Indigenous Bodies, Unwritten Desires: A Reading of Sukirtharani's "Body Poetry"

Cuerpos indígenas, deseos no escritos: una lectura de la "poesía corporal" de Sukirtharani

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Impossibilia. Revista Internacional de Estudios Literarios. ISSN 2174-2464. No. 20 (noviembre 2020). Miscelánea. Páginas 156-174. Artículo recibido 06 mayo 2020, aceptado 09 septiembre 2020, publicado 30 noviembre 2020

Abstract: The paper is an attempt to read into the psychosomatic experiences of a marginalized indigenous community by reading and analysing the newly emerging works of literature in the area. The focus, here, is on the poetry of Sukirtharani who has come to the fore as a prominent figure in Tamil Dalit-Christian poetry and has sculpted a genre of "Body Poetry" in contemporary Tamil Literature. The interstice between desire, caste and the body is a territory which requires much critical enquiry and the paper tries to problematize the same.

Keywords: Dalit literature, Tamil Poetry, Body, Desire, Indigeneity, Caste

Resumen: Este artículo tiene como objetivo conocer las experiencias psicosomáticas de una comunidad indígena marginada, la tamil dalit, a través de la lectura y el análisis de obras recientes de su literatura contemporánea. En específico, se centra en la obra de la poeta Sukirtharani, figura prominente dentro de la poesía tamil-cristiana dalit, y quien ha esculpido el género denominado "Poesía corporal". La interrelación entre el deseo, la casta y el cuerpo es un territorio todavía insuficientemente estudiado. Este artículo es un acercamiento al tema.

Palabras clave: Literatura dalit, poesía tamil, cuerpo, deseo, indigenidad, casta

Introduction

Desire, in its very roots, is a form of transgression of the established codes/systems lest dictated by the same. The very idea of desire embeds within itself the passive-aggressive and impulsive characteristics which essentially constitute it. This nature of the emotional category deems it to be seen as a taboo-worthy, sensational symbol of intimacy. The body is most often the vehicle of this translation of the intangibles of identity. The body as a site of desire and the site of desire as a location of repression (as well as the retaliation against it) has invited the attention of academicians and researchers alike in the recent past. An aesthetic representation of such an intersection of desire, and the response to its repression is what one sees in the poetry of the Tamil Dalit[1] poet Sukirtharani (Lalapet, 1972). Hers is a body of work which attempts to give shape to a section of the society at large, striving "to become 'I's' who produce the truth: cultural, political, religious truth" as Luce Irigaray says of the (sexual) other (1984: 116).

Born as the fifth child into a Tamil Dalit-Christian family, Sukirtharani became aware of her caste identity along with the commencement of formal education. Although her parents were uneducated, they insisted on letting her complete primary education (which was a fairly rare occurrence in Indian villages, and in the case of girls in particular), owing to which she developed an exquisite taste not only in Tamil literature, but in world literature; especially the writings of women authors such as Kamala Das and Taslima Nasreen, and the women writers from Africa left a very deep impact on her (Holmström, 2015: 117). Sukirtharani and her writing received intense criticisms even from the home-front as she

[1]A term used to address the ethnic groups which were considered as the lowest strata (caste) of the society as per a hereditary classification which was (and still is) followed by the Hindu religion/society, and were deemed to live in abject poverty, doing menial jobs. Besides, this term comes from the Marathi *dala*, meaning "of the soil".

established herself as an intellectual, inculcating within herself an erudite flavour of Tamil counter-cultures. Her oeuvre, replete with the discourses on the sexual, the female body and the caste-ridden society, offers a distinct introspective outlook on the Tamil society, the indigenous Tamil Dalit cultures and on women's lives. "For Sukirtharani, Dalit history and memories of oppression are to be understood experientially, as physical oppressions to the body; truly, they are inscribed upon a Dalit body" (Holmström, 2015: 118). Sukirtharani, during an interview with *The Wire* in July 2017, had herself said that her writings are the experiences of every other Dalit woman; she strongly believes that caste and the Dalit body are entangled in a manner which makes the Dalit experience stand apart from women's issues faced by women from other castes: "We are all in shackles of caste", she goes on to say, "Dalit women's bodies are especially subjected to routine violence. [...] Normally, a feminine body is disrespected, but a Dalit body is almost hated" (Sukirtharani, 2017). Therefore, this paper intends to extend a cartographic analysis of Sukirtharani's poems (2015), which she calls her "body-politics" as she "weave[s] caste and body narratives together" (Sukirtharani, 2017).). The paper would seek to unravel the ways in which her oeuvre propounds a novel attempt at theorizing the female body, which is marked by her gender, caste, and class.[2] The paper also attempts to study the hierarchies of desire and its expounding as seen in her poetry.

Caste, Desire and a Body of Memories

Any study of desire is inextricably connected to the studies of sexuality, gender and thus, to body as well. Poetry, as a body of art, is intricately woven in with the nuances of human existence, rooted in the persistence of the body and the bodily, of both the spoken language and the written—people who write, who are written about, and also, the words with which one writes. Poetry, thus, becomes a path to the variegated studies into the nature

[2]The paper defines this particular genre of poetry as Body Poetry (in Tamil).

of human lives and bodies, and their interconnectedness. This leads to an intersection of history, culture, language and biology. Owing to the delicate nature of such a concurrence, it becomes necessary to study poetry without falling into the traps of biological essentialism or cultural constructionism. It becomes important to sustain the dialogue between these two viewpoints as it acts as a point of validation of the various categories involved.

Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly, in their introduction to the book *Sites of Desire/Economies of Pleasure: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific* (1997) opine that,

> both those who argue biological sameness and [...] cultural difference typically proceed from a Western viewpoint, from which vantage such sameness or difference is measured. They also equally elide the deep histories of sexual contact and erotic entanglement between Europeans and "others" (Manderson & Jolly, 1997: 1).

Their argument stands true, especially, in the Indian context, and in the cases of its marginalized histories and societies. Sukirtharani's poetry is a momentous attempt at bridging such a gap in the history of Tamil literature. She carves a special place for her idiosyncratic style of poetry which defines the female Dalit body, its desires, her people, and her existence. She accomplishes this by unashamedly foregrounding her lived realities. This marks an important juncture in this study as we stop to define desire as not just the bodily, but of a land, of a people, of a community, and of a castrated civilization of "others".

"Can literary history as academic genre be decolonized?"—asks Nilanjana Deb in her study on histories of indigenous literature (2009: 49). She suggests that a history of literatures, in the West, arose with an idea of the nation, whereas in the case of Indian literature as well as the other colonial/postcolonial literatures of the world, a pattern similar to that of their colonizers, in our case, the British was followed (50). Any literary history, thus, paints the "location" of its origin while comparing it with other literatures, forming a sense of prevalent mores and canonical or critical stances. This attempt is all the more visible

in nascent literatures derived from indigenous cultures and traditions such as is the case with Dalit women writers and their writings which have gained immense standing in recent times. Characterized by a sense of violence, of being constantly violated and coercively marginalized, these writings work towards a nation-building process—an attempt to create a space for themselves and to salvage their kind from the amnesia of history. Canonical works of Dalit literature such as Babytai Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (1986), Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* (1991), Bama's *Karukku* (1992), Narayan's *Kocharethi* (1998), Baburao Bagul's *When I Hid My Caste* (2018), are all monuments of such historical resurfacings, making the nation accessible to those from the fringes as well, reiterating the fact that it is their nation as well and that they have helped building it too.

The idea of nation in itself is intricately woven into the ideas of womanhood and motherhood in India. David Kinsley argues that the conventional premise of a Mahadevi (the great goddess) figure in texts "is that the ultimate reality in the universe is a powerful creative, active, transcendent female being" (Kinsley, 1986: 133). In a comprehensive, analytical study of Hindu goddesses, he traces the contours of a Devi (goddess) who is at once Sakti (power) as well as prakriti (nature) and maya (the illusory nature of reality), which corresponds to the notions of primordial matter, and a finite, phenomenal existence, respectively (1986: 135). This idea of the mother goddess and the concept of motherland which derived from it is central to the construction of Indian femininity. As Sugata Bose explicates in *The Nation as Mother and Other Visions of Nationhood*, the Indian concept of the "motherland" instead of the more common construct of the "fatherland", was a result of the division of Bengal and the subsequent poetic expressions (2017: 1-2). The idea of Mother Bengal slowly spread across the entire nation as Mother India, which was further concretised by the Indian independence movements. The age-old association of woman as Shakti (as the powerful energy of nature, and as the goddess of nature wielding such immense power) gave momentum to this *motherification* of the nation. However, Bose provides an interesting observation which

would bring to light the nuanced idea of desire that will be discussed in this paper: "In a macabre twist to the narrative of the Indian nation, the apparently triumphant moment of independence coincided with a gory dismemberment, if not the death of the Mother" (Bose, 2017: 2).

This gendered, sexualized idea of nation is central to the Indian imagination post-independence. It pervades the Indian psyche as extended metaphors of the female condition or of an overplay of the anxious male ego and its many fantasies (2017: 5).

The term 'desire' as used in this paper, is inclusive of all possible dimensions of it, and thereby, it attempts to encompass both the semantic essentiality and the liminal, intersectional space which distinguishes it from what is not desire[d]. "The history of desire in India", as Madhavi Menon explicates, "reveals not of purity but *im*purity as a way of life" (2018: 12). The context of desire in India can never be limited to its sexual pretexts; here, "desire is [...] the thing that escapes control [...]. [And where] impurity embodies the condition of desire" (14). But, she points out, that desire in the Indian context can be tied to an object of desire also, and not a subject alone, by which she means that the term 'body' as we know it gains multiple connotations; in fact, the God of desire in Hindu mythology, Kama, is an entity without [a human] form (14). These images of impurity and formlessness are both relevant in Dalit discourses as the Dalit body is often considered as "untouchable" and "ugly".[3]

In her poem "Infant Language", Sukirtharani, using the metaphors of motherhood and pregnancy, narrates the pain of a language of marginalization with which those others wound the marginalized (Sukirtharani, 2015: 77). She desires to give birth to a language which will

[3]In the aforementioned interview with the wire, Sukirtharani mentions an anecdote where she was given a piece of sweet by an upper caste girl in her class and the next day when she tried to do the same back, she was harshly admonished (Sukirtharani, 2017). The lower castes are considered to be untouchable in parts of India, even to this day.

be a liberal site, a space of emancipation, and not a sad reminder of a past where harsh words haunted their histories of being Dalit, being an outcaste. She claims that such a language which will put an end to those sorrows of being the unworthy periphery to a privileged centre, and it shall proffer a special pride. Here, she considers her poetry to be that child, who in the womb of her writing, struggles to come to life and to provide people with that liberating space of language and expression. She describes the language of her poetry as "an infant language, sticky with blood", which will, in all its goriness, expose the atrocities that she and her people had to suffer for no fault of theirs (2015: 77).[4] This mother-desire (as opposed to and as an antecedent of the Freudian 'mother fixation' or the Elektra complex), is an attempt to reclaim a mother principle which was lost in the pages of history, whereby creating a vacuum of nostalgia, where these marginalized masses gasp for the lack of a past, and the desire to know what was theirs—a desire to know their mothers before them, writing them as they form, foetus after foetus, destined to be born as a martyr, or a slave. This desire is, again, different from the concept of "maternal-enthrallment" as suggested by Sudhir Kakar, where the longing for the mother principle nearly results in the hatred, and as mentioned before, its eventual death (Kakar, 1997: 74). Embodying the mothering body, thus, becomes a central trope in Sukirtharani's poetic works (as elucidated in this paper), and it signifies the reclaiming and representing of womanhood, as well as all that has been lost.

The poem "I speak up bluntly" deals with the ideas of shame and public-shaming (Sukirtharani, 2015: 79). The poet describes how, during her childhood, to avoid being at the receiving end of social stigma and public-shaming she denied her own identity as a member of the Paraiyar[5] community, but eventually ended up "friendless" and alone. As a child, she felt ashamed of having to dry cow-skins, and to eat only leftovers of the upper caste people,

[4]A parallel could be found in the poem "She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks" by Marlene Nourbese Philips (1988), where the poet rejects the father's language as one of patriarchy.

[5]A caste group found in South India and Sri Lanka.

because of which she never revealed her father's identity, class, or caste to her peers. She went to the point of ignoring him if she ever passed by him on the streets and found him with his leather drum (*parai*)[6] around his neck. Her teachers derided her in class for not revealing her social status, yet she refuses to speak up. It was only then when hiding her own caste identity did her more harm than good that she realized the importance of being honest and unapologetic about her own identity,

> But now
>
> if anyone asks
>
> I speak up bluntly:
>
> I am a Paraichi (2015: 79).

The desire to be accepted, the desire to live a normal life is reflected in these words. In "A faint smell of meat", Sukirtharani reiterates these emotions as she paints a picture of how others perceive her: a woman who smells of meat, in a house where bones (after the flesh is discarded) are dried and kept, living in a street where lawless young men loiter, making din with musical instruments of their own make (80). She yet again refers to the sense of shame she had felt in being what she was and how she used to always assure others that she was the best among the worst (her community), as if that made any difference to her oppressors. This is a stinging critique of not just the poet herself, but of the caste system itself, and how the cross-sections of Indian society are smeared with the idea of shame at being who they are. It is, in fact, an intrinsic character of our hierarchical caste system to ridicule and to suppress the identities of the lower castes and classes using the very identity markers which had been assigned to them by the oppressors themselves, in the past. Many lower caste Hindus converted to Christianity to escape from the clutches of this system but, as the poet narrates here, as a convert too, she was the very same *paraichi*. History has witnessed similar atrocities

[6]One of the popular assumptions is that the word *paraiya* came from the word *parai* meaning a drum.

elsewhere too, such as in the cases of Hindus who had converted into Buddhism and were ostracized from their societies for doing so. Spanish Writer Ana García-Arroyo's novel *Devi la intocable* (2017) is a striking representation of the same.

People from the poet's caste found livelihood in doing menial jobs for the upper caste and upper class landowners of the village. They cut grass, and bury the dead animals for them; they made use of the skin of these dead animals for various purposes. This serves the purpose of their community marker within the Tamil culture. Sukirtharani depicts this in her poem titled "Portrait of my village", where she shows how the people are paid wages in stale gruel or a "single measure of paddy" (Sukirtharani, 2015: 82). She goes on to tell how they would have already lost their hunger due to the nature of their jobs, where they have to carry the carcasses of dead and decaying animals, and to top that, they were treated as untouchables and were given a second-hand treatment within the society. For instance, they eat not from regular plates, but in plates made of leaves or hands cupped together. They drink tea from cups made of palm leaves and that too, they should receive from the upper class landlord's household standing at a distance which has been deemed proper for the untouchables. It is from this reality of being mistreated for belonging to a community at the peripheries that she writes the poem "Every town is a hometown, all people are kin" (86). Here, Sukirtharani compares the lives of her people in her village to the general condition of Dalits across the nation, or even, the state of the marginalized, universally. She voices her ire with great agony as she says,

> Any language may be spoken:
> the English of the Gazettes,
> the Hindi of the rulers,
> Chinese, dripping poison,
> Sinhala, drunk with hatred,
> high Tamil, stripped naked (2015: 87).

She points out how each and every claim of the world being a place for everyone, and of equality, have their tenets laid on unequal plains. It might be said that the world is for all but the "all" mentioned are only those upper classes and upper castes; the interstices they inhabit are controlled by the diktats on "spaces of belonging and dis-belonging" handed over generation-after-generation by those who marginalize them (Fenster, 2005: 246). A space which is theirs, appropriated before their births, and cordoned off as private/public and forbidden/permitted—this creates a sense of alienation, and of rebellion. Indeed, this is what urged great minds like Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy to spearhead campaigns to eradicate the caste system and its derivatives. He had criticized the Brahmins greatly for their duplicity, and accused them for stealing the land which belonged to the very people whom they had ostracized in the name of caste; using that very land, they further abused the power, which according to them was vested in them by the Gods themselves (Ramaswamy, 2008: 485, 518-519). It is the vehement anger towards this that is resonant in Sukirtharani's poems like "Nature's fountainhead", "Nothing left", and "Castrated seed".

The poem "Nature's fountainhead" embodies the anger of a community, and generations of its repressed members; it admonishes the oppressor, seeking to rise back from the ashes and desiring to get back at them (2015: 84). The poet claims to overcome all hurdles because centuries of confinement has made her (where she represents her people as a whole) capable of breaking all chains,

> I myself will become
> earth
> fire
> sky
> wind
> water.
>
> The more you confine me, the more I will spill over,
> Nature's fountainhead (85).

Anger has become an overwhelming desire here, almost as if it had the power to overturn the social structure. The schism is always a result of violence, even if the cause or/and its effect are not essentially violent. Frantz Fanon points out that "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon [... it] is quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men. Without any period of transition, there is a total, complete, and absolute substitution" (2007: 79). The poet, here, desires for such a denouement resulting from the total sublimation of that which represents the other—may it be the caste-Hindu or the men within and outside the community; only, this desire is one of unmitigated violence born from the womb of nature.

In the same way, in "Nothing left" Sukirtharani depicts the suffering of a woman usurped of all her life's belongings: her land, her husband, her children, and her own body (2015: 88). The poem juxtaposes the agony of the Dalit with the pain and sufferings of the Liberation Tigers of Sri Lanka and their concept of a Tamil Eelam. In a two-pronged manner, the poet invokes the memory of the Tamil Tigers and their fight for the Eelam, at the same time, she metaphorically compares the world of the Other as an Eelam—as an united, idyllic world of their desires, very dissimilar from theirs which is of torment and destruction. She illustrates the sense of a similar theme in the poem "The soldier", where she ponders upon the mechanical way in which the army men are replaced when one of them die (2015: 89). During the time of the LTTE struggles, this was a reality: when the Tamil Tigers were dying out, hiding like criminals, the army went gorging on them, as if it was one huge cannibalistic organism, erasing the Tamil traces from the face of this earth. This sense of transience of time during the battle as well as the terror-evoking resurfacing of the enemy is poignantly painted in the poem.[7] Using the metaphor of time, the poet tries to define the nature of their fates—

[7]The experiences of the Tamil Tigers (as an event in history) are most comparable to torments and tortures of the Third Reich. The Tigers were constantly persecuted up until their leader Prabhakaran was hunted down, along with the other top leaders in 2009.

one of eternal recurrence, but of the same catastrophic events, one after the other, and leaving images of something which *has been* or which *was*.

Both "Nothing left" and "Nature's fountainhead" are also a clarion call to reclaim what is *hers*, her space when she is not somebody's (a man's, in particular) family. "A woman's space is only a space when it is connected to a man's space", she says, critiquing the normative belief, "If I bear a child, I can't say it is mine, it is my husband's heir. We've been taught to think that way. We have been instilled with such ideas" (Sukirtharani, 2017).

In "Castrated seed", Sukirtharani talks about a particular point in her childhood when her entire family took part in the process of farming, and growing crops with much hope, but eventually, it turned out to be a failed project (2015: 92). The "castrated seeds" in their "watery wombs" betrayed their trust, she says. This speaks of the established (ecocritical) idea prevalent among the Dalits that they and the nature are intrinsically connected. Sukirtharani's use of words and imagery exemplify this. Lakshmi Holmström, in her "Translator's Note" to these poems points out that Sukirtharani's poetry exhibits a distinct "Dalit aesthetic [which] cuts across the poetics of landscape because of the close emotional link between land, labour, and the body, a relationship of both love and anguish" (Holmström, 2015: 118). In this way, she not only does weave into the poetry the desires of herself and her people to fight, to win and to overpower, but also of the land to be its own natural self, fighting against all manmade manifestations—but both fail. The castration has a hint of coercion, and they, the family—the representative unit of the community—is unaware of it; they have been fooled. Yet somehow, they already had sensed it, as the castration anxiety permeates through the specific use of the vocabulary with references to the nature turning into a betraying monster, how the father no longer worshipped the sun, and ploughed with hands. Also, the instance of the long-haired mother watering the earth suggests a refusal to follow the norms set by the society so as to subjugate them; but this act is not one of dissent, it is of disillusionment. The reference to "bird-whistle" as the harbinger

of harvest time is also indicative of the higher powers with vested interests in their lands and its unyieldingness (Sukirtharani, 2015: 92). This brings us to another aspect of desire: Fear.

Fear is what precedes desire, and at times, what is left of it, too. Most of our desires are controlled, manipulated, and manifested in terms of our fears. Fear is what bonds the concepts of desire and violence. Mieke Bal opines that gender is "what it does", and that "gender [...] is inherently violent", for the imposition of the "natural" and its inevitability is subject to violence, one that is "disciplining (Foucault) and rehearsing, to the point that the performer believes her behaviour is 'natural'" (Bal, 2009: 530-532). Desire, for Sukirtharani, most evidently takes the form of the gendered "body" and its depiction vis-à-vis traditional representations: "the body, for her, carries not only a map of history; in its turn, it maps its own pleasures and pains, its surprises and turbulences" (Holmström, 2015: 119). In the poem "My body", for instance, she charts the geographical terrain of her body simultaneously as she draws a picture of her land at night, coming to terms with the coolness of the hour once she disgorges her body's warmth (Sukirtharani, 2015: 83). She ingeniously amalgamates the notions of land/body and liberation/satiation. The land becomes the post-coital woman's body, and the tiger[8] becomes the concept of liberation of her land, her community and her people. The woman's choice, her victory is equated with the triumph of her people's fight against atrocities; desire culminates in the trepidations of the prey and the killer—the stillness of nature represents the renewal of the cycle, freed from the anarchy of manmade violations.

In "The only woman in the world", the tropes of Gaia and the Keatsian "La belle dame sans merci" are evoked (Sukirtharani, 2015: 93). But unlike those two figures, one a mother and the other a lover, this woman—the only woman in the world—is dispassionate, ruthless and the embodiment of an overpoweringly female disposition. Like the antichrist, she is the image of the primal female spirit who has been bidding her time to present herself in her true

[8]Interestingly, she uses the image of the tiger recurrently, invoking memories of a fight for freedom, and connecting that to the fight for an 'Eelam'.

form to the cruel world of men. It also evokes the image of an inverse-*Ahalya Moksha*[9] as well when "innumerable men [...] [are] released from their curse/by the touch of her feet" (2015: 93). Here, the woman is not meekly waiting to be saved; she is not the damsel-in-distress: she is a capable mother-goddess-like figure who waits in the dark to avenge herself and her people. A *mother-desire*, bordering upon incest, "coexisting with the terror inspired by assertive female sexuality" is shown towards the Great Mother, the emissary of salvation for mankind (Kakar, 1997: 74). The mother, however, is not the kind, "good" mother, but a fierce, "bad mother", as Kakar defines her (1981: 89), as she has never known birth herself — she is depicted as the first woman, with "no scar of an umbilical cord" (Sukirtharani, 2015: 93).

In poems like "A time for birdsong" and "The last kiss", Sukirtharani brings to us a different kind of woman. A woman, like the mythical image of Krishna, who escapes her lover after a passionate encounter, for "birds never forget when they should sing" (2015: 90). The transience of the woman in these poems points to an image of freedom the emancipated woman experiences, moving further away from the misogynistic, patriarchal stereotypes of the subservient and homely woman. The body, here, is at the zenith of desire; it has no more 'space' left to accommodate the excesses of passion; it seeks to be as the "earth [,] submerged into the flood" (91). These poems come as a stark contrast to the earlier discussed poems such as "Infant language", "I speak up bluntly", and "A faint smell of meat", which resound the pain and agony of being ostracized from a society which one calls one's own. The poet now seeks to dream; daydream, even. Gaston Bachelard calls daydreaming a philosophical category which is marked by the intimate property of grandeur—it is the mind's capability to transcend the immediate realities (Bachelard, 1994: 184).

[9]As narrated in Hindu Scriptures, Ahalya, the wife of the sage Gautama Maharishi, was seduced by Indra, the god of gods, and thus were both cursed by the sage. Indra was cursed with vaginas all over his body whereas Ahalya was turned into a stone. She could only gain Moksha (liberation) by the touch of Rama, an avatar of Lord Vishnu, for which she waits for hundreds of years. This story is, therefore, called *Ahalya Moksha*.

The propensity for imagination culminates in the anxiety of creation and a poem such as "Translating her" speaks of such dilemmas of the poet as she herself transforms into the subject of her poem, and narrates the pain of transcending back and forth between reality, imagination and creation , which in turn becomes the poetry:

> I translate her poverty,
>
> the hunger she eats,
>
> the hunger she expels,
>
> her dwelling place
>
> whose air sprinkled with untouchability
>
> her oppressed community.
>
> I speak the words, becoming her (Sukirtharani, 2015: 81).

Here, there is a translation of life into the literary, and the object into the subject. It signifies the attempt at submerging the margins into the periphery, the marginalized female body into the emancipated and adept citizen who is deemed worthy of her accomplishments. It is this process of emancipation which is marked by the transition from the shamed/shameful Paraiya body to the woman, free from the worldly charade of laws or moral codes which dictate to her normative ways of sexuality and gender roles. It symbolizes desire in its naked form—the bare histories of untold desire of the voiceless, unwritten until then, and heard for the first time; the birth of a new language, a new body of poetry. It is also a gentle reminder that the poet is still, deep inside, a receptacle of all the traumas which haunted/haunts her and her community.

Conclusion

> The need for this change exists in its crude state, impetuous and compelling, in the consciousness and in the lives of the men and women who are colonized. But the possibility of this change is equally experienced in the form of a terrifying future in the consciousness of another "species" of men and women: the colonizers
> Frantz Fanon (2017: 79) .

Any act of dissent is in eventuality one of decolonizing the mind, of teaching the self to not fall into the crevices of difference. The work of art, at any given point in history, has to be read against the grains of sand from its own shores. With roots in the strong socio-political movements, fuelled by the anti-colonial spirits prevalent in India, the Dalit movement as well as literatures has come a long way. In writers such as Sukirtharani, the movement finds a more nuanced, contemporaneous effort at writing, rewriting and retelling the experiences of not only being a Dalit, but of not being the Other; of how the body which writes you *unbecomes* you in the literatures of the other and therefore, the importance of writing the Self in letters formed by a sense of boundedness to an identity which refuses to set you free. Paradoxically, those very words carve the histories and/or herstories as we, —the representatives of the posterity—will know them, revealing un-fearing bodies and their relentless fight against not just being shunned to speak, but also refusing to be spoken for. Sukirtharani's Body Poetry, thus, becomes an ongoing archival project for subjugated millions across the Indian subcontinent as well as elsewhere. Her work re-emphasizes on the importance of writing in one's own language as well as being written in translation; the question and answer, both, are changing according to the times—the masses no longer wishes to be handed down from one colonizer to the other: from the foreign to the native, from one man to another. To quote B.R. Ambedkar, one of the most important Dalit activists, and

scholar, "Equality may be a fiction but nonetheless one must accept it as a governing principle" (2014: 58).

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