicine. So I do a follow up on that. There are outreach workers and counselors as well. I have to take these people and make them meet them. They will give us information and tell us that we need to do these many check ups and follow ups this month. If the CD 4 count is low, they need to take medicines, if the CD4 count is not low, they will be asked to come for

30 Call for prayer

31 A dot of colour placed on the forehead in many South Asian countries

a checkup once in 6 months. I bring them to the clinic once in 6 months. Our duty is to bring them and make them meet these people.

My parents live with me. My brothers and sisters are all ok, I was the one who got them all married. I earned and with my hard earned money I got them married and took care of them. They all listen to me, if I ask them to sit, they sit and if I ask them to stand they stand. They all listen to whatever I say, even now. They are all staying with their families separately in our village.

I go to my younger brother's house, if they call me. Otherwise I don't go. I go to their house and spend some time and get back. I earlier used to go to my elder sister's house, she is good to me. But once, her children told my sister, what is this, she looks so ugly. That is when I stopped going to their house.

I did joga and got my brothers married, but now they don't need me. They don't listen to me. One of them recently got his son married, they didn't invite me. They asked me why should they invite me. Similarly, my father had two wives, there too there was a wedding and they didn't invite me . They don't need me anymore. I don't go to their houses anymore.

I take care of my parents since they took care of me in my childhood. I lost my father recently, and I bore the entire expenses of his last rites by myself. One of my brothers asked, tell me how much I should pool in. I told my brothers , I am a jogappa , and I have no one after me , I will take care of my parents. You have children, whatever you earn you spend it on them, you don't have to worry about anything. I bought flowers and cloth and everything else for the burial of my father. I used all the money I earned by joga to take care of my parents.

My parents were living with me and now I am taking care of my mother. However after my parents, the property will go to my siblings. They are of the opinion that I am a jogappa; I have no family and children. Why do I deserve any property rights? It is all in their name, they will inherit it after my parents.

Only if a person wears a sari, then she is a jogappa . [Those who tie] Parushuram muthu are not jogappas; they are men, they wear pant-shirt and will have family and children, they will not be jogappas. Meesala muthu are people who have tied muthu and are not married and do not have any children. Yenjal muthu are people who after getting married have tied muthu.

I have heard about transgenders and kothis and have also seen them. Some of them wear churidhar,³² some of them wear-pant shirt. They get operation³³ done. These days some of the jogappas are also getting operation done. I am not very keen on getting operated. Earlier if a person had womanly behaviour he became a jogappa. Now they have so many other identities, like kothi, hijra and transgender, they have partners. Now one chooses to be what he wants. If he feels the goddess is on him, he becomes a jogappa.

There is no difference; jogappas also wear sari, hijras also wear sari. However a hijra can't get married have children, she does lot of fashion and people look at her. Nobody looks at us. They are more fashionable, they wear lipstick and different kinds of clothes. We always wear a sari. It is ok if they wear pant and shirt.

Relationships also they have. They will have partners. These days' even jogappas have partners. Yes, people who do pujas also have partners. Yes, if they feel like having sex they will have a partner, and then some other partner and so on. No, there is no problem. Performing pujas and other things are different and this is different. Some of them do this, some of them don't. It depends on how they feel from within. Back in those days we did not have partners, like I don't have a partner. There are lots of people with partners. According to me, the people who have partners, their life is very difficult. The partners will do as they please. Once a partner comes into their lives, it becomes different. Let them have sex and all, many of them do it. I too have done it, I won't hide. Because I am also just like a woman. I have spoken to people and shared things with them and all, but I never got home any one as a partner.

These days the younger jogappas have partners, there are people who see them and like them. We are all old, who will look at us. Sometimes I also

32 A garment traditionally worn by women in South Asia

33 castration

feel like that, I should have a husband and an adopted son. However, some of them feel that they should have a husband or a partner. But there are also people who think that, if there is a partner, tomorrow he will take away everything I have and leave.

So many of us treat our brother's children as our own, and take care of them and then send them to school and all.

The younger jogappas have partners; they go here and there they can earn money. When I was young, people used to give me money too. Now who will want me? Hence I am totally dependent on the money I beg for. See, the younger jogappas, they are provided some money by their partners. However, the older jogappas like us are dependent on the money we get from performing poojas and begging, we get five rupees or ten rupees.

The biggest problem in society for us is that the people around us are harassing us; to travel in buses we have problems, to use toilets we face problems. Some people go for sex work, there are problems there also. We are harassed by the rowdies and even in the hospitals, the doctors discriminate against us. They hesitate to touch us, they feel that we are jogappas and we are possibly HIV positive .

Jogappas face problems from their families, siblings and the neighbourhood. They ask whom did you become a jogappa for, who asked you to wear muthu. Especially if we are jogappa, then we absolutely have no respect at all, even if we ask for entitlements. They ask us, why do you need anything, you roam around begging, right? Why would you want to anything? Even when I asked in the panchayat, I was given the same reply.

When I travel, I mostly use the gents' toilet. Though I feel like a woman and want to use the women's toilet, the other men will create problems. Being a man how can you go to a ladies toilet? Even the women ask, but if we tell them, please if we go to the men's toilet we will have problems, they usually agree and lets me use the ladies' toilet. However, there are men who ask me, where you go to use the toilets in the bus stand. When I say that I feel like a woman and prefer using the ladies' toilet, they say if you see their thing you might get turned on. However if you see a man it will not make such a difference. To which I said that I am a woman and I feel like a woman, I don't have the need to see other woman's things. And

he said how that can ever be possible.

The other day I was travelling by bus and there was a passenger sitting next to me on the bus. When the bus was taking a sharp turn, I touched him by mistake, at which he spoke to me very rudely saying that I should sit properly. I told him instantly that I too am a human being and I am a jogappa. They insult us like this. There are these drunkards who are mostly rowdies, who at the sight of us want to harass us; they raise their hands, almost coming to beat us up. This is the kind of life we have.

There is no caste system followed among jogappas. For us, everyone is one. But there are people who discriminate on status, there are people who look fair and there are people who dress really well. They wear good saris and dress themselves up well, there are also people who wear average saris and don't have many saris to change. They are looked down upon.

if someone discriminated on the basis of caste or religion they have to pay penalty to the gurus. According to me, this practice should not be there. Everyone is equal; if we pay penalty to a particular guru it is not correct. Everybody is one according to me. The gurus take fine to make money. They take money. The younger jogappas are made to pay some money to the gurus saying that they have helped them tie muthu and all. This is wrong according to me; people should be able to enjoy their own earnings. Actually the people who take money from the younger jogappas should be fined. I don't have any guru and all; we live in the villages and are together that is all.

The people who are in the cities – their lives are difficult. In the villages, the jogappas have partners, they stay in a house separately; somehow, we are able to survive. The jogappas who are in the city are on their own, they get drunk and all and are on the streets, there is no one to ask them about good and bad. Whereas in the village, our neighbours question us, if something is wrong.

in Bijapur I work in an NGO office. I bring jogappas together over there for programmes, take them to the ICTC for checkups and other things. There are jogappas who are scared to take the tests, they are afraid of being positive or they ask me why should I get it done? What has happened to me? According to me, we should get the checkups done, what is there in this? Whether we are positive or negative, we should follow the instructions given to us as it is good for us.

It happened a year back. I convinced a jogappa to get the check-up done, his result was positive, the doctor had asked her to come the next day for a talk. That night she went back home and committed suicide after the doctor told her this. After that incident, I don't force jogappas much to come and get a checkup done.

I still work as a peer educator. The salary they give is very low, last month they gave Rs 1800. Whatever they give is not enough, we put in so much effort. Per day the bus charge itself comes up to Rs 100. So per month I spend Rs 3000. We have spoken about this in the meeting, but there is no proper interest shown by the office. We have been talking about this for a long time now. They say that they have increased the pay this month. We should wait and see.

I have one or two 'children' - disciples, but as I told you earlier, our life is difficult. There are people who have many followers. These days kids don't take care of their own parents, how are we going to be dependent on our followers; they have their own lives. They do as they please, go behind any one; have their own partners and their own lives. Our lives cannot be dependent on them.

Tomorrow, we will have no support from any one. That is why I feel that why should we ever have such a life. I think that if there is another birth, we shouldn't be born this way. There are lots of people who even ask us, why have you become like this, why are you a jogappa and all. They look down upon us. I sometimes wonder who is going to take care of us in the future, but I don't know. Some people in my family say, I will take care of you, give me everything. But I don't think they will take care of me.

There are different people like Kothis, transgenders and people like us. I don't know how to differentiate and talk about it properly. However, we need facilities from the government. It appears that the government will come and enquire about this, and ask us what we are. If people are willing to be open and accept that they are, that is fine, they can enjoy the facilities, but if there are people who are not willing to be open and talk about their gender then they will not be able to enjoy their facilities. I am open about myself, I have gone and spoken about jogappas' problems on stage in Gulbarga.

Even to protect animals these days, the government is taking steps. However our lives are worse than those of dogs, people look down upon

us with disgust, like they don't want us around. We have no children or family. The younger jogappas will somehow survive, what about the older people like us. We don't have the energy to go around begging to earn a living. It is difficult, our body is not permitting us to do this as we get old. We don't have any house to stay or family or any other facilities. In case something happens to us tomorrow, we have nobody and no support.

I just wish to say that there are many jogappas who are not accepted in their families. 9 out of 10 jogappas are thrown out their homes, they migrate in search of work and are facing lot of problems from society and it is a definite struggle for existence.

There are people like me who openly admit that I am a jogappa and wear a sari. But there are also many who are not able to be open, they wear a sari outside and when they return home they have to go back as a son. Jogappas have the feminine character in them since childhood, or it may be seen later when the Devi chooses to come to us .

We are unwanted everywhere, society has only been harassing us. We require support and a place to live as we have nowhere to go. Even in the health aspect, doctors don't treat us well. I have spoken about this in many meetings and have been covered by the newspapers. We have no one, so we bring up our siblings' children as our own, we send them to school and take care of other things. Though we do all this, we have no one to take care of us during our old age and difficult times. So when no one has taken responsibility for us, we should demand that the government to do something for us.



Jayanthi Jogappa

*“I couldn’t stop myself from
worshipping the Goddess”*

“I couldn’t stop myself from worshipping the goddess”: Jayanthi Jogappa

I was born in a village. I have an elder brother and younger sister. I am not married.

I had everyone in my family when I was a kid. Mother, father and everyone else. My only desire during my childhood was to draw rangoli³⁴ in front of the house and go to the temples. I liked performing pujas and things. My father and mother use to question me, why are you behaving like this? They felt really bad. Though they felt bad, I did not stop worshipping the goddess. Even when I was so small that I only wore chaddis³⁵, I always draped a towel across my upper body like a sari pallu. People always made fun of me, saying that I am a jogappa. They used to scold me.

I had friends, but no one liked me. They always made fun of me. I liked talking to girls when I was a kid, they too did not want me. They said that you are behaving like a girl, we don’t like it. You are a jogappa. I have studied till 6th standard. I used to go with my classmates to school, but they never liked me. I too always wanted to be with girls, behave like them. I wanted to always worship the goddess, it was always in me to perform and think about the goddess. At school every one teased me, that I had grown my hair and applied the sacred ashes on my forehead and behaved like a girl.

I stopped school because of all that. I wanted to learn; however, I couldn’t stop myself from worshipping the goddess. I would go and seek alms on Tuesdays and Fridays. I quit school because of that. The teachers would encourage me to study. They told me not to behave like this and told me not to wear the sacred ashes and grow my hair. But my intention was to only pray to the goddess and not think of anything else. That was my only feeling at that time; I did not take their advice.

I was 10 years old it started. The same feelings are continuing till now. Tuesdays and Fridays I feel like worshipping and performing puja. I did not have any body pain or things like that. I had some marks all over my body, it looked like water retention and swelling. I went to the doctor,

34 Designs drawn on the ground using different materials such as coloured powders or flower petals

35 Underwear

I had the medicines they prescribed, but this did not come down. The doctors themselves told me that look, this is some godly influence, that is why it is not getting cured. If I went more than once, they said that we don't know about it, please go. I think they were scared of me, because I was different.

I used to behave like a mad person, I use to wander about. When I say like a mad person, I mean not like a man or a woman. I used to feel like worshipping the goddess all the time, I would wander about. The only thought in my mind was the goddess. People would tease me and talk about me. I told them, what to do, I am like this; I felt why goddess has done this to me.

My parents were totally against it in the initial days. My parents used to beat me up, when I went to seek alms on Tuesdays and Fridays. My father told me, don't worry, we will do whatever it takes to make you all right. We will take you to the doctor and get you medical help, you will be alright. I told my father to leave me alone. I told him, I will always remain like this and worship the goddess. My mother eventually understood me, and she stood by me saying, let him be. He says it is what he wants. And he says that this is godly.

The guru used to come to my village seeking alms, my mother asked her what to do. She would pray to the goddess and give my mother a lemon to help me with my situation. Whenever she said something, all my bodily marks would slowly go down. When I was old enough to know things, I met a guru and told the guru about my situation at home. The guru came to meet my parents. My mother asked the jogappa who came home about me, she shared her agony, look, my son is like this. Then the jogappa told my parents not to beat me or scold me or call me names; he said he has a goddess on him. They told my mother that, after some time, if he persists in the same kind of behaviour, we will come and help to tie the muthu, and become his guru.

Then I started following the jogappas. I used to go seek alms on Tuesdays and Fridays. Eat what was offered, like rotti and chapati. I did not tie the muthu when I was ten years old. When I was old enough to understand what it was, I decided to go to the temple and find a guru and get a mangalsutra³⁶ tied. I was 15 years old at that time.

I informed my mother that I am going to a temple like this, I have to meet the guru and follow everything. The temple is in Saundatti, it is very far, it is in Gulbarga. Then the guru herself took my mother and me to the temple and followed all the rituals which are done for a woman. She tied the muthu around my neck; she recited a few things in my ear. She told me to never lie to anyone, never to steal gold and silver from any one. Never to eat in a house where a death has taken place and other things like that. You should always drape a sari, wear bangles. All this was done with the acceptance of my family. My maternal uncle himself got a mangalsutra for me.

After I went to the temple and got the muthu and everything tied, we came back home. Everyone around my house was only talking about me, look, he has transformed from what he was to what he is right now. Then the family organised a function and invited everyone, saying that this has happened and there is a godly presence in our house. They had a function declaring to everyone that we went to the temple got the muthu tied, henceforth this person will always be seen in a sari. She will follow the goddess Yellamma and the other rituals followed by her jogappa guru. Everyone should accept her. The gurus made my parents and relatives apply the sacred ashes on my forehead. My family slaughtered a goat and served food for everyone.

Everyone felt bad for me and they cried for me. My mother, sister, all my aunts and my friends everybody cried for me, look how he was and how he has become now. What will happen to his future, everyone cried. I felt why everyone is crying? I was very happy that I'll get to go to functions and give people my guidance. I did not understand why they cried. I felt that I have taken the path of the goddess, what is there to cry? When they were crying I was laughing.

For this program, my elder brother did not come; he was against all these things. He did not even eat anything on that day from the function. Because my mother supported me, nobody talks to my mother. My elder brother doesn't talk to her at all. During festivals, they call me and give me a sari and bangles, but they never talk to my mother.

After the function was over, I left the house and started staying along with my guru. The reason for that was that everyone had started crying

at my state. I did not want that. Secondly, my brother and younger sister were still at home, I did not want their lives to get affected because of me. People shouldn't think that in this house there is a man who is wearing sari and bangles. Once in two months I would visit my family, stay there for two days and return to my guru.

My guru stayed in Hubli; she had taken a house on rent. I used to go along with her to different places like Gulbarga and Bagalkot and take part in dramas and sing and dance. She grew old, and is no more now. After that I took over. I came back to Gulbarga, I started following all that she used to practice, similar procedures of tying muthu for people and praying like her.

I am a guru for five jogappas now, they too do the same thing, they go around sing, dance and perform pujas, seek alms. So, we have our own 'children' who are jogappas. When I followed my guru; she had many younger jogappas under her. I too have five younger ones under me, who are like my children. I regard them as my children, they also take me to the hospital when I am not keeping too well. They give me Rs 50 or so and provide me with rice and other cereals at times. Hence I don't have the feeling that I don't have children at all, these are my children.

I regard some jogappas as my elder sisters. If there are people who have got the muthu tied before us, and then they are regarded as elder sisters, if they have tied the muthu after us, then they are regarded as younger sisters. They have their followers; we regard them as their children. I regard them as my elder and younger sisters' children. They too address us as dodamma or chikkamma, as aunts.

I stay in Gulbarga in a rented house. I don't have my own house. I visit my mother often, stay there for a night and come back. My mother tells me, enough of whatever life you have led till now. Why do you want to pay Rs 1000-2000 and stay on rent? Come back home and stay with us. But I also have mother and siblings here, what about them, where will they go? If I give my family Rs 100-150 they will give me food. But if I go back, who will take care of my children? They come to me, I cook for them, and they all eat. They go seek alms and come back; I too go along with them at times. If there is a function we all go together to do joga. I told my mother that I will stay where I am right now for some more time. How can I go back home leaving all these children? It is difficult. They will not be ready

to accept it. This is my life at present.

My life as a jogappa is: she went and sat in a place for puja. For that puja, all kinds of people were present. She asked the people what they wanted, one of them said that he wants to be an engineer, another person said that I should get married have a wife and many children, to which she said, go on, everything you wish for will happen.

Once the goddess is in us, we feel it. We understand the feelings of the goddess. We follow whatever she wants, if she wants to keep flowers and dance or do anything, we just feel it and follow what we feel. In people's houses if any such 'incident' occurs, then it is understood that goddess will arrive. The 'incident' is in the body. It will remain in the body. We will be told what the goddess wants to tell us is happening in the person's house. At that time, we have no consciousness that this is my mother or my sister. Everyone will be the same for us at that time. If people come to us and ask for a lemon or a banana as a blessing we feel like giving it to them. How can we say that the goddess is not in that person then?

The goddess does not remain in our body for many hours at a time. She will come on us on Tuesdays and Fridays for 2 hours, that is when she is within our body. During those days we drape a sari for her, we do all the things she likes, we dress her up completely, with bangles and we light the camphor in front of her. The experience at that time, we will know at that time. At that time, when she is on us, we feel like dancing and reciting some verses, we wish that everyone who comes to us tells us about their sufferings so that the Devi will tell them all what to do. We want everyone to know that the goddess has arrived; we want our mother and sisters to realise that the goddess is on us.

I use the familiar pronoun to address her because she is our mother. We feel very close. Whenever we go anywhere, we feel that she is with us, very close, that is why I address her thus.

Some people will ask other things. But we people only asked her to make us like her, which she did. Our only wish was to be like her, we too do joga like her. We eat what is given to us in our disciple's house, we like to recite verses about god and tell fortunes to people. We pray to the goddess on behalf of the well-being of a family and give the family a lemon and ask

them to drink its juice.

This is our life, we too wanted to sing, and dance and do joga like her. Which we are.

At home, we keep the kalasha with a coconut, we drape a sari for the goddess and tie muthu for the goddess. Place rice before the goddess. We draw a rangoli outside the house and perform pujas.

When we go to the functions, the people who have invited us would have finished doing the puja inside their house in their own way and would have cooked food. We just go to the house where there is a function, take a coconut and light camphor on it and then recite mantras and do the aarthi. We take food and other offerings and return home. If they ask us to perform the puja, we do it, if they say that we have finished doing everything, we just do the aarthi. They give us Rs 200- 300.

We travel to various village festivals. The village elders invite us, they call us saying that there is a festival for 2- 3 days, please come. Sometimes we are invited by our gurus – there is a big programme, we need to perform pujas for 2- 3 days, we need to do abhishekam and aarthi for five days. Then we go for those occasions. These are big temples. The goddess is taken into the streets; we sing in front of the goddess' procession, as soon we reach the temple, she is dressed up freshly in a new sari and flowers. We take the koda keep it on our head. And dance, we dance until we fall.

In the temples, they perform their own puja and prepare a prasadam³⁷. We do go inside temples, only during pujas. We go and worship the goddess and seek her blessings and come back after taking the prasadam.

In temples, they perform dramas and other performances. We stay in a room, we perform puja. Some people ask us to apply sacred ashes on their forehead; they give us Rs 10 or so. If our guru calls us, we go to a place where the devotees come before or after darshan³⁸, where there is a big crowd. There we sing and dance and recite verses. People make offerings at that time.

37 Food offerings given at the places of worship

38 The opportunity to see the deity

In some temples, we guide people through the tapallu ritual. Tapallu was the practice of wearing leaves around the body as clothing, it was offered as a prayer to the goddess earlier without any clothes underneath. People used just the leaves to cover their bodies and took part in the goddess' procession. This is something that the government has banned these days, they have brought about a rule that the devotee should wear new clothes and then a pot of water will be poured on them, after which they can wear the leaves over the newly worn clothes to offer prayers. Otherwise, we just tie muthu for the children and come.

The difference with the pujaris³⁹ at the temples is, in the temple, the pujari will show aarthi, recite mantras and tell the devotees of the goddess, don't worry things will be alright.

Whereas we jogappas say that we are a form of the goddess. The goddess speaks through us. When people ask us, what is the difference, I pray so much yet I don't have a boy child, we bless them saying don't worry, you will soon be granted a boy child, in return please make some offerings to us. They do. The only difference is that the goddess doesn't talk, we talk. She is the biggest goddess, we are just a form of her, and they regard us as the smaller Devi.

The pujaris feel that, the whole day we are the ones who show aarthi to the goddess, decorate her and chant mantras, but yet people go to these jogappas and take the lemon and the sacred ashes from their hand and get the muthu for their children tied by them. The pujaris have this kind of bad opinion about us.

My guru is my everything; my mother gave birth to me. But my guru held my hand, she taught me everything. More than my mother, for me

my Guru is more than everything. If I had stayed with my mother, she would have got me married and kept me with her. My guru, on the other hand, after I tied the muthu, has taught me everything about the goddess. Once my guru became old, we started following the same tradition that our jogappa gurus followed. Over the years whatever we observed, we put that in practice, we got to know who will become a jogappa, who needs a muthu to be tied and things. We have observed whatever they offered the

39 Priests

goddess, fruits or vegetables, and we follow the same practices.

The mangalsutra I am wearing means I am married [to the goddess]. The red kumkum line in the parting of my hair we keep with the significance that we should always be muthaide – remain married till we die. The other necklaces show that I am an artist and I dance and sing. The red and white muthu is a very important thing. It is our identity – it is of more value than any gold or silver. The red muthu signifies the goddess Yellamma and the white muthu signifies Parashurama her son. We sing about them and their life story. These white and red muthu carry a lot of value for us. When we die, before we are buried, the muthu and all the other ornaments are handed over to our ‘children’.

Once in a year, we completely offer prayers to the goddess. We buy the goddess new clothes, buy her toe rings and nose rings. We cook lavish meals, brinjal masala, Rotti, we buy clothes for all the ‘children’, we make sweets, we recite songs for the goddess and offers lemons to all the devotees, and we apply turmeric and kumkum and buy green bangles for all the ‘children’, the younger jogappas.

We also go to Saundatti once a year. We buy green sari and green bangles; we apply turmeric and kumkum for the Devi. We offer five kinds of fruits and five kinds of vegetables to her. The vegetables are brinjals, spinach, fenugreek leaves, carrots and potatoes. We offer bananas, oranges, lemons, apples and sapotas. We do abhishekam for the goddess, offer her the vegetables and fruits and pray to her. We are meesala muthu disciples, vegetarians. We are neither men nor women; we don’t get married, don’t have wives or children. We are a pure form, which is not married, for the goddess. We are meesala muthu.

There are also married men who come behind us, wearing a lungi, they ask us for a lot of things. We tell them that they have acquired some sort of feelings, and it is not bhakti⁴⁰, we ask them to go see a doctor. Even then if they don’t realise and keep coming to us, we go to their wives and tell them; we tell the wife her husband has been coming to us. If she then says that he doesn’t sleep with her anymore, on Tuesdays and Fridays he performs puja and things, then we take them with us, but the manner in which they worship is different from us.

Since they are married and have children, that is why they are yenjala

40 Devotion

muthu. They pray to the goddess that their wife and children should not be affected by anything. They pray to the goddess asking them to keep the family safe from all the bad things, they pray that they will sacrifice a goat and offer themselves to the goddess. Their gurus slaughter a goat, make sweets and worship the goddess. They sing and drink in the name of god.

Once a year for a lunar month, from Randri Hunnime⁴¹ onwards, we don't do any pujas. On Randri Hunnime, some people do homas⁴² at home. Or else there are village festivals through the night till 5 in the morning. We burn everything that we have used the previous year. During that period we take off all our ornaments, we don't go to beg during that month, we don't tell fortunes. Even if someone comes to us we tell them that we are in the Randri Hunnime month for the sake of the goddess and we can't bless them or do any sort of puja. We send them away. We don't take any money from any offerings, we go to the temple.

We go from house to house; we tell them that we have to go to the Muthyalamma temple at the end of the month and ask them to contribute something. If they give 50 or 100 rupees, we take the contributions and go to the temple. Many jogappas from Bijapur, Bagalkot and Belgaum come to the temple, we take a bath, we go to the temple and come back. That is the procedure. We go to the temple, and put on our bangles and toe-rings in the presence of the pujari. Some jogappas organise a function in their own villages and wear all their ornaments again.

The story goes like this: once, when Jamadagni, Goddess Yellamma's husband, was meditating, a king comes and kills him. On seeing her husband dead, Yellamma calls for her son, Parashurama and asks him to get medicinal sanjivani herbs to bring his father back to life. Till her son arrived and restored him to life, she took off all the ornaments and draped a plain sari as mourning, and did not worship. Muthayala hunnime is nothing but the occasion to start wearing the bangles and other ornaments again after a month of mourning. We jogappas follow it because the goddess kept this ritual.

There is a temple near Saundatti for Jamadagni. We go to the temple. In the temple, after he is considered to come back to life, abhishekam is done. The goddess wears all her ornaments and turns into a sowbhagyavathi

41 The full moon of December is important for Jogappas as it marks the beginning of their ritualistic mourning period

42 A ritual which involves making offerings to a 'sacred' fire.

(a fortunate, married woman) after her husband is brought back to life. When the ceremony is done, we think of him and wear our mangalsutras and seek blessings from the guru. Once the goddess's husband is back to life, they bring him in a chariot and make him wear a crown. They garland him.

Some people who can afford it have a celebration at this time, we serve food to everyone, some of them offer saris to 10 or 11 jogappas according to tradition. Others who cannot afford to do this, can get a sari and a few bangles, perform puja by offering fruits and flowers, seek the blessings of the goddess and get back to their routine lives. Whatever happens, this tradition should be followed, it should not be neglected.

We do whatever is told by our guru. If at all we tie muthu, go for functions with other jogappas and accept saris and eat in devotees' houses without the knowledge of our guru, and we don't tell our guru about this, they will somehow get to know at the next function. When the guru asks how come you haven't informed me about this, no matter how much the younger jogappas say that you were not around, please forgive me for not asking you, they were expected to pay a fine of 50 to 100 rupees back in those days. Nowadays the fine will be 1000 to 2000 rupees.

We have no casteism among Jogappas, that people are madigas or something else. We don't believe in the background of anyone. Whatever the caste, they will want to sing and dance, wear a sari, they will seek alms, do the same things as other jogappas. In Hijrapan, there might be a little bit of significance in caste. But there is nothing like that in jogappas. There is no discrimination based on these grounds. There is absolutely no discrimination, if anyone is found discriminating, they are asked to pay a fine to the guru. We all stay united as sisters.

There are also Muslims who are Jogappas. There are no problems when they come from a Muslim background. The person who brought out the cassette of Jogappas, Maqbool Baba, was our guru and a jogappa. He was our chowtki⁴³, we followed his songs. They do face problems at home, in their community. They ask them why have you become a jogappa, you can become a hijra. They do try to influence these people by saying, why do you have to apply the sacred ashes on your forehead, come follow the

43 A person who plays the musical instrument that is used by Jogappas

hijra culture. You get nirvana done and things. Some of them confront such talk by saying, no, the goddess is in me; I cannot leave this path; and continue to follow our group. Though they face problems from their families, they are not very bothered about the families. Because once they start applying kumkum and follow the Hindu tradition, they are not entertained at home, where they follow the Quran.

We cover our heads during the call for prayers from the mosque. It is a ritual that we follow, our gurus used to do it. We respect the Almighty even if he is Allah. It is just paying respect to their prayers as well, and their Almighty. We too pray in our minds at that time that our 'children' are blessed, that is all.

There were lots of people coming to get the muthu tied earlier. They come to Saundatti; earlier, there were many people coming. After the government said, don't tie white and red muthu for men and drape a sari, fewer people are coming to do so. Even now they come, but now many of them are following the hijra culture. Earlier, they used to sing and dance, they never used to go anywhere. These days for money they go anywhere they want to. We used to listen to our gurus and abide by their wishes. We used to respect them very much; these days they don't respect gurus as much. There was a guru called Shobha who died recently, we asked her 'children' if they wanted to follow another guru now that their guru is dead. They replied that, their guru has been everything to them from the beginning. They chose to keep her as their guru even when she is physically no more. They told us that they will regard us their aunts like before.

A jogappa will carry the muthu till her death. She will not give it to anyone. We children will take care of our guru when she becomes too old to work. We do whatever she has taught us. After her death, her muthu is handed over to her children and they keep it with them and pray. In some circumstances, if after her death her family asks for it, we give it to them. However, our family should not have rights to anything of ours. My family members should not feel attracted to anything of mine, neither my saris nor the very little gold I might have, it will all go to my followers, my 'children'. If at all my family takes anything the goddess will get angry and will do something to them. The goddess knows that we have dedicated our lives for her; hence it should rightfully go to our followers. In cases in which the family might have not handed over the muthu to the followers

of the jogappas, when they might have felt why we should give it to the followers, we will keep it at home and worship it...If they do that, then certainly the goddess will make sure that someone from their family definitely wears a sari. If the jogappa's belongings are not rightfully handed over by her family to her followers whom she considers her children, this will happen to them.

The practice of parents dedicating their children as jogappas isn't followed here. No parents will wish this for their children. Towards Hubli and Dharwad side, a childless couple might have prayed that if they have a child they will dedicate their child towards serving the goddess. They might do it; here it is not followed or done.

Jogammas are women. They too tie muthu for the goddess. When the jogamma is young; muthu is tied for her by the jogappas. Many jogammas are with a 'husband'. To us, it's just like for big ministers, there is a body guard, it's similar to that. She would have got married to her husband, and got a mangalsutra tied by him. She would also have got a muthu tied by us. After her husband's death, she will not wear a bindi. She goes to the burial ground and after her husband is buried, after that is done, she comes back home and takes off all her ornaments under a tree. After a period of 20 days or forty days, she goes along with two jogappas to the temple and hands over her toe ring and her muthu to the jogappaguru, which they in turn give to the followers they regard as their children. After doing abhishekam for the goddess and puja in the name of her husband, she is then given aarthi 21 times and sent back to resume her life. He took her as a companion for his happiness, why should she remove her ornaments and live as a widow for that?

Some of the girl children are named as Parashurama muthu; they cannot have a relationship with either a man or a woman. She cannot have a relationship with anyone. She can sing and dance with us; she dedicates her life to the goddess. She shares her good and bad with the jogappas. The woman will be like Parashurama after tying the muthu – she will be like a man, she will come to Saundatti to participate in the rituals.

There are also Parashurama jogappas who are men who wear muthu. Such a jogappa cannot have a relationship with any woman. If he has a relationship with any woman, it is equivalent to having it with his sister, If he has a relationship with people like us, then it is like having a relationship

with his mother. He cannot have any relationship.

The pant-shirt jogappas can probably do what they please when they wear pant and shirt. They can have sex and things with men and all. But once they tie muthu they are supposed to wear sari. Some of them wear muthu and are in pant and shirt, but they are not under the influence of any guru. They feel what is there if I am in pant and shirt or in sari, my devotion is purely towards the goddess. They tie the muthu under the guidance of a pujari and not under a jogappa guru. If they tie muthu under the guidance of a jogappa guru, they are told to wear a sari. People tend to call us for dramas and functions, they get scared of them.

In earlier times, only if a person had the true grace of the goddess, they could become a jogappa. Earlier we used to be told about possible new jogappas. We would go to the house where we are told that there is a jogappa, we would apply the sacred ashes on their forehead, observe them for a period of 6 months to one year and then decide that yes, this person is a jogappa, and tie muthu. These days, say, in the past 10 years, men who have feminine character choose this as a means to dress like a woman and move around like a woman. They either become hijras or choose to become jogappas to practice what they feel is feminine in their nature.

Society did not accept us earlier; there was no space for us. Now everyone has accepted us and people's sexualities. In hijrapan, people get nirvana, take basthi and find a husband. The jogappas, we are following the divine path of the goddess and are focused on worshipping and performing puja. The hijras have been successful in making their mark, whereas the jogappas have not been able to do this. The jogappas have not come together as a group. The government has recognised them; the government has not recognised us.

Now I am very old, it's very difficult for me to dance and sing and participate in dramas. My feet ache. The government has not provided any support for us. It is very difficult for me to travel for the village festivals carrying the koda on my head. People ask us, why you are behaving like this, don't drape a sari, don't behave like this. If we borrow 500 or 600 rupees and go to Saundatti, they say don't behave like this.

Our life was much better before, after the hijrapan culture started and they started clapping and begging for alms, we lost the divine mark we had made for ourselves, and the people's impression of us changed. Now people know about nirvana and things. Earlier the Gurus only used to sing, dance and do fortune telling and seek alms. They also tied muthu for children and things like that. Now from the past ten years after hijra culture has come into existence a lot has changed. People feel that only on Tuesdays and Fridays the goddess comes on us, other days I will need a companion.

Earlier companionship was only with goddess, now the feelings of people have changed. They seek a proper companion with a man, not only the companionship of the goddess. Earlier they only felt like worshipping and performing pujas and praying for others. Earlier it was just the practice of worshipping the goddess as told by our Gurus. Now after the hijrapan culture has come into existence, when they boast about their panthis or husbands, even the jogappas have the feeling of wanting a husband. It does exist partly. Some of the jogappas in saris do have husbands.

Earlier, the jogappas were following the traditions. There was more unity and they went to sing and dance and perform dramas together. They shared and ate everything. These days the jogappas feel, what will they get out of singing and dancing. They end up staying with a hijra in their house and learn to get a nirvana and keep a husband that is what is happening.

In hospitals they treat us well; they recognise us, that we are jogappas. The sisters and doctors are well aware of us these days. They tell us to be careful even if we go to do sex work. They ask us to use Nirodh. There is no problem in accessing toilets; we always use the ladies toilets. But our life is difficult. Whenever we travel by buses, no one sits next to us. They speak ill about us, they feel disgusted by us. We don't practice any sex change that is all the more difficult for us. We are neither completely men nor women.

The police and goondas harass us. We tell the goondas, fold our hands and tell them please don't harass us, we only worship the goddess and don't do anything else, please leave us alone. We tell them that if we cast a spell, it will not be good for their family. To an extent they recognise us, as they see us seeking alms from door to door during festivals. They see us worshipping the goddess and don't trouble us much.

The police ask us if we have a license to perform dramas on streets as people gather to watch our drama. From the past 27 years I have been living in this place, recently a new SP came to me and told me to stop dramas because we don't have licenses. They say that the hijras gather to see our dramas, and in the name of watching our drama, the pickup clients for sex work. They tell us we are creating a situation for the hijras to pick up their clients for sex work. Even the hijras don't treat us well. The hijras are the ones who harass us more, they talk about our traditions. They say that we want to perform your dramas.

How to survive like this. Others they clap and get money in hijrapan. What are we supposed to do other than worshipping the goddess and offering prayers on behalf of the few people who come to us? It is very difficult. They dance and earn money, where should we go? please don't forget about us, we are human being. we depend on the money we are get from begging. There are no facilities for us, the government tells us not to tie muthu and spoil a person's life. That is not true, what should we do, tell us what to do. We have dedicated our lives to the goddess; we are into worshipping and prayers that is all know.

I don't have anything or anybody for me. what should I worry about? I only pray that when I die, there should be few people bury me. I pray that I should be able to take good care of my children, and they too should be able to get enough money. they should be able to take care of my later and bury me when I am gone.

After our death, we only expect to go to heaven. We would not want to be like this in our next life. What is the point, there is only suffering. make us either a women, where I can go to my husband's house without any problem, or make me a man who can have a family and children. Or if it is possible, keep me up there; don't send me for another life. that is all I will pray for. I will not want a life like this again.



These three oral histories are accounts of transition. The multiple changes in the world around them have impacted the Jogappa community in various ways. Each Jogappa here gives an account of the unique experiences that have shaped their lives and identities.

Ranjini accounts for the multiple identities that reside within her. She attests to the different experiences she has had, both elating and distressing, that have come to strengthen her belief that individuals must be allowed to choose the identities they live and express in daily life.

Reshmabee's powerful testament explores multiple phases of her life: her visions of Yellamma at an early age, her gradual realisation and acceptance of her own gender identity, and her struggle to deal with the people who question the validity of a Muslim born person being possessed by a Hindu goddess. She is emblematic of how Jogappas transcend barriers of gender and religious held as sacrosanct by society.

Jayanthi examines the deep connection Jogappas have with Yellamma. This relationship is so important that it touches every aspect of their lives, from their daily interactions with people to their clandestine affairs with their partners. Yellamma is possessive and protective of them and, to some extent negates the impact of the public's casual cruelty towards them.

