



Feminizing Male Bodies: Cinematic Representation of Rhizomatic Transformation from Man to Woman in Marathi Film *Jogwa*

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In his examination of James Joyce's central character Leopold Bloom as a "womanly man", Joseph Allen Boone compellingly argues that Bloom's androgynous experience raises him above ordinary level with a concrete understanding of the values of sexually bifurcated society. Joyce here demonstrates "the way in which subconscious fantasy becomes a release mechanism allowing Bloom to transform his masochistic desire for self-punishment into purgative experience" (Boone, 82). Having been made to doubt his manhood by the orthodox people around him, Bloom, as a mouthpiece of Joyce, renounces what he sees in essence as a stupidly blind ethos of so-called masculinity. Perhaps this wisdom makes him finally accept Molly's infidelity by "demonstrate[ing] the breadth of his humanitarianism, concurrently acknowledging the interrelation of all life" (80). As will be contended below, Gilles Deleuze's theory of *becoming-woman* is a perfect paradigmatic tool to analyze the hermaphrodite-like state because it is a strong method of understanding this male/female dualism and the positive side effects it offers.

More particularly, this article will examine how Deleuze's becoming-woman can be a positive ontological tool in solving complexities associated with androgynous feelings in a male. Rajiv Patil's 2009 *Jogwa* (The Awakening) is a recent Marathi film that listens to becoming-woman's capacity to understand the fantastic effects of trauma into fruitful narratives. Because this film can be read as challenging the fundamental assumptions inherent in a feminist approach to gender studies, it provides an alternative way of understanding the bodily and psychic effects of androgyny in a more forceful manner.

In an important scene in *Jogwa*, Tayappa (Upendra Limaye) is seen seated on the floor draped in a sari. He has just been offered to the Goddess Yelamma¹. At this narrative juncture, our attention is focused on his style of sitting with one leg just raised above. He is staring at the ground with sad expressions on his face. We are told that he is afraid of getting outside because of the sari he is draped in. He is a man but made to wear a sari as per the custom. This is the initial phase where Tayappa is manifesting feminine traits in his self on the unconscious level. This is evident from the way he is sitting with one leg raised. He has maintained a particular distance as if he wants to avoid others' physical contact due to some flaw or dirt in him.² In the very next scene, he is seen going to fetch water with a pot in his hand. He has neatly covered his head with the corner of his sari. Some village boys make fun of him by calling him a woman and he is seen adjusting the corner of the sari on his head. These female gestures confirm the statement of Yemnya (Kishor Kadam), when, in a later phase of the film, he recounts how womanhood seeps in a male body.

Jogwa, along with another noted Marathi film *Natarang* (An Artist), employs social metaphors that embody internalized feelings showing that the cinematic genre can effectively address subtle philosophical issues through real-life situations. Of course, the strategies of directors of both these films radically vary as per their scripts. *Jogwa* lashes ruthlessly at the



meaningless Indian ritualistic practices that dehumanize individuals, while *Natarang* portrays its protagonist's quest for art through what Deleuze and Guattari call *Becoming-art*. However, both protagonists of these films namely Tayappa and Guna anticipate androgyny on account of odd circumstances thrust upon them. If we take Deleuze and Guattari's theory of becoming to its logical conclusion, then, we have ground enough to consider Tayappa and Guna's odd circumstances as blessing in disguise. Indeed, Deleuze's work is often approved for the positive ontology it pursues. It is acknowledged that "Deleuze is concerned with unfettering possibility to experiment with what a life can do and where a life might go" (Sotirin, 99). He seems to affirm "the possibilities of becoming something else, beyond the avenues, relations, values and meanings that seem to be laid out for us by our biological make-up, our evolutionary heritages, our historical/political/familial allegiances and the social and cultural structures of civilized living." (99)

Before articulating the crux *Jogwa* sets forth, I will first, in detail, explore Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of becoming-woman justifying its application to the characters Tayappa and Guna respectively. The concept of becoming-woman is developed in a host of books like *Kafka: Toward the Minor Literature* (1986), *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972), *Difference and Repetition* (1994) and others. According to Deleuze and Guattari, all becomings are molecular:

...[B]ecoming is not to imitate or identify with something or someone. Nor is to proportion formal relations. Neither of these two figures of analogy is applicable to becoming: neither the imitation of a subject nor the proportionality of a form... becoming is to extract particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. This is the sense in which becoming is the process of desire. (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 272)

This rule of appropriation is solely particular and it rigorously indicates what Deleuze and Guattari call a "zone of proximity." Becoming-woman is not the process imitating molar entity or even transforming oneself into it. This means becoming-woman is not "imitating or assuming the female form, but emitting particles that enter the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a microfemininity, in other words, that produce in us a molecular woman" (275). In short, becoming is a transformation from one identity to another and focuses on what Deleuze and Guattari call "multiplicities" composed of heterogeneous singularities in dynamic compositions (Sotirin, 99-100). According to Deleuze and Guattari, becoming is always "in the middle" and in-between (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 293). We might be tempted to think of becoming in terms of where or who we were when we started and where or who we are when we end up. But becoming is not about origins, progressions and ends, rather, it is about lines and intensities, "modes of expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, peopling." (239)

To put this in other way, Deleuze and Guattari have described the movement of becoming as "rhizomatic", a term that refers to underground root growth, the rampant, dense propagation of roots that characterizes such plants as mint or crabgrass. To quote Sotirin:

Each rhizomatic root may take off in its own singular direction and make its own connections with other roots, with worms, insects, rocks or whatever, forming a dynamic composition of [what Deleuze and Guattari call] "interkingdoms" and "unnatural participations" that has no prescribed form or end (100)



It is noteworthy that roots, rocks and insects have their own “molar” configuration or their own distinction that sets them apart from one another. But such “molar” configurations are composed of infinity of particles; lines of becoming may break off particles, recomposing them, deterritorializing them from their proper place in a molar configuration. For example, the rhizomatic roots of a Banyan tree may break through a seemingly impenetrable concrete retaining wall, one molecule at a time; the detachment of each concrete particle by the collocation of a tree particle has its own singularity. The molar configurations of a tree and wall are multiplicities that the molecular lines of becoming may move through and beyond, recomposing each into a tree-wall.

As the above mentioned scene portrays, Tayappa has already started extracting particles from his established relation with what he has started becoming (woman). The fact that Tayappa responds to his father’s anger by stroking his forehead against the wall and shaking his hands in a womanly fashion suggests that he has started becoming schizophrenic. He is afraid of going outside and prefers to sit inside the house because of peoples’ fear. Even Freud also suggests that when reality becomes too heavy to cope up with, “each one of us behaves in some one respect like a paranoic, corrects some aspect of the world which is unbearable to him by the construction of a wish and introduces this delusion into reality” (Freud, 28). Woman is not an object of laughter, but a “male-woman”, in the Indian scenario, is certainly is. On the subconscious level, now he wishes to become a woman as he has no alternative— a construction of wish that can save him from peoples’ laughter. This is an act of introducing delusion into reality. Again this difference in Tayappa’s character echoes Deleuze who links modern art to veritable theater of metamorphoses and permutations leaving the domain of representation to become ‘experience’, “transcendental empiricism or science of the sensible” (*Difference*, 56).

Exposing this reality, Rajiv Patil’s *Jogta* juxtaposes the numbing effects of bisexuality on his characters Tayappa and Yemnya. The latter avidly accepts his androgyny as it is a necessary condition for him to survive, whereas Tayappa is reluctant to face facts as he is caught in a whirlpool of his duality. Since the day he was ritually made a *Jogta*, Tayappa starts displaying his split self both inwardly and outwardly. Particularly, the scene where he is seen draped in a sari wearing pants inside denotes symbolically his divided self. Tanakka (Aditi Deshpande) and Basappa’s (Vinay Apte) censure of his wearing pants highlights how social customs bring about a gradual castration in males offered to the Goddess Yelamma. At this narrative point, the expressions on Tayappa’s face indicate that he is being de-masculinized. This becomes amply clear in the next important scene when some village boys make Tayappa’s fun by taunting that his making of *Jogta* is a convenience for local boys. This abusive sexual remark infuriates Tayappa who charges at the boys violently. His father’s intervention by slapping Tayappa saves the occasion. But Basappa further weakens his son when he says: “Why do you create a scene? You’ve grown up, yet you don’t understand. A *Jogta* should behave like a *Jogta*. He should not exhibit much *manliness*.” This statement registers the fact that the whole society, including his parents, hones the femininity in Tayappa and ends up possibilities to restore his former manly state. Furthermore, Yemnya’s account of his loss of masculinity creates a cyclical effect of zombification. He recounts how the circumstances forced him to become a *Jogta*:

“This sari appeared on my body when I was in my early teens. I didn’t even know how to drape it... My mother left me at Akkubai and eloped with someone. Everything is meaningless. Only two things are true, stomach and skin. Local boys used to take me to nearby farms, undrape me forcefully. I started enjoying it afterwards. Now I can’t do



without liquor and man. So I decided to clap hands at each forthcoming day.”

This scene suggests that Yemnya wants Tayappa to take this kind of life and free himself from emotional impasse.

This zombifying effect can also be noted in a key scene when Yemnya tells Suli (Mukta Barve) that a *Jogtin* is like a bell on the mountain, anyone can come, ring it and leave. This statement has sexual undertones as it implies that a *Jogtin* is equivalent to a prostitute. He also mockingly asks Suli, “Should I arrange someone for you?” It is necessary for the *Jogta* and the *Jogtin*, in fact the whole cult, to embrace profaneness. (Near about all young *Jogtins* in the film have illicit relationships) Yemnya goes a step forward when he tells Tayappa that the males in society add grace to *Jogta/Jogtin*’s life, hence, they should play a prostitute for them. Suli is also indirectly asked to play a prostitute by Phula (Smita Tambe), as their youth and beauty alone can ensure their survival. This makes us to examine the practice of *Devdasis* in India – a practice of dedicating young girls to the service of the temple prevalent from the eleventh century right up to the late colonial period. These girls were expected to dance and perform other services in the temple. Among others, rulers, landlords and rich merchants were their patrons. However, as Nitya Vasudevan remarks, *Devdasis* were never classified as ‘obscene’ or “degraded women” (*Public Women*, 174). This may account for their association with religious services. Despite this, they were looked down as public women. In one key scene, where the troupe of *Jogta* and *Jogtin* are busy singing and dancing, one of the spectators offers fifty rupees and asks Suli to dance at a song of his choice. Tayappa urges them not to consider their religious ceremony as *Tamasha*.³ On this, another spectator Sakhya (Chinmay Mandalekar) stops Tayappa saying that a eunuch like him is not supposed to tell this. He further asks Suli to serve them as she serves their God at whatever cost. The word ‘eunuch’ again makes Tayappa think of his changing self – that becoming-woman which is disheartening him gradually.

With respect to becoming-woman in *Jogwa* and *Natarang*, the queer relationships in these films have a special significance altogether. Shalmalee Palekar, in her analysis of the *Nachya* (effeminate male performer in *Tamasha*) in *Natarang*, remarks that, “[...] there are a remarkable number of ‘zones of fluidity’ that function as liminal spaces within the narrative of *Natarang*. Crucially, I argue that the film deliberately foregrounds a queer audience within it, depicts a particularly queer portrayal of the *Nachya* and recognizes the figure of the *Nachya* as a generator of queer eroticism. It therefore disrupts any ‘normative’ formulations of the *natural* equivalencies between ‘correct’ bodies and ‘correct’ desires” (*Nachya in Natarang*, 863, italics in original). There are at least four scenes in *Jogwa* that directly evoke homosexuality. In the beginning, Yemnya’s embracing a young boy on the mountain at Akkubai (Amita Khopkar) sets the tone of queering male bodies. In the second instance, Tayappa’s friend amorously holds him urging him to play a prostitute. This, of course, infuriates Tayappa as he has not yet crossed the thresholds, zones “in- between”, or Deleuze and Guattari’s “zones of proximity.” In fact, he never does cross that boundary as he is able to return back at the end of the film. Then there is a scene where we are directly shown Yemnya seducing a male – the act aborted by Suli and Annu’s (Prashant Patil) arraival in the room. The next important scene is more voyeuristic and semi-homosexual in which Tayappa is scrubbing Yemnya’s back when the latter is bathing in the river bed. This pivotal scene confirms Tayappa’s androgynous feelings more explicitly than earlier. The male gaze at his naked body enlivens Yemnya and he says, “When a male looks at my wet body, my heart begins to float like a feather in the air. Don’t you feel likewise? Alright, you will realize how womanhood gradually seeps in a body.” Because Tayappa stops scrubbing Yemnya’s body as



the scrubbing stone slips from his hand at this point of narrative, it creates a fantastic *mise-en-scene* for becoming-woman.

Jogwa, like many other Indian films, staunchly addresses the theme of female subjugation. However, the film's line of flight does this through morbid social customs that have been thrust upon the people. Under the coded permit, the males in the film seem to exploit females who are trapped in grotesque circumstances on account of blind beliefs and prejudices. Even the males are also victims of irrational religious practices. In fact, the film's trajectory movement from female exploitation to androgyny has a special significance from becoming's perspective. Becoming-woman in the film is a necessary subjunctive mood to foster inequality, chaos and gloom prevalent in the orthodox Indian traditions. Deleuze and Guattari attach special significance to becoming-woman when they say that, "...all becomings begin with and pass through becoming-woman" and that [i]t is the key to all the other becomings" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 277). Despite the resistance of classification in various ways by transsexuals and intersexuals, Tamsin Lorraine feels that Deleuze and Guattari underscore the importance of the binary machine of sex and gender in sorting out social identity and that it is almost impossible to escape this binary machine (*Deleuze and Guattari's Immanent Ethics*, 105). Though most men will be socialized into masculine behavior and exhibiting manly characteristics and just as most women will learn to conduct themselves as females and display feminine characteristics common to their sex, which does not promise any warranty for supposing that persons of one sex, biologically speaking, always interpret themselves as having a gender identity matching with their sex. Reflecting Anne Fausto-Sterling's article "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough", Vinay Lal asserts that "[l]ogically, womanhood and manhood need not have any relation to genitalia" (*Not This, Not That*, 120). Echoing Deleuze and Guattari, Sterling suggests even that sex may be "a vast, infinitely malleable continuum" (quoted in Lal, 120). Thus, becomings always operate within this context of transcendental empiricism creating ever-new circuits between our actual and virtual possibilities.

Though the process of de-masculinizing Tayappa is gathering momentum every time, the undercurrent *psychomachy* between his divided self can be seen at many occasions in the film. In one particular scene, Tayappa is riding on a bicycle with Annu. Annu asks him about his wearing of sari. He is particularly interested in knowing the degree of Tayappa's androgyny. He asks, "Don't you feel anything after watching a woman ... though you dance in the midst of women every time?" This question makes him think of his remaining masculinity and he tries to exhibit vigor and strength through a neo-real image of paddling the bicycle speedily. Speaking about Bazin's notion of 'fact-image', Deleuze explains neo-realism in the context of movement-image. The real "was no longer represented or reproduced but 'aimed at'. Instead of representing an already deciphered real, neo-realism aimed at an always ambiguous, to be deciphered, real; this is why the sequence shot tended to replace the montage of representations." (*Cinema 2*, 1) Similar gesture which can be treated as a neo-real image occurs in *Natarang*. When Guna is asked by a drummer to engage in a homosexual relationship, Guna tries to kill him in a great rage. However, he recovers and leaves the man. But the insult torments him much and makes him think of his former masculinity in which he took so much pride. In order to restore his equilibrium, Guna, in a fist of impulse, starts exercising – an act of displaying manliness to overcome the trauma inflicted by the sexual abuse of the drummer. This 'fact-image' recurs in both these films whenever the protagonists introspect about their split selves. Indeed, Deleuze's capacity to make us perceive cinema's ability to mould our actual experiences through virtual material is certainly laudable. While paying tribute to Deleuze, Duncan Chesney says:



‘Great films’ continue to open lines of flight; that is, films are valuable if they open lines of flight, not for fantasy and escape, but for thought and creativity. A contemporary aesthetic of the cinema should in this respect learn from Deleuze, who enables us to ignore questions of mimesis and realism, photography and the digital image, and to reconsider the history and the present state of the seventh art in its relation to the ongoing becoming of thought in a complex engagement of our image-world. (*Ranciere, Deleuze*, 36)

Deleuze’s lenses provide us a more comprehensive understanding of the complex and thought-provoking ideas hidden in great films and induce in us a creative potential to read subtle philosophies entangled in them.

Jogwa not only addresses intricate issues like becoming-woman, it also characteristically highlights varied methods of exploitation current in Maharashtra society. The film is a social documentary that exhibits how evil customs spoil the lives of people and lead them to horrible deaths. In a pivotal scene, Yamnya confesses to Tayappa how he is victimized by the *Bhandarbhog* – an evil religious practice. Both Yamnya and Tayappa are consuming liquor and the intoxication stirs Yamnya’s agony. He recalls his former love affair and his inability to sexually satisfy his beloved whom he weds. She then abandons him due to his impotency leaving him to play a prostitute in the rest of his life. Finally, Yamnya’s death, especially his burial ritual staunchly underlines the cursed lives of androgynous people in India. It is noteworthy that Yamnya is not cremated after his death as is the custom in Hinduism. Instead, he is buried. The practice of burying dead has symbolical undertones as it suggests the resurrection of the cursed. While throwing clay in Yamnya’s grave, all members of the cult chant a verse blessing him to seek rebirth as either a male or a female – not as a combination of both.

The androgyny in Tayappa and Yamnya happens to be the chief reason for all atrocities inflicted on them so far. However, this very predicament proves to be beneficial for Tayappa when he exhibits great vigor and strength to overthrow the whole cult that opposes his marriage with Suli. In the film’s closing scene, Tayappa asks Suli to clean the entangled lock of her hair – an act of overruling the codes of the cult. Tayappa also undrapes the sari and wears a shirt and a pair of pajamas. Here, both the active and inactive forces of Tayappa’s body generate the force and vigor that was so far dormant in him. In fact, the inactive forces in him become what Deleuze calls reactive. Speaking about the body, Deleuze says, “Active and reactive are precisely the original qualities which express the relation of force with force.” (*Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 40). Tayappa at this stage becomes so violent that he, along with Suli, is able to drive near about twenty people who are trying to thwart their union. Tayappa thus begins to overcome the abuses with the help of active and reactive forces of his body.

Thus, *Jogwa* edifies a challenging and difficult world with Tayappa and Yamnya’s experience of becoming-woman. The film refuses to allow Tayappa to remain mired in his disempowered state of victimhood and helps him to heal in such an open-ended paradigm. The final scene in which Suli rids Tayappa of a sari by throwing it to the winds symbolically can be read as Tayappa’s emancipation from forced womanhood. It can be said that Rajiv Patil’s touching film admirably succeeds in rewriting the morbid customs and traditions in Indian society that dehumanize the people who are marginalized and underscore the dictum that established Indian class⁴ endlessly repeat the zombie cycle of exploitation and abuse.



Notes

1. A religious practice in many Indian states of offering women and men to Goddesses who dedicate their whole lives in serving deities. Nitya Vasudevan gives an elaborate account of *Devdasis* in her article 'Public Women' and the 'Obscene Body': An Exploration of Abolition Debates in India.
2. There is a custom in Maharashtra that does not allow a woman to mix with other members of the family on account of her monthly menstrual period. Hence she is asked to sit in a corner of a room doing nothing so that she may be prohibited to come in any physical contact with other members of the family. This custom foregrounds the otherness of a female more staunchly than otherwise. Tayappa seems to adhere to this custom on the subtle level as he has been made a *Jogta* due to his bleeding while urinating.
3. The Maharashtrian *Tamasha* (Theater Show) is famous for songs and dance of an exquisite taste. The spectators can offer money to the woman-dancer and make her dance at a song of their own choice. The dancer then comes dancing and collects the money from the spectator who first seduces her overtly and then parts with the currency note. This also indicates another type of sexual harassment of a female public performer.

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