BODY AS A METAPHOR OF PROTEST IN THE AESTHETICS OF FEMINIST WRITINGS

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Abstract
Feminist writings have seen a transition from time to time in its approach to the patriarchal domination over the ages. Women’s sexuality has been subjugated since the beginning of civilizations. Indian caste politics has used women’s body to retain the caste system and constrained her sexuality. Gender stereotypes have constrained women to the norms framed by the patriarchal society. This paper examines how the women writers have used the image of body in their writings as a means of protest against such containment imposed on women. This paper focuses on the diverging ways in which the feminist writers in their writings criticise and protest against the cultural ideologies imposed on women and it focuses on how different is the aesthetics in their writings.
Key words: Patriarchal domination, sexuality, transition, protest, aesthetics, stereotype.

Introduction
If we study the traditional representation of women in society, literature and religious texts and so on, the objectification of women is clearly visible. Throughout the history and even today, a woman has been treated as a mere object and as something to be valued for the use others have by her bodily representations. She has been viewed as a mere physical object out there to fulfil the familial needs and sexual desires of men. The consequences of objectification of women have made the women internalize within themselves such views of men about women and in the process, they have self-objectified themselves and treating themselves as objects of evaluation to be evaluated on the basis of their appearances and the use of them for men. Physical appearance of woman has a greater role in the objectification and self-objectification of women. We can see many girls feel anxious about their appearance. Values of their self are depended upon the attention given by men and in order to seek male attention women engage in toning their body and skin complexion. The scriptures also have objectified women. There are number of writings on the ideal beauty of women. The notions around ugliness and beauty are filled in the classical texts of India. Sita, wife of Rama, is believed to be the most beautiful woman on earth. Apart from this, beauty is associated with virtue. Chastity, submissiveness, modesty, outer beauty and inner virtue are considered as the jewels of women. The romantic novels will have to have a beautiful and virtuous lady who is a mere love interest of the male protagonist. Apart from this, the greatest unfortunate element of this discourse is that the women have imbibed all these notions in their psyche and behave accordingly.

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The early women poets and their voice against patriarchy

The ideal image of women created in terms of women’s virtue and beauty has been one of the issues which the feminist writers throughout the history have taken up to address in their writings. Not only in the writings of emerging feminist writers but also among the early women poets, this protest that is seen represented through the image of body of women can be witnessed. If a woman ventures to articulate herself, it would prove fatal to her life. Because, the opportunity of questioning is denied to her and going against the image that is set for women would be an unwelcomed move in the male dominated society. Whereas, the early female poets and the emerging feminist writers as well, have articulated their voices in a shockingly militant way. How do body and mind react to the forces which colonise one’s body and mind is shown by using body as the image. Hence, body is one of the significant metaphors of protest in their writings and especially it is used as part of the diction in the writings of dalit feminist writers. If we look at it historically, we can see several instances where the women’s body itself has been used as a metaphor of protest. Akkamahadevi’s whole life is a metaphor for the protest and war which she waged against the male domination. Akkamahadevi is one of the female poets in vachana movement in Karnataka.

Mesmerised by her beauty, the king Kaushika married her against her will. The wedding of Akkamahadevi did take place with the Jain king Kashia but with some conditions. The conditions were that the king should neither touch her without permission and nor cause hurdles to her worship of Lord Shiva. However, when the king Kashia failed to honour and comply with the agreement, Akka abandoned his palace and the royal life. She abandoned her clothes also and left the palace acknowledging that Lord Chennamallikarjuna is her husband.

Don’t hold me. Don’t Stop me.
Let go Of my hand, the whim Of my Sari

.....
Guru became kin,
Linga, the bridegroom
And I, the bride
The whole world knows

......
Channamallikarjuna is my husband,
O brother,
No one else can be my man.

Poem by Akkamahadevi (Translated by H.S. Shivaprakash).
Anything beautiful was used to be claimed by the king and the women did not have the freedom of denying a man’s desires. Akkathrew off her clothes and left the palace naked and thereby rejected the modesty imposed upon women. A man who only knows how to control a women’s body and mind, has not got the mental preparation of facing the nudity of women. Her nudity might have rendered the king Kaushikahelpless. Akkamahadevi, in 12th century itself staged a protest against patriarchal norms using her body as a metaphor of protest. Akka finds the possibility of crossing the line through the nudity itself which was considered as sin in the society. This act of Akka was not welcomed by anyone in the society. Nudity was and is considered as insanity. Whereas Akka a had evimight have felt liberated from the worldly life by disrobing herself symbolically. Akka travelled to Kalyana seeking to see her Chennamallikarjuna. But it was not easy for her to find place among the saint poets of Virashaiva Bhakti movement which was initiated by Basavanna. Though she had liberated herself from the worldly life, she was not given place in the Anubhava Mantapa. She had to face several questions cantered around social, spiritual and philosophical discourses and she was also questioned for her nudity. Ultimately, she succeeded in her test and became a part of the saint poets’ group. In that group, she was given the honorific title “Akka” which means an elder sister. Akkamahadevi is regarded for her contribution to Vachana Bhakti Movement. Lal Ded is one more saint poet who worshipped Nata Keshava Bhairava. She is a revolutionary figure seen in the 14th century in Kashmir. She was given in marriage at the age of 12 to a Brahmin family whichill-treateher. She was accused of infidelity. Her long absences in home brought the accusation of infidelity on her. Out of suspicion, one day her husband strikes the pot of water which she brought home but, the water remained intact on her head. She poured the water in the containers and tossed out the remaining water out the door where a lake got formed. Such miraculous stories around her got spread. Ultimately, she abandoned the worldly life and went forth naked dancing in ecstasy on the road. She is known to the world through her verses called ‘Vakhs’ In the case of both ‘Akkamahadevi and Lal-Ded, their nudity, initially, was treated as insanity and people even pelted stones at them. Whereas, their radical views on women, spirituality and their critical notions on religious orthodoxy prove their rebellious selves. Both Akkamahadevi and Lal Ded disrobed themselves. It might be a sign that they wanted to disrobe the cultural baggage which a woman was supposed to carry on herself. By disrobing themselves, they registered their protest against the societal rules which were drawn by the patriarchal society. Don’t torture this body with thirst and hunger, give it a hand when it stumbles and falls. To hell with all your vows and prayers: Just help others through life, there is no true worship. Lal DedLal Ded attacked the conventional society and
criticised religious orthodoxy. Her Vakhs consisted the thoughts of defiance. In her writing one can see an urge for thinking, reflecting and liberating themselves from the clutches of society. The one earlier female saint poet Mirabai had an ecstatic worshipful longing for Krishna. Mirabai challenged everything that the patriarchal society has set as a rule for women. ‘Sati’ system was a social evil and Mirabai challenged it in the early sixteenth century itself. According to Hindu traditional custom, a woman had to immolate herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. But Mira Bai declared that she is not going to commit Sati which in itself was a powerful attack on patriarchy. She asserted her right to live and thereby she vehemently registered her rejection against the underlying notions of patriarchal society that husband is the god for a wife and without him she has no life. She repudiated the pseudo-heroism which the Sati system implied. Above all, she chooses Ravidas, a saint poet, as her guru which is an outrageous act during that time. Ravidas belonged to one of the lowliest castes in the Hindu society that is the Chamar Caste which means a cobbler’s caste. Mirabai was a princess and she was the wife of Raja Bhojaraj of Mewar. She belonged to a high caste aristocratic family and naturally her guru was supposed to be of high born. But her act of choosing a guru from low caste was extremely rebellious in a caste ridden society. She devoted her life to the devotion of lord Krishna. She mingled with all the devotees of Krishna irrespective of their caste and gender. She attempted to fulfil her quest of creative desires and aspiration. Sunil Khilnani, in his book ‘Incarnations’ made an observation about Mirabai that “......... the central challenge of her life how to overcome rigid social expectations in order to pursue one’s own free chosen values is a struggle women all over India are engaged in today”, has been referred in the article Mirabai- A feminist par excellence by Ashok Celly published in mainstream weekly. These female saint poets liberated themselves from the fetters of society in a most rebellious way. They protested against the patriarchal values in a unique manner. They used their body as a metaphor for their protest. They liberated their body and inner self. Mira sung and danced fearlessly in public place of temple for Krishna and Akkamahadevi and Lal Ded disrobed themselves leaving behind the cultural baggage and women’s modesty and called Channamallikarjuna and Natakesha Bhairava respectively as their soul mates. In this way they registered their protest against the orthodox patriarchal domination by siheiown body as a symbol of protest.

The emerging women poets and their voice against patriarchy

Some recent poets have used body in significantly different way compared to these early oets. Feminist poets like Meena Kandasamy andRupi Kaurand many others have used the female ody and sexuality as metaphors of protest in their writings. Meena Kandasamy’s poems are
one of the examples of that kind of writings. In her poem ‘A cunning stunt’, Meen and asamy discusses the body of a woman and how it is used by a man to fit in meanings. She discusses how the female body is a repository for the male dominated society to fill in meanings. bound in bed and blind folded hear the man of words come to me. burying his face between my thigh she says a cunt by any other name would smell as complicate and then, sniffing in Sanskrit, he christens it yoni, the womb’uterus, vulva, vagina, the female organs of generation. From the poem 'A cunning stunt’ by Meena Kandasamy The Hindu traditional values that were sphere headed by the traditional institutions haveturned women frozen bysetting gender roles. Women’s role is circumscribed by the traditional values and any attempt of getting out from that role would be get viewed as transgression. The scriptures, Vedas classical Hindu texts, Dharma and the religious institutions have set propositional beliefs about the status-quo of women. Modesty is something which is enunciated in all the religious texts irrespective of time and place. The womb of women is seen as something sacred for humanity according to religious texts. Thus, the female organ of reproduction is given with number of meanings. The First person “I” is used here and the speaker is a female. The poem is in the form of telling how the female body was circumscribed by the traditional values. The patriarchal tendency of looking at women’s body as something lent by the deity to serve the purposes of fulfilling men’s sexual desires and give birth to their children is viewed here as something that turning women passive. The poem delineates the discourse around the women’s role in a family. Memory gives way to medical terminology Gives way to metaphor as this man Turns into a word-monster who says That it connotes place of birth Source, origin, spring, fountainFrom the poem 'A cunning stunt’ by Meena Kandasamy. The patriarchal society has assigned women the places and roles to be active in caring activities and fulfil the nominal roles expected to be filled by them which are well defined. Those roles provide women a place in a religious organisation and in society. Men invoke feminine ideals for women to follow and this poem describe such process of men invoking the feminine ideal for women. And with his first thrust it also becomes a place of rest, repository, and a receptacle to his erection, enormous as the monier-williams dictionary. He is tearing away to make the meanings fit in and cunt now becomes seat, abode, home, lair, nest, stable, and he opens my legs wideband shoves more and shoves harder and I am torn apart to contain the meanings of family, race, stock, and asteand form of existence and station fixed by birth and I can take it no more. pinned down that way I cannot walk away. I am frightened. I turn frigid turn faker. From the poem 'A cunning stunt’ by Mena Kandasamy. The diction used here shows the frigidity to which women ultimately reach to and the aversion a woman feels about all the station
wherein she is fixed by birth. The speaker here says that she has been pinned down to family, race, stock and caste which are fixed by birth she just has to play the roles assigned to her by birth. In the poem, the female body itself is employed as a metaphor and the poem delineates how the patriarchal society used the women’s body as a metaphor to fix nominal roles a traditional values. In her poetry collection Ms Militancy she has dealt with the women’s issues at large. The women’s body which is traditionally considered as a metaphor for beauty, motherhood and womanhood, has been taken here as a metaphor for protest and it is not shown as something beautiful but rather shown as a thing in the hands of men which has turned frigid and fake. The idioms used in the poems are the idioms of protest. Meena Kandasamy repeatedly uses the images of parts of both men and women’s body. For instance, yoni, the womb, uterus, vulva, vagina, cunt, legs and terms like his erection [referring to the male reproductive organ] have been used in the poem. She has tried to show how the meanings of family, race, stock and caste are fixed. Another such writer referred in this paper is Rupi Kaur. She takes dig at the patriarchal notions. Her poems consist ink drawings of a woman and other things. She is an Indian born Canadian poet. Her poems focus on feminism, violence, race and so on. ‘Milk and Honey’ is collection of poetry penned by her. It delineates the violent experiences of people. It is about love, abuse, violence, femininity and loss. One such example is: The next time he Points out the Hair on your legs Is Growing back remind that boy your body Is not his home He is a guest Warn him to Never out step His welcome again A poem by Rupi Kaur

Conclusion
The emerging women poets have taken poetry as a vehicle to convey the journeys of women’s life. The undesirable experiences of women in terms of bodily colonisation is expressed in their poems. women’s sexuality has been curbed by such forces which colonise body of
women with its ideas related to ideal image of women in terms of beauty, virtue, chastity and modesty. Women’s chastity is an integral part of all the scriptures, religious texts, social and religious institutions, myths and canonical texts which are seen scattered throughout the world. The emerging women writers are raising their voice against such ideas and called them as the constructed ideological notions which curb women’s sexuality. They react to discourses around women’s chastity and modesty and cultural bindings in an unique manner.

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