

## Female Sexual Politics in Tattooed with Taboos

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### Abstract

*The discourse on female sexuality is closely studied in feminist studies as it can reveal much about cultural values, moral standards, and identities of women. Women's lives are often put under the scanner of culture and tradition which controls the female sexuality within the acceptability of the societal structure. Even the female sexual taboo like menstruation is hardly discussed explicitly. However with the emergence of new wave of feminism like the Free Bleeding movement, it has questioned the very ideology behind declaring the female blood as impure and unnatural. The evasiveness surrounding the discussion of female sexuality validates the conceited attitude of the patriarchal society. This paper will discuss the taboo surrounding the female sexuality in the context of three women poets—Chaoba Phuritshabam, Shreema Ningombam, and Soibum Haripriya in the collection **Tattooed with Taboos: An Anthology of Poetry by Three Women from North-East India**. This paper will address the pervasiveness of sexual taboos which circumscribe women through ages with the use of powerful symbol of phanek (wrap-around used by Meitei woman). Besides questioning the taboo imposed on women, it will accentuate how these female writers celebrate the sexual liberation by denouncing the taboos and their inhibitions. They also question the myth concerning the glorification of ideal womanhood which trample the woman's subjectivity under the weight of culture and tradition.*

**Keywords:** Manipur, Taboos, Women, Sexuality, Phanek, Menstruation

The discourse on female sexuality is closely studied in feminist studies as it can reveal much about cultural values, moral standards, and identities of women. Women's lives are often put under the scanner of culture and tradition which controls the female sexuality within the acceptability of the societal structure. Even the female sexual taboo like menstruation is hardly discussed explicitly. However with the emergence of new wave of feminism like the Free Bleeding movement, it has questioned the very ideology behind declaring the female blood as impure and unnatural. The evasiveness surrounding the discussion of female sexuality validates the conceited attitude of the patriarchal society. In the

contemporary Manipuri poetry, poets like Shreema Ningombam, Soibam Haripriya, and Chaoba Phuritshabam with their usage of forceful and derisive poetic imageries has marked the emergence of new women writers who refuse to accept the taboos blatantly without any guilt and self-reproach. For them poetry is a rebellion that explodes in opposition to the gender construct that always censures them both in personal and public sphere.

The work *Tattooed with Taboos: An Anthology of Poetry by Three Women from North-East India (2011)*, which consists of seventy seven poems, encapsulates the repressed consciousness of three women Manipuri poets. Through this collection, they have explored the journey of womanhood through the explicit use of sexual metaphors which a conventional Manipuri culture will be bashful to confess in its wildest dreams. The intermingling of personal and political metaphors has entwined the growth of personal self with the political intensification which forms the historiography of Manipur society. They have broken the taboos which have for ages shaped the women's mentality. *(Henceforth, all quotations of poems will be taken from this anthology. Chief Editor).*

The collection has captured the varied moods of the poets from the first menstrual flow, the wedding night, the first consummation, the misconstrued womanhood, love, betrayal, anxiety, and hysteric state of female identity. This collection is divided into three sections -

“Tattooed with Taboos”, “Angst for Homeland”, and “Love and Longing” - depending upon the copious problems faced by women in their voyage into the subterranean space which is defined by tradition, modernity, and violence. The first section “Tattooed with Taboos” celebrates the sexual liberation by denouncing the taboos. The second section “Angst for Homeland”, expresses the disillusionment owing to the violence prevalent in the region. The last section “Love and Longing” expresses assorted emotions connected to love and yearnings. They talk about love without any strings attached to a person or object. Love to these poets is devoid of hope. This paper will make an effort to analyse the first section “Tattooed with Taboos” which exposes the myths of woman's hysterical position thereby exploring the pattern of woman's imprisonment, outrage, and insurgence towards their sexual captivity.

The sudden surge of women voices in contemporary India and elsewhere has made us question the position of women and the feminist discourse in general. The cyberspace has gradually intruded into our space and started grilling our feminist instincts to come out and see the shifting world where women in actuality are voicing their constrained emotions. Recently the hard hitting proclamations of “My Choice” in Vogue's Empower Campaign by a well-known actress of India and many other women from different walks of society have made us question woman's sexuality and what really is woman's empowerment?

Empowerment carries different connotations and it does carry class division. “My Choice” was too elitist for the Indian minds. To talk about sexual fantasy “to marry or not to marry, to have sex before marriage, to have sex outside of marriage, not to have sex, my choice” is accused of suggesting the adulterous nature and is not acceptable for any gender (Bawa 2015). The campaign has caught many feminists who gnawed at the social message which the video wanted to convey. Despite its remaining shreds from gnawing, one thing that catches women’s psyche is the emergence of discourse on sexual taboos which for many years have been the dialogue carried on in hushed tones behind closed doors. The other movement that catches our attention is the recent sanitary pads movement started by Germany Elone Kastratia on Women’s Day. It has swept the whole feminist discourse. It also reached many Indian universities which have shown strong detachment by the repugnant sight of pads in every recess of university. The protest by women has gone to the extent of showing the patriarchal culture which considered women’s blood as impure. And coming out from the taboos which incarcerate women generation after generation is also an excruciating task in a traditionally rooted country like India. Such movement has dumfounded many and different opinions have also been generated on this issue. The discourse on Indian feminism has taken a new exterior with the growth of many female activists who have been campaigning for women’s

rights. Through the evolution of new feminist concerns, we can also discern the growing anxieties and victimisation of men which will take its due course with time.

Coming back to North-east India, there is a general perception that women in this part of India do not face the curse of being born as female and its interrelated issues like dowry, female infanticide, child marriage, rape, female education, and other numerous problems. In a region like Manipur that has witnessed the two great women’s wars (NupiLans of 1904 and 1939), many have denied the existence of patriarchy or male domination. Some also refute the claim of women’s subjugation per se and have a strong belief that women enjoy better living standard as compared to the mainstream counterpart. There are many literatures available on the legacy of women’s movement to show their prowess and their experiences in the conflict zone but feminist discourse on female sexuality is a relatively neglected area in the literature coming out from Manipur. The appalling disclosure of these three poets will expose the very mentality of the populace who are in denial mode that women are not victimized in this society.

The writings of these three poets will unmask the age old deception and pretense which Manipuri society has been hiding. These new writers follow the trajectory of the themes which occupied the earlier women poets like the conceptualization of ideal Manipuri women through myths,

legends, religion, and so forth. Nevertheless, they discuss the women related issues in a more vociferous tone. They also concentrate on the other themes like love, betrayal, the question of morality, and female sexuality that render the creation of woman's identity. They challenge to escape from the superficial demands of the society which persistently entangle women in the jargons of ideal womanhood. With this collection of poetry, a new wave has emerged which revolutionizes the perspicacity of women advertency, their life, their aversions, their appetencies, and lastly their self-liberation. To articulate taboos itself, displays a sense of rebellion against the patriarchal culture that always criticizes topics related to female sexuality. Sexuality as a term is "a domain of restriction, repression, and danger" and simultaneously, it suggests "a domain of exploration, pleasure, and agency". The problem is if we focus on the pleasure and gratification it would mean to ignore "the patriarchal structure in which women act, yet to speak only of sexual violence and oppression ignores women's experience with sexual agency and choice and unwittingly increases the sexual terror and despair in which women live" (Vance 1984 :1). After all women have to compromise as they have been taught to act in this manner since their childhood.

*Tattooed with Taboos* will dismantle countless unspoken problems facing the women in the patrilineal culture. These three extremely spirited young poets

avowed in their introduction to the anthology that, "Womanhood is at all times projected as an image of an eternal mother, whereby the poems try to resurrect the other women, the fallen" (i). It puts forth the inhibited appetency of women in a precise manner without concealing anything. It also lays bare the stark reality of the concept connected to imagining prototype of femininity which preordains her to immanence. The surreptitious objectives of archetypal womanhood are exposed by penetrating into the taboos circumscribing women's existence. They show the uncensored part of women's lives by vocalizing about their bodies, pleasures, desires, and enormous bodily territories which have remained buried behind the closet for centuries. This section celebrates the profanity and filth of women's body as a sign of liberation. Helen Cixous once proclaimed, "Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth...." It is through the act of writing that "will not only 'realize' the decensored relation of women to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal" (Cixous 1976: 880). For the first time these women writers are writing their bodies, desires, and repressions thereby exploring their bodily territories.

Soibam Haripriya's "After the Wedding", "Five Days' Untouchable", "I Died a Little", and "Of Clothes and

Robes” encapsulate women’s struggle to survive amidst the taboos which make them sacrilegious since the time they have attained puberty and their flight as a woman. “After the Wedding” uncovers the bafflement surrounding the sanctimonious marriage and how a woman sees it. For the poet the act of marriage is ‘an eternal exile’ which coexists with sorrow, frustration, and sadness of leaving one’s home to live an ultimate exile which brings with it the sense of alienation, displacement, and negotiation of identity. Thus the poet declares, *‘The strange courtyard of my eternal exile’* (3). The understanding of exile gives details of a course which involves a woman’s level of approval and involvement to dominance. The courtyard of her new home is like a voyage on an unknown terrain where she will gobble up her own individuality with time. The poet despises the consummation of marriage as some kind of forceful invasion by the alien object or the invasion by the dominant man. The woman’s body is constructed as highly sensual and a natural object for male desire through which man shows his superiority. As a woman is an object, she has no right to show her desire as she is expected not to manifest the active qualities. She has to act as the situation demands. It is shown as some kind of deed that needs to be done urgently without any delay. She declares:

*The deed was done  
Emptiness succeeded  
After containing you in me  
Void of withdrawal*

*Tired bed sheets soaked with violent sweat.* (3)

As Beauvoir has argued in *The Second Sex*, a woman is expected to carry on the feminine functions in their generality after marriage. As far as her erotic fate is concerned, “she has no right to any sexual activity apart from marriage” but man can “enjoy contingent pleasures before marriage and extra-maritally” (1949, 1997: 454-455). The sexual frustration of woman is accepted by men as a natural process. Apart from this frustration, a woman has to bear the burden of pregnancy - “a heavy payment exacted from woman in exchange for a brief and uncertain pleasure.” It is like “Five minutes’ pleasure: nine months’ pain” (ibid). Every relation is formed not on the individuality of woman but her relation to others.

The imagery of ‘...the gray Tulsi/ Desiccated by the merciful sun’ (3) in “After the Wedding” also symbolizes the harshness of woman’s life or Tulsi (a symbol of woman) under the sun, a male god. Marriage would also mean the permanent acceptance of customary duties assigned to every woman. The institution of marriage is shown as a license to invade the female body. It is a destiny offered to woman without which woman does not become a complete woman. After marriage a woman not only gets married to a person, but she is bound to a subjugated role of being a wife, a mother, and a daughter-in-law. She is expected to participate in the cultural practices and

religions through which she should prove her capability of being a good housewife. The agitating body of the poet which is resisting the male incursion wishes to uproot the dried remains of Tulsi or the 'mute twigs' which are silently witnessing the established absolutism.

The poem "Five Days' Untouchable" is about the taboos associated with those five days of confinement due to menstrual flow which is seen as the impure blood. The myth regarding the impurity during these days is prevalent in many primitive societies. The girl during her puberty does not see her blood as impure but the feelings of shame surface when she is persistently reminded of her impurity. In many cultures, women are prohibited to narrate the menarche stories because "public display of menstruation and menarche are regulated by rules of secrecy and concealment, and in part because menstruation and menarche are seen as something that happens to women, not as something women do" (Locke. et al 2009:408). Although menstruation is a biological act for women, it is not devoid of culture. It is "surrounded with secrecy and shame" and menstrual taboos and rules are justified on religious grounds. The seclusion of menstrual women from the rest of the non-menstrual women is an act of repression (Ibid: 415). During the five days of menstrual flow, a woman is prohibited from doing any chore as she is considered untouchable. She is secluded from the rest of the family. She cannot enter the kitchen, perform any ritual, and touch or serve men's food. The poet says:

*For five days  
Quarantined from the rest  
By this unholy fluid  
Wrapped with untouchable phanek  
Phanek after phanek  
Carrying my untouchable-ness  
Accused piece of cloth  
Contaminated for a lifetime (4)*

The 'phanek' or wrap-around which a Manipuri woman wears is also a sign of taboo and no man can touch it as it is inauspicious for any man while going out from home. A man cannot take it off from the clothesline also. The poet has unequivocally revealed how phanek and menstrual flow are blended to form a taboo. She expresses:

*Neither nocturnal tryst nor daytime  
assault  
Defile the hands that tore it away  
Yet lying apart from me  
In the pale weather-beaten bamboo  
polangkhok  
He watched the muga fabric  
Soaked up the rain  
Droplets after droplets. (4)*

Man can lay a hand on the phanek during his nocturnal visit in the bedroom or can tear it during the act of raping a woman but to touch it in broad daylight shows the unmanly gesture. The social and religious convictions are shaped by irrational mechanisms which put female in the lower order. The stigmas attached to women's sexual activities are enforced by patriarchal traditions. In their interview with *The Gender Studies Journal*, the three poets said that they have

intentionally used the metaphor of phanek and the use of phanek on the cover page is also a conscious decision so that many men while reading the book will unconsciously touch the phanek. Shreema expresses, “From being a symbol of impurity to the symbol of resistance in nude protest, phanek is a marked signifier in women’s lives in Manipur.” Chaoba also questions why the phanek is a sign of impurity and why many men shy away from touching. Meiteis have this belief that a piece of mother’s phanek can ward off the evil spirits (Tattooed with Taboos: ‘Quietly and Unexpectedly Poetry came and Woke us up’: 2012). The cultural belief system has glorified the mother’s phanek in one way and demeans it in another.

“I Died a Little” is a poem that deals with the different stages of attainment of womanhood purely based on the stage of puberty, loss of virginity, and marriage. A girl is introduced to the myth of sexuality which shapes her individuality in her discovery of womanhood. The rite of passage to womanhood is constructed through her introduction to the set of beliefs and values inscribed only for women. The contradictory notion of menstrual blood which sometime acts as a taboo is being celebrated in this poem as it is attached to the fertility of woman. It is menstruation which reinstates the fecundity of woman. Woman without her monthly period is disdained in the society for her barrenness of womb. The poet states:

*I died a little  
Killed by impure little droplets*

*Though there were celebrations  
The stained cloth  
Became my flag  
I was congratulated  
For reasons I knew not  
My mother said  
I was now a complete woman. (7)*

The notion of impurity is equally heralded with splendour as a symbol of a complete woman. The poet shows how unconsciously the celebrated societal norms are being forced and internalized into the women’s state of mind to structure a dogma that female without a menstrual cycle is considered an incomplete woman. Next stage is when she loses her virginity as a maiden. Disregarding the virtue linked to the virginity, the poet poignantly addresses the event when he (may be a boyfriend) deflowers her, he celebrates for “*being the first/ that became his flag/ worn proudly around his neck*” (7). The defloration of women is a victorious thing for men. The next is her wedding night when her husband failing to see the little droplets which are the sign of being a virgin condemned her. The poet makes an effort to investigate how woman’s blood is interpreted differently carrying ambiguous symbolic meanings.

In the poem “Of Clothes and Robes”, Soibam Haripriya questions the violation of individuality and freedom of women by imposing a certain code of dressing especially on women. Gender differentiation is visible when a female is expected to follow the pre-defined aspect of activity, means of clothing, forms of

reverence, and anticipated behaviour. She inquires why such imposition is not applied to her brothers. She inquires:

*They did not ask me  
Whether I wanted to uphold 'culture'  
While my brother cycled to school  
In his grey trousers*

.....  
*It did not have a khamenchatpa border  
It was not tailored  
From a striped khudei  
But yet 'his' it was  
It was his trousers. (14-15)*

In androcentric societies, the culture, knowledge, and institution often echo the dominance of men. Every standard in the society is created keeping in mind the perception and interests of men. The dichotomy of masculine and feminine is often used to maintain a patriarchal structure of power and to create a perception among women that they are naturally inferior to men. If women accept the roles given to them, they are exalted and eulogized for being symbols of motherhood and if they fail to learn these norms they are loathed for not obeying the societal standards. The freedom and culture represent the polarization of ideologies which conveys both liberation and confinement.

The imagery of phanek reappears in the poems of Shreema Ningombam. She fearlessly articulates the sexual morality which has overburdened the conscience of women by talking about the sexual union before marriage. She is also eloquent about the forbidden phanek and menstruation which subjugate women in

different areas of life. The sexual politics associated with women's clothing emerges heavily in poems like "Unburdening Dead Spirits" and "To the Ema Lairembi". She celebrates the sordid messiness of blood and even questions why a woman is not allowed to worship the female gods who themselves menstruate. Her poems are rebellious and revolt against the societal norms that bind women into a state of immanence. She desires to break the taboos and prohibitions from the moral standards that define and expect women to persevere. "One Last Time" expresses her desire to break loose the values and norms for the one last time in her pursuit to liberation. She wants to liberate from sexuality and social taboos which become parameters for defining the virtue of women. In the poem "One Last time" she puts across her non-conformist attitude. She asks the society to let her be disgraced without any ignominy in front of a million eyes for one last time. She says:

*Let me be immoral that shames the  
immorality itself.*

.....  
*One last time,  
Let my body be tattooed with all taboos.  
One last time,  
Let me enjoy the most wanton of all  
dreams.  
One last time,  
Let me show my nakedness to the tempting  
tempest.  
One last time,  
Let me be a mother without wedlock ever  
locking me up.*



.....  
*One last time,  
Let me be sinfully free [...]. (23)*

Although sex and motherhood are related to each other, to talk about sex without the legality or the acceptance of society is unacceptable. The immorality is not tolerable within the general concept of womanliness. Subsequently a maiden cannot be a mother outside matrimony. A maiden is often a desire for male gaze. Literature and any art display “the experience of sexual union and motherhood within the terms of traditions that celebrate love and eroticism....” When we talk about eroticism it involves a woman, the other woman but not the ordinary one. She is the other woman as she does not fit in the universal parameters. The erotic love is extended to the women like courtesans, devadasis, and so on, and they exist outside the realm of the definition of ideal womanhood with no desire and pleasure of their own. They are branded as promiscuous and wanton. The appropriate femininity and inappropriate femininity are defined within the tradition that should not be crossed. The falsity within the classification of womanhood is that “in one instance, the chaste, obedient wife, the very image of patience and tolerance is upheld and in the opposite instance, the desiring, seductive ‘other’ woman is both simultaneously desired and denounced” (Geetha 2007: 134). Women are made to negotiate within these strictures so as to come out flawless within the sexual conformity.

In her poem “Unburdening Dead Spirits”, Shreema uses the images of khudei (lungi for men) and phanek to symbolize the sexual act with an unknown man who comes every night and infringes her maidenhood. She discloses that that night “the eternal locked doors of my maiden-room unlocked itself” (26). The moral yardstick like ‘prestige’ has deserted her. She starts unburdening herself through each piece of cloth through the act of disrobing. When his hands touch her bosom, she is accused of losing her shame and lost everything which is beyond irreparable. She alleges:

*Our blood merged  
I do not remember what covered our  
bareness.  
That night  
My phanek or his khudei(27)*

The sexual experience of women is mostly condemned by the repressive social order. Male sexuality is discussed openly without any taboo but female sexual activities are entrapped in the socially constructed standards. Reclaiming woman’s sexuality would reclaim women’s body as part of her identity. Despite his treachery she feels free in his betrayal as she avers:

*For the first time betrayal freed me  
From those dead spirits  
Named [...]  
Izzat  
Leirangi-leinam  
Chastity  
This ultimate union  
Made me lose everything. (27-28)*

The sexual liberation would mean to accept the intense and powerful part of nature which would no longer be suppressed in the essentialist models. Codes regulating the sexual decency are applied to women as she is seen as the upholder of culture. Silence and implicit words define the sexuality within the confinement of home. A poet like Shreema resists the sexual silence which is the norm of modern sexual repression. Michel Foucault holds that “sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden”. Power acts on the rule and power exercises on sex is maintained through language or through the act of discourse (1978: 83). The cycle of prohibition says:

Thou shalt not go near, thou shalt not touch, thou shalt not consume, thou shalt not experience pleasure, thou shalt not speak, thou shalt not show thyself; ultimately thou shalt not exist, except in darkness and secrecy. (1978: 83-84)

Foucault further argues that as far as sexual act is concerned power employs a law of prohibition (ibid). Through the law of prohibition, power is exercised on women to control their sexuality. It acts as a taboo and it is imposed only on women. They should obey it as obedience, submission, and repression are the ways through which power is implemented.

Simone de Beauvoir asseverates that the “anatomic destiny” is different in men and women, so do their moral and social situation. Patriarchal civilization dedicated “woman to chastity; it recognized more or less openly the right

of the male to sexual freedom, while woman was restricted to marriage”. She alleges if the sexual act should be sanctioned by the code or norm, by a sacrament. She is expected to defend “her virtue, her honour; if she ‘yields, if she ‘falls, she is scorned; whereas any blame visited upon her conqueror is mixed with admiration” (1997, 1949: 395). She feels free from the encumbrance of ideal womanhood which seeks for virtuous and chaste woman and through which women are seen as objects of disdain for crossing the barrier of taboo.

In the poem “To Ema Lairembi”, the poet inquires of EmaLairemba (Mother Goddess) why a woman is not allowed to worship at the temple during those five days of menstrual cycle. However, the goddess herself is a woman; and a girl or a woman in her menstrual days is banned from offering flowers. She says:

*Mother, in this laibung of yours  
I am not allowed a floral offer  
It is my third day  
And your carnival will be over today  
Mother, answer me once! (39)*

The set of laws are laid down for women as to what to wear, how to wear clothes and how to present themselves in public. A woman is considered polluted and unhygienic. Religious explanations of gender differentiation are commonly employed to rationalize every prejudice and inhumanity against women. She asks whether the goddess is freed from such woman’s cycle or from such exclusion as she herself is a woman and extolled by

the male-biased society. Therefore, she asks:

*Have you never felt that blood in your palm?  
That warmth; that scent  
You are a deity so are you free from this  
flow? (39)*

She inquires the goddess whether she is offended when she worships her or when she does not dress up in accordance with the conventions. She asks if she ceases to be her child when she goes beyond the customs. Although men do not have to undergo such strictures, women, married or unmarried, have different rules to follow as far as dressing is concerned. The poet puts across the view that:

*An unsolemnised wife  
Yet my mapanneibaphanek will not be  
waist up tonight.  
Mother, would you grudge my presence  
in your laibung?  
When you do not why would they? (39)*

The mapanneiba phanek (a striped wrap around) is especially worn by the Meitei women on varied occasions. The way to wear it is also different from a married woman to a maiden. A married woman usually tucks it around the bosom to take part in the rituals whereas a maiden wears it around the waist. The poet asks the goddess why the society has imposed such ban on the women and not allowed to take part in the religious ceremonies whereas there is no such rule for men. So she requests the goddess:

*Mother, tell them  
We are your children  
Neither pure nor impure. (39)*

As far as Chaoba Phuritsabam's poems in the section "Tattooed with Taboo" are concerned, they are not that rebellious as compared to Soibam Haripriya and Shreem Ningombam. Although she talks about the maiden by using the imageries of flowers that carry their own symbolic meanings in the poem "Maiden Mother". The poem like "Sati" deconstructs the myth surrounding the Manipuri legends Sati Khongnang and Meikibi Khongnang. The poem "Fruits of Your Taste", on the other, puts on show the varieties of female bodies by utilizing the imagery of different fruits which are displayed according to the taste of the male.

Sati Khongnang and Meikibi Khonang are shown as two dichotomous women. Sati stands for the woman who sacrifices her life for her beloved husband. Meikibi wishes to follow the footsteps of Sati but incapable of bearing the flames she attempted to escape the burning pyre and later on she was compelled to plunge into the funeral pyre of her husband. The purpose of legendary heroines is to reinforce the roles inscribed for women through generations. Myths reflect cultural element and often the mythical heroines are invoked time and again to construct feminine dispositions. Legends and myths create a female identity that is interpreted as natural. The symbolic meanings found in the myths and legends are used as instructions. The legendary heroines are the embodiment of sacrifices, submission, and revered as the role model for the subsequent generation. The feminine

qualities prescribed by the myths need to be dismantled so as to expose the gender politics ingrained in myths. The archetypal females in myths are often silent characters and they moulded their existence as society demanded from them. In the Hindu myth, Sati becomes one of the epitomes of female sacrificial spirit who ends her life for her husband. The myths cannot be an authentic voice as women are always mute spectators who submit to destiny. The poet here in the poem "Sati" gives voices to the fallen other. She laments:

*Following your footsteps  
Putting up with the judgemental eyes  
Many a woman endured the rage  
Of her husband's funeral pyre  
In the lineages to come  
Your fame shall remain  
You are after all a sati.*

*Your sister Meikibi trailed your path  
Defeated in the trail of flames  
Neither able to die  
Nor able to live  
Defamed and disgraced. (46)*

We always venerate Sati's valiant qualities which are the emblems of purity, self-sacrifice, courage, and dignity of women. But no one knows her story. Thus, Sati narrated her horrendous experiences and said:

*"I followed my slain husband  
I thought of leaving the world  
Overwhelmed by its oppression  
.....  
I am not sati*

.....  
*Am I glorified to make martyr of more women?"*

.....  
*You traded my corpse with tradition?*

.....  
*Why take my name to kill so many other women?*

*I left this world for I could not bear the oppression. (47)*

The women in myths are victimized in the patriarchal society. Myths, folktales, and legends are used as instrument to teach the folks about the human situations. They are the manifestation of ethnicity and what culture has expected from us. The customs and beliefs enshrined in the myths have been imparted to the people to promote a standard of culture. Thus, women are persistently trained to have the values of the legendary women to uphold the culture in which they live.

In the poem "Fruits of Your Taste", the poet uses the metaphor of fruits to display the female bodies like curves, fair and attractive face to the choicest market of male desire. She says: "You have the choice to hold and weigh/ You can just lift and taste its juices" (50). The tone is expressed in a lighter vein but the symbolic meaning is the trading of female bodies in the market of male gaze which bargains for the superficial bodily attraction or the exteriority of the female bodies. It shows females as commodity which is available in the market. Consequently she proclaims:

*Welcome to the market of fruits  
Some are like your favourite apple  
Some look like your juicy orange  
You have choices in front of you  
.....*

*Till the market is opened for you. (50)*

Going through their poems, it can be discerned that though their bodies are tattooed with taboos, their frenzied, bloody, angry, and crazy writings have liberated the silent women who are circumscribed in the superficial bodies. They represent a unique female tradition which has derailed the sexual prohibitions.

They negate the pure and virtuous woman that form the crux of the social fabric. Negating the pure heroines, they speak of the profane woman whom society disdains, to construct a female iconoclast where desires matter but not the tradition. They abjure the cultural elements which constitute the personal “self” that is often repressed and dominated. These poets attempt to unravel the politics of their bodies which has entrapped them for centuries, in their mission to search for their personal identities as well as sexual autonomy.

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