

The Song of Liberty: Celebrating our Vaginas

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ABSTRACT

It is well known that the concept of gender is established and enforced through societal expectations where young girls are conditioned from their childhood that men are superior, and it is in their best interest to serve as their vassals. The aim of the paper is to redefine the body from a solely biological shape to a historical creation and instrument of social control that is now at the center of body politics. In the light of the feminist battle, to take control of their sexuality, the body has thus become a political issue and it is richly described in the poem The Song of Liberty that I have analysed employing *écriture féminine* framework. Therefore, the paper culminates that the body politics need to be the part of the process of social transformation and not a postscript to it.

Keywords: *Body Politics, Patriarchy, Feminism, Deconstruction, Écriture féminine, and Women's Sexuality*

Gender as A Social Construct

Simon de Beauvoir's formulation "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" distinguishes sex from gender and suggests that gender is a social institution that is not only a cultural construct imposed upon identity but in some sense, gender is a process of becoming ourselves. It is this "becoming" that is responsible for the childhood conditioning as gender is passively determined, constructed by a personified system of patriarchy. As a result, we may state that becoming a woman is a process rather than a matter of sex, in which case one would be born a woman. Instead, becoming a woman is an active process of appropriating, interpreting, and reinterpreting inherited cultural possibilities. Since sex is based on the anatomy of the body and is biological, gender is the form that the body acquires as a result of the varied modalities of the body's acculturation, it has been vital for the long-running feminist campaign to refute the idea that anatomy determines destiny.

The preference for a boy child over a girl child signals the beginning of gender discrimination as early as infancy. All cultures have a strong preference for having sons since girls are seen as a liability and burden for the family while boys as an asset. In order to gender a baby, society has to know the baby's sex. Everything changes the moment a child's sex is revealed, including how they are treated and how they are observed. The most artificial and seemingly harmless method is used as a starting point: colour coding. Boys wear blue, while girls wear pink. Then,

as children grow, girls are supposed to play house and boys are supposed to play things like construction or war, boys are asked to be a “little man” and are admonished “not to cry” whereas girls are asked to be “pretty” and “docile”. The boys are celebrated for their penis and girls’ genitalia are ignored as a result girls come out to ignore their own body. The boys experience erection and play with their penis. Often girls get a doll which is a passive thing and girls however learn to be like a doll -pretty and passive. As Wollstonecraft opines in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman :With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* “taught from their infancy that beauty is woman’s scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body and, roaming around its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison”. In contrast to this the boys as they grow use their bodies to dominate nature and as a fighting tool. They like their muscles, climb trees, fight with other boys ,learn to take blows and suppress tears whereas girls are taught to make herself “other” in order to please and is treated like a “living doll” as “the supreme necessity for woman is to charm a masculine heart”. (Beauvoir,353). It is evident from Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* where she identifies “Woman is Sleeping Beauty, Donkey Skin, Cinderella, Snow White, the one who receives and endures. In songs and tales, the young man sets off to seek the woman; he fights against dragons, he combats giants” . It is due to this conditioning that the girls begin to accept things as they are and their passivity is condoned by the family, the more child matures, the more family hierarchy asserts itself where father is dominant and mother is subordinate (because of the way girls are raised in the society when they become mothers, they attempt to regulate their daughters).Therefore, Colette Audry describes this as “I didn’t even blame her for her authority or for her orders or arbitrary defenses but for wanting to subjugate me. She said it sometimes: when she didn’t say it, her eyes and voice did” . In a patriarchal society, boy’s future is open while “the girl will be wife, mother, grandmother; she will take care of her house exactly as her mother does, she will take care of her children as she was taken care of”. (Beauvoir,360).“She is locked up in a tower, a palace, a garden, a cave, chained to a rock, captive, put to sleep: she is waiting. One day my prince will come ... Someday he’ll come along, the man I love”. (Beauvoir,353). Women are socially conditioned to play the roles that are expected of them, and as a result, they continue to do so. This social pressure is constant and finally becomes something that women impose on themselves. Since the biological underpinnings of patriarchy appear to be so unstable, one has reason to respect the power of "socialization," which can sustain a global situation where men dominate women. As we've critiqued that gender is a social construct and how society shapes

both girls and boys, we can understand how it persuades girls that men are superior and that it's in their best interests to serve as their vassals. So, through societal expectations, the concept of gender has been established and enforced. Let us now turn to women and their sexuality and how it is addressed in the society.

Physical Bodies and Gender Relations

Sociologist Raewyn Connell's social constructionist theory of hegemonic masculinity is a response to the criticisms of sex role theory. According to the theory of hegemonic masculinity, gender refers to the practices and behaviors that define men and women as masculine or feminine, respectively. Gender is a verb because it is enacted through practices rather than fixed or passively internalized through norms (Connell, 1987). In particular, the theory argues that men act in ways that are masculine because this gives them power via patriarchy. Men's enactment of masculinity, therefore, influences social structures, such as the family, in a way that allows for the reproduction of patriarchy through granting men power and status over women.

Many academic disciplines, including cultural studies, literary criticism, literary theory, etcetera, have shown an increase in interest in sexuality in recent years as earlier feminist discourse only exposed the oppressiveness of femininity. Susan Bordo in her essay *Feminism, Foucault, and the politics of the body* asserts that it is only when feminist theorists found both Foucault and deconstructionism that they argued for the pleasures of shaping and decorating the body or their subversive potential as Foucault's theoretical apparatus highlighted the inadequacies of the prevailing feminist discourse and was useful in reconstructing it. Moreover, not only the feminist theory of sexuality but also masculinity studies, and queer studies have all contributed significantly to the growth of this new field of study. Within women's studies, feminist philosophy, body politics and sexuality has been a significant topic as Carolyn Newton's focus on the politics of the body makes explicit the complex relationship between physical bodies and gender relations. How do gender inequality and sexuality relate to one another? In fact, this is the issue that has sparked debate and discussion among feminisms more than any other. Men are dominating in sexual relationships because they govern women's economic and social lives in patriarchal societies. With their male partners, women have either no control over the situation or less control. The major method by which men exercise, maintain, and dominate women is through sexual activity. The establishment and maintenance

of women's subordination are reflected in and supported by sexual encounters as a location of male authority.

Women have clearly had distinct experiences with their bodies throughout history. By using a patriarchal system that divides people into males and females and forces them to accept roles, traits, and behaviors that correspond to each gender, the body is built differently. The male physique stands for civilization, reason, being in charge and in front. In other words, the feminine body represents everything that must be subdued and controlled by the male agent, which in society could be the father or husband. Women's bodies are built both physically and mentally for procreation and to entice men to consume or exploit them for men's enjoyment since they are perceived as the attractive "other" and as sensuous, mysterious and exotic. In the light of feminist's battles to take control of their sexuality and reproduction, the body has thus become a political issue. The feminine body has always been associated with nature, emotions, the enigmatic "other," and an insufficient and incomplete state of mind in western philosophy. The Lacanian notion that women desire because they are incomplete and always searching for the other missing half. Nicole Brossard retorts to this by declaring "I am a being of desire, therefore a being of words, a being who looks for her body and looks for the body of the other: for me, this is the whole history of writing". Akin to this Helene Cixous also argues that women do not need penis to decorate their body with, they do desire the other whole and entire, male or female; because living means wanting everything that is, everything that lives, and wanting it alive. She calls a desire originating from a lack as a meager desire.

As we know that the postmodernism is about reading against the grain. Therefore, from a postmodern perspective, women's bodies that have always been subjected to dominance and violence due to social conditioning which later leads to 'normalization', are not only resisted but questioned ultimately giving rise to feminist discourse that opposes the dominant patriarchal ideology. In order to craft their own stories, they must go back to the patriarchal canon and uncover the narratives that kept them imprisoned and silent. Writing, therefore, becomes a process of social revolution. In addition to this, they must also write their own stories.

Women and Their Writings

The opening line of Helen Cixous' essay *The Laugh of Medusa* "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing from which they have been driven

away as violently as from their bodies” calls on women "to write themselves." She had been brutally taken away from her body, and now it is up to her to take it back and break free from patriarchal restrictions. One of the most prominent theoretical frameworks for women's writing and reading is french feminism and the idea of *écriture féminine*. In the essay, Hélène Cixous essentially gives the female readers an ultimatum: either they read it and decide to remain confined in their own bodies due to a language that does not permit them to express themselves, or they can utilize their bodies as a means of communication. French feminism, led by Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray, opened the door for expression outside of the patriarchal hegemonic discourse. They did this by establishing a vocabulary more in tune with the feminine body and associating it with the mother rather than the father. *Écriture féminine* aims to be a particularly female kind of writing that can elevate mothers and daughters to the status of becoming the subjects of their own discourse. Many questions about oppression are raised by it. It has aided in the development and expression of the notion of a female "self," while also demolishing the idea of the exclusively male "I." They drew inspiration from the work of psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan to demonstrate how patriarchy works to stereotype the sexes and how we perceive them in ways that favour the masculine and deny the feminine. One of Cixous's main arguments was that the language of patriarchy, or phallogocentrism as it was known by Lacan, conceptualised the world in binary pairs that were always formed in terms of activity/passivity, sun/moon culture/nature father/mother masculine/feminine. As higher status is accorded to all things masculine and the feminine side is always perceived as detrimental and weak, these binary oppositions are deeply ingrained in patriarchy. The structural relationship between each term is the sole way that it has meaning; otherwise, masculine and feminine have no importance. Derrida's analysis of writing as difference and Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine* are inextricably linked since feminine texts focus on the difference. First, they fight to disprove the prevalent phallogocentric reasoning. Second, to savour the benefits of the open-ended textuality.

The phrase "women's writing" is legitimate due to its unique perspective in both creative and critical writing. Women have had a difficult time changing or overcoming these limitations since they are embedded in many societal institutions and household duties. More than any other genre, writing by women has served this goal. It not only reflects the experiences, circumstances, reactions, and challenges of the other half of humanity, but also a gender-specific consciousness, since gender is historically defined in terms of kinship, marriage, and

procreation. On another level, it challenges beliefs and frameworks that were previously taken for granted. It draws attention to how freedom and creativity are defined. In their own work, women have made an effort to make loud and audible all that phallogocentric discourse has silenced. Hélène Cixous argues that in order for your body to be heard, "Women must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes and rhetorics, regulations and codes".

The Song of Liberty: An Analysis through Hélène Cixous's essay "The Laugh of Medusa"

Prof. Nandini Sahu writes "Witness Literature", a concept popularized by Nadine Gordimer, which she calls social mobility literature, responsible and accountable literature. According to her, the writer must be critical about his/her pen and pose the question- does my writing make an impact on anyone at all? She discloses that women writers are offering cerebral challenges to their readers as they articulate their experiences in their works that stand as a testimony of their strong position in the poetry canon.

Her poem The Song of Liberty is truly a poetry that is candid and emancipatory. Through her poem, it is quite evident of what she says "Sex is no more a taboo; it is accepted as a part of existence". The poem clearly indicates "the desire to break out the prison- like the clutch of orthodoxy/societal norms".

The Song of Liberty uses the vagina as a metaphor to enunciate on fending off sexual assault and taking back one's sexuality and body. The poem examines sexual experiences that are both consensual and nonconsensual, body image, women's sexual pleasure, choice, and autonomy. It also acknowledges that sexuality is both a domain of restriction, repression, and danger as well as a domain of exploration, pleasure, and agency, which further illuminates body politics and the place of women in the society. The poem expresses the sexual terrors that surround women since these acts of sex contribute to the institutionalization of sexual violence and oppression inside patriarchal power structures. The poem serves as an excellent example of *écriture féminine* because the poet has articulated the feminine sensibility in a feminine way. The poem not only reveals about female sexuality as it is, which leads to the articulation of a language to name the power inequalities in the bedroom but also focuses on the sexual experiences which women have that are enjoyable, good, joyous, profound, lyrical fascinating, mysterious, and intriguing that remain unspoken if not in our private conversations, then most

definitely in political discussions. In the setting of patriarchal oppression that prioritizes male sexual activity over female sexual pleasure, the poet asserts female sexuality. Although society and culture hold such social conventions and commodification of women's bodies that they cause women to lose ownership of their genitalia and infuse them with ignorance and self-loathing. Women's bodies have been systematically and historically hidden, shamed, or sexualized in our society, thereby making it impossible for authentic, empowering portrayals of women or healthy relationships with oneself.

“Mother taught me about its invisibility.
Sister taught me how to place a pad
Down there, yes there (whispering!!)” (Sahu, lines 12-14)

Since childhood, a substantial part of woman's socialization is woven around her body and the most pernicious kinds of patriarchy run through the mothers, which can be especially harmful for daughters and their ability to thrive as independent women because a mother's treatment of her daughter becomes internalized as her own sense of self. Therefore, Bell Hooks is right when she says “We have to highlight the ways women perpetuate and sustain patriarchal culture” in order to be fully empowered, actualized and fulfilled, women must be disloyal to the patriarch in their mothers and, consequently, the patriarch within themselves.

“they were politically correct
about it. The vagina.”
“It is your dignity girl!!” (Sahu, lines 20-22).

The patriarchal system believes that a woman's dignity and self-esteem are intertwined to her physical appearance. Any physical scars become a scar on her dignity. Her virginity, sanctity, and purity are throttled during sexual assault when a woman's body is assaulted.

“Bond with it. The vagina
It was just there. Down there.
Like the vault. It was a room I never visited.” (Shau, lines 29-31)

The above lines clearly depict that the female unconscious remains untapped and unmapped by psychoanalytical theory, as women have been made to believe that it was too dark an area to be traversed and explored. From the very early age girls are brainwashed and conditioned to repress their sexuality and are appropriated to dark, monstrous, unexplorable realm whereas the truth is it is left unexplored as men fear women and their femininity in the same manner as

they fear castration. As a result, they dictate them according to their desires. The words in the poem for instance “He picked”, “He wanted”, “His convenience”, “his private chattel”, “I was his” clearly indicates the domination and ownership of men over women. Andrea Dworkin in her book *Intercourse* writes “the normal fuck by a normal man is taken to be an act of invasion and ownership undertaken in a mode of predation: colonializing, forceful (manly) or nearly violent; the sexual act that by its nature makes her his”.

“The black bile from the local sorcerer
Got the ‘dry’ woman ‘wet’, bloody wet,
For his convenience.” (Sahu, lines 77-79)

According to the patriarchal ideology, men’s desire has no responsibility to bear, nor does the culture which subordinates women’s bodies, and offers them little opportunity for social or personal power. Rather, it is in our essential feminine nature to be (delightfully if incomprehensibly) drawn to such trivialities, and to be willing to endure whatever physical inconvenience is required. In a patriarchal society, not a single part of woman’s body is left untouched, unaltered. Andrea Dworkin is right when she says “from head to toe, every feature of a woman’s face, every section of her body, is subject to modification, alteration. This alteration is an ongoing, repetitive process”.

“Screaming for orgasms vagina.
Desiring to desire more vagina.”
“Lady dare to call yourself a slut!”(Sahu, lines 238-240).

It clearly enunciates women in a patriarchal society are made guilty, ashamed of everything, for having desires, for not having desires. Furthermore, assertive, ambitious, desiring women in a patriarchal society are seen as monstrous. Hélène Cixous in her essay *The Laugh of Medusa* urges women not to identify themselves in relation to men. She asks them to destroy the prison of sexual impropriety. Similarly, Annie Leclerc in her book *Parole de femme* asks women to speak the joys of her sex, her belly, her vagina, her breast, her sumptuous joys as it is only when she speaks of them that a new, woman speech will be born. In the light of this Germaine Greer in *The Female Eunuch* writes:

“It is impossible to argue a case for female liberation if there is no certainty about the degree of inferiority or natural dependence which is unalterably female... We know what we are, but know not what we may be, or what we might have been. ...[w]omen must learn how to question the most basic assumptions

about feminine normality in order to reopen the possibilities for development which have been successively locked off by conditioning....”

“He couldn’t stand a
rejuvenated, no-nonsense
Blistering, exultant vagina
Depth hungry vagina” (Sahu, lines 232-235)

The above lines illustrate that women’s sexual desires are always repressed and in the name of sexual modesty they are not allowed to speak of their sexuality and bodies and the patriarch could not stand a strong, liberated, assertive and independent woman.

“Oh you beautiful woman!
Vagina song is the song of liberty.
Let me celebrate your body, let me
adore you my lady!” (sahu, lines 280-283).

These lines resonate with Cixous, suggesting the bimodality of sexes as against bipolarity of sexes since males and females are identifiable groups who have areas that overlap and where the virtues of each are celebrated. As we know, the entire history of writing literature, whatever is written is based on self-admiring, self-obsessed masculinity. Everything gets defined by the normative man and women occupy the margin, periphery, dark and incomprehensible realm of life. Therefore, The Song of Liberty becomes an epitome of what Cixous calls *écriture féminine* as her essay is, in a way, calling out women out of their spheres, their shy existence and trying to bring them forth, bring them out of masculine enclosure and asking them to write their experiences and desires because it is through writing that women will register themselves into the history that has been earlier monopolized by men. It involves two things, (a) returning and unearthing the patriarchal canon of the past that kept women silenced and captive in order to dismantle and destroy them. (b) To write and create so as to proclaim their unique empire that is a body of literature that will bring femininity into writing. Hélène Cixous emphasizes that writing is not just prerogative of men alone and women need not feel guilty about entering the territory of writing.

“No black and white game for me please,
Give me all shades of grey.” (Sahu, lines 386-387)

The poet through these lines suggests that the binaries that create hierarchy in the society are to be replaced with a fluid, interplay of desires. The in-between, grey suggest that the human subject whose identity is fluid and ever changing. Also, the poem is about inclusivity as it takes into consideration the vaginas of womenfolk that includes grown up women, fledgling women, lesbians, teachers, friends, foes, sex workers, brahmakumaris, homemakers, nuns, married women and transgenders. All of them speak with their bodies.

The poem is a journey of a young girl from vagina conscious who did not have any sentient bond with it to a vagina speaking woman who uses it as a weapon to customize her aptitude and to negotiate her life voyage with the vagina truth. The poem depicts that when women began to express themselves, it is at this point that they will return to their bodies and their desires. Writing is an important political act therefore “women must put herself into the text”. (Cixous,875)

“Let it be no counter discourse of
the penis as the sword” (Sahu, lines 401-402).

As I have discussed above the poem is about inclusivity, bimodality of sexes that takes into consideration feminism along with masculinities study and queer studies. Therefore, bringing femininity into writing is not the expulsion of the masculine or bringing about an end or death to it. Although, it is evident that in a patriarchal society masculine sexuality always gravitates around penis whereas women’s libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide. Her language does not contain, it carries. It does not hold back, it makes possible.

“Do this, dare do this,
while managing to look like feel like
an Amazonian cherished dream!” (Sahu,lines 403-405)

Through the above lines, the poet asks women not to be threatened by the patriarchal discourse rather they should dare to talk about their desires, pleasures, and experiences through their writings. They should break the old circuits when they were locked in silence because either they spoke in a language that was not their own or their words were not received by man’s ear which could only hear only when they spoke masculine. Therefore, we can conclude that The Song of Liberty is truly a cherished amazonian dream which portrayed feminine sensibilities in a feminine way.

Conclusion

The song of Liberty is a poem that really embodies femininity and frees women from the confines of phallogocentric writing that fueled tyranny and hijacked them for a gloomy, monstrous domain. The poem is an act of recognizing women's decentered relationship to their sexuality and womanliness, giving them access to their innate power and reclaiming for them the products, pleasures, organs, and vast physical territories that phallogocentric thought has sealed away. Women have historically operated within the discourse of men, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier, therefore The Song of Liberty is an attempt to make women the "mistress of signifiers".

Notes:

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The analogy between the woman and the doll remains until the adult age; in French, a woman is vulgarly called a doll; in English, a dressed-up woman is said to be "dolled up"

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The mother satisfying her domineering and sadistic instincts on the child in an attempt to affirm herself as sovereign subject.

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