

CHAPTER-III

HIJRAS : A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

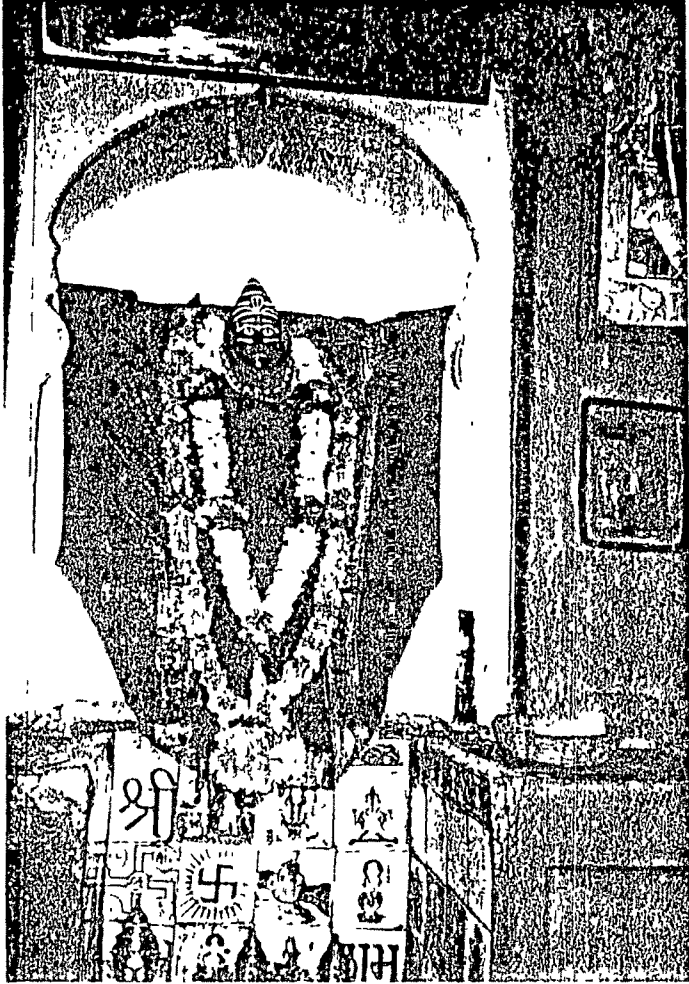
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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION :

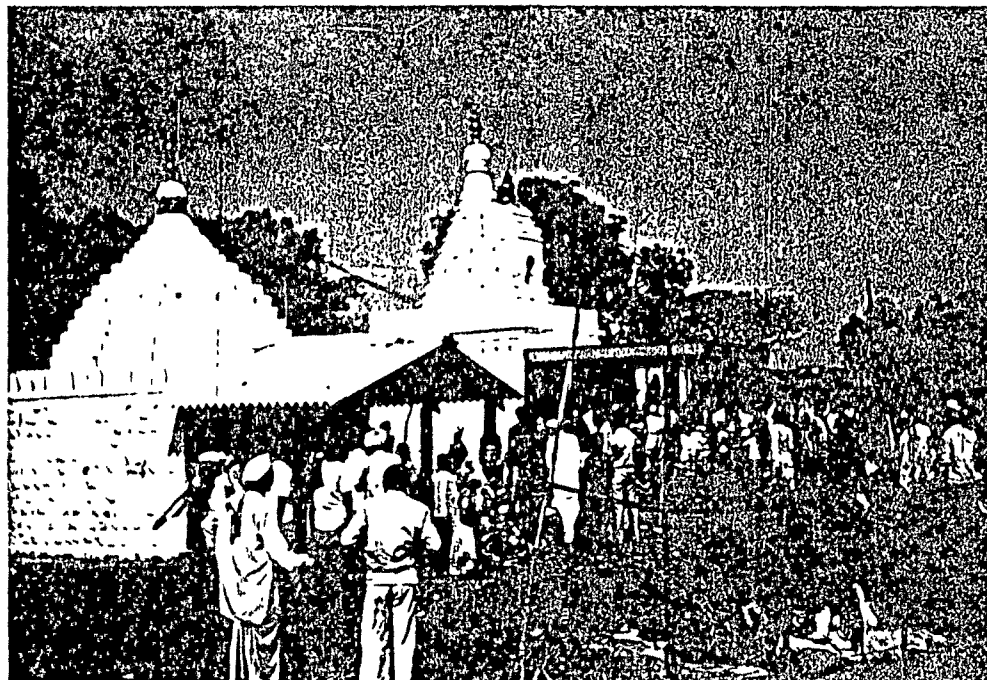
The group under study is comprised of 45 members. All these were contacted at Alte, (Kolhapur District) Soundati (Belgaum District in Karnatak and at Ichalkaranji and Kolhapur (in Maharashtra) with the accidental sample method. These hijras live at the outskirts of the village and it is generally the area where scheduled castes and backward people reside. They are treated as the most unwanted neighbours however due to the fear of the deity Yallamma they are not openly opposed by the villagers. It is observed that in each village there is one hijra house in those villages of Maharashtra which are at the Karnatak State boundry they are invariably found in more in number. We do not find these hijra in the area where educated middle class and elite class people of the society reside.

All these hijras are worshipers of Renuka or Yallamma goddess. In Kolhapur, there are three major areas where they gather and perform religious and ritual ceremonies. At the end of Rajarampuri Extension area of Kolhapur which has been developed in the last forty years or so. This area was developed by late Chh. Rajaram Maharajas officials and they were given land for establishment of residential colonies by the then Chh. Rajaram Maharaja of Kolhapur State, whose name has been attached to it.

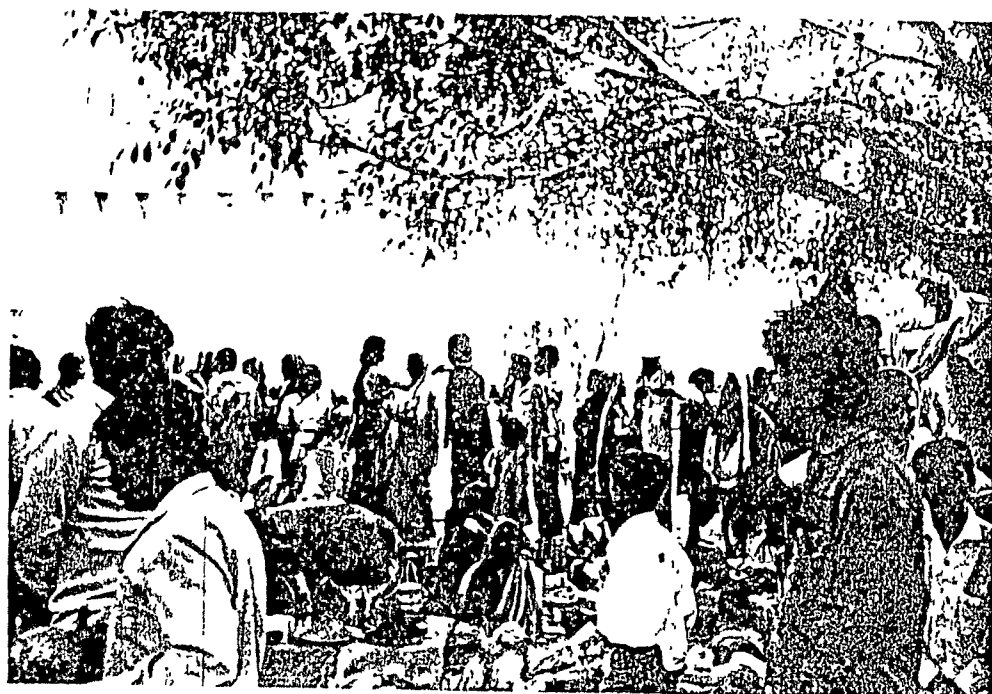
In the 11th Lane of Rajarampuri, there is Reuka Temple established in 1950s when the area was not occupied by residential houses and bungalows. It was the last part of the city at east and the area was almost deserted a jungle like area. The worshipers of Renuka used to perform religious ceremonies at this end of the city. With the



MOTHER GODDESS,  
RENUKA / YALLAMMA.



A/ RENUKA TEMPLE  
ALTE (DIST :- KOLHAPUR.)



B/ RENUKA YATRA,  
SAUNDATI, (DIST :- BELGAUM, KARNATAKA.)

establishment of new housing colonies and educational complexes at Sagar Mal, this temple has been surrounded by housing colonies and commercial complexes. The city bus stops very close to the temple and people having faith in Renuka Devi visit this temple with ease due to cheap transportation facility. Every Tuesday and Friday the number of worshipers visit the temple and other things to Goddess. The temple is looked by a Devdasi and daily morning and evening prayers are performed by herself and her followers. In the tenth month of Hindu calender, Paush as it is named a ritual takes place in this temple. There is a temple committee and a ritual committee who are entrusted the duties to conduct the ritual known as Bhandara generally in the last week of December or so. On the day when the ritual is performed worshipers are served with feast by those lucky and fortunate people who have achieved material and other benefits by worshipping the diety.

In the month of Shravan, the initiation ceremony is done to allot membership to new hijras and Jogatis. The ceremony is done under the supervision of a senior Jogta who is known as Guru and he is assisted by junior Jogta known as Up Guru.

Hijras are initiated by Jogatas, Guru Jogata and Up Guru Jogta. The Guru and Up Guru are not hijras by any sense. They are the religious agents and worshipers of Renuka Devi or Yallamma Devi. The temple activity and property is managed by Jogatas. Though the temple committee consists of members from the general public who worship the deity, the final say or decisions are taken by Jogatas.

In recent years this temple has become popular and is getting donations by many rich followers. The structure of the temple has been improved, it is being coloured every year at the time of religious performance, new gate and compound walls have been erected and a new brass bell and iron grills has been donated by worshipers.

There is another Renuka temple at the outskirts of the city Kolhapur on its western side. This area is known as the Mahalaxminagar which is adjoined by Jawaharnagar an area occupied by tannin workers, the hitherto neglected and backward castes of Chambhars or Cabler (teather workers). It is occupied by backward class, illiterate and religious minded population. The temple is located on the banks of a stream which divides the city into two parts and this stream has been bridged at four places. This stream is popularly known as Jayanti Nala locally and the temple is at new baridge which is known as Nava Pool. Here the ritual performances are done on every Tuesday and Friday. This temple is managed by Jogatas and hijras and jogtis are controlled by them.

The yearly festival is performed in the month of Magh at moonday and the people are served with a dish called Ambil in local terms. This temple is famous in the area as a Renuka devi's temple performing functions of giving psychological guarantee to disabled one. It is the belief of the followers of the goddess that issuess gets an issue and especially male issue to continue the decent. However, the people who gather here are mostly from the depressed sections and illiterate sections of the society. They gather every morning and evening for prayers and on every Tuesday, Friday and Monday to offer things to the temple deity.

The third temple of Yallamma is in the interior part of the Kolhapur city. The area is known as old Budhawar Peth, a local name given to the area. This place is close to Panchaganga river and is joined with rural area by a bridge known as Shivaji Bridge. The nearby villages at the west of Kolhapur are Ambevadi, Padali, Wadange, Kerle, Rajpootwadi and others nearing to Panhala fort. The rural population worshipping the deity visit this temple on holidays. Those women who are milk and vegetable vendors coming from nearby villages to Kolhapur daily take the blessings of the temple priest Jogta and offer things to the deity.

The Alte is a place 30 kilometers away from Kolhapur. It is the place of Renuka or Yallamma goddess having importance next to the Renuka temple at Saundati in Karnataka. Alte temple is an old temple having a tradition of about hundred years as told by Jogatas managing that temple. In the month of Magh and Shravan according to Hindu calendar on the moon days in those months hijras gather here to marry with the goddess. The yatra (festival) is performed for three days including either Tuesday or Friday.

All these temples of Yallamma or Renuka have contributed to the cultural history of the people in the area. These temples have been able to mold the personalities of the people to a great extent and have directed the way of life in many respects.

### 3.1 THE DEVADASIS AND JOGATIS RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS :

This institution has been created by the Brahmin priest and common man. The institution of Devadasis drew its strength and force

through factors like devotion to, faith in, fear of the deity, and a desire to subservient to the deity voluntarily or under compulsion. However, originally it was introduced to provide certain services in the temple. In general, women were pressed into the temple service. At the same time, voluntary dedication or men of natural eunuchs was not unheard of and it was also as common as the dedication of the women, atleast in some parts of the country. Yet by and large, the institution flourished on the women who were exploited by the temple priests for satisfying their sexual urges. So soon after its origin the institution of Devadasis degenerated into the ignoble profession of body selling for the pleasure of others.

The institution of Devadasis was not the same every where in India. It was known by different names and exhibited certain unique features in each region. These unique features sometimes place the particular form of institution on a different plane though certain common features are exhibited. These unique features make the institution much more complicated for the purposes of analysis and understanding, especially when the prostitutes, the married women, and the eunuchs get recruited to the institution of Jogatis in north-western Karnatak comprising the four districts of Belgaum, Bijapur, Dharwar and North Kanara and also in Southern Maharashtra is one of this type.

The institution of Jogatis is built around the legendary episodes in the life of Renuka who is known to the common man as Yallamma - the mother of all. The analysis and description of the institution must precede a brief narration of the important episodes in the life of Renuka so as to serve as a background for different features, practices and ceremonies of the institution of Jogatis.



Main story : The main story of Renuka is popularly known as Shri Renuka Mahatme, which is believed to be written by Vedavaysa. It forms the Sahyadri Khanda in Skanda Purana and runs into forty chapters. According to this source, Renuka is believed to be part incarnation of Aditi - the wife of Kashyapa Brahma - and part incarnation of Parvati - the wife of Lord Shiva. Renuka was born in the pit of the sacrifice that was being performed by King Renuka of Kashmir with a view of getting a child. It is believed that Lord Shiva himself was born to the sage couple. Rucheeka and Satyavati and was named as Jamadagni. He was the contemporary and close relative of Viswamitra. When Jamadagni and Renuka came of age, they were married by their parents with the blessings from the heaven. Four sons were born to them, the last of whom was none other than Parasu Rama - an incarnation of Lord Vishnu - who was destined to exterminate the Kshatriya race from the earth. He was named by his parents as Ramabhadra, but after getting the Parashu (axe) from Lord Ganesha he came to be known as Parasu Rama.

Jamadagni had married Renuka on the condition that she would bring holy water from river Malaprabha for worshipping the gods in a pot prepared every day from the sand from the river bed after taking bath in the river and also by using a cobra to serve as cushion ring while carrying the pot on her head. Renuka used to bring the holy water in the prescribed manner with ease. But one day (after all the four sons were grown up and were engaged in meditation on their own) she witnessed a Gandharva couple bathing in the river and felt the desire for sensuous pleasures. On that day, she could not prepare the pot out

of sand and returned late to the ashrama without water as she was trying in vain to prepare the pot.

Jamadagni, in whom the goddess of wrath had her abode, was enraged by his wife's lapse, and at the height of his temper, he abused and cursed her to lose the bodily charm (by way of, perhaps, contacting the incurable diseases like leucoderma and leprosy), and ordered her to vacate the ashrama. While wandering aimlessly in the nearby forest she met two Shaiva saints by name Ekiath and Joginath - popularly known as Ekkayya and Jogayya respectively. The two Jogis were moved by her condition, took pity on her and advised her to take bath in a pond (which is known as Jogula Bhavi and Jogigala Bhavi - meaning the well of sages) and to worship Lord Shiva with full devotion, collect alms every day from five households and to share it with the hungry. They gave her a round basket bowl for collecting alms.

Renuka followed the advice with devotion and regained her original bodily charm. She went to Jamadagni for his acceptance. Finding Reuka absolved of his curse, Jamadagni again lost his temper and this time he ordered his first three sons who were in the ashrama itself at the time to cut off her head. All of them refused to execute the order. Hence, the rishi curse them to become eunuchs for rest of their life and be the devotees of their mother. (It is believed by the common man that the male Jogatis are the incarnations of the three sons of Reuka who were cursed by their father to become eunuchs.) Then he called Parashu Rama, who was away from home engaged in meditation, and ordered him also to cut off the head of Renuka. Parashu Rama, being



A/ TAKING A BOY FOR INITIATION CEREMONY.

B/ A KID -TO BE INITIATED.  
(SHOWN BY AN ARROW)





A/ WITH GURU - BANGAL CEREMONY.



B/ WITH SUB-GURU - PERFORMING POOJA.

the most obedient son, executed the order without a second thought. Therefore, the rishi was pleased and blessed his son with two boons depending upon the wish of his son. Parashu Rama demanded the life of his mother and the varility of his brothers out of the first boon, and from the second he asked his father to discard the goddess of wrath. Both the demands were grantec by the rishi immediatly.

### 3.2 INITIATION CEREMONY :

To become a fullfledged member of the Renuka or Yallamma's worshipers group, Jogati or Devadasi or hijra a person has to undergo initiation ceremony. This initiation ceremony is not held in the strive of Rēṅka. Instead it is held in one of the quarters of the temple around the shrine near Saundati in Karnataka.

The initiation ceremony starts with a bath in the holy waters of the three ponds that represent the three holy rivers. After the bath the person wears new clothes and is taken to the quarters of one of the temple priests in a procession accompanied by his/her relatives, one or two senior Jogatis from the person's native place and the musicians (who may also be from the same place). The person undergoing the initiation ceremony carries a nominal gift in kind (food articles) to the priest. He/she also carries a new basket bowl containing an idol plate of Parashu Rama (which must always be in the bowl). In the priest's quarter, Renuka and Parashu Rama are worshipped, and the priest garlands the person but after the senior Jogatis have prepared and tied the stringed beads around the person's neck. Then the priest addresses the Jogati

and gives him/her a list of 'Dos' and "Don'ts" : a Jogati is required to share whatever he/she has with the hungry/need, if nothing is available to share, to direct the person to a house where the alms would be available; to observe the minimum rules of purity and pollution; to accept the priest as his/her master and to be faithful to him and his descendants. Then the new Jogati is taken by the senior Jogatis and the village priest to five houses for collecting alms.

### 3.3 DRESSING PATTERN OF HIJRAS :

The eunuchs who accept Jogatihood necessarily switch over to the female's dress. They start wearing saree, bodice, grow hair and regularly dress them as the women do, wear the bangles, and above all take clean shave every day. Thus it would be very difficult to distinguish them from women, especially from a distance. Therefore, they have an advantage of mixing freely with, especially, the lewd women and the prostitute-Jogatis.

There is a folk belief that goddess Renuka causes a change of sex-male into female and female into male. But in fact it is just a case of simple transvestitism. It may also be mentioned that in a few cases the Jogatis try to grow Jata-knotted hair that are not amenable to combing. A Jogati having such hair is considered to be very pious.

### 3.4 WHY THEY BECOME HIJRAS ?

The reasons for becoming hijras are simple as well as difficult to discern. Simple because of the fact that the reasons for becoming Devadasis, and Jogatis are as similar as those for becoming a hijra.

The reasons become difficult to discern in case of those hijras who are not eunuchs and have become hijras and accepted third gender role.

They do not answer as to why they have become hijras, instead they take shelter under the name of Yallamma.

In many cases, especially in the cases of man made hijras religious superstition is the main reason for a person becoming hijras. The desire to avert the evils, the displeasure of the goddess, to earn the pleasure and favours from the goddess, the desire to get cured from certain skin diseases (particularly leucoderma), to keep the vows and oaths taken at various times of sufferings and so on.

Family custom and tradition is another reason for becoming hijras. It is found especially in the untouchable families that at least one person is left for goddess worship and in a very young age of that male he is converted into a hijra after performing the initiation ceremony at Saundatti.

There are other hijras who have joined the group of hijras due to the desire to earn an easy livelihood in the name of Renuka or Yallamma goddess. In the rural areas and especially in those backward and illiterate groups it is very easy to collect alms in the name of Renuka. A hijra is not denied alms, especially on Tuesdays and Fridays.

A hijra has to collect alms irrespective of his socio-economic status. The hijra from rich families collect alms from five houses merely to undergo the formality. In many cases when a person becomes hijra

he has to leave the root family as it may harm the status of the root family. The recruitment to the institution of hijras may mean social derecognition of the family for the purposes of matrimonial relations, or the withdrawal of proposed relations, and so on.

The hijras from the poor families collect alms certainly more than five houses and do not share any part of it with others. On Tuesdays and Fridays, they collect alms from almost every house in the village and some of them go to the adjoining villages too. Therefore, the quantity of alms collected on the two days every week would be adequate or more than sufficient for the maintenance of the family. Moreover, some hijras collect alms every day. They also collect a good amount of gifts whenever they visit the main temple, especially on the festive occasions, from the pilgrims and other devotees who spend generously on these occasions. Therefore, the festive occasions are looked forward to by the hijras. It may, therefore, be said that the institution of hijras has created a social problem, namely, beggary.

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