

Radical Feminism and Blazon Tradition in Selected Poems from East and West

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Abstract

Body is a peerless gift to mankind. It is the Law of creation that both the sexes should get attracted physically to keep the world alive between the phase of life and death. The sacredness of sex turning to be violence not only against woman but also on girl children could be seen at an alarming rate in the current scenario. Is woman a mere drug of sedation? Is she an object of physical attraction for the other? While pornography is deemed to be graphic sexually explicit subordination of woman through pictures and words; is blazon verse pornographic in nature? has been analyzed in the paper. Due to the limitations of space, the paper seeks the assistance from a few love sonneteers of England and some prominent poets of love, family ethics and woman liberty from Tamil literature for the justification of ideas. The paper prioritizes gender safety.

Key words: violence, pornography, blazon tradition, gender, safety.

The human body is the best work of art.

- Jess C. Scott

Aridhu aridhu manidarai pirathal aridhu
Adhaninum aridhu goon kurudu sevidu pedu neenghi
pirathal aridhu.

-Ovaiyar

Body is a peerless gift to mankind. Healthy body plays a pivotal role in keeping mind healthy and energetic. It is the abode of soul. Suffering of body results in irreparable loss. Law of creation deems that both the sexes should get attracted physically which indeed keeps the world alive between the phase of life and death. John Donne's claim in his poem 'Ecstasy', *Love's mysteries in souls do grow/ But yet the body is his book//* insists upon nature's predicament. While the physical urge is common and inevitable among all living beings, the question of morality and control is placed before mankind.

The sacredness of sex turning to be violence not only against woman but also on girl children could be seen at an alarming rate in the current scenario. Everyday newspaper gets registered with a case of harassment unexceptionally on girl and woman. Lodging of complaints about harassing 12yr old girl and 5yr old girl, several voices of plea for judgment notably Nirbaya, stains the society with shame on entire mankind. This brutal treatment enables the woman to fear her birth. Is woman a mere drug of sedation? Is she an object of physical

attraction for the other? The radical feminist Susan Brownmiller's argument that,

Patriarchy creates an ideology of rape designed as a conscious process of intimidation. Women are therefore kept locked in a state of fear and even men who do not rape women benefit from the fear and anxiety that rape cause. (Hall)

Feminism ventures for woman's recognition besides the domestic sphere, radical feminism claims at gender equality. Prof Subhash Chandra recollecting the concluding remarks by Chughtai in her *Rock*

Men's interest in women is largely sexual; Women's way to man's heart is not through their stomachs (as traditionally believed) but through women's bodies which are required to be kept in good trim (age and childbirths notwithstanding) serviceable and seductive at all times. (180)

The claim throws light on Andrea Dworkin's critique of pornography. She considers "Marriage is an institution developed from rape as a practise" and "the intercourse as an act that expresses the power men have over women." (Hall)

The term 'Pornography' has received its concrete definition as 'subordinating women by sexualising their inequality' only after several debates and arguments. One among the seven criteria of ordinance by US Council and Indianapolis Council in 1983 and 1984 respectively defines the term as the "Graphic sexually explicit subordination of woman through pictures and words that also includes 'Women's body parts- including but not limited to vagina, breasts and buttocks- are exhibited such that women are reduced to those parts.'" (West) This in turn questions the conventional traits of blazon poetry that picks up woman's beauty in parts and celebrates her.

The term blazon stands for list of virtues and an act of praising (gradefixer.com). The blazon verse is not a mere exotic admiration of the beloved. It is the manuscript of loving heart celebrating and honoring the beauty and virtue of the lady love, on being haunted by divine celibacy. Woman is not portrayed as a mere flesh or an object, despite speaking about individual parts. The trend pioneered by Petrarch earned numerous disciples. The discussion throws light on a few love sonneteers of England, in specific; Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Shakespeare and Thomas Campaine and some prominent poets from Tamil literature especially the epic writers on family ethics and love, Ilango Adigal and Kambar, the revolutionary poet on woman liberty, Subramania Bharati and the Contemporary Vairamuthu to defend the argument that blazon poetry is not pornographic in nature.

The beloved Stella, being invoked as muse, admired as a mighty leader of invincible troop headed by Cupid, revered for defeating Cupid himself; conquers not only Astrophel, but all. Sidney presents a very grandeur account of Stella's physical beauty. Her face, forehead, hair, eyes, lips, cheeks, mouth, teeth, breasts and legs are compared with precious materials like Queen's court, alabaster, gold, Cupid's bullets, Cupid's heralds, red and white marble, porphyry, pearls, Cupid's tent and Cupid's chariot respectively is an adorable depiction of physical beauty. Sidney did not stop at this mere admiration. He concludes that his heavenly guest, Stella will be ever revered for her virtue. The sonnet 42 in *Astrophel and Stella* expresses

Oh eyes. Which do the spheres of beauty move,
Whose beams be joys, whose joys all virtues be,
Who while they make love conquer, conquer love

The schools where Venus hath learn'd chastity
(Sidney)

The argument shall travel forth towards Spenser's compliment of wedding hymn to his beloved. Spenser finds Hesperus dull while comparing the brightness of his beloved's eyes. His beloved dressed in white enables him to doubt her for some celestial angels. The beloved's locks adorned with flowers reminds him of maiden queen. He too compares his beloved's physic to beautiful palace, eyes to bright sapphires, foreheads to ivory, cheeks to apples, lips to cherries, breasts to creamy bowl and neck to marble tower. He even goes to the extreme adoration that the heavenly angels would be mesmerized and failed to do their celestial duties on looking at his beloved. He does not stop with physical admiration but crowns his beloved on the thrown of chastity. Verse in *Epithalamion* expresses,

So fayre a creature in your towne before? ---

Ascending uppe with many a stately stayre,

To honor seat and chastities sweet bowre (Spenser)

Among this trend of worshiping beauty by equalizing with precious objects, Shakespeare jots down a different practice. He is dared enough to say that his beloved is not so beautiful; indeed her eyes, lips, breasts, hairs, voice, footsteps are not like sun, corals, snow white, golden locks, pleasant music and goddess' walk respectively. Besides these, he admits his beloved to be the best and the rarest treasure he could ever possess in the world. His *Sonnet* 130 confesses

And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare

As any she belied with false compare (Shakespeare)

The three poets top the virtue as the most beautiful ornament in their beloveds. Thomas Campion, Shakespearean contemporary, throws light on woman's will power and determination in his poem *There is a garden in her face*. Campion too compares his beloved's physic, face, lips, teeth, eyes, eyebrows to garden, rose and white lilies, cherries, orient pearls, angels, bow respectively. Besides these admirations, he quotes that his lady love remains very firm against the conquest of love and none could taste the 'Cherries', her lips without her permission.

Yet them nor peer nor Prince can buy,

Till "Cherry ripe" themselves do cry. (Campion)

Sidney's account on Stella's beauty armed with Cupid's squadron parallels the depiction of Ilango Adigal's

epic heroine Kannagi in *Silapadhigaram*. Kovalan states Kannagi's forehead to be Lord Shiva's crescent moon, eyebrows to be love God's arrows and her waist to be a steel from Lord Indra's Trident. He even claims that peacock envies at the complexion of his beloved, swan hides in shame on looking at her gentle treads and the music of harp and parrot is not sweeter than his beloved's voice. Kovalan finds the ropes of pearls futile on her beautiful breasts; ornaments adorning her are in vain glory and burden her feeble waist. He even claims that any precious stones, nectar, harmony of harp are in no equivalence to Kannagi's beauty. To crown it all, poet insists on virtue itself as a beautiful ornament.

Maasaruponne, valambarimuthe---
Perungudivaaniganperumadamagale
Set in pure gold
You yourself a jewel without rival---
Noble maiden born of noble line of merchants
(Danielou)

Spenser imagines his beloved to be his maiden queen, Kambar touches the zenith on adoring his epic heroine Sita, the Goddess of wealth in his *Ramayanam*. He even swears that Lord of creation, Brahma would only fail in producing anyone equal to Sita's beauty. The celestial maidens of Lord Indra's court Rambai, Menagai, Urvashi will get defeated in Sita's appearance. Again, the image of armoury is found being used. The poet says that all the armours and even Lord of death (Yama) would be defeated and long to look Sita's appearance. While all the other poets compared precious gems with their beloveds, Kambar says that the ornaments and gems are beautified at the touch of Sita. Ravana's statement

Pandeulaguyelinumulla
Padaikannara
Kanden; idhupolvadhu ore
pennurukandilenaal
Before this, I have seen all of them
with eyes like swords
throughout the seven worlds but never before
I have seen any woman
formed like this (Harlt and Heifetz)
Sita is an epitome of virtue and honour.

The treatment of blazon tradition in the hands of revolutionary poet Subramania Bharati is still interesting.

While addressing his beloved Kannamma, (an imagination) the poet compares her eyes to the beaming rays of Sun and Moon, darkened nights and glittering stars to the diamonds embedded in her sari. The smile of his beloved parallels the beauty of flowers, her sweetness equals the sparrow and her lips are the spring of nectar. All sorts of controversy on blazon tradition gets defeated by the treatment of his beloved (Goddess of Sakthi) as the child by the poet. "KannammaEnKulanthai" Poet expresses that he could not endure any sufferings of his beloved. He confesses not only gems but also other celestial beings will not be equal to his beloved in gentleness and showering love.

Anbutharuvadhile- Unainer
Aagumore Deivamundo? (Bharati)

The mission would be incomplete without a look at the contemporary poet and lyricist Vairamuthu. His poem, 'Kanveechil Sonnal Kavi' treasures within it innumerable comparisons for woman's beauty. A few notably, nectar lips which are the snares set for prey, body which is a cup filled with wine, hair adorned with flowery verse, physic made of emeralds and gold, teeth made out of selected pearls, her fragrance equalizing the jasmine and his beloved herself to be the sibling of moon.

Thanimullaimanankodutha
Mangai- nilavin – thangai (Vairamuthu 32)

Poet admits, it is not only him but also his verse gets mesmerized at the touch of beloved. Poet further claims that the golden bowl could not possess the nectar of his beloved, the mirror itself would long to see his beloved's face to clear its filth every morning and sea waves would bath in her eyes in his poem 'Thangakathavugalaitattu.'

The constant rivalry between beauty and virtue could be seen from these lines with the victory of only the latter at the end. It is not the mere physical appearance but the virtue of their beloveds won the hearts of the writers. From such few notable explorations of verse, it is very clear that blazon tradition has not subordinated woman as a sexual portrait. The writers depict their beloveds only in the honorary account. Thus, blazon tradition of poetry worships the virtue in woman while praising her beauty and it is no more a pornographic account.

It would be very apt to conclude that; woman in the current society does not expect the recognition of their

gender greatness or nobility as worshiped by these poets but plea for her safety. Of course, woman comes out of her domestic shell and marches independently in modern society. Beneath this reality is the underlying fear for safety; haunting her each and every moment. Society must ensure that, this fear for safety against all physical, moral and emotional abuse should not drag back woman to her shell again.

Gender safety of woman does not limit with the strengthening of laws against abuse and guarding woman all the time. The term attains its real sense only when the woman is considered both the flesh and emotions; body and mind with the same touch of pain and suffering, by her counterparts. It could be only such empathy which can pave for gender safety, liberty and equality in society.

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