

## Conclusion

The medieval women lived according to rules and norms built by the patriarchy. The society was designed in order to satisfy the male rules and there were strict codes of conduct and it was hard for a woman to stand for her rights against the social injustices implicated upon her by the macho word and associated institutions. The courage to protest and violate these so called 'social standards' were must. In this aspect, the Indian mystical realm opened a wider space with love and devotion as the core themes for the mental support, liberation and autonomy of women. Many medieval women resorted to the sphere of mysticism and this resulted for their liberation from the orthodox shackles. Karaikkal Ammaiyyar, Andal, Akka Mahadevi, Lal Ded, Janabai, Muktabai, Bahinabai, Kanhopatra, Mirabai, Sahajobai and so on are the examples of the female Bhakti cult. They emerged as the pioneers of what is today known as Indian Feminism and laid down the seeds of female autonomy. They are regarded as the first feminist voices by demanding and asserting a space for their own through their poetry. They were prominent revolutionary voices which strongly refused to the established patriarchal norms and hence setting a platform of defiance through lyrical compositions at multiple levels. This thesis dealt with the verses of four such women mystics namely Andal, Akka Mahadevi, Lal Ded and Mirabai, who selected their path of mysticism and left their great influence upon the psyche of common people and shaped an eternal space for themselves in this conventional society. The problem of the research was how one can consider a poet from sixth century and eighth century or eleventh century under the same genre of Bhakti as they four come from different geographical regions and time spans. The aim of the research was to find out what binds them altogether. Later, after the detailed textual analysis of each poet, it is found that the concept of body and desire in devotion that made these four poets to come under the same umbrella of Bhakti. The

methodology adopted for the research was Gender studies. Translated lyrics of each poet along with the secondary materials about their works are studied in detail.

The thesis is divided into five chapters along with an Introduction and Conclusion. The first chapter traces the beginning, growth and development of Bhakti movement throughout India in detail. The second chapter deals with the theory of body and its association with culture and religion. The third chapter brings out an exclusive analysis of the lyrical compositions of Andal and Akka Mahadevi. As a continuation to that, fourth chapter is a complete analysis of the verses of Lal Ded and Mirabai. The fifth and final chapter is about the theme of resistance and how these female mystics associated their physical body and carnal desires with the concept of medieval resistance by bringing out the significance of feminine freedom and agency.

The first chapter titled “On Devotee and Deity: An Introduction to Bhakti Literature” of the thesis begins by locating the vast history of Indian Bhakti tradition, both as a social movement and as a particular branch of Indian devotional poetry. The chapter primarily concentrates on the growth and development of Bhakti cult beginning from its early days in Tamil Nadu (medieval period) till the end of Mughal era and beginning of British rule. It also discusses on significance and relevance of using regional and vernacular languages in the devotional hymns by discarding the usage of elite languages like Sanskrit used by Brahmins. The chapter continues to explain Bhakti as a pan Indian counter-cultural movement that lasted for several centuries. It provides information on devotional cults including major sects such as Saivism and Vaishnavism across the country and how these religious sects became vital parts of India’s renaissance movements. The chapter also mentions the major literary figures of the movement from various geographical locations of the country spanning from sixth century to seventeenth century by analysing the similarities of Bhakti hymns with that of

other Indian folk traditions. The rebellious notion of Bhakti in describing different human relationships are also discussed. The relation of Bhakti hymns with that of the teachings of other Asian religions including Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are also defined in detail. Towards the end of the chapter, the reading on D. D. Kosambi's article provides further details on Bhakti movement, in association with Marxist theories and ideologies that relates Bhakti cult with Indian economic scenario. This chapter is an attempt to build a comprehensive retrospection on medieval Indian Bhakti by portraying those philosophies from major writers and social analysts such as P. Govinda Pillai, Shahabuddin Iraqi, A. K. Ramanujan, Arundhati Subramaninan, Andrew Schelling, Hiren Gohein, Pandit Nehru and so on.

The second chapter, "Being Woman: Theoretical Speculations on Female Body in Medieval India" completely discusses female body and its relation with the social community, political structure, literary culture and religious conventions. The chapter begins by a discussion on how the physical body of a female along with her bodily experiences forms her literary output. It also defines how a female existed in the socio-political context of medieval period and how she reacted against those patriarchal anarchies that strictly imposed restrictions on her feminine freedom, mental psyche and individual identity. The chapter continues to describe how the social, political and cultural spheres of East and West describes a feminine body from ancient days. It also locates how religions all over world such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, etc., observed woman and her feminine body in respect to the existing social, cultural and spiritual environments. The individual identity of a woman was always a strong matter questioned by the society she lives and her physical body was a crucial subject for social and religious contamination. Pregnancy and motherhood were always regarded as the only grading measurements of a woman's dignity. This indirectly

made her passive and submissive to the masculine world. It was her physical sexuality that marked her an all-time wife and mother. But, here the same sexuality itself makes her a strong tool of agency, autonomy, freedom, strength and courage. The chapter puts forward the significance of human physical body and how Bhakti poets used their body as a tool of resistance against masculinity in medieval India. The feminine body, its physical desires and its nudity always stood as a great threat to men and their conventional systems. Towards the end, this section also explains the significance of women saints and how they enlarged their individual space and transcended their physical body. They tried to defeat the traditional religious beliefs about feminine body and announced that it is never an obstruction to the society or inferior to human psyche. In contrast, it's a clean abode of human intelligence, knowledge, emotions, creativity, and enlightenment. The second chapter deals with the theory of feminine body and its association with medieval culture and religion. It discusses the statements of several theorists such as Judith Butler, Margaret Mead, Nivedita Menon, Madhavi Menon, Jasbir Jain, Professor Udaya Kumar and many others.

The third chapter titled “Desiring Devotees: An Analysis of Early Bhakti Poets — Andal and Akka Mahadevi” is solely dedicated to the lyrical analysis of Andal and Akka Mahadevi, the major female saint poets of earlier periods of Bhakti movement in South India. They passionately desired for unification with their favourite deities, Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva respectively. The first half of the chapter describes the life, works and the lyrical analysis of Andal, the Tamil Alwar saint of 8th century. Her works, *Tiruppavai* and *Nacciyar Tirumoli*, are thoroughly analysed from the perspectives of female body and physical desires. The concept of Bridal Mysticism (*Madhurya Bhava*) of Andal is defined with lyrical examples from these poems. Andal explains the importance of undertaking periodical vow (*pavai nombu* of *Margazhi*

month) and preserving physical cleanliness. According to Andal, the portrayal of her physical body was a strong means of her individual protest that finally lead her towards the eternal transcendence. Her lyrical manifestations of sensual love and bodily desires towards her beloved lover was a subject of severe shock to the medieval ‘moralists’. The second half of the chapter then moves on to discuss the poet Kannada poet Akka Mahadevi, another ‘problematic’ figure of the Bhakti tradition. Like Andal, she also followed the path of Bridal Mysticism in her lyrics, but in a much more revolutionary style. Apart from her powerful verses, dominant actions and threatening lifestyle, she was a solo wanderer who fashioned several social and cultural revolutions in 12th century Karnataka. Her verses are described from the side of a woman who directly questioned the patriarchal society by revealing her physical nudity and distinct soul. A complete study of her lyrics (*vachanas*) shows that her in-depth desire and devotion towards her Lord, is the result of her sheer conditioning. Her lyrical compositions are comprised of strong erotic imageries, symbols and metaphors of their sexual union originating certainly inside her heart. Towards the end of the chapter, brief details on Lingayat tradition and Veerasaiva movement are also explained in the backdrop of Akka Mahadevi, who herself was born and brought up as a Lingayat girl and then later questioned the injustices inside the same sect. This chapter brings out an exclusive analysis of the lyrical compositions of Andal and Akka Mahadevi. It is framed with the substantiating accounts of Archana Venkatesan, Alka Tyagi, A. K. Ramanujan, Mukunda Rao and so on.

The fourth chapter “Body and Beyond: An Analysis of Later Bhakti Poets — Lal Ded and Mirabai” discusses about the life and verses of later medieval female saint poets, who were ardent devotees of Lord Shiva and Lord Krishna respectively. This chapter primarily aims at analysing the love, body, emotions, and passion contents in the

verses of these mystic poets of North India. Those solid expressions of physical body and desire manifests their strategies of freedom, courage, agency or autonomy. The first half of the chapter focuses on Lal Ded and her verses (*vakhs*). They are philosophical teachings rendered by a female mystic who travelled beyond physical body and personal desires. Those *vakhs* carries peace and harmony. Lal Ded focused more on the theme of emptiness of human body rather than on concentrating on bodily flesh and carnal desires. Therefore, her verses signify the physical as well as the metaphysical. The poetic excellence of her lyrics automatically transit from that of a sage to an expert, from a priest to that of a passionate and dedicated lover and finally to that of a pure female yogini who is in search of eternal bliss or transcendence. Her verses are straight expressions of her spiritual visions and the talents of a brilliant mystic, who was always attentive to the powerful spiritual fragments of medieval society and the spiritual concerts of Kashmir Saivism. In her verses, the human physical body occupies chief importance as it is the nucleus of all her spiritual experiments in self-refinement. She demonstrated human love and peace all along her verses. The chapter next moves on to discuss the next poetic saint, Mirabai, the most celebrated female mystic saint of Indian devotional poetry. Her love lyrics (*padas*) on Lord Krishna (Vaishnavism) reveals the embodiment of 'prema bhakti' and are regarded as eternal classic songs of medieval Indian literature. The songs of Mira transform an enthusiastic devotee to the mood of transcendental delight or ecstasy. They express the cry of an ardent devotee from the inner soul, melancholic, with deep desire for profound love to embrace eternity. Mira's songs created space for those voices that could not be voiced in her days. Those songs were spontaneous reflections of pure love melodies that developed from the core heart of a passionate lover, who longed for her Beloved all along her life. Humanity in its supreme form is observed in the songs of Mirabai. Like the other female mystics of

devotional poetry, Mira also strongly states her intense desire for the unification with her lover, Lord Krishna. Towards the end of the chapter, her delicate feelings, sentiments and the passionate desire to join with her Beloved is expressed evidently in her verses. Mira's lyrics prove that she was an obedient lover possessed by mad love. Her verses carries erotic images and metaphors in relation with feminine body and desires. Mira directly manifested her love towards Krishna in a straight language filled with personal emotions, feminine sentiments and carnal desires. Her songs are individual manifestations that carried passionate depth of her liberal love in its highest forms. Poets, translators as well as thinkers including Ranjit Hoskot, Andrew Schelling and Pradeep Trikha aided in framing the major judgements associated with these songs.

The fifth chapter titled "Body and Resistance: Re-Contextualizing the Works of Female Bhakti Poets" is a long discussion combining the different ideas of female resistance present in the verses of the four selected poets, Andal, Akka Mahadevi, Lal Ded and Mirabai. This chapter reveals the unheard voices of dissent, protest and resistance from the parts of these medieval mystical poets. The beginning of the chapter shares the notion that resistance struggles held by women is far different from that of the vigorous rebellions or agitations of men. History defines resistance struggles as those revolutions organised by the passive divisions of the society particularly women, labourers, farmers, laymen and so on. Here, in Bhakti poetry, these female mystic poets composed their love lyrics in relation with their individual experiences and personal desires. They placed their physical body as the major tool of their resistance. This body, apart being a resistance device, also becomes a strong platform for the celebration of bodily pleasure. The passionate desires, deep and ardent love, sexual cravings, etc., formed the major subjects of their lyrics. The accurate organisation of these themes in the backdrop of Indian devotion poetry marks them different from other medieval Indian

poets. Their passionate dedication and love towards their favourite deity and the unending desire and passion to unite with him forms the core of their lyrics. This physical as well as metaphysical unification with the lord that travels within body and beyond body signify their ways of resistance against the feudal norms of patriarchy and religious conventions. This sensuality in their verses forms the nucleus of their resistance struggle. These poets celebrated their own physical body and bodily desires. The chapter further moves on by defining how these medieval mystic saints treated their physical body. For, them, it was never a burden or liability, but an abode filled with eternal happiness, pleasure and celebration. Andal, being an ardent lover and mystic poet of medieval period conveyed her passionate love in a social space through her lyrics. This public declaration of physical love and carnal desires were great shock to the patriarchal system of her days. The highly erotic elements present in her lyrics, particularly in *Nacchiar Tirumozhi*, makes her a strong rebellious woman who directly defined her intense personal desires and bodily cravings. The feminine body she possessed, her passionate love towards her Beloved and the grief of separation she felt when he left her constitute Andal's love verses more and more rebellious in its structure. Similarly, Akka Mahadevi, the Veerasaiva poet, was a complete rebel of her times who continuously tried to break the shackles of the masculine world. Being born and brought up as a Lingayat follower, she firmly stood under the same spiritual sect and questioned the anarchies inside Lingayatism. Her powerful verses describe the celebration of her feminine body and her deep physical desires which were great social taboos during medieval eras. On the other hand Lal Ded, the Kashmiri mystic, arranged her verses in the forms of philosophical teachings and these teachings (*vakhs*) were the tool of her resistance against patriarchy. Through her lyrics she questioned the consumerist attitude of medieval man. Also, she chose her literal terms, images and metaphors from her



nearby surroundings and domestic lives of common masses, which broke the medieval style. Her *vakhs* prove that by withholding the human physical body and its carnal desires, she could easily open a world of metaphysical body in the state of transcendence. Lal Ded tried to promote ordinary medieval women from their domestic lives of just being wives and mothers into another wide sphere where they can express themselves. She sang and danced in complete ecstasy. Towards the end, the chapter discusses on Mirabai, the most well-known mystic saint who conveyed her love in the form of *dasya bhava*. She touched the top of her feminine defiance when her ardent love was questioned by her Rajput family. Her melodies has noble roots and an elite genealogy. Still, her songs, stood for the women in general, the women caught in love. She consciously used personal phrases including 'I', 'I am', 'I have', etc. in her songs to indicate her mental strength to express her female, mental psyche, individual self and agency. Her songs carries the images of an imaginary world around her. Mira in fact struggled against this fantasies and myths of the society. The whole chapter is framed with the intention of exploring the relations between feminine body and resistance. Susie Tharu, K. Lalitha, Alka Tyagi, G. Mohana Charyulu, Sucheta Sankar, Dr. Sarada Thallam, Leela Mullatti and so on are the major thinkers and theoreticians who worked on medieval female writings. The verses of female mystics and its cultural significance are presented with substantiating comments from them.

The major finding that have emerged as a result of the Doctoral Study include the relocation and reinterpretation of the verses of women mystics helped in creating a wider space for the marginalised voices of medieval Indian literature. The concepts of personal devotion, passionate love and supreme surrender are evident in women mystics as these concepts together comprised their politics of resistance. Also, the sensibility of the women poets are frequently discordant with that of their contemporary male poets as

according to them, discourses on physical body and gender is as important as the caste and creed issues raised by the male poets. These poets of Bhakti movement could be regarded as the pioneers of Indian feminism as the contemporary persistence of the freedom, agency and autonomy of every Indian woman has its reflections from the voices of these medieval female mystics. These poets were later considered 'outcaste' in the mainstream realm as their verses carried eroticism, carnal desires and nudity. Talking about feminine body and bodily desires became the powerful weapons of resistance against the medieval patriarchy, traditional beliefs and conventional ideologies of the masculine world. Hence, the female poets successfully created a space in Indian mainstream literature by expressing their passionate love, sexual desires and personal emotions. The portrayal of day-to-day life and domestic household chores of medieval women as strong metaphors in the mystical poetry was another notable feature of female Bhakti saints.

A study on female Bhakti poets is still significant as the questions raised by them regarding feminine body and individual self are still hot topics for debates in the contemporary academic scenario. It involves diverse social and cultural areas such as religion, class, gender and so on. The thesis discussed how these poets showcased their physical body and sensuous desires in their lyrics from sixth century till the end of the movement. The similar issues have substantial significance in the contemporary period too. Woman and her sexuality are major topics of arguments even today. Her communal life, dressing style, profession and so on are interrogated by the male patriarchy. The socio-political, literary and cultural spheres of contemporary society express difficulties in interpreting female body and her erotic desires.

Further studies can be conducted by selecting any single poet from the entire Bhakti literary scenario and analysing his/her lyrics. Also, more poets can be added to

this spectrum apart from the four selected poets. A comparative study on the differences found in the manifestation of physical body by male poets and female poets who lived in the same periods can also be conducted.

The idea of resistance put forward by the Bhakti poets in general and the female Bhakti poets in particular is relevant in the contemporary socio-political scenario. The common thread that binds the female writers under the umbrella of Bhakti movement is the idea of body and its representations in their poetry. Each of the four selected poets—Andal, Akka Mahadevi, Lal Ded and Mirabai—represent the concepts of body, eroticism and spirituality in their own unique ways. The works of these poets carry many rebellious ideas that question the existing norms of their respective societies and contain their own attempts to find new answers regarding issues of gender and other struggles during their times. Their poems are powerful tools of resistance that constantly interact with the social systems of their age and conduct deep inquiries into the society's psyche to unveil the evils and injustices of patriarchal society. The issues raised by these poets are still relevant because such issues continue to exist even today. Thus any contemporary study on the female poets of Bhakti literature that problematises body and gender should be regarded as a political activity.