

Chapter 2

Being Woman: Theoretical Speculations on Female Body in

Medieval India

A woman, her physical body, mental psyche and her artistic creativity occupies several great platforms for cultural discussions. The significant question that has always been asked is how a woman's experiences of her physical body shape her literal creativity. Also, there are other frequently asked queries about how a woman exists in a particular cultural context and especially, how she reacts to those cultural events and traditions which impose their conventions and contexts on identities of women. It is important to note that the physical experience of being a woman and her very existence in a society is different from being a man because of her subjugated position in a patriarchal society. Therefore, her engagements and involvements in various artistic activities will be totally different from that of a man. There are different ways in which a woman's physical body acts as conduit for moral and sociopolitical messages. The literary texts produced by women answer to a large range of beliefs and principles that are strictly imposed upon their gender. The diverse genres of literature by women, be it fiction, poetry, drama and so on, often create their own cultural positions.

The British critic and public intellectual Terry Eagleton in his article "Nationalism, Irony and Commitment", mentions that as the Irish are oppressed by not 'considering' them as Irish, women are oppressed by 'considering' them as women (29). The histories of Ireland state that the land itself offers every topographical advantages for its persecutors. In the case of women, it is the existing national, socio-political and cultural traditions and conventions that tend to marginalize or downgrade them regularly on the basis of their bodily differences. Eagleton is of the opinion that female writers

must not “[circumvent] the abstract universal equalizations of exchange value” within nationalism, “in order to turn it against itself” in order to break the chains of those cruel and oppressive conventions that dwell upon creativity (30-31). Creative women may always have a best, true and unique association to their cultural contexts along with the literary genre in which they respond. This chapter is an attempt to explain the significance of a women’s physical body, experiences and responses to the socio-political (patriarchal) and cultural world.

In the Introduction to the book *Women’s Literary Creativity and the Female Body*, Diane Long Hoeveller and Donna Decker Schuster mention that from the very ancient days, women have been widely associated as well as marginalised by their reproductive bodies. Women have always found (or forcefully recognised) their creative outlet by giving birth, raising their children, and therefore celebrating motherhood. Maternity was the highest and ideal form of a woman’s creativity; the Valorization of Virgin Mary with baby Jesus Christ in her arms is an example. Diane Long Hoeveller and Donna Decker Schuster consider Virgin Mary with the child as a cultural icon:

Such an icon has been literally worshipped in Western civilization, while Japanese, Chinese, African, and Indian societies have fostered very much the same sort of iconography and attitudes toward the mother-woman. The historical record makes it clear that there has been a persistent focus on the female body in all attempts to understand women as creative, which has led the female to be seen as the subject of creative efforts by men, rather than the agent of creativity herself. (x-xi)

The idea of portraying female body was always there in all art-forms, irrespective of the geographical locations. Several manifestation of the female body has been portrayed even in Raja Ravi Varma paintings. Such Ravi Varma paintings can be identified not just

as a creative expression that has been influenced by European realisms, but as an attempt that follows a larger tradition of portraying different manifestations of female body.

Gender, especially woman has become significant in the medieval writings. Women started to write about their own physical body and sexuality. Body became their tool of expression, resistance and revolution. Her feminine body influenced her sense of self, especially her socio-political image and identity. The medieval ages were the period when society gradually established itself as patriarchal and masculine by controlling every sphere of a woman's presence. The religious books of Hinduism such as *Manusmriti* and their sacred laws encouraged this subordination of women. Religion has great influence upon the lives of medieval people, and they were encouraged to follow certain rules and regulations put forward by the religion. Women under the patriarchal spell of religion were always subordinated. According to an ardent devotee, her emotional feelings are more significant to her than her religious scholarship, ritualistic ways, authority, power and so on. To become a keen devotee, a person should discard the senses of authority or dictatorship. The patriarchal ideologies and gender egos must be strictly discarded. She should surrender herself to the lord. Several female Bhakti saints to an extent could break the chains of patriarchy. Their lyrics are great examples for this. This is evident while we analyse the songs of Mirbai. She happily submits herself to her Lord Giridhar (she calls Lord Krishna by the name 'Giridhar') by singing and dancing for him in ultimate adulterous passion. Unfortunately she was born as a medieval woman – a Rajput princess. Here, it is noticed that saint poets such as Narsi Mehta, Bulle Shah, Chokhamela, Surdas, Kabirdas, et al. poets ranging from diverse spiritual convictions, provinces, social groups, clans and circumstances tended to use generously the romantic verses and idioms to exhibit their own spiritual feelings as well

as philosophies and finally discarded the separation felt between one's intellect and his/her emotion. Jasbir Jain, in the book *Indigenous Roots of Feminism: Culture Subjectivity and Agency* explains that:

Looking at the devotional hymns of men is of importance in order to comprehend the impact and significance of this movement which was subversive of a great deal of elitist, codified value structure and which sought to place god–man relationships on a different footing altogether. It was a native upsurge addressing its own social concerns frontally. (Jain 127)

Jain points out the significance of Bhakti poets and the significance of re-reading them in a contemporary socio-cultural scenario where caste and class is still an issue. Through problematizing the works of Bhakti literature, critics like Jasbir Jain observes that it is a fine tuned documentation of the medieval terms where the society was ruled by several hierarchical structures. They tried to reduce divine elements of worship and bring God and place him closer to human heart and emotions. A best example is that of fourteenth century saint poet Kabirdas, who was significantly admired by Guru Nanak and whose verses are also incorporated in *Guru Granth Sahib*, the holy book of Sikhs. He penned numerous sensuous verses that question the existing hierarchical models of the society. Those poems directly mirrored Sufi philosophies and thoughts as well and are deeply secularist in its essence. Quite often, the supreme God is interpreted as a mere earthly lover.

The principal idea of Bhakti movement was to build an intimate relationship between heavenly God and the earthly devotee and thus bring God closer to humans. Thus, worshipping God naturally becomes an individual act of devotion without the presence of any mediator such as a priest or husband. God himself becomes an eternal lover. This technique consequently crossed the conventional barriers and widened the

ideas of agency and freedom. It radically converted the self-images of the harassed, oppressed females and the lower class people. It further moved into the everyday spoken idioms, dialects and the vernacular languages of common people including art forms such as dance and music. Producing sounds to sing hymns and chanting mantras were significant characteristics of these mass movements which aroused the power of emotional feeling. The Sikh holy book, *Guru Granth Sahib*, is the direct product of development of the Bhakti Movement, and is exclusively grounded on classical ragas. In another sense, it was a traveling movement that continuously travelled from one place to the other over many years and centuries, approximately from the early sixth century to nearly nineteenth century. The followers of the movement traveled from place to place in the forms of long unending pilgrimages. The Bhakti leaders such as Surdas, Namdev and Guru Nanak travelled extensively aiming at spreading their message to large masses and refusing fixities of every kind. According to these saints, their Gods too travelled with them. In most of the cases, these Gods never confined to temples, but wandered along with their ardent devotees. Their philosophies and ideas travelled and wandered along with them as the revolutionary rudiments that exposed the emptiness of life-denying configurations.

In the Preface to the book *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval and Modern India*, editor Mandakranta Bose points out that:

Devotional Hinduism swept through India, taking root as an ideology that offered an irresistible alternative to the common individual, at least in the spiritual context. It gave space to people on the margin, such as women, lower castes, and outcastes. Women, powerless and silent in many domains of community life, found strength in their sense of the divine and their own voice in poetry and songs. (ix)

The earliest recorded poetry by women in India—*Therigathas*, the poems of Buddhist nuns (6th BC)—are the best examples of women expressing their joy at finding happiness and freedom from the toils of domestic life and achieving spiritual liberation. The images, symbols and metaphors used by the medieval Bhakti poets are moreover romantic, sensuous, worldly as well as physical.

A.K. Ramanujan, in his article “Talking to God in the Mother Tongue” has prepared a remarkably perfect summing up of the various drifts in Bhakti Movement in the Karnataka region. He has also, using a flow chart, recounted the numerous methods by which some of these female saints dealt with their bodily sexuality and domestic margins. Their husbands, mothers-in-laws, children, etc., all had to be dealt with. The legend says that Akka Mahadevi, a Kannada Virasaiva poet, was wedded to a chieftain. She had asked her spouse not to physically touch her, and if he violated her, then she will soon leave him. Later, this happened and she walked out on him naked, dropping off her clothes and went in quest of parallel devotees. Men are placed by her only in asexual relationships such as father and brother. The idea of cuckolding her husband through a relationship with God, the lover, is acceptable to her (Jain 132). In one of her verses translated by A. K. Ramanujan in his *Speaking of Siva*, she plans to give the slip to her sister-in-law and says:

And I cannot cross the sister-in-law.

But I will

give the wench the slip

and go cuckold my husband with Hara, my Lord. (Ramanujan 141)

In other verse she expresses her inner struggle:

Husband inside,

Lover outside,

I can't manage them both.
 This world and that other,
 cannot manage them both.
 O Lord white as jasmine
 I cannot hold in one hand
 both the round nut
 and the long bow. (Ramanujan 127)

Here, the devotee might be continuously struggling with his own internal desire, and for whom “any contact with the other gender would be a distraction” (Ramaswamy 151).

The Veerasaiva movement, from the name itself is evidently clear that it is directed towards the strong devotion of Lord Shiva as a contradiction to the Vaishnava section praised by Andal of Tamil Nadu or Mirabai of Rajasthan. Therefore, the phallic symbol of linga (Sivalinga) is worshiped in profound devoutness and looks upon Lord Shiva as a perpetual male bridegroom. Even today, many Hindu women worship Shivalinga and observe fasting on every Monday (Mondays are treated as the days of Lord Shiva) and pray to Lord for worthy husband and a happy married life. This example accounts to the legendary episode of Parvathi, the Himalayan princess, worshipping Lord Shiva to get married to him.

Lord Shiva is considered as both the creator as well as the destroyer. He is known for his *thandava* form of dance – the dance of massive destruction. Female protests inside the Veerasaiva movement never tried to dislocate or substitute the linga form with any other form of iconic representation. As a substitute, men and women together observed Lord Śhiva as the eternal companion, submitting themselves to the Lord and shifting the obligation of lordship from urbane outlines to holy domains. The Linga-dharma likewise resulted to substitute the initiation rights of Brahmins.

The consciousness and achievement of gender equality was an unusual event in Bhakti Movement. Even in the monastic missions and in the religious resistance movements including Buddhism, that intentionally interrogated the medieval caste hierarchies, gender pyramids continued, and therefore it was very natural to retain females as domestic heroines and thereby totally eliminate them from their opportunity to enter asceticism and attain salvation. The female body and its nudity always stood as a strong threat to men regardless of the condition whether they were sadhus or hermits. In accordance to the straight violation of these existing social taboos strictly executed by conventional religions, female saints always inquired whether devoutness is either male or female. Nevertheless whether one distinguishes this or not, or is unwilling to admit the fact, gender obviously becomes a puzzling feature and communal preconceptions continue. Still under these rigid social situations, if a female devotee comes out of her home by denying the social prejudices, norms and restrictions, others must accept and acknowledge her courage and the underlying strength of her deep faith in her God. Females have always been targeted, branded as whores or prostitutes, narrowed within their households and penalized in many other means for being brave and daring to step outdoor of the male distinct space.

Here lies the question of how women saints enlarged their individual space and how they transcended their physical body. There are several implications accounting to it by rising above body, disregarding body, or rejecting to recognise and accept body or via discovering alternate ways of survival and sublimating human physical desire. In the book *The Collected Essays of A. K. Ramanujan*, the flowchart drawn by Ramanujan enlists certain approaches adopted by female saints (272-273). This list includes rejecting marriage with a mortal being, living a courtesan lifestyle, astonishingly skipping the youth days using absolute determination, trust and belief throughout their

young days by means of their physical splendor and sexuality, or by walking away from marriage, even by converting as a male or an aged unpleasant woman, rejecting the barriers of widowhood, denying maternity, marrying a sacred God, walking out in nudity, or even by consciously violating caste barriers (274-275). The above mentioned points are those listed by Ramanujan after examining the lives of female saints. The male followers never need to confront any of these difficulties and therefore they never have to resort to any such tactics of bypassing their gender.

The two Jain sects—Digambars and the Svetambars distinguished themselves on the basis of nudity of their physical body. Also, it was on the same actual basis once more that the feminine body was distinguished against, for the reason that the female nudity was recognized as totally unlike from that of a man. Akka Mahadevi stretched it to every women saint by truly performing it in her real life and later becoming totally unconscious and unconcerned of her own physicality, consequently transcending the physical body in its total sum.

Theoretically, the devotee rejects the division between domestic life and the one of renunciation. Where the women devotees are concerned, there happens some exceptions in accordance to the patriarchal forms of power. Whereas, at several other cases, possibly a usual hatred to the sexual act and hence Bhakti facilitated them to select an alternate option. Here, there exists two different and exciting phases of resistance chosen by female devotees and one must certainly pay attention to their verses. First is that religion was not a necessary aspect to restrict one's life or one that deprived of his/her completeness. For example, the Tamil Sangam poet Avvai (Avvaiyar), as she is more popularly referred to, joined in secular political life. Second, according to married women, even the idea of cuckolding her spouse using a deep emotional relationship turned acceptable. Karaikal Ammaiyar, an ancient South Indian

Tamil saint poet, converted her physical sexuality by achieving a tremendous power that could even horrify the men present around her. In Karaikkal Ammaiyar's new appearance that rejects her body and sexuality, she herself becomes unchanged and so no man will possess the courage to come anywhere near her vision and therefore she gradually becomes a feminine ascetic par excellence. It is associated with creative power and remarks that Karaikal Ammaiyar is characterized similar to a Kali like figure and hence she occupies the 'preta' realm (ghost like domain) in the burial ground. Therefore her ultimate liberation or deliverance lies at Lord Shiva's feet.

The same body and physical desire get discussed with Muddupalani's work. It's a crucial question where we should place the Thanjaore poet Muddupalani and her text *Radhika Santwanam* (Appeasing Radhika). It stands halfway in the middle of devotion (Bhakti) and human sexuality. Muddupalani is believed to be the first woman poet who wrote an erotic verse. Her work *Radhika Santwanam* (Appeasing Radha) helped in strengthening female's subjectivity and subjecthood that easily paved way for a change from the complete submission to one's Lord into a further cognizant setting inside a social construction and also in the authentic involvement of one's bodily desires. In the Introduction to the book *Women Writing in India*, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita have remarked a healthy description about the book and the controversies that it faced at the time of reprinting the same by Bangalore Nagaratamma in British India (1910). The entire narrative poem was well knotted in love and thus the principle mood was *sringara rasa*. The entire text foregrounded on a woman's sensuality (Radha) instead that of a man's (Krishna). The medieval society was not ready to accept erotic love of Radha-Krishna over the platonic love they found in Krishna fables and tales. Muddupalani was an eighteenth-century poet, and Nagaratamma, of twentieth century who reprinted it, was a courtesan and both these women were associated with the basis of aesthetics. The

publication of the book was strictly prohibited by the British government and the already published copies were destroyed. The reason behind these mass protests is that they found the book obscene. Thus the debatable query was what converts something from eroticism to obscenity.

The nationalist leaders used the image of Kali to represent inspirational martyrdom, the revolutionaries used for expressing ferocity, strength and violence whereas the imperialists used the same image to criticize India and the pan-Indian culture and thereby set it back into ancient or primitive eras. Kali arose to express the horrifying, dark yet also peculiarly seductive as well as enthralling supremacies of the Orient. She fashioned a crucial portion of the wider scheme of 'Imagining India' as an 'Other of the West'. The pan-Indian culture, religious notions, its ideologies, beliefs, fancies and imagination widely used the Kali image to stimulate nationalist enthusiasm, passion, fervor or commitment. However in an effort to tame her feminine sexuality she too was locked up in the motherhood image of nourishment, shelter and protection.

The Victorian prudishness had by this period (1910) occupied its clutches on Indian culture, that was much more liberal about the Radha–Krishna love. By this time, the British colonial authorities had initiated to interfere not only in the writings of political matters including that of Gandhi's or Ambedkar's, but also were genuinely involved in the charge of reformation of gender. Here then this particular element must be taken into memory.

The theme of agency, freedom and sexuality of woman in India gets associated with the images of Kali, a double faced goddess with a drastic physical appearance and attires. At the same time she is a benevolent protector who is powerfully capable of vengeance and unkindness. Hence, the image of Kali naturally induces awe and fear in the mind of devotees. She is portrayed as a blood-thirsty vindictive female deity and a

war goddess. It significant how she herself becomes the determining factor and the destruction of the demon Mahishasura. Yet again, the powerful image of the female naked body itself becomes a very tough constituent which rounds through spiritual, secular and political Indian writings including Vyasa's epic *Mahabharata* till Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* and thus openly expressing the female sexuality. Contrary to these arguments, the concealed physical body, modest and passive is an image fashioned by the social culture only for the shield and protection of males. The sexuality of a woman is considered as a threat or a trap; therefore it must be controlled, suppressed and tamed.

It is found that numerous sects of divine worship in the Indian subcontinent echoes the Rig Veda's hymns of mobile desire of physical body. All the significant spiritual movements that developed in medieval India to pay homage to both Lord Shiva (Saivism) and Lord Vishnu including his incarnations such as Rama and Krishna (Vaishnavism) from the 5th Century A.D till 19th Century A.D highlighted the requirement to detach oneself from his masculine power so as to experience the erotic pleasure. After a thorough analysis of the Bhakti poetry written in India during the medieval eras, the erotic sensual love of Lord Krishna is narrated in detail from the point of view of a female, particularly even by the major male poets. Madhavi Menon in her book *A History of Desire in India* writes:

Masculinity in Bhakti poetry recasts itself in the mould of the feminine in order to fully embrace what it is like to worship the god of multiple desires. In the history of his worship, Krishna assumes several different shapes, and so do his devotees. The very form of this Bhakti poetry is transsexual—men become women in order to worship a man, and have to live the erotic experience of being women in order to be able to write their poetry. (Menon 162)

Several Bhakti poets had observed this peculiar state of ecstasy where they themselves come into an erotic pleasure with their Lord Krishna. Here, what indirectly happens is that femininity naturally becomes a form of erotic delight which is to be experienced with Krishna, the boundless lover of gopis. This peculiar condition which is a firm statement frequently repeated by numerous poets of Bhakti movement stresses to hold into the state of being feminine. Such a movement is problematic because the state of adoration is inevitably conflated with being a woman, while the adored is a man (Menon 166). However, it is quite significant that it is certainly the male devotee who transfers from being male to female. And this transformation from male to female enriches instead of reducing his pleasure.

According to Rig Veda, desire exists everywhere. It existed in the very beginning of the universe and continues till date. Madhavi Menon further explains about desire:

Desire is the all in all, that without which nothing can be. But it is also nowhere because no one source for it can be identified. It cannot be reduced to being the product of one body or another. It is within this universe that we see a multitude of desiring positions undercutting the central importance of castration anxiety. Desire might take on the local shape of man and woman. But male and female are not the primary nodes through which desire exists in the universe. Instead, desire is inchoate, which means it is not limited to or defined by gendered bodies and roles. (Menon 162)

When we look outside of the Bhakti customs that are dedicated to Vishnu or Shiva and their numerous incarnations, the erotic interchangeability of physical bodies was the ongoing customary practice in both spiritual and in lyrical verses. Such a rich multiplicity becomes an apparent extension of the Hindu faiths in multiple gods as well as goddesses. There lies also the association concerning erotic desire and the status of

physical body. Poets such as Bulleh Shah or Ksetrayya never change their physical bodies with the intention of becoming females. Instead, they assume that they are females and hence declare their personal desires. Several Gods and poets alter their physical gender from masculine to feminine and their devotees follow the same.

Sree Narayana Guru, Kerala's significant social renaissance leader-sage of twentieth century, explains body in its associations with caste and autonomy. His disciple, Kumaran Asan, a noteworthy Malayalam poet, described in his poetry an explanation of the concept of interiority, making it the suitable locus of individuated sensual craving as well as the turn of self-transformation. When the works of both these reformers are analyzed, it may throw some light on the intricate connections among austerity and physical yearning that trigger the structure of contemporary subjectivity.

Narayana Guru's poems portray the combination of various cultures and traditions. Even though he was observed as an *advaitin*, he was also attracted to the Tamil *Siddhars* and *Saiva Sidhanta*. His works reveal the impacts of *yogasastra*. The stories, legends and tales that explain the life and incidents of Narayana Guru show his familiarity with yoga and *Siddhavaidyam*.

Professor Udayakumar, describes Sree Narayana Guru's Siddha tradition in his essay, *Self, body, inner sense: Some reflections on Sree Narayana Guru and Kumaran Asan*. He explains:

The influence of these traditions, especially those of the Tamil *siddhars*, on Sree Narayana has not been adequately understood. Sree Narayana's poems are resonant with allusions to this tradition, and commentators have traced the strong presence of Pattinattar behind many of his verses. One of Sree Narayana's devotional compositions, *Kundalinippattu*, has clearly been along the lines of the work of Pampatti *siddhar*. Each stanza in *Kundalinippattu* ends with the refrain,

‘Dance, Snake! Dance!’ as in Pampatti *siddhar*’s work. Even Sree Narayana’s most popular slogan ‘One caste, one religion, one God for man’ resonates with the presence of lines from Tirumular’s *Tirumantiram*: ‘One caste, one God.... (251)

The repeated mentioning of *siddhars* in the works of Guru is not by chance. The Tamil *siddhars* possessed an extensive tradition of their constant fights against caste hegemony. Czech literary scholar Kamil Vaclav Zvelebil comments that, the Tamil *siddhars* are never a secluded team or unique body of numerous independent scholars, but is a very significant segment of a broad tradition, healthily spread in every phase and space of medieval years of South India – the moving practice of *siddhars*, who belonged to the groups of tantric or yogic Indian culture (Kumar 251-252)

These *siddhar* customs have many contrasts with medieval Bhakti tradition. According to Udaya Kumar, their practices of idol worship, ethical conducts, yoga culture, stress on knowledge and definite manners to fervent devoutness to an ‘ishtadevata’, differentiate them from the Bhakti cults. *Jnanam* and *Arivu* are the two significant terms for wisdom that are frequently used in the works of Sree Narayana Guru. Generally, *Arivu* dwells in the physical place for Brahmins. It is considered as the very crucial reality. The whole surrounding world as well as the living realities here is recognised as brief instances in the introspective measure of *Arivu*. Guru created alternative idols like mirrors, stones and lamps that could be analyzed in various accounts against the idolatrous custom of the Tamil *siddha* convention. The influence of *siddhars* on the daily life customs is evidently observed in Sree Narayana Guru’s doctrines and other associated works. *Tirumantiram*, written by ancient Tamil Saivite mystic and writer Tirumular, is considered as the initial foundation for the Saiva

siddhanta tradition. He is also considered as the first Tamil Siddha. Moreover, there also exists a strong belief regarding his lineage associating to the Kashmir valleys.

The Tamil Siddha tradition treated *uyir* (life-force) as something that cannot be present devoid of *utal* (body). Tirumular believed the human physical body and its upkeep to be the fundamentals regarding any kind of mystical practice. For him, the physical body is God's sacred shrine and hence the protection and maintenance of a man's body with boundless care and affection becomes the fresh task for a rational follower. According to Tirumular, scorning the physical body develops into an unsound action when he learns about the *porul* within *utal*. In one of his verse, Tirumular describes the human heart as the shrine and human body as the house (Kumar 252).

Two noteworthy early works of Sree Narayana Guru namely, *Mananattheetham* and *Siva Satakam* request God Shiva to liberate his devotee from his strong temptations concerning body (flesh). In his text *Siva Satakam*, the female is the chief character that exemplifies the fallen status of the physical body. The physical body of a woman ultimately becomes a spot of stink, as the deep oceans are entirely emptied and then occupied with stench water. The female breasts are at times associated with cysts, and the whole life along with the female is compared to the infernal ocean occupied wholly with blood and pus. *Mananattheetham* wavers among the two binary extremes of terror and attraction with an extreme sense of earnestness and anxiety. Here, the feminine character is an active tempting conqueror where the disciple is totally stranded deprived of the grace and support of Lord Shiva. And the soul is associated with a bird who is caught in Kamadeva's snare set. It is death and insanity that is constantly haunting the existence of the female. The feminine body is treated as a corpse, and the female discloses herself as wild and outrageous in the core of passionate hugs. The fear and anxiety of the woman combines along with the fright of death and dependence. In these

works, the senses of the physical body is unaware of what they can rejoice and what their authentic sphere could be. They continuously specify the immediacy of man's demise and the immoral ploy of dependence. Udayakumar states, "To change from this sense of fallenness and shame, of *jugupsa*, the senses need to be reinscribed in a new relation to the body and the self" (253).

Another notable poem of Sree Narayana Guru, *Indriya Vairagyam*, explains that even the problem or its answer never lies in the senses. The senses never possess any kind of pains. It is the human self which becomes the locus of miseries and grief. Udaya Kumar states that "The devotee sees his body as being abused by the senses-the latter are seen as inferior beings involved without respite in the sensible world" (Kumar 253). Each time, the prayer to God Shiva is in the formula of a request to rescue the disciple from falsehood; thereby he can hold the fresh and virtuous body. This option of a pure physical body and its upkeep joins Sree Narayana Guru's texts to the sacralization and preservation of the delicate body in yoga.

Guru's elaborate work *Atmopadesa Satakam* is also provided with various instances derived from *Saiva Siddhanta* and also from the practices of the Tamil *siddhars*. The whole work is written in the form of advice. The importance specified to Arivu as the exhibition of God and the placing of the senses (*indriyam*), inner sense (*karanam*) and body (*kalebaram*) and the world (*jagat*) as its manifestations already pick up many of the constituents from these backgrounds. The sense about one's self (*Ahanta*) is regarded as something that encompasses human skin, skeleton, excreta and other unpredictable internal views or thoughts (*anthakalakal*). Still, *Ahanta* is the crucial instance for the distinction of Arivu. Udayakumar points out:

The ambivalence of the text towards the body is expressed in detail in verses 8 and 9 of the Satakam. Verse 8 describes the body as a foul-smelling tube on

which tantalizingly play the five birds of the senses, feeding on the five objects of the senses. The verse, however, ends with another, contrasting image of the body-that of a body of light or *velivuru*. This new body annihilates the birds of the senses, and can be rightly inhabited by the soul. The juxtaposition of these two bodies, one the subject of the self-practice and the other the object, is made possible by the availability of the distinction between *sthula sarira* (gross body) and *sukshma sarira* (subtle body). This makes possible a re-presentation of the body inscribed in terms of the yogic tradition. Verse 9 presents the image of a sage meditating under a tree, on the two sides of which climbs a creeper bearing six blossoms. The image of the tree is a *yogasastric* figuration of the body, with the two sides of the creeper: being *ida* and *pingala*, and the six flowers suggesting the six stages (*muladhara*, *swadhishtana*, *manipuraka*, *anahata*, *visuddhi* and *ajna*) in the ascent of the *kundalini* towards its final destination of enlightenment, *sahasrara*. (255)

Human physical body is a strong indicator which exposes the base of an accurate distinction. In short, Guru tries to explain that it is never the *jati* (caste) that results or establish the exact semiology of distinction, it is the human body itself. The physical body is not just a carrier of numerous signs; it could be a sign in its own right. Hence, caste markers obscure the accurate implication of the human body, not simply by rendering redundant symbols, but by assuming the semiological purpose to themselves. By constantly repeating, ‘Caste should go; there is no other way. All human beings belong to the same community’, Sree Narayana Guru is emphasizing the disapproval between true and false distinction of the body of humankind. He also asserted on the difference between religion (*matham*) and community (*samudayam*). According to him, it is immoral to put the subjects of the community inferior to religion or the religious

subjects inferior to the community. There must not be any association between communal activities and their religion. For him, religion is a complete material of human minds.

The true depiction of a feminine physical body in the verses of Kumaran Asan, the major disciple of Sree Narayana Guru, is different than other Malayalam poets. He tried to interpret the feminine body via a different channel than his contemporaries. He rarely explained his early poetical heroines Nalini and Leela in terms of their physical beauty. However for his later heroines like Seetha or Mathangi, their bodily portrayal barely permits any lingering on their physical body as a matter of physical desire or attraction. Breasts, which were very typical matters of lingering delight in the poetical times of Kumaran Asan, scarcely find any reference in the works of Asan. *Karuna*, his last work is the only text where he portrays his heroine in accounts that specify sensual attractions. Udayakumar quotes, “However, the reader recognizes soon that this description is inscribed in terms of a mechanism of repetition, where the same parts of the body will reappear at the close of the poem, bleeding and fragmented, to underline the finitude of the body” (263).

Here, desire may or may not identify itself as physical. Physical desire creates a platform or a distinctive occasion of the carnal desire. The subject of bodily desire for the desiring matter is not actually the body of the other, nor even the physical desire for the other, but a desire acknowledged by the other’s soul. Asan’s verses prove that desire can happen only between a male and a female and hence it may depend upon the classification of every human being into either man or woman, where the distinction of physical body naturally becomes the chief icon. Behind this, there lies a natural law of distinction and desire. Narayana Guru, as mentioned above, constantly disputed in contrary to the wrong distinction of natural kinds, and at times accepted a correct

distinction inside the humankind, a kind of normal distinction, between the masculine gender and the feminine gender. As the physical body becomes the major icon of this inevitable variance, physical desire becomes the chief symbol of a desire which is eventually stranded as the desire of the soul. A model for the soul's desire, the rationality and vibrancy which it outdoes, the deep passions that it articulates, relishes and agonizes continue to get entrenched in a treatise of physical desire. When Nalini dies on Divakaran's chest, even the desire of the soul discovers its completion in the complete parting from physical desire and resounds with the delight of fleshly union. Here, there exists an extreme bodily craving for physical desire, which finds its assertion in human body. The physical body appears to establish a perimeter to the carnal intensity of desire. At a particular time, when this perimeter gets acknowledged, the desire naturally vacates the physical body and accepts the human soul as its next habitus. This is how desire gets recognized itself.

Sree Narayana Guru's texts, both as theoretical and as prescriptive, constitute a relocation of the human body from those societal barriers including caste indicators and hence work as a ground for the actual distinction permitting to natural laws. Whereas, Kumaran Asan produced an advance transformation of those essential fundamentals that he attained from his mentor, Sree Narayana Guru, and to Sree Narayana Guru's usage of features from traditions. The 'natural' basis of distinction not seen in the functioning of human body, but in the sense of a physical, sensual desire. This sensual desire moves further away from the body and discovers in the inner sense the proper location of its advanced strengths.

Nivedita Menon in her book *Seeing Like a Feminist* talks about the Bhakti poets of medieval India within the aspects of body and desire. The social movement initially originated in the Southern parts of India, particularly in the Tamil region around fifth or

sixth century and later spread to the whole nation. The female mystic poets of Bhakti tradition expressed a kind of carnal desire towards their supreme deities that passes over their physical bodies and later reconfigures the same. What they desired was to achieve the defeat of masculinity as dominant power and the defeat of femininity as sexualized flawless (57-58). Kannada poet A. K. Ramanujan comments that the outlines drawn in between man and woman are constantly traversed in the mystic lifestyle of these Bhakti poets. They reinterpreted the physical body and human sexuality by breaking all the rules and regulations that governs the physical body. These spiritual poetic saints turned away from sexuality in the physical world. It was not because of fright, distress or disgust of sexuality, but for the reason that their sensual desire was intensely aimed wholly at a spiritual approach, to their selected deity (58).

Ramanujan points out that when Akka Mahadevi of Karnataka and Lal Ded of Kashmir valleys threw away their bodily attires and jewels, they were making the general public to view the 'modesty' that was invested in hiding the physical body with garments. This was a brilliant technique of fighting against as well as enhancing sexual inquisitiveness, not of controlling it (Menon 58). Akka wote:

You can confiscate
 money in hand
 can you confiscate
 the body's glory?
 Or peel away every strip
 you wear,
 but can you peel
 the Nothing, the Nakedness
 that covers and veils? (Ramanujan 120)

Akka Mahadevi points out that it is easy to take away the material glories from a being, but nobody can steal from you the essence of the being. Her thought transcends the material world and talks about ‘the nothing’ which she considers the ultimate meaning of the world. Jasbir Jain points out that:

In view of the continuously present resistance movements in Indian culture such as Buddhism, Jainism, Sufism, the Bhakti Movement and Sikhism, it is a mistake to construct Indian culture dominantly through Hindu culture, *shruti*, *smritis* and reform movements, especially when we wish to trace the histories of resistance, the relationship of the individual—whether man or woman—to social institutions. (15)

By the continuously rigid and untiring marginalization, people lean towards constructing solid concepts of culture along with that of harassment and fall prey to the belief that inactiveness or repudiation shapes the chief features of our culture where sacrificial principles always possessed control.

The Indian Upanishads further exclude women in several stages. Texts such as *Manusmriti* further stress these discriminations and exclusions. The customs and rituals that exclude females are related to their physical body especially because of menstruation and act of motherhood. Both these acts make the female body ‘impure’ or ‘contaminated’. In addition to that, female body is more seductive as well as vulnerable. All other activities later rooted upon these major exclusions which were directed not only at their body but also formed a platform for other societal and mental discrimination. It is a power strategy and is contrary to the belief that there is nothing pure or impure in itself and that all life has emanated from self-division and dismemberment (Jain 16). Anand Sadashiv Altekar in *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization* has briefly mentioned about how participation of a female in Vedic

sacrifices had weakened steadily and later on how males arose to substitute these vacuum spaces for women in traditional customs. Moreover, the system of child marriage in India again marginalized women as it denied their right for progressive education. The evil practices such as jauhar, sati, restrictions on widow marriages, etc., again ostracized them.

The long accounts of human life goes on unfolding a repetition of major themes like boons, curses, reward, punishment, repentance, exile/banishment, austerity, existence of karma along one's birth and death and self-generation of an 'other' control or power. A hierarchical set up was later formed by creating woman as a 'sexual' other from the males. Gender equality was a term unaware to the Vedic periods where customs and rituals controlled the human culture and other communal practices such as weddings, castes and religions started to form stronger platforms. Jain explains how Upanishads and Vedic texts dealt with these circumstances:

There is a gap between the Upanisads, which advise restraint and spiritual life, and the epics and other religious narratives which depict a more equal, free and dialogic life, but the gap between the ideal person and the 'ideal' woman come into being as a result of the hardening of rituals which gradually went on closing options, choices and alternatives such as we find in the oral tradition. Women such as Draupadi are further trapped in clan histories of revenge and war. (21)

In India, the mythical characters from ancient classic texts such as Sita, Draupadi and Damayanti were the initial figures in constructing gender. The Agnipariksha faced by Sitadevi, Draupadi's chirharan and faithfulness and loyalty to the pativrata code by Damayanti are some of its examples. From these statements, the two legends, both *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and their other alternatives and retellings gather significance. These epics not only portray females in their pivotal roles of submission,

purity, obedience, etc., but also portray s men in their strong masculine roles. Rama in *Ramayana* is depicted as 'Utthamapurasha' as well as apart from Krishna, other than the cousin rivals, all the male characters beginning from Bhishma to Abhimanyu gather enough significance in *Mahabharata*. Human gender is fashioned using the chemistry of both femininity as well as masculinity. The reinterpretations and retelling of these epics have later paved way for a swing in the process of reading these legends from different point of views, especially from feminist outlooks. The entire narrative shifts into the outlook of a woman and her physical body. The female psychology is thus revealed and therefore here, woman along with her mental state and physical body becomes both a victim and a survivor. The way of their resistance is celebrated and glorified. Jain explains:

Further, the manner in which retellings have altered them is equally relevant, for the change marks either a resistance or a shift in the social perception of the role, or it may even signify a shift of focus because of social location (caste or class) of the narrator/narrators. Modern interpretations like Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* or Saoli Mitra's play, *Five Lords, Yet None a Protector*, are attempts at psychoanalyses, social criticism and deconstruction. (29)

Furthur, in *Mahabharata*, Draupadi is portrayed as someone different from that of Gandhari or Kunthi. In the Swayamvara segment she ultimately waits for the arrival of the Pandavas, especially Arjuna. At the same time, Karna, the king of Anga was humiliated in public as everyone questions his societal caste which they consider inferior. Even though Karna was as equally brilliant as Arjuna he was cautiously forbidden to enter into the segment. But, the Pandavas, including Arjuna, were nowhere in the *swayamvara* picture. They are believed to have been killed in the fire at

Varanavrata. All the way through this contest, hoping against hope for Arjuna to appear and win, Draupadi intellectually repels the notion of marrying anyone else. She even asks her brother Drishtadyumna whether these wedding proceedings can be stopped for once, which directly indicates her way of resistance. There, Draupadi is portrayed as a woman who is evidently aware about her romantic concepts, sexual desire and bodily pleasures. Moreover, the entire *Mahabharata* celebrates Draupadi as a wife rather than Draupadi as a mother whereas Gandhari or Kunthi is more celebrated for their motherhood. Each of the five Pandavas has his own expectations and desires from Draupadi. The epic also depicts an unconditional loving relationship between Draupadi and Krishna which is explained under the term of 'sakha'.

Mahasweta Devi reinterpreted the character of Draupadi in her short story *Draupadi* which looks up into the chiriharan episode. She shifts the whole narrative into the scene of literally a rape and the following police atrocities of present-day society. Dopdi Mejhen, a Santhal tribal lady is caught. Mejhan and her husband are part of the ongoing Naxalite movement, which aims for the social and economic equality. She was widowed and on one of her missions she was caught, brutally gang raped and was brought in front of the police officers. The officers hope that at least at this dreadful situation, she will reveal the names of other comrades associated with their Naxalite agitation. There are several other crucial segments present in the story but what matters to the readers here, is her aggregate reversal of the disrobing motif. She strongly refuses to be robed by them and then exhibits her bare naked body for the men to get ashamed of themselves. Similar to the mythical character Draupadi of the *Mahabharata*, Dodpi Mejhan used both her inner mind along with her physical body as strong weapons of encounter and therefore extremely criticizing the age old masculine and hegemonic

structure of norms and values that establishes itself in numerous means. Her mental and physical resistance was through her nakedness. Mahaswetha Devi wrote:

Draupadi stands before him, naked. Thigh and pubic hair matted with dry blood. Two breasts two wounds. She mocks him and shakes with an 'indomitable laughter'. Her lips bleed as she begins laughing, Draupadi wipes the blood on her palm and says in a voice that is as terrifying, sky splitting and sharp as her ululation. What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man? (108-109)

Romance has a foremost part in almost all the main sub narratives of *Ramayana* and consequently it defines the foundation of succeeding spousal devoutness. It is very apparent that a person's physical beauty and charmness, his/her way of love-making and the bodily sexual desire play a significant character in every marital relations. American Indologist, Philip Lutgendorf, in his article *The Secret Life of Ramchandra of Ayodhya*, explains these features and evidently comments out that Ram 'rasiks' (one who savors rasa in itself describes artistic pleasure and delight in Natyasastra) mentioned certain tranquil phases in Rama's life span and further used it in the performativity style. It concentrated on that calm and peaceful period of Rama and Sita where the newly wedded couples enjoyed a cheerful life amidst the splendid eases of Ayodhya. According to Lutgendorf a devotee always believed that God has two faces - one earthly face and the other, a transcendental face. Further than these conventional actions, there is a secret face 'in which the quality of erotic attractiveness or madhurya predominates and in which Ram expresses his ultimate reality' (220). Jain says:

Romance and eroticism are natural physical desires even as they help the patriarchal construction of power, control and supremacy, especially through the different kinds of morality being applied to men and women as well as to the

public domain of the moral and immoral. The surfacing of self-interest and rationality shifts the romantic base. (55)

A significant feature noticed here is the excellence of whole surrender and then the unification with the lover, where in this case, is the devotee's favorite God. In the case of a female, the romantic impulse may work negatively. The conventional customs such as the Pativrata concept, a woman's love, sacrificing her life for the other, etc., had not only been assumed during several historical periods as the major suitable roles for medieval women, but also became the ideal replicas for expressing their heroism as exhibited in those medieval rituals such as Sati or jauhar. The story of queen Padmavati gains significance in this circumstance. Padmavati, along with several women in the court performed the ritual of jauhar and later this story has been romanticized as a brave action by the women to protect their chastity. The pain and sufferings these women underwent has been valourised in the later narratives.

When one looks into the accounts of human history across ages encircling almost all cultures in globe, human romance has operated as a tempting principle for the feminine subservience. The salient imagery depicted by British poet S.T Coleridge portrays in his poem *Kubla Khan*, in a line in second stanza such as 'By woman wailing for her demon lover!' picturing the woeful need for a lover. This image is corresponds to the Modern writer Katherine Mansfield's passive description of an entire domestic as well as three generations of women rotating round a single man, who is a son, spouse and father, in her short novel, *The Aloe*. Women, from very old ages, had subjugated and succumbed themselves to the notions of love and affection. The womanly desire for her individual space must negotiate with the notion of a platonic romantic love too in diverse rapports and possibly this may be one among the major explanations that the separation felt between romantic love and sexual desire is similarly positioned in diverse

outlooks. Previously, whores, prostitutes and female courtesans used their physical bodies, but in due course, as was inescapable, it finally directed towards a romantic participation, injured regret and distress. The major separation was framed by the conventional society which distinguished women as good/pure woman and bad/impure woman. But now with a greater awareness and control over the body, sexuality as a power in itself, separable from the idea of romance or any lifelong relationship, is an acceptable way of negotiating the difference (Jain 125).

The human body became the prime matter of concern for numerous social movements including spiritual, societal, and literary. These incidents marked certain bodily actions of individuals and always tried to create stories, legends, myths and so on about the source and later to substantiate their roles and how they employ freedom. All such themes have constantly experienced the lack of social control as a lack of power. The human body need not be always be a familial matter. It can be a pure separate being and can even be a basis of fear and fight, of terror. A disconnected dependent body will develop into a fighter body that can exist itself by a controlling power. If power is treated as a dignity of physical practice, then the body itself is mirrored in the medium of strength. A masculine body is always held together by his pressure to dominate the body of another.

Also, the human body is a significant platform where societal degrees, gender, ethnicity, location, cultural or spiritual conditions of a human being is exposed to. The ceremonial alterations assign various social positions to a man. The philosophy of the body is more discussed in the branch of anthropology. In our contemporary society, it is quite evident that the physical appearance of a particular person signifies his richness, prosperity and his ways of life style.

Religions and faiths play vital roles with human body. They bind people together by the practices of rites, rituals, religious ceremonies, etc., for example, human body occasionally gets converted into a tool of sacrifice. Religions such as Islam, Judaism and Christianity were particularly masculine in its beliefs. The contemporary interpretation of domestic life and its secularisation has had a huge and strict concerns for the conventional world views. An incomplete response to this problem is the upsurge of fundamentalism including the Moral Majority in United States. These people were observed as if they are intensely possessed with the controlling of sexuality in the matters of homosexual practice, role of women in a society, lesbian-gay weddings, and teenage sexual conducts.

Patriarchy and matriarchy are considered as orthodox ideologies that ascertain the correctness and occupancy of bodies, particularly child rearing as well as controlling of children. A Father God, Mother Nature and the physical reproduction of human bodies shares certain mutual homologies. Mythologies and folklores were grounded and developed on these homological associations. The red colored menstrual blood specifies the transmission of generations however the white colored breast milk and human semen specifies nutrition and nourishment (Turner 12).

When it comes to Judaism, the Jewish people continued various concepts about female sexuality and marriages. In the Biblical story of Genesis, the very distinctive, supportive and compassionate relationship within a male and a female was swapped after the Fall by a connection of power control. The Mosaic Law was then suggested to a culture where females were treated as mere domestic assets who had no choices of their own. Consequently, in some rustic areas, women only appeared with household chores and domestic animals. A female who was unable to produce a child was not fulfilling her responsibility as a proper wife and hence sterility was recognized as a vital characteristic

for marriage separation. The Old Testament states that infertility is the symptom of a godly disapproval. On the other side, prostitution was permitted to gratify the carnal desires of manhood. Apart from that, menstruation and child rearing was filthy procedures so that these women were frequently evaded from societal get-togethers. According to the culture of Israel, the marriages occurred between two diverse families and therefore the female companions were considered hazardous to males because of the reason that they come from outside of the husband's family (Turner 12).

The Christian church was chiefly masculine. As per the spiritual stances, the role of Virgin Mary was important in order for Jesus Christ to be deprived of all sins. But at the same time, he is born into earth as a human being so that he must be born to a woman's womb. Later, when years went Holy Mary was removed from every phase of sin and became detached from a link with the Fall. She was detached from original sin in 1854 by the principle of Immaculate Conception. Since she was released from every type of sin, she was then observed and worshipped as equal to Jesus Christ. She was later detached from all the physical connections of a female including sexual intercourse, childbirth and so on. Even the suckling of Baby Jesus was excluded. This caused in developing a cult around her breast. Later on, the subject of worshipping Mary became a vital portion of primeval Celtic belief and custom. The Holy Mary was then specified with the role of holy winner of reproduction because of the reason that there was no other powerful female character existent in the biblical stories (Turner 12-13).

The human body specifies a boundary between in-groups and out-groups of religion. The hair of human and its organization is an essential conception of group unity. Both Christianity and Judaism cover their whole hair while praying. This covering of their hair by women anticipated a purpose in describing devoutness, truthfulness and trustworthiness. For men, his beard is a prominent indicator of purity. All these are

different methods that controls the human physical body. The development of the human body sociology have effectively joined hands with spiritualism and philosophy.

For a woman, body is the place where her natural organic gender and the society fashioned gender meets together. Here, her sexuality is visualized and her erotic desires and yearnings are described along with the explanation of the exploitation, maltreatment and so on that she agonized all along her life. The communal and political significance of a woman's body together with her feminine sexuality in satisfying as well as troubling to the masculine community. This is now acknowledged by the feminists and feminist accords.

There are numerous metaphors, symbols and portraits that conveys various stories concerning feminine body and sexuality. From time to time, her physical body and her association with that brands her minor, sub-standard or second sex. Together with that, there are several stout and aggressive characters too. The Western stories have iconic womanly figures such as Medussa, Eva or Delilah who fashioned outstanding turmoil because of their astonishing dynamic attitude. If all these cases are considered, it is their feminine body and their sexuality that made them what they are. The macho thoughts, from time to time tried to interrupt, dislocate and portray them as greedy. All the above mentioned cases are some of the chief instances of portraying woman and the feminine body in the branches of philosophy, religion, science and morals. Australian philosopher and feminist Elizebeth Grosz points out in her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*:

Together these have done both body and women a great deal of harm in practical life. These have projected a lopsided view of both body and woman. In the mind/body dichotomy discourse, thus it has been hardly acknowledged that mind exists in body only and plays a formative role in gaining the philosophically

valued ideals like truth, knowledge and experience. Similarly, misogynist thoughts has represented or even constructed women as “frail, unruly and even unreliable”, subject to various intrusions which are not under conscious control. (Grosz 13)

When our Indian milieu is considered, there is not much difference when compared to the western situation where woman and her body is devalued and even abandoned. The Indian philosophy generally looks at the outer world by various labelled concepts such as *Purusa* and *Prakriti*, *Brahma* and *Maya* or *Siva* and *Sakthi*. These basic labels are defined in terms of soul/spirit and body/materiality. Body here remains unpolished and submissive to the soul. If body is an automobile, then the soul is the motorist. The concept of *Moksha* or redemption, according to Indian religious ideology, happens only when a physique or physical presence is transcended. The female and the risk connected with her gender is that of the physical body she possess along with her sexuality. This becomes a great problem when compared with the masculine gender. It is her sexuality that makes her an all-time wife and mother. But at certain times, the same sexuality makes her a tool of agency and freedom, of courage and strength. Therefore, she is both a need and a risk and so becomes a significant theme in the Indian manuscripts.

If the sacred works of Hinduism is evidently examined, one can certainly notice that if a woman herself controls her distinct body and sexuality, then she inevitably develops into an evil or nasty individual. On the other hand, if the woman is controlled by a man, then she possesses very generous, sympathetic and good hearted character. The similar condition can be easily observed among the Hindu Goddesses. The ‘good female goddesses’ of the religion includes Lakshmi, Parvathy and Saraswathy who are the primary consorts of Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma and so are controlled by them. While the other goddess incudes Durga, Kali and so on. They are recognized as independent

and so are vigorous and cruel. A masculine control of woman is constantly approved and valorized in the Indian philosophical framework, folklore, mythologies, Sanskrit classics, indigenous literature, etc.

A woman is an individual with her physical body and therefore they are realized as simple bodies. But a paradox seen here is that a male is given the full privilege to enter into her physical body with or without her consent. This happens in a masculine culture. Helen Cixous in her work “The Laugh of the Medussa” remarks:

We have been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with that stupid sexual modesty. We have made victim of the old fool’s game: each one will love the other sex. I will give you your body and you will give me mine. But who are the men who give women the body that women blindly yield to them? (Cixous 885-886).

The apprehensions related with the female body have not only created arrogance or contempt regarding the physique but also female herself started to internalize the misogynist thoughts. She is often referred as an ‘Unresolved Mystery’ or a ‘Dark Continent.’ She is alienated from her own physical body or otherwise her body is occupied or colonized by the masculinity. Body is something that a female occupy all the way along her life and this body which worries them and it is this body that satisfy the carnal desires of their male partners, i.e, it is this body that her husband, family, religion, society, conventions, and all those agencies require. The desires and yearnings of a feminine body are always kept locked so as to prohibit them from the aspects of dissatisfaction or unhappiness. Therefore, human sexuality, for a woman is a matter of silent and terrific zone where her wants and needs are kept closed. Therefore it is a zone for her anxieties rather than her desires.

A group of feminists believe that the feminine body, its physical nature, phase, etc., creates limits and edges for the wants and wishes of a woman in the masculine world. They certainly believe in the “natural” division between human soul and human body and feel that subjugation and harassments felt by a female body could be the outcome of her physical biology and they must extremely try to overcome this limitation. For them body is “something to be rejected in the pursuit of intellectual equality according to a masculine standard” (Price and Shildrick 2-3). There is a particular group of “societal constructionists” comprising Julia Kristeva, Juliet Mitchell, Nancy Chodorow and some other psychoanalytic and Marxist feminists who firmly consider the communal construction of this partisanship. For this group too, human physical body remains biologically resolute, stable, and ahistorical, though the mind becomes a social, cultural and historical statement (Grosz 17).

They feel that it is not biology per se, but the way it is perceived in ideology that is oppressive for women. So, the question is not how to supersede biology, but how to give new meaning and values to the body. Many of these feminists see body as something to be reclaimed as the every essence of the female. (Price and Shildrick 3)

The next group, of feminists like Helene Cixous, Jane Gallop and Luce Irigaray have a poststructuralist focus. For them, the human body is no longer recognized as an ahistorical, biologically given venture. They are further concerned with existing body and reject a mind/ body dualism. The body here is a considered as a public and comprehensive object, a “crucial site of contestation in a series of economic, political, social and intellectual struggles” (Price and Shildrick 3).

Body was yet again described in detail from 1960s onwards with the upsurge of second wave feminism. These feminists conducted a serious cross examination of the

biological sex as well as the cultural sex. They later came into the inference that there was nothing around a woman's corporeality that specified her 'obedient' and 'insignificant' roles in the community. Pregnancy or menstruation can never clarify any rational phases to distinguish women in attaining appropriate education or participating in socio-political engagements. They tried to bring the feminine physical body beyond the masculine biosphere and discussed about the role of females in an open sociocultural sphere.

If we look into the feminist literature, it openly explained how women are distinguished in the socio political civilization. It is quite obvious that males are always associated with autonomy and independence however women characters were connected with their physical body and sexuality. They were recognized as more biological and therefore had a very reserved and limited sphere of locked circuits. Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray precisely scrutinised the marginalisation of 'clearing out' of females and their sexuality in the male controlled world. The feminists have also positioned on the curriculum of re-exploring, re-examining concepts of female corporeality. They have obviously observed the feminine body with the features of sexuality, ethics and so on have designed vibrant concepts of feminine body.

The human physical body has also established into a substance of commercial product in the corporate sphere. It had emerged into a matter of consumer culture (Shilling 181). In contrast to this, the physical body is a material of sexuality, compromise and submissiveness. From the view of radicals, the physical body of a female describes her subordination, subservience and the oppressions that she suffers in her every day.

Usually, women's creativeness has been bracketed by their reproductive bodies. That is a woman is socially forced to find her artistic outlet by producing and raising

their babies. The topmost creativity for a woman was her maternity. For example, we have discussed earlier in this chapter about the image of Holy Mary with baby Jesus Christ in her hands. Such a female was more recognized as female goddess in Western civilizations, Chinese, Japanese, African and even in Indian cultural milieu. Diane Long Hoeveler and Donna Decker Schuster in the Introduction to their book *Women's Literary Creativity and the Female Body* points out that:

The historical record makes it clear that there has been a persistent focus on the female body in all attempts to understand women as creative, which has led the female to be seen as the subject of creative efforts by men, rather than the agent of creativity herself. In fact, women's bodies, as Jane Garrity argues, valued for their ability to perpetuate the British race as the central representation of British racial stability, were the primary symbols of nationalism and culture. (Hoeveler and Schuster xi)

Even in the ancient world classics, women's sexuality is considered as dangerous and vicious. Homer's *Odyssey* illustrates a very deep debate on female's sexual conduct. For example, the sexual reputation of Penelope is a chief fulcrum of the story. The positive purpose of the classic involves not only that Odysseus should return to his home, but also that Penelope must maintain her chastity. Uncontrolled sexual desire of a woman is recognized as hazardous and destructive. It intimidates not only the hero's homecoming, but also there is more emphasis on maintaining the necessary social order. In another situation, the adverse replicas of Helen and Clytemnestra describes the dangerous consequences to both individuals and community of feminine sexuality run amok. The infidelity of Helen was regarded as the major cause for Trojan War. Achaeans reached Troy for the sake of Helen. Similarly once Odysseus expressed his grief that many among them died only for the sake of Helen. Characters like Eumaeus even wished to

hear that the whole clan of Helen got destroyed. He describes Helen as a very active verb making her the direct cause of many deaths in the war. All these above statements portrays Helen and her sexual body as not only a meagre cause for the war, but also as a prime initiator and the real demolisher. Her sexual transgression is considered as the crucial reason behind all the miseries and sufferings of Odysseus: his struggles in the Trojan War, his lengthy homecoming ride, the difficulty in separation from his beloved wife and son and the whole destructions faced by his family.

Until nineteenth century, Europe, Africa and South Asia were occupied by a set of unwanted patriarchal notions relating to human body, sexuality and desire. Nivedita Menon in her book *Seeing Like a Feminist* points out that the society before the enlightenment, modernity, worked with a number of assumptions:

That is assumptions such as the idea that nature exists separately from humans as a passive, inert set of resources to be put to human use; that bodies are naturally entirely one sex or another; that hermaphroditism (bodies possessing both male and female) is a disease; and that desire naturally flows only between opposite sexes. (53)

Margaret Mead once described about masculinity and femininity across different geographical spheres and societal cultures. Not only do various communities consider a specific group of codes as feminine codes and the other group of codes as masculine, but all these symbols may not be same all around the world. Henceforth, the feminists came forward and strongly claimed that there have never existed any significant association between the masculine biology and the feminine biology and of those attributes which are thought to be masculine and feminine. Rather, it is the major practice of being pregnant and the child rearing that always tried to firmly establish and propagate variations between sexes. For example, from the very beginning of childhood onward,

both boys and girls are perfectly trained in suitable gender-specific methods of their social behavior, hair style, modes of play, dressing styles and so on. This modes continue as they grow up and establish themselves as 'being perfect' and brings conformity to the gender. Therefore, the specific gender qualities such as courage, self-reliance, physical strength and so on must be adhered to the boys and shyness, humility, empathy, gentleness and such traits should be adhered to the girls. These gender values to males and females that are imposed by the society are produced by different institutions, social beliefs, religious rites and rituals, customs and so on. It is as Simone de Beauvoir pointed out in her *The Second Sex*, "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (330) which states femininity is a construction of civilisation. A woman is gradually shaped by her social upbringing. She remarks:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on insociety; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. Only the mediation of another can constitute an individual as an *Other*. Inasmuch as he exists for himself, the child would not grasp himself as sexually differentiated. For girls and boys, the body is first the radiation of a subjectivity, the instrument that brings about the comprehension of the world: they apprehend the universe through their eyes and hands, and not through their sexual parts. (330)

Situation regulates character, not the other way around. A woman is not born or just formed; she is gradually moulded by her communal upbringing. Biology does not regulate what styles a woman a woman—in fact, she learns her roles and duties from man and others in society. She is not born as submissive, inferior, and nonessential, but all the powers in the outside world have combined to make her so. Each distinct self,

irrespective of their gender, is allowed to subjectivity; it is only external powers that have conspired to rob woman of this right. Destiny is not a cosmic energy but the personal choice of every human, the result of his/her culture and context.

When we explain the distinction between sex and gender in connection with biology and culture, we could find that a female's physical body is molded by several communal constraints and standards of beauty. Specifically, the 'physical body' is fashioned more by culture than by nature. For example, the quick advancements in the athletic accounts of women over the previous two decades have molded the strong capabilities of their physical bodies too. Certain feminist theoreticians have argued that in several indigenous cults, there slight bodily differences are found between males and females. In brief, it should be accepted that there exists two different phases at work. One major aspect is a wide series of interconnected modes by which our social orders produces sex differences. On the other hand, sex differences formulates a culture in specific methods. Nivedita Menon hence points out in her work *Seeing Like a Feminist*:

'Sex', seen thus, is not an unchanging base upon which society constructs 'gender' meanings, but rather, sex itself has been affected by various factors external to it - there is no clear and unchanging line separating nature and culture. A second kind of rethinking of sex/gender has come from a kind of feminism which argues that feminists must not underplay the biological difference between the sexes, and attribute all difference to 'culture' alone. To do so is to accept male civilization's devaluing of the female reproductive role. (65)

In the medieval days, a woman talking about her body to break the patriarchal structure was not an easy task. It was at this point where Bhakti poets violated this social construction and emerged as the pioneers of Indian feminism. The male poets protested on eradication of caste and creed issues whereas the female saints spoke against gender

inequality. It was not a change defined by the medieval male parameters. They depicted the realities of their time by depicting the social patriarchy. The status of a woman was defined in terms of her role in a family as an obedient daughter, submissive wife and responsible homely mother. Crushed and confined to this male patriarchy and daily domestic livelihood, these women found an alternative possibility in the form of devotion. Renouncing their earthly marriage and material life, they directed their desires and passions towards the heavenly deities.

For the medieval women devotion slowly became an outlet. A study of their lyrics portray that they negotiated the patriarchy shackles through the mode of devotion and love, which provided an open space for them. They received a better platform to express their freedom and mobility.